

# OPEN FORUM

Kay Albury-Pierce's article "Casting out Demons" in the Jan/Feb issue is no joke. She set out to preach a sermon on 'casting out demons.' At the invitation following the sermon, a man came forward and asked to be delivered of seven demons. She didn't anticipate such a response. Not knowing what to do and fearing to try anything, she briefly counseled with him afterwards and referred him to a couple of Roman Catholic priests.

I appreciate Albury-Pierce's honesty in confessing to the man that she didn't have a clue. I am sure a vast majority of the Church is in the same boat, especially those of us in mainline Protestantism and specifically United Methodism. "Deliverance ministry," or exorcism as referred to in Roman Catholicism, was a significant part of Jesus' ministry, as well as the ministry of the disciples and the early Church. In Matthew 10:1 and in Luke 9:1 & 10:19 among other places, Jesus gives his disciples authority over evil spirits to cast them out in His own name. We have that same authority, command, and privilege today. Unfortunately, many Western Christians operate out of a worldview that is strictly ratio-empirically based. Our Enlightenment-derived understanding of the universe as a closed-system prevents us from taking seriously the supernatural in Scripture. We have reduced all things to matter, primarily, by defaulting to a 'disease' model of sicknesses and abnormal behaviors, and consequently, resorting to a chemical solution for all such ailments.

I believe in doctors, including psychiatrists, and the proper use of medicine, but there are times when 'disease' is not the primary or ultimate cause nor medicine the primary or ultimate cure. Some things have supra-rational ultimate causes and intermediate natural causes. They are not always mutually exclusive.

Therefore, deliverance as a viable part of the Church's healing ministry needs to

be considered. The fellow in Albury-Pierce's article had been institutionalized and under medication. These seemed to suppress the "voices" but not offer a cure. In my own ministry I have prayed deliverance over hundreds of persons by simply taking the authority given to all believers in Jesus' name and have seen incredible results. Sometimes the results are immediate and other times the healing is a process. I do not tell these persons to stop taking their medication or to stop seeing their doctor. Again the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

I believe that ministers today are missing great opportunities to minister to the demonically oppressed because they are either ignorant or unbelieving in regards to the spirit world and God's power to overcome all things.

**Peter Bellini**  
Dayton, OH

"Casting Out Demons" by Kay Albury Pierce was excellent.

I started in the Missouri West Conference in 1972 and I have been to Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, MO and Duke Divinity School in Durham, NC. Yet never did I find a course on casting out demons.

If it had not been for a missionary who was willing to sit down with me and tell me what to do when I was faced with the same situation Reverend Pierce faced—I would have never been able to pastor efficiently all of these years. My question is: "Why are we not prepared at seminary to face these situations?"

**Bruce Hensley**  
Strawberry Plains, TN

"Casting Out Demons" by Kay Albury-Pierce left me feeling uneasy. Is that the best your editorial staff can do to deal with an adequate pastoral response to a person

with a severe mental illness?

I would have looked that young man straight in the eye and said: "I do not believe you are possessed by demons. You have an illness that can be treated. I know where you can get treatment that will offer hope to you. Would you like to go?"

The mental illnesses that produce hallucinations, delusions, and the "voices" are a biological and physiological problem that respond to appropriate treatment. To mix them up with "demons" misses the point and clouds the issue.

I am sure the United Methodist Church has chaplains that could have articulated a better response to the challenge of mental illness. Why did you not contact the Division of Chaplains and Related Ministries for such a list of persons? Do your homework.

**Reginald E. Gentry**  
Chaplain  
Lexington, KY

I compliment you on your wide variety of articles. Most, I've noticed, cover means, methods, and reasons for ministering to others. Is it possible to reverse this once in a while? That is, ministering to those who serve others? The last issue of *CR* took up "Visible and Invisible Wounds," which described non-pastoral persons. One exception was by Dan Johnson who showed how others minister to him and his family during their ongoing crisis of an injured daughter. This greatly moved me.

My great concern is to see some articles on the "visible and invisible wounds" of the pastoral ministry and how we can treat these as openly and compassionately as we do for non-pastoral persons. Could it be that we don't want to expose our wounds? As I surveyed the conditions you listed on the cover, i.e., "mental illness, depression, addiction, a pastor's crisis, physical disorders" and the objects of these ministries, I thought of the parsonage families I know who wrestle with the same problems. Yet, they are rarely covered and treated with the open compassion we offer to others.

I can think of one growing concern that must be addressed with forthrightness, sincerity, and compassion. It is the obesity that pervades our society. Studies say that it is intertwined with forms of mental illness, depression, addiction, and physical disabilities. I'm shocked by the growing number of obese pastors. Could this not be one of the "visible and invisible wounds" we should begin to address? Maybe, in the words of

one of your articles by Kay Albury-Pierce, it's a "demon" that needs to be exorcized.

Medical studies warn us that we have a severe problem of obesity among our children. But how can we respond to this "eating addiction" with pulpits occupied by obese pastors? If the research is valid, could it be that obesity is a "visible" expression of "invisible wounds" that we should begin to acknowledge and treat among our pastoral colleagues? Furthermore, is it not something that seminaries and ordaining committees would want to address and treat?

**Charles V. Bryant**  
Oriental, NC

In appreciative response to Bishop Carder and Powell (Jan/Feb), two further thoughts.

**One:** the arguments from our knowledge of God's nature are the decisive ones, and the subsequent experience of Powell's church reflect this. We may add a secondary reflection from our tradition. In the "Doctrinal Minutes" of 1744-1747, the early Methodists record the conviction that the Incarnation of the divine Word, the second Person of the Trinity, has given all humanity a new and restored relationship with God. They did not go on to consider how this applies to people with special needs, but we can. Powell, and our sisters and brothers with comparable conditions, are heirs with us all of that transformation. The early "Minutes" may not be binding on us but at least they represent a part of our inheritance of faith of which we ought not to be ignorant.

**Two:** Powell's parents certainly were entitled to a decision which was not solely a matter of personal discretion. When we have to speak for the Church (and the "we" may be any member, not only the appointed or the ordained), we owe it to the Church and to the enquirers to speak representatively. [That] obliges us to know the tradition, and to go on learning of its depths. The "tradition" is, as the British Methodist Church describes it, "the divine revelation recorded in Holy Scripture," interpreted subsequently by the community of faith; it is not the private property of any one, or any few, of us. We have to speak with personal conviction, but as stewards of a truth bigger than ourselves. The community of faith, in "assuming the vows for one of its own," was exemplifying this beautifully.

**David Tripp**  
Rolling Prairie, IN

# CIRCUIT RIDER

## Reviews

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### Books reviewed in this issue:

*Addiction: Pastoral Responses*  
by Bucky Dann

*Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter*  
Wendell Berry, Dorothy L. Sayers, Blaise Pascal, et al.

*Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*  
edited by Stephen T. Davis

*Fragile Hope*  
by Thomas G. Bandy

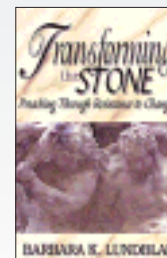
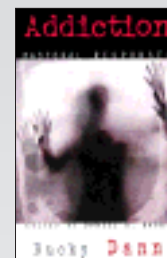
*Transforming the Stone: Preaching Through Resistance to Change*  
by Barbara K. Lundblad

*The Undoing of Death: Sermons for Holy Week and Easter*  
by Fleming Rutledge



**Book Review Editor**

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