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DOI: 10.34813/ptr4.2021.9

The exorcised. Demonic interference among the members of the Polish Charismatic religious communities*

Abstract. The dynamic expansion of the Neo-Pentecostal teachings across the world has given rise to the significant growth of interest in the question of demonic interference. John Wimber and Peter C. Wagner, who are believed to have been the most influential Neo-Pentecostal missionaries, spread the concept of spiritual warfare among their followers. This particular idea has become a substantial part of contemporary Christian Charismatic religious communities, also those located in Poland. What appears to be worth mentioning is that the members of the above-mentioned groups tend to perceive the activity of evil spirits as the main cause of their failures and emotional turmoil. The principal objective of this study is to investigate how the individuals who attend the Charismatic worship services in Poland conceptualize demonic interference and how this specific condition affects their daily functioning. Moreover, this research also refers to the similarities and differences between the ritual of exorcism in the Catholic Church and the deliverance ministry, which is typical of the so-called independent churches. Besides, the study attempts to put forward the concept of spiritual warfare in terms of its interpretation by the selected Charismatic religious communities. The analysis is based on individual in-depth interviews (IDI).

* This study was financially supported by the Research Infrastructure on Religious Studies (ReIReS) from Bologna and was part of the Transnational Access Project. In addition, I would like to thank the project's coordinators from Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose (FSCIRE) for their professional assistance.

Keywords: demonic interference, evil spirits, exorcism, deliverance ministry, Charismatics, Neo-Charismatics, Neo-Pentecostals, Pentecostal Catholics, spiritual warfare

Introduction

The practice of delivering people from demons has been present in Christianity since its beginnings. However, contemporary Christianity is not homogenous, so the ritual of what is known as exorcism varies from congregation to congregation. This study focuses mainly on the Christian believers who will here be referred to as *Charismatics*. For the purposes of this research, it seems to be crucial to explain who they are what communities represent the above-mentioned category.

According to Richard Flory and Brad Christerson (2017, pp. 7–9), two groups of Charismatics can be distinguished. The suggested division results from the emergence of the so-called waves within the Pentecostal Movement. The first one encompasses the individuals who belong to either mainline (e.g., Catholic) or independent churches but embraced both the Pentecostal understanding of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Pentecostal religious practices. Meredith B. McGuire (1982) uses the term *Pentecostal Catholics* with reference to the members of the Catholic Church who are strongly influenced by the Pentecostal teachings because of the emergence of the *Catholic Charismatic Renewal* in 1967. The second group mentioned by Flory and Christerson applies to the Christian believers who are involved in the activities offered by the independent Charismatic churches and ministries that have emerged since 1980s as a result of the apostolic work of John Wimber and Peter C. Wagner. They are also recognized as *Neo-Pentecostals*, *Neo-Charismatics*, and *Third-Wavers*. In this paper, both groups will be discussed. However, it should also be clearly indicated that the line between them is undoubtedly fine. In Poland, for instance, the leaders of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal have been implementing the Neo-Charismatic teachings into their communities, and therefore, the Neo-Pentecostal elements have become part of the formal training as well as intragroup reality. These far-reaching changes can be observed especially within the context of Wimber's *power evangelism* (signs and wonders) and Wagner's concept of *spiritual warfare*. To be more precise, the Neo-Pentecostal religious message with all its components has been willingly accepted within the Catholic Church. Surprisingly, the flow of ideas is not mutual since Neo-Pentecostals do not seem to be attracted by the Catholic doctrine. Andrzej Kobyliński (2016, pp. 100–101) notes that: "over the recent years, we have witnessed a pentecostalization of Christianity

around the world. The term pentecostalization refers to the exceptionally fast rise in the number of Pentecostal communities and the gradual transformation of many other Christian churches and congregations into a single, universal type of charismatic Christianity around the globe. The dynamic and worldwide process of pentecostalization is often referred to as *charismatization* of the Christian religion, or the birth of Pentecostal, charismatic or evangelical Christianity.”

This paper concentrates primarily on how members of the selected Charismatic communities based in Poland conceptualize demonic interference and how the condition they have experienced has affected their daily functioning. Furthermore, the research provides better insight into the similarities and differences between the ritual of exorcism in the Catholic Church and the deliverance ministry, typical of the so-called independent churches. Finally, the study aims to emphasize the idea of spiritual warfare in terms of its interpretation by the demonically oppressed Christian believers who represent the chosen groups. This article is divided into a theoretical part and a results section. As for the theoretical part, in the first place, the question of demonic interference among Christians will be discussed, taking both Catholic and Pentecostal perspectives into account. Secondly, reference to the symptoms of spirit possession will be made, bearing in mind the analysis provided by the *DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders)*. As for the results section, it will discuss the findings of the research, which has been done with the aid of individual in-depth interviews (IDI), carried out in different parts of Poland.

1. Demonic activity among Christians

As mentioned above, Christianity is not homogenous, and that is why particular denominations, as well as independent churches, have got their own styles of worship. The same is true for the rituals they perform. This section will focus on the important aspects of Catholic and Neo-Pentecostal demonology with the purpose of identifying the main features of a demonic influence.

