



Dear Friends,

Recently I was asked to make a statement about the use of authority in the Unbound model. It has come to my attention that certain individuals have been critical of Unbound in their teaching, and that this criticism has negatively influenced several people who are doing Unbound ministry. In this letter, I will present a response to some of the criticism and explain the biblical and theological basis for our methodology within a Catholic framework. I intend to present my position with clarity in the hope that I can find common ground with those who disagree.

For those who may be unfamiliar with Unbound ministry, our teaching and ministry is based upon Five Keys: Repentance and Faith, Forgiveness, Renunciation, Authority, and the Father's Blessing.

The Controversy over Authority (the Fourth Key).

Over the years I have encountered some people who promote the idea that a lay person cannot command evil spirits to leave a person to whom they are ministering. This idea seemed to be a response to the experience of demonic confrontations during exorcism and to reflect the fear that a lay person may become vulnerable to spiritual attack or reprisal if they give a command.

There have also been abuses in deliverance ministry over the years that have provoked many valid pastoral concerns for the protection of God's people. When these pastoral concerns were misinterpreted, misunderstood, or over accentuated, vague and overreaching theological reasoning about lay people and their authority developed without a proper review. This, combined with an unhealthy fear of the devil, and a misplaced sense of obedience has created a cloud of suspicion regarding the Catholicity of our teaching that lay people can command evil spirits to leave a person in the context of Unbound.

In my own study of this topic, which is reflected in my book *Resisting the Devil: A Catholic Perspective on Deliverance*, I found that prohibiting the use of a direct command is a rumor derived from pastoral concerns, or from a misinterpretation of a 1985 Vatican document, not a magisterial teaching or a sound theological teaching.

Recently, the criticism we face has been based on the theological opinion of an exorcist who teaches that a lay Catholic can only cast spirits out of themselves, their children or spouse. Some have viewed his teaching as the *authentically Catholic* approach and have regarded it as authoritative.

I cannot speak to the motivation for such a teaching. What I do know is that some exorcists believe the rumor, and others are seeking a cautious approach because of their experiences with evil spirits in exorcisms. Whatever the reason, this opinion drastically undermines the authority given to the believer in baptism. We live in an age where the need for deliverance ministry is so great that a multitude of lay people need to be equipped to carry it out. I am concerned that this teaching will have a stifling effect upon lay persons involved in ministry and will promote unreasonable fears.

Unbound in Context

Unbound is *not the ministry of exorcism* and should not be viewed or carried out from that perspective. Nor should parts of it be evaluated apart from the whole. Unbound is best understood as evangelization because it involves helping a person encounter Jesus Christ, appropriate the good news, and experience the kingdom of God. Unbound is person-centered, not demon-centered. It is a prudent approach that incorporates many guidelines to safeguard those doing the ministry as well as those receiving it.

One expressed concern is the fear that demons will retaliate against those who do the work of deliverance without the authority of a priest to accompany them. This fear is not based on any teaching of the Church. In fact, it is in conflict with Jesus' assurance of spiritual protection in Luke 10:10 and Mark 16:17-18. In our experience, those who do Unbound ministry *as we teach it* do not experience any more retaliation than is normal for those doing the work of evangelization. This

observation is based on over 20 years of training leaders in the Unbound model in over 20 countries.

Deliverance is another word for salvation. Liberation from the influence of evil spirits takes place in the context of surrendering to Jesus, exercising authority in His name, and encountering God the Father. Freedom is the result of the action of the Holy Spirit as a person embraces the truth of the gospel as it is proclaimed.

Jesus and his disciples proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God, cast out demons and healed the sick. This activity continued throughout the time of the first apostles and in the early church. Having worked in evangelism since 1970, I learned by experience that evangelism, deliverance from the influence of evil, and healing are intimately connected. Eliminating any of these weakens the kerygmatic proclamation.

Lay people should be encouraged to proclaim the kingdom of God in all of its power. Bad practices should be corrected by good teaching, not by rules that are unsupported by scripture or the tradition of the church. This teaching that lay people cannot give a command undermines and raises questions about their baptismal identity and calling. One of the great needs of the church today is for lay Catholics to begin to exercise the authority they have received for mission while respecting hierarchal authority.

