

IAMS 2016 Paper Proposal
Healing/Pneumatology Study Group

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Proposed Title: "Making Room for the Holy Spirit: Exorcism in Origen's *Homilies* and in the Early Christian Catechumenate"

Abstract:

Deliverance from bondage to evil spirits has long been noted as an important aspect of the growth of early Christianity during its first three centuries. Exorcism was commonly understood mostly as a sign that, when performed, rendered such psychological force upon observers as to elicit an almost instantaneous conversion response. However, as Alan Kreider's recent work has proposed, conversion in the early church was not an instantaneous event, but a process of transformation through "patient ferment" and the cultivation of new *habitus*, which primarily occurred during a period of liminality and identity reconfiguration known as *catechesis*. As a contribution to this insightful new line of thinking about the nature of conversion in the Early Church, I wish to focus on the role that Christian exorcism, the deliverance from demonic oppression, played within the catechetical process as but one of the aspects of identity transformation that occurred during the process of conversion. My thesis, drawing from insights from cognitive anthropology, is that exorcism fundamentally represents a complex internal reordering of relationships with the cosmological order (the spirit world). I will examine in depth relevant selections from the "midweek" homilies of the Church Father Origen, which are widely believed to have been focused on the instruction and preparation of catechumens. I will especially focus on an account of an impromptu exorcism as it is recoded in Origen's *Homily on 1 Samuel*, as a case study, set within the framework of Early Christian understandings of the demonic, exorcism, and conversion.