Grzegorz Wiktorowski (2017, pp. 267–268) notes that the term *demon* derives from Ancient Greece; however, its meaning differed semantically from its contemporary interpretation. The author refers to the definitions presented by Socrates and Homer. The former perceived a demon as a protective entity, whereas the latter associated *daimon* with the deity. Wiktorowski also refers to the Christian New Testament written in Koine Greek, where the Apostle Paul was described as the proclaimer of foreign deities (*xenōn*

daimoniōn). The author clarifies that the Christian understanding of a demon has changed over the years, and nowadays, it has nothing in common with protection. Conversely, demons are seen as personal spiritual entities instead of just mere types of energy. On the basis of the New Testament, it is believed that demons lie, delude people, and are submissive to Satan. Therefore, all the demonic manifestations a Christian believer witnesses tend to be regarded as destructive. Surprisingly, according to the Catholic doctrine, a positive form of demonic possession is also possible. Wiktorowski (2017, p. 268) mentions the so-called *expiatory possession*, which is tantamount to the atonement for the sins of others. To be more precise, a believer who accepts this form of demonic activity voluntarily chooses to suffer for the benefit of sinners. Such an approach is not acceptable for the Neo-Pentecostals. The question of expiatory possession will be further discussed in this paper.

Marc-Antoine Fontelle (2004, p. 25) observes that the problem of demonic activity has hardly ever been tackled throughout the twenty centuries of Church history. The author refers to the Fourth Council of the Lateran, which took place in 1215, mainly because of the similarities between the former and contemporary understanding of demons. According to the Council: “[...] there is only one true God, eternal and immeasurable, almighty, unchangeable, incomprehensible and ineffable, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons but one absolutely simple essence, substance or nature [...]. The Father [...] creator of all things invisible, spiritual and corporeal; who by his almighty power at the beginning of time created from nothing both spiritual and corporeal creatures, that is angelic and earthly, and then created human beings [...]. The devil and other demons were created by God naturally good, but they became evil by their own doing. Man, however, sinned at the prompting of the devil” (The Canons 2021, p. 1215). When it comes to the contemporary approach, the teachings of Pope John Paul II, which can be found in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliation and Penance*, dated 2 December 1984 – seem to be worth discussing. The Pope highlights the consequences of human wrongdoing and treating God as an enemy by stating that: “God is faithful to his eternal plan even when man, under the impulse of the evil one and carried away by his own pride, abuses the freedom given to him in order to love and generously seek, what is good, and refuses to obey his Lord and Father. God is faithful even when man, instead of responding with love to God’s love opposes him and treats him like a rival [...]” (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 2021). The same document mentions the existence of “dark forces which are active in the world almost to the point of ruling it.” Based on what has been discussed above, it can be assumed that demons are spiritual entities involved in pulling human beings away from God through disobedience.

Sławomir Zalewski (2013, p. 70) explains that the Catholic Church distinguishes between two types of demonic activity, namely, *ordinary* and *extraordinary*. When it comes to the first category, it relates to *temptation* whose main aim is to lead a human being to moral decay. Zalewski (2013, pp. 74–81) alludes to the symptoms of a demonic influence, emphasizing intense anxiety and fear which prevent an individual from undertaking significant tasks and, at the same time, make them unable to think rationally. As demonstrated in the work by Héctor de Ezcurra (2020, pp. 28–29), temptation is strongly connected with human senses. In other words, demons interact with them by intensifying particular sensations, and consequently, an individual starts acting in a chaotic as well as destructive manner. The author also refers to the aftermath of temptation, providing the following examples: infidelity, homicide, the war, corruption, abandonment, an abortion, and euthanasia. De Ezcurra (2020, p. 29) notes that demons attack human beings by affecting their memory, dreams, imagination, self-esteem and also by provoking situations that modify their behavior. The second category mentioned by Zalewski (2013, pp. 114–152) encompasses *oppression* (*oppressio personarum* and *oppressio locorum, rerum et animalium*), *obsession* (*obsessio daemonica*), and *possession* (*possessio daemonica*).

Oppressio personarum relates mainly to illnesses, physical, sexual, and financial abuse that affect human beings. When it comes to physical abuse, the author highlights whacks and flagellation which cause severe pain. With regard to illnesses, Zalewski (2013) observes that demons have the ability to act internally, interfering with physiological processes for longer or shorter periods. In the case of sexual abuse, the oppressed report intense bodily sensations which tend to be associated with sexual intercourse. This particular type of demon is usually called an *incubus* or a *succubus*. The author clarifies that the *incubus* is the entity in male form, responsible for seducing women at night, whereas the *succubus* manifests itself in female form and engages in sexual activities with men. It should be mentioned that sexual abuse of demonic nature has nothing in common with erotic lucid dreaming or schizophrenic delusions. Conversely, these sensations can be felt by the oppressed when they stay awake. With respect to financial abuse, Zalewski (2013) provides the examples of the individuals who, for some inexplicable reasons, face difficulties in finding a job, keeping a job, or running a business. *Oppressio locorum, rerum et animalium* does not harm human beings directly because these disturbances affect first and foremost places, objects, and animals. The author speaks of houses whose inhabitants suffer from strong headaches, insomnia, or stomach problems. Strange noises and phenomena have also been reported. Zalewski (2013) draws attention to the fact that in several cases, *oppressio locorum* involves only one

specific area instead of the whole building. As for the causes, they may result from particular incidents from the past which may have happened in a given room or part of the house.