Authority in Unbound Ministry.

In the critique we received, the claim was made that the only sources of authority are natural (such as family relationships) or sacerdotal (i.e., priestly). This implies that a lay person only has the authority to command spirits afflicting himself or those under his authority (spouse or children) or in the administration of an office. I would like to address this limited view by describing the authority that God's children have and how it is expressed in Unbound ministry.

Where does the lay Catholic receive the authority to minister to others?

First: From God through Baptism and faith.

Lay Catholics who minister in Unbound are exercising the authority they have as children of God. The prodigal son received a ring from his Father so that he could represent his Father and carry on his business by participating in his authority. Exercising authority is part of the very nature of being children of God.

In John 1:12, we read *“But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”* The word translated as power is literally “authority.” We need to exercise both authority and power to fulfill our mission as God’s children.

In any area that there is God-given responsibility, there is also God-given authority and power to carry out that responsibility in accordance with our faith. This God-given responsibility is not restricted to the family. Every baptized believer has authority to serve in Jesus’ name. Every believer is called to be a missionary disciple. Jesus commands his disciples to go forth and make disciples, and he gives them power to be his witnesses.

Baptized believers carry Jesus’ authority to invite people to taste and see the goodness of the Lord. This authority was given for the purpose of humble service and love for others, not to lord it over them.

Second: From the people we serve.

I have authority to minister to people because they come to me and ask for ministry. When people ask you to help them in their need, they expect you to exercise your God-given authority and they give you permission to use it on their behalf.

When a person asks me for Unbound ministry, I have the authority to minister using the Five Keys and to speak a command. In the command, the authority I exercise is not *over* the person, it is *with* the person. The command is an expression of faith in union with the person and on their behalf. The command is, “In the name of Jesus I break the power of every spirit that (person’s name) has renounced and I command them to leave right now.”

Jesus has paid the price for every believer and defeated their enemies. We exercise our faith confident that to the extent that the person has closed the door

to the influence of evil spirits through the first three Keys, those spirits now have to leave.

Why does the minister give the command and not the person?

The Unbound minister is exercising authority throughout the session by leading and it is a natural step to invite the person to silence and be in touch with what is happening internally as the minister speaks the command. They are full participants as this is often the point where God reveals to them their hearts. This is not a confrontation or a challenge to demons. It is an expression of faith, not a ritual. Many have never heard a word of command spoken in Jesus name in a calm manner and with authority.

It is valid to have the person give the command and have the leader confirm it with expressions of faith. But for practical reasons we recommend that the leader speak the command as a continuation of his/ her leadership being expressed throughout the session. Before the command, the leader tells them to be aware of their thoughts. This gives them permission to relax and receive what God is doing. After the command, the leader asks the person, "What is coming to your mind?" The person will usually say something like, "when you spoke the command, I saw/felt... spirits leaving, something lifting, an image of freedom, or an image that reveals the root of their bondage.

If the recipient of ministry gives the command, they may not be able to recognize the shift that took place. They may not relax or be as aware of their thoughts. Or they might question themselves and how they said it—did they say it with enough authority? etc. They might focus on their words or voice instead of their thoughts.

Jesus is our example. He healed and set free those who came to him. Hearing about his great works and teaching drew many people to Jesus. Jesus did not seek to control people, demand their allegiance, or drive out demons from those who did not come to him. He responded to those who came to him and listened to their requests. God the Father offered his Son and awaits our response. When we proclaim the gospel, which is a testimony of God's liberating work, people come expressing a free act of their will.

In Unbound we make every effort to instruct people who are asking for ministry, so that they can make a free and informed decision of their will. They give us permission to serve them in the same manner that a person might ask a spiritual director to give them counsel. When a person demonstrates a charism of the Holy Spirit as they serve, they exercise their authority. Those who recognize the charism at work in the minister and ask for their help receive the gift at work on their behalf.

In Unbound ministry, authority is exercised by taking the initiative to listen, love and affirm the person as they are led through the Five Keys. The command is an expression of faith and agreement with what the person has already done.

Authority to command spirits to leave.

