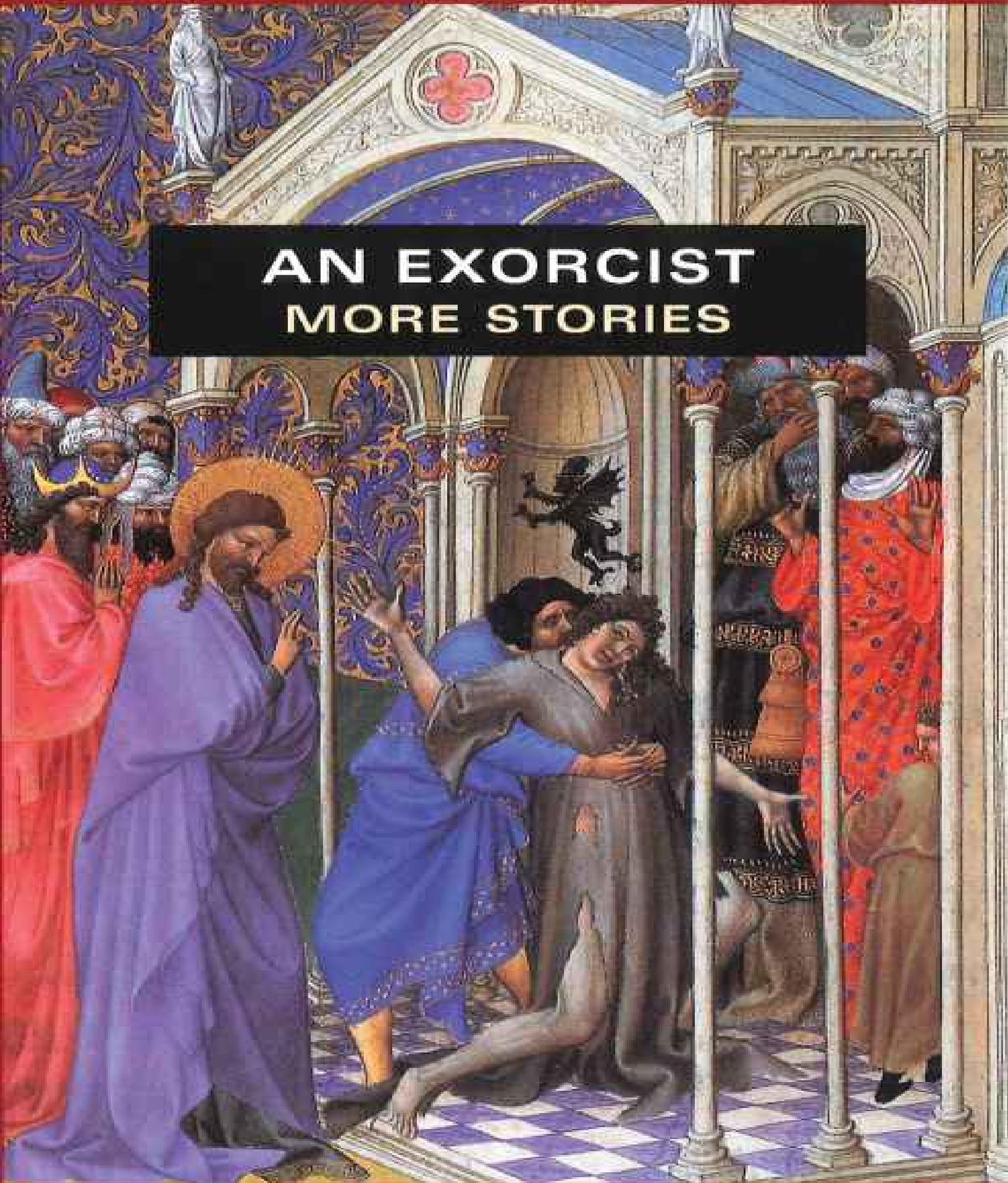


GABRIELE AMORTH

**AN EXORCIST
MORE STORIES**



IGNATIUS

AN EXORCIST: MORE STORIES

FATHER GABRIELE AMORTH

AN EXORCIST: MORE STORIES

Translated by Nicoletta V. MacKenzie

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INTRODUCTION

My previous book, *Un esorcista racconta* (1990; English: *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1999), was successful beyond my most optimistic expectations, generating more interest than what I thought was warranted. I can explain this phenomenon only by referring to Proverbs 15:23, “*Sermo opportunus est optimus*”, that is: the best sermon is the one delivered at the right time. I believed there was an immediate need to discuss the topic of exorcism, and I felt an urgency to write about it. I cannot deny that I am gratified not only by the rapid diffusion of the book, but also by the many things that happened after its publication.

In view of the great response to the topic among both clergy and laity, I decided that I would provide a service to everyone by following up with a second book. When I was planning the format of *An Exorcist: More Stories*, I intended to limit the book to a series of examples with commentary. Then I realized that I needed to expand some topics that I had barely mentioned in my first book so as not to make it too heavy. This second volume is still based on my personal experience under the direction of Father Candido Amantini, but it also includes the experience of other exorcists and their suggestions; I want to thank them, and other Catholic faithful, for their contribution to my work.

As far as the format of the book is concerned, I believe that concrete examples are fundamental for understanding the subject matter that I will discuss. Therefore, I begin each chapter with one particular topic and conclude the chapter with an example—among the many—that best illustrates my point. These examples were all chosen from recent occurrences; in fact, some are still unresolved. I reported the unabridged facts, but I changed the names and significant details to protect the identity of the victims and anyone else involved.

I thank the Lord for this second book; I hope that it is as successful as the last one, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

IN MEMORY OF FATHER CANDIDO AMANTINI

I cannot write this book without pausing to remember my teacher, Father Candido Amantini, whom the Lord called home on September 22, 1992. It was the feast of Saint Candido, Father Amantini's patron saint. To his brother priests who had come to wish him well, he simply answered: "Today, I asked Saint Candido for a gift." Since he was in great physical pain, we all guessed his request, and he received his gift.

Father Candido was born in 1914 at Bagnolo of Saint Flora (Grosseto). In addition to his vast education—he had taught Sacred Scripture and moral theology—he was endowed with holiness and wisdom, and he had a well-balanced