Regarding *obsessio daemonica* it can be further divided into *obsessio interna* and *obsessio externa*. The former, as its name suggests, refers to what happens to a human being internally, and concerns an idea or a set of ideas the individual concentrates on and acts within, such as suicidal thoughts. In this particular case, demons influence the emotional sphere of a human being, which is believed to be the most fragile. The latter applies to external senses, for example, the sense of sight and hearing that can be easily stimulated. Zalewski (2013, p. 142) mentions the demonic activity within the context of the angel of light. In other words, the affected individuals acquire the ability to see mysterious figures and to hear mysterious voices (cries, swear words, and animal sounds). *Possessio daemonica* is regarded to be the most serious form of diabolical activity. The previously-mentioned instances of the extraordinary demonic activity included temporary harassment, whereas the demonic possession signifies the demonic indwelling of continuous nature. The possessed loses control of their body to some extent, and consequently, the dark forces take over its different parts, for example, the vocal cords. Demons use the human body as a tool. According to Zalewski (2013, p. 145), *possessio daemonica* extends to the mind, free will as well as the feeling realm. The author also claims that this particular condition is not homogenous, and therefore, two different phases can be distinguished, namely, the moments of crisis and the moments of quietness. As far as the moments of crisis are concerned, they are always associated with the rapid destruction of the possessed. The indwelling demon manifests itself to the public through various supernatural phenomena. The possessed either loses consciousness or remains conscious. When it comes to the moments of quietness, the possessed displays symptoms that are *prima facie* similar to the mental disorders described by psychiatrists. The only difference is that in the case of demonic possession, these symptoms cannot be calmed down by pharmaceuticals.

The question of the extraordinary activity of the demon has also been discussed by Francesco Bamonte (2006, pp. 53–63) who focuses on its causes. The author explains that they can be grouped into three distinct categories directly related to the type of sin. The first category includes perseverance in sins committed by the possessed (self-inflicted) such as taking part in a séance, wearing amulets and talismans, being involved in the activities offered by the New Age movement, keeping the ritual objects brought from Africa, Asia, or South America, belonging to religious groups that are actively engaged in esoterism, belonging to the groups which worship Satan and listening to

music whose content promotes violence, necrophilia, suicide, homicide as well as blasphemy. The second category includes the actions taken against the possessed in the past, which consequently affect them in the present. These are the following: putting a curse on the individual, consecrating a child to Satan before or after the birth, or bringing the child to a shamanic ritual and prayer. It is also believed that the sins committed by the ancestors may influence the remaining members of this particular family. The third category encompasses the cases of special vocation which do not result from sin. In other words, the possessed accept their condition, often referred to as blameless suffering, for the benefit of others. To be more precise, they suffer for the salvation of mankind. This kind of extraordinary activity of the demon is also termed the *expiatory possession*. Jarosław Międzybrodzki (2013, pp. 14–21) explains that expiation consists of three fundamental elements: union, suffering, and love. The union applies to the relationship with God on the basis of which believers are responsible for one another. The core of the expiation is love because it defeats sin and death.

In Catholicism, a sacramental by means of which the possessed are publicly and authoritatively liberated from demons in the name of Jesus Christ is known as exorcism (Gr. *eksorkizo* – to whisper). As defined by the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “In a simple form, exorcism is performed at the celebration of Baptism. The solemn exorcism, called a *major exorcism*, can be performed only by a priest and with the permission of the bishop. The priest must proceed with prudence, strictly observing the rules established by the Church” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2021). Based on what has been stated above, it should be mentioned that two types of exorcism exist, namely, the so-called *minor exorcism* as well as *major*, often referred to as the *solemn exorcism*. This research does not aim to analyze the rite, however, providing the source seems recommended. Stanisław Madeja (2004, p. 301) clarifies that the current version of *Exorcisms and Related Supplications*, which constitutes part of the *Roman Ritual (Rituale Romanum)*, and which was officially approved by Pope John Paul II in 1998, replaced the 1614 *Exorcism Rite*. The present *Ritual* specifies the guidelines an exorcist should adhere to before deciding whether or not to perform the ritual. As discussed by Zalewski (2013, pp. 267–302), the exorcist should be able to recognize the so-called signs of possession. These are the following: (1) speaking the languages the possessed does not know and has never learned (*xenoglossia*), (2) speaking of past events the possessed has not witnessed or revealing the future (*distinta et occulta patefacere*), (3) supernatural physical strength, and (4) aversion to the sacred. De Ezcurra (2020, pp. 43–45) highlights the physical and mental dysfunctions that can be observed in the behavior of the affected by the extraordinary activity of the

demon, for instance: (1) a severe, not responding to treatment pain in different parts of the body, (2) physical weakness, (3) temporary paralysis, (4) intense throbbing, (5) movements in the abdomen, followed by mysterious sounds, (6) tumors which disappear after the prayer, (7) insomnia, (8) nightmares, (9) voices in the head, (10) hallucinations, (11) concentration problems, (12) laughing for no reason, (13) inexplicable fear, (14) a tendency to participate in distressing events, and (15) digestive problems. The author also focuses on what is known as supernatural phenomena related to a particular space, such as levitation, rapid drop in temperature, objects moving by themselves, object materialization, and sounds of playing instruments.