Any pastoral directive that restricts the exercise of the authority of the believer should be tested in light of scripture, tradition and the teaching of the magisterium before making any generalizations or drawing any theological conclusions.

The issue of a layperson's authority to command spirits to leave has been addressed in *Deliverance Ministry*. Published in 2017 by the Doctrinal Commission of the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal and written by highly respected theologians in consultation with leaders throughout the world, this work was reviewed by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith and introduced and endorsed by Cardinal Kevin Farrell. This work affirms that a lay person has the authority to give a direct command to evil spirits.

Below are three key pieces of evidence that support the lay command.

1. The Scriptures

Mark 16:15-17

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons...."

In this passage, Jesus declares that the casting out of evil spirits will be a sign that accompanies those who believe and are baptized. He does not restrict this ministry to the apostles or to any other office.

Luke 10:1-19:

After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come.... The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you."

In this passage, Jesus appoints seventy other disciples and sends them to preach the kingdom of God. They returned with joy that the demons responded to the authority they exercised in the name of Jesus. The God-given authority they carried was directly related to their mission and responsibility to proclaim the gospel.

2. Tradition

The following is a selection from *Deliverance Ministry*, reflecting upon the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Alphonsus Liguori.

3.5.3 The Role of Direct Commands

Another central element of deliverance is to adjure the evil spirit, that is, to command it in the name of God or Jesus. Adjuration is "the invocation of God, or a holy thing, or one of the saints for the purpose of inducing someone to do or to omit something." In the case of deliverance, this means one invokes the name of Jesus to command the spirit to stop afflicting the person and to leave. This is part of deliverance because it is the way Jesus and his disciples cast out demons and has been taken up by the Church. It is usually not enough simply to take back our consent to a lie, because we are not dealing only with ourselves, but with another being. Here too, we are simply putting into action the authority God has given us over evil spirits in our lives and in the lives of others, which is recognized in Catholic tradition. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "It is written (Mark 16:17): 'In My name they shall cast out devils.' Now to induce anyone to do a certain thing for the sake of God's name is to adjure. Therefore it is lawful to adjure the demons." As an exercise of our God-given authority, adjuration is legitimate and effective.

4:2 In the meantime, more clarity grew about a diversity of ways of casting out demons. The type reserved to ordained ministers and invested with the authority of the Church was named "public," since it is performed in the name of the Church with a precise ritual. However, moral

theologians in the modern period also developed the notion of a “private” exorcism for less severe cases of demonic influence. St. Alphonsus Liguori noted that these private exorcisms are not reserved to priests or bishops and need no special authorization, but are “permissible to all.” Some moralists stress that they are to be used frequently. They are commended to all confessors, as well as to each of the faithful for their own spiritual life. In some cases, especially if they have the charismatic gift of miracles, the faithful perform private exorcisms to free someone other than themselves. The regulation of combat against demons by the Church thus leaves open a space for all the faithful to take their part.

3. A Vatican document

The following is also from *Deliverance Ministry*, reflecting upon a Vatican document issued in 1985.

In 1985 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a document with some more details, *Letter to Ordinaries Regarding Norms on Exorcism (Inde ab aliquot)*. The Congregation was asked to give its opinion on prayer groups in the Church led by lay people where deliverance from demons is practiced, even when these are not properly speaking exorcisms. A first comment to be made is that the CDF thus recognizes that some people practice a form of deliverance which is not exorcism, that lay people lead these, and that neither of these are forbidden.

The document makes three points. First, Canon Law must be observed, especially the provision that exorcisms may only be performed by priests with the explicit permission of the bishop (canon 1172). Second, laypersons may not use the prayer of Exorcism of Satan and the Fallen Angels published under the authority of Pope Leo XIII. Third, the document stresses that, even in the more general case of deliverance from demonic influence (rather than full exorcism), public meetings in which demons are “questioned directly and their identities sought to be known” by “those who are without the due faculty” are not permitted. Finally the document recommends that the faithful pray to be protected from evil according to the words of the Lord’s prayer, “deliver us from evil” (Mt 6:13) and advises recourse to the sacraments and to the intercession of Mary, the angels and the saints.