In contrast to the Catholic ritual of exorcism, the Neo-Pentecostal deliverance ministry is not structured. Moreover, what seems to be worth mentioning is the fact that the model of spiritual warfare provided by John Wimber and Peter C. Wagner, although significantly different from the Catholic approach, has been the dominant one among contemporary Charismatic Christianity. Andrzej Migda (2010, pp. 107–108) observes that the teachings of Wimber and Wagner, which are also referred to as power evangelism, tackle the problem of demonic interference in great detail. Peter C. Wagner (2009, pp. 14–17) distinguishes between three spiritual warfare levels: *ground-level*, *occult-level*, and *strategic-level*. The *ground-level spiritual warfare* is defined as the ministry of casting out demons which is also the most common variety practiced by contemporary Charismatics. The *occult-level spiritual warfare* involves the activities of shamans, New Age channelers, occult practitioners, witches and warlocks, Satanist priests, fortune-tellers, and many others who, according to Wagner (2009), are uniquely demonized. The author claims that the occultism-related demons differ from those causing headaches, marital blowups, or drunkenness. The *strategic-level spiritual warfare* applies to the so-called territorial spirits. Wagner (2012, p. 78) believes that Satan: “delegates high-ranking members of the hierarchy of evil spirits to control nations, regions, cities, tribes, people, groups, neighborhoods, and other significant social networks of human beings through the world. Their major assignment is to prevent God from being glorified in their territory, which they do through directing the activity of lower-ranking demons.” In other words, the selected demons govern particular territories. What is more, they have also been delegated particular areas of evil, such as abuse, adultery, gluttony, greed, homosexuality, lesbianism, lust, prostitution, seduction, grudge, hatred, or homicide. With reference to what has just been stated, Thomas Csordas (1994, pp. 181–185) notes that in the Charismatic demonology of the twentieth century, which was shaped predominantly by Neo-Pentecostals, personal spirit names were either biblical (e.g., Beelzebub) or invented by the healers. Over time, however,

due to the pragmatic nature of Charismatic healing, those evil spirits were named for how they act on a person (e.g., depression). To be more precise, sin has been deemphasized in favor of psychology, that is, negative emotions, behaviors, and thought patterns. Csordas (1994, pp. 182–184) provides examples of the so-called Master Spirits and Subordinate Spirits, bearing in mind that the former are the root whereas the latter represent the side-effects. To take a concrete example: (1) nervousness – tension, headache, restlessness, insomnia; (2) sensitiveness – self-awareness, fear of man, fear of disapproval; (3) pride – ego, vanity, self-righteousness; (4) paranoia – jealousy, envy, suspicion, distrust, fears; and (5) indecision – procrastination, compromise, confusion, forgetfulness, indifference.

According to John Wimber and Kevin Springer (1987), Satan's kingdom bears responsibility for sickness, whose deepest form is sin. Therefore, the primary goal of healing is to release the individual from the guilt of sin. Wimber and Springer (1987) introduce the term *divine healing* by which he understands the immediate intervention of God, bypassing all natural processes of the body and medical treatment. The author claims that: (1) God does not directly will evil, (2) God does directly remove evil, (3) God sometimes overcomes evil not by removing it directly but by accomplishing his purposes through it, and that (4) there are many kinds of evil we experience that we do not approach passively (Wimber and Springer, 1987, p. 36). The Charismatic demonology treats divine healing holistically as it focuses on its different aspects, namely, healing of the spirit, healing of the effects of past hurts, healing of the demonized and mental illnesses, healing of the body, and healing of the dying as well as the dead. When it comes to the practice of healing the demonized, Wimber and Springer (1987) draw attention to the fact that spiritual warfare is continuous by nature, and nothing will change until Christ's return. The author distinguishes between three types of demonic influence: *temptation*, *opposition*, and *demonization*. As for *temptation*, Wimber and Springer (1987) refer to the struggle between the spirit and the flesh. He believes that temptation aims to strengthen Christians' faith and results from the cooperation of the world, the flesh, and the devil. *Opposition* applies to difficulties in preaching the gospel and manifests itself through various impediments, such as illness or accidents. *Demonization* (Gr. *daimonizomenoi*) has nothing in common with the Catholic definition of demonic possession. Wimber and Springer (1987) explain that the demonized suffer under demonic bondage, but they are not absolutely owned by the demons. Therefore, they are still able to control themselves and undergo deliverance. To be more precise, the demonized experience periodic attacks that may affect their physical, mental, and spiritual realms. Mild forms of demonization involve influence, oppression, obsession,

and subjection, whereas the severe ones include assault and possession. When it comes to healing the demonized, Wimber and Springer (1987) identify six core principles that should be taken into account, namely: (1) God wants to heal the sick today, (2) healing is a corporate ministry, (3) our trust in God is demonstrated by action, (4) Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit, and that is why they can pray, (5) healing should be conducted with the aid of loving brothers and sisters, and (6) God wants to heal the whole person, not just a particular condition. What is also important, the personnel (healing ministers) should have faith for healing, and they should also be receptive to God's power. Although the procedure itself bears no resemblance to the content of the Roman Ritual, Wimber and Springer (1987) refer to five steps of the healing procedure, and these are the following: the interview, the diagnostic decision, the prayer selection, the prayer engagement, and post-prayer directions.

To sum up, based on what has been stated above, it can be assumed that first and foremost, the traditional Catholic rite of exorcism differs significantly from the Neo-Pentecostal approach to the ministry of casting out demons. Secondly, contemporary Charismatic religious practices have been considerably influenced by the Neo-Pentecostal teachings, and the same is true for the Charismatic demonology. Thirdly, the model provided by Wimber has been implemented by denominational and nondenominational communities, that is, by Catholics (referred to as Pentecostal Catholics) and the so-called independent churches. Besides, both Catholicism and Neo-Pentecostalism recognize different types of demonic interference, ranging from mild harassment to a severe form of activity. When it comes to the Catholic Church, the solemn exorcism is always performed by an appointed priest who receives a special decree from the diocesan bishop, as opposed to the Neo-Pentecostal deliverance ministers whose service does not tend to be supervised. Nevertheless, Pentecostal Catholics are also known to perform deliverance in their prayer groups without the bishop's approval. Finally, it should also be mentioned that in contrast to the teachings of Wimber, the Catholic doctrine does not recognize the term demonization.

2. Possessing agents and the human mind

The problem of possession has also been tackled by psychiatrists, and consequently, this particular condition has been classified as *dissociative identity disorder* (DID). According to the fifth edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), published by the American Psychiatric

Association in 2013, dissociative disorders: “are characterized by disruption of and/or discontinuity in the normal integration of consciousness, memory, identity, emotion, perception, body representation, motor control, and behavior” (APA, 2013, p. 291).

When it comes to the diagnostic features of DID, the presence of two or more distinct personality states or the experience of possession are the most typical ones. The overtness or covertness of these disruptions depends on the current level of stress, culture-related issues, internal conflicts and dynamics, emotional resilience, and psychological motivation (APA, 2013, p. 292). As for the signs, they tend to be reported by the affected individuals or by others. The *Manual* (APA, 2013) emphasizes the fact that in many possession-form cases of DID, manifestations of different identities are highly overt. In cases when alternate personalities cannot be observed directly, the identification of DID is usually made on the basis of two distinct clusters of symptoms, namely, (1) sudden alternations or discontinuities in the sense of self and sense of agency, and (2) periodic dissociative amnesias. Regarding the first cluster, the following experiences have been enumerated: (1) depersonalization – individuals have the impression that they observe themselves, that is, their own speech as well as actions, (2) hearing voices, for example, the spirit’s voice, (3) uncontrolled impulses and puzzling emotions – the affected utter the words or act in a way they do not feel responsible for, (4) a shift in attitudes, outlooks, as well as personal preferences, and (5) perceptual disturbances related to the body – individuals claim that their bodies feel different, for instance, they believe they are muscular or the opposite gender. In spite of the fact that the above-mentioned symptoms are regarded as subjective, they can be easily observed by witnesses. When it comes to the second cluster, the *Manual* shows that the individuals with DID tend to report (1) gaps in remote memory of personal life events, for instance, they do not remember their wedding ceremony, (2) lapses in dependable memory, that is, they do not know how to carry out their occupational responsibilities, and (3) discoveries connected with everyday actions – the affected do not recollect doing particular tasks, although they find objects which represent these tasks, for example, drawings, writings, or injuries on their bodies (APA, 2013, p. 293). The *Manual* also focuses on the concept of dissociative fugue, whose main characteristic is the impression of being taken to distant locations. In other words, individuals believe that they travel away from their homes but at the same time are not able to explain by what means they came to be there. As discussed in the *Manual* (APA, 2013, p. 293): “Possession-form identities in dissociative identity disorder typically manifest as behaviors that appear as if a *spirit*, supernatural being, or outside person has taken control, such that the

individual begins speaking or acting in a distinctly different manner.” To be more precise, individuals may appear to have been taken over by a “ghost” of, for example, a person who had committed suicide in the past, because they speak and behave as if this “ghost” was still alive. The *Manual* (APA, 2013) also refers to the cases which result from different spiritual practices around the world and, therefore, do not meet the criteria for DID. The disturbances which are caused by possession-form dissociative identity disorder are regarded as unwanted and involuntary. Besides, they tend to be associated with intense suffering, which may even lead to self-mutilation and suicidal behavior. The *Manual* (APA, 2013) emphasizes the fact that those diagnosed with DID frequently report different types of maltreatment during childhood and adulthood. Hence, the connection between a traumatic event and the appearance of symptoms indicating possession-form dissociative identity disorder seems probable. Particular cases of maltreatment and its consequences related to supernatural phenomena will be shown further in this research.