A widespread interpretation of the third point holds that it prohibits lay people from giving direct commands to demons. We do not believe this to be the correct understanding.

First, this point does not concern only laypersons but anyone who has not received explicit permission from the bishop, so priests also fall into this category. Second, the Latin original states that demons should not be “questioned directly” (*directe interpellantur*). This does not correspond to a prohibition of direct command but rather of dialogue with demons. The rest of the sentence—“questioned directly and their identities sought to be known”—confirms this understanding. Though it is not exclusive, there is a strong link between *interpellare* and seeking the spirit’s identity: demons should *especially* not be questioned with the intention of seeking their names.

For these reasons, we understand that *Inde ab aliquot* forbids anyone, layperson or priest, who has not received from the bishop the authorization to practice public exorcisms, to dialogue

with demons, to ask them for help, and especially to question them about their identity. Though it does not commend any other form of direct address or confrontation with demons, it does not prohibit them either—so it does not prohibit direct commands spoken by the lay faithful. Even less does it forbid the faithful to pray for deliverance of demonic influence.

A second criticism involves lay people laying hands upon others in an Unbound session and during the Father’s blessing (the Fifth Key).

Some have expressed the opinion that the laying on of hands is an expression of taking authority over a person or acting like a bishop who lays hands during ordination, or a priest laying hands in the sacrament of the sick or giving a priestly blessing. Those who object seem to be viewing Unbound ministry as a ritual instead of a normal human encounter that believers should have regularly with one another. The expression of our hands in an Unbound session does not signify any of these actions of the clergy; rather it is a gesture of ordinary Christian life grounded in Sacred Scripture (see, for instance, Mk 5:23; 16:18; Acts 9:17).

Touching in a human encounter is important. A touch gives expression to the words we are saying or praying. Touch in this context is informal, not formal. It is an expression of love and support. When we hold a hand or put a hand on a shoulder during the first three keys, it is an expression that we are walking together with them. Sometimes expressing forgiveness or renouncing is very difficult for people and a touch communicates, “you are not alone, I am with you.” Some can become overwhelmed by a sense of evil they are naming. A reassuring touch says to the person you are confident and not afraid. This is one way you lend them your faith and bring them to the Lord as so many in the Gospels brought their loved ones to Jesus for healing. In addition to all of these expressions, it is also true that when we lay hands on a person, the Lord often will use it as a means of His divine power, bringing healing, relief from pain, or deliverance.

In Unbound we make practical recommendations regarding appropriate touch that are helpful to people such as asking them first. The laying on of hands is neither a requirement nor a ritual. We also teach that a trained intercessor must be present as a witness to the ministry and for the safety of the minister and the recipient.

The Father's blessing (the Fifth Key) is also not a formal prayer or a ritual. In the Hebrew tradition, a blessing imparts something good when it is spoken. The blessing empowers someone to prosper, thrive, and have a pleasant journey. We speak a blessing with the understanding that the person has already received the Father's blessing at their Baptism. The words that God spoke to Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan River now communicate the Father's love to this person personally. The Father desires to help every believer receive a deeper knowledge of his love. When the prodigal son returned home, the father ran towards him and embraced him. For this reason, ministers often place their hand on the person's head, shoulder, or back as they speak words that reveal the Father's delight. The touch and the words communicate that the person is a beloved son or daughter of God.

A restriction that prohibits lay people from laying on their hands, simply because it resembles the action of a priest or bishop in another context, is unjustified.

Conclusion

The fact that lay people can command demons to leave does not mean that all lay people can practice deliverance *as a ministry*—any more than the fact that lay people *can* teach means that all lay people *should* teach. Not all have the needed gifts, skills, training, or maturity. The pastoral concerns that arise in various places are valid and should be dealt with through sound theology and helpful guidance.

Adjustments can be made to how Unbound is practiced in various pastoral and cultural situations. However, these changes should not be made on grounds that undermine the exercise of authority by a lay person, which is fundamental to one's baptismal identity. From my perspective, the criticisms and opinions I have described above have done just that. It is my hope that this response fosters greater dialogue and understanding, and that the work of setting the captives free can continue to grow in the Church today for the glory of God.

Yours in in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neal Lozano". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Neal Lozano