To conclude, the religious point of view is not the prevailing one when it comes to possession. Experiences from the past may affect the present. Therefore, before giving a diagnosis, an in-depth interview should be carried out to prevent the implementation of inadequate therapy. In the 1970s, a young German woman, namely, Anneliese Michel, experienced the presence of supernatural phenomena in her life. Due to the fact that her family consisted of strong believers, she was immediately diagnosed with demonic possession, and as a result, exorcisms were performed on her by the appointed priests. Anneliese was also consulted with medical specialists; however, they remained powerless. The woman died soon after, and her death gave rise to a fierce discussion on the real causes of her death. Some believed that Anneliese had represented a classic example of expiatory possession, while others accused the priests of having contributed to the deterioration of her condition. Based on what has been stated above, the symptoms of DID and those of what is recognized as demonic possession are similar, and that is why the affected individual should receive professional help.

3. Results of the study

The research was carried out among Polish Charismatics and involved twenty participants (thirteen women and seven men) between the ages of eighteen and sixty-five. When it comes to their religious affiliation, three of them were Catholics, six belonged to the Neo-Pentecostal movement, and eleven – represented the so-called independent churches which are founded on Wimber

and Wagner's teachings. For the purposes of this paper, they will also be referred to as the respondents (R). The study was conducted in the form of semi-structured, in-depth interviews that were held on-site as well as off-site, mainly by means of online communication tools. With reference to sampling techniques, the purposive and referral ones were used since particular inclusion, and exclusion criteria had previously been established. The former were the following: (1) active participation in the Charismatic worship service, (2) respondents' personal conviction that they had been affected by demons, and (3) completion of deliverance rituals, whereas the latter encompassed: (1) lack of interest in the Charismatic worship service, (2) respondents' personal conviction that the problems they had experienced, had not been of a demonic nature, (3) a negative attitude towards the practice of expelling demons. The research focused primarily on how members of the selected Charismatic communities from Poland conceptualize demonic interference based on their own stories. To investigate this issue thoroughly, several hypotheses have been put forward. These are as follows: (H1) individuals who experience demonic interference claim to be affected by dark forces either because of their own actions or the actions of others taken against them, (H2) individuals who experience demonic interference display unusual behavior which, as a result, has a destructive impact on their physical and emotional condition, (H3) Polish Charismatics implement the Neo-Pentecostal teachings, language, and religious practices during their worship services, (H4) the Catholic exorcism ritual is structured in contrast to the Neo-Pentecostal deliverance ministry, (H5) spiritual warfare is a continuous process. The findings will be discussed below, and what is most important, they will be categorized according to the key aspects of demonic interference, namely, (1) the causes of demonic activity and its influence on one's physical and emotional condition, and (2) the stages of the recovery process: exorcisms, the aftermath, and the individual's perception of spiritual warfare.

3.1. Causes of demonic interference and its influence on physical and emotional well-being

This particular section will refer to what is commonly known as the *demon's gate* (Pol. *furtka złego ducha*). In other words, it will focus on the possible causes of demonic interference and its consequences for the respondents' physical and emotional condition. In the first place, the interviewees were asked to identify the situation which, in their opinion, might have "opened the gate." To be more precise, they tried to recollect certain events from the past, usually

traumatic ones, that consequently might have enabled the dark forces to enter their lives. What appears to be significant for this research is a liability issue. According to the respondents, they were affected by demons either because of their own actions or the actions taken against them by others. In the next stage of the study, the interviewees were asked to describe their daily functioning from when they had been dominated by demons. Problems such as physical and emotional distress were raised in detail. Moreover, the interviewees were also asked to determine whether or not they had been displaying unusual behavior while under the influence of the demon. Finally, the respondents were requested to describe the dimensions they had functioned within, referring mainly to their interaction with the dark forces, as while asleep as in reality. The answers provided by the participants of this research were as follows:

(R1). "My mother cursed me. I was also sexually abused by my uncle [...]. When I was seven years old, I saw the demon for the first time. I saw his bloodshot eyes [...]. Jesus and my dead brother used to visit me regularly. I had wounds on my feet. I vomited strange objects and I felt tingling. I could read people's minds. I was weak in a physical sense. The demon was trying to strangle me [...]. I was terrified, depressed, and discouraged all the time. The demon wanted me to doubt Jesus [...]. I had continuing nightmares. For example, I could see a battlefield and the demons that tried to invade my house. Those demons surrounded my father [...]. The dark forces tortured me also in reality. I could see the demon in the guise of a priest who kissed me [...]. He told me he would kill me [...]. I wasn't able to work. I used to take days off frequently. The religious community I belonged to, started making fun of my distress" (female, age range: 46–65, Catholic).

(R2). "I was sacrificed to Satan before my birth [...]. When I was a child, I wanted to receive Holy Communion, but the priest told me I did not deserve salvation. In consequence, I thought to myself: *if I cannot serve God, I will serve Satan*. I became an active Satanist [...]. I had out-of-body experience, unusual strength [...]. The demon acted as if we were best friends. I could damage people's lives. I knew how to destroy them spiritually. I could speak languages I did not know, predict the future, and travel across *death chambers*. The demon was next to me all the time and was trying to persuade me to commit suicide. I could not sleep longer than an hour. The demon did not allow me to get married although I genuinely wanted to have a wife. I felt lonely. I could not choose the job I dreamt of because it might interfere with my service. The demon required absolute obedience" (male, age range: 31–45, Neo-Pentecostal).

(R3). "When I was in primary school, I made a Voodoo doll. I did not like one girl. I used that doll against her. It was a beautiful girl, but as she

started growing up, she developed a hump. 10 years ago, I got interested in reading Tarot cards and returned to making Voodoo dolls. At that time, my body started to change. Little bumps appeared, face looked distorted, one of my legs was fat, whereas the other – thin. It seemed to me that some worms were crawling under my skin. I could hear strange noises at home. Besides, I could hear the voice that kept threatening me. The door closed by itself. My health deteriorated. I used to drink a lot, but I did not have to use the toilet for months. I had recurring nightmares where I could see some men raping me spiritually. After waking up, I had an intense pain in my bones. That demon lived inside me. I got depressed and had suicidal thoughts. My mother could not deal with this situation. She became a different person” (female, age range: 31–45, the independent church).

With reference to the remaining causes of demonic interference, the following were also mentioned: (R4, R5) conjuring the spirits, (R6) idolatry and rebellion against the parents, (R7) listening to the songs which glorified Satan, (R8) interacting with a childminder who made a joke about the children from an orphanage; this particular joke triggered intense fear, (R9) a curse of unknown origin, (R10) visits to a fortune-teller arranged by the parents, (R11) a spell cast by a neighbor, (R12) sexual abuse during childhood and personal visits to a fortune-teller, (R13) masturbation as a teenager, (R14) failed abortion, parental rejection, and sexual abuse during childhood, (R15) drugs, (R16) witchcraft practiced by a family member, (R17) suicide committed by the father, a bargain with the Devil, and as a result – worshipping Satan as well as Belial, (R18) arguments between parents, witnessing the practice of conjuring the spirits, and using the Silva Method, (R19) pornography, (R20) a bargain with the Devil at the age of 16 and a visit to a Thai masseur. Some of the above-mentioned cases represent what has formerly been discussed in this paper, namely, the spirits named for how they act on a person, bearing in mind the division into Master Spirits and Subordinate Spirits (Csordas, 1994, pp. 182–184). For instance, R8 (male, age range: 31–45, the independent church) claimed to have been affected by the spirit of fear. R10 (female, age range: 18–30, the independent church) fought a spiritual battle with the spirit of bulimia, whereas R6 (female, age range: 18–30, the independent church) believed she had been tormented by the spirit of chaos. Apart from these, proper names of theological demons were also provided, for example, Belial, Asmodeus, Beelzebub, Baal, and Legion. R4 (female, age range: 31–45, Neo-Pentecostal) experienced the activity of the previously-addressed Incubus, that is, a demon in a male form with whom she had sexual intercourse.

To conclude, based on what has been discussed above, it can be stated that these findings support the hypothesis of the causes of demonic interference

(H1) as well as the hypothesis of the destructive impact a demonic activity has on one's physical and emotional condition (H2). All respondents confirmed that the distress they felt had been caused either because of their own actions (e.g., conjuring the spirits) or the actions taken by others against them (e.g., a curse).

3.2. The recovery process: deliverance and its aftermath

As stated earlier, the Neo-Pentecostal deliverance ministry, which is also practiced by the so-called independent churches, differs significantly from the Catholic ritual. The former is known as a spontaneous prayer, whereas the latter consists of several guidelines, referred to as the *Rite of Exorcism* (H4). The results of the research show that both approaches to the ministry of casting out demons seem to work. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that Polish Charismatics implement the Neo-Pentecostal worship patterns, especially when it comes to Third-Wave teachings, language, and religious practices (H3). Besides, the investigation revealed that Polish Charismatics agree on the continuous nature of spiritual warfare (H5). This section will focus on the stages of the recovery process. In other words, particular cases will be discussed, with special attention given to the reasons for which the interviewee decided to undergo deliverance. Its powerful effects will also be addressed. Therefore, the last set of questions presented to the respondents referred to the implemented deliverance methodology as well as a participant's response to it. The exemplary answers were as follows:

(R16). "I decided to get exorcised because I could no longer function. I had to move my family out of town, away from me [...]. I spoke to the priest before the ritual. I confessed my sins [...]. The exorcist put his stole to my head. He was holding a purple book in his hands. You know, the one exorcists always use. Suddenly, all the windows opened by themselves, and I was levitating. My eyes were not really mine. The temperature in the room increased. My body bent. Then, I lost consciousness. After the ritual, the exorcist said: *thanks God we are still alive*. Unfortunately, exorcisms did not help me. One day, when I was alone at home, something inexplicable happened to me. I was sitting at the table and at the same time, I involuntarily started uttering names, such as Baal, Legion, and Asmodeus [...]. I was finally liberated in Toruń during the retreat with Fr. Bashobora. He approached me and told me to open my mouth. He was praying in tongues. Then, demons left my body. I am still afraid that demons will once again attack me in the future, but now I know how to

fight. I mean, regular confession, Holy Communion, and the Church” (male, age range: 46–65, Catholic).

(R14). “The pastor of the congregation I belong to approached me and suggested that I should get exorcised as he could sense the spirit of death. Firstly, the pastor gave a lecture for the gathered on demonic activity. Secondly, we prayed all together. Then, individual prayers started. I was crawling on the floor and speaking a deep male voice. I was vomiting, crying and then I became paralyzed. My body bent and seemed hotter. I could hear the pastor casting out the spirits of sexual abuse, bitterness, fear, and masochism. I lost consciousness. At the end I was calm. I no longer feel pain. I suppose demons will come back but I will not give up” (female, age range: 31–45, Neo-Pentecostal).

(R5). “I kept having visions. I suffered extreme pain. Doctors could not make a diagnosis. I was in despair as I knew something was wrong. I came across a video where I could see people giving testimonies of faith. I decided to contact them. It was a Christian community. I told my story. The pastor suggested deliverance. I came into the room and the gathered were dancing, jumping, singing, and praying in tongues. I was disappointed because there was no cross in that place. Suddenly, I felt pain that spread throughout my entire body. It bent. I fell to the floor, hit by some kind of supernatural power. The pastor was expelling the demons of suicide, depression, and rape. I could hear a voice in my head saying: *you are reborn*. The pain I suffered disappeared. I went off my medication. I don’t get sick anymore. When demons return, I will pray and bind them in Jesus’ name” (female, age range: 18–30, the independent church).

The discussion above demonstrates clearly that the Neo-Pentecostal worship patterns have been embraced by both Catholics and the so-called independent churches. Father John Bashobora, although Catholic, performed an exorcism which was in accordance with the Neo-Pentecostal deliverance methodology (e.g., praying in tongues) instead of with the guidelines set out by the Church. It is also worth mentioning that the pastor who represented one of the so-called independent churches selected for this study identified demons connected with the interviewee’s past experiences. Surprisingly, he did not make an attempt to find out their theological names (H3). When it comes to the ritual itself, the Catholic one was structured from the beginning to end, whereas the Neo-Pentecostal deliverance relied on a spontaneous prayer uttered by the pastor and community members (H4). Finally, the question of spiritual warfare should also be raised. All the respondents who participated in this study agreed on its continuous nature. In other words, they were convinced that demons might attack them once again in the future. However, their participation in deliverance changed their attitude towards “the

enemy.” The word “equipped” was used by many times by the interviewees. To be more precise, they realized they had been given spiritual armor (H5). As far as the aftermath of the ritual is concerned, the following powerful effects were reported: (R1, R6, R11) a rest of heart, (R2, R17) behavioral changes, (R3, R10, R20) a full recovery from a medical point of view, (R4, R7, R8) lack of fear, (R9) getting rid of headaches, (R12) getting rid of physical weakness, (R13) getting rid of a sin of masturbation, (R15) absence of demonic voices; overcoming drug addiction, (R18) a change in attitude towards other people, and (R19) coming off psychiatric medication. Concluding this section, it may be argued that in all the cases referred to above, the recovery process turned out to be successful. Generally speaking, the main reason for which all the respondents decided to get exorcised was the fact that their quality of life had deteriorated. Some interviewees came a long way, whereas the others were released from their suffering on the first try.

Conclusions

What emerges from this research is that members of the selected Polish Charismatic communities recognized demonic interference in their lives either by themselves or with the help of religious leaders. Furthermore, as many as eight interviewees claimed to have been possessed (five women and three men). The study focused entirely on respondents’ subjective perceptions. Therefore, the content of this research has not been consulted with mental health professionals, although some symptoms of a demonic activity resemble those enumerated by the *Manual*. A number of the conclusions of this study may have wider validity to both psychiatry and religious studies. The results of the research support all the proposed hypotheses.

Firstly, the interviewees were able to determine the causes of their condition. This implies that making a proper diagnosis from a spiritual point of view may end intense suffering, which used to affect an individual’s daily functioning. The findings show that the recovery process started on the day the exorcised was counseled by a religious leader. Surprisingly, deliverance turned out to be more successful than the previously-received medical treatment. In consequence, those interviewees who, for instance, used to hear demonic voices or see mysterious figures no longer experience them.

Secondly, it is important to distinguish between the Catholic, well-structured ritual and the Neo-Pentecostal spontaneous style of worship. It should also be noted that although Catholic priests are expected to follow the official guidelines, it is not always the case since the Neo-Pentecostal practices and

language have been embraced even by the mainline as well as the so-called independent churches. Eventually, for instance, theological names of demons have been replaced by the areas of evil based mainly on psychology-related issues, such as fear, rejection, or confusion.

Thirdly, the findings lend strong support to the argument that spiritual warfare is a continuous process. The interviewees agreed on its nature, emphasizing the necessity to stay alert. In other words, they admitted that they had been equipped with practical knowledge on how to repel demonic attacks.

To conclude, the question of demonic interference requires a great deal of further research which should be conducted in cooperation with specialists representing different fields. From a religious point of view, demons do exist, whereas according to psychiatrists, all the presented symptoms may suggest dissociative identity disorder (DID). The answer probably lies somewhere between these two poles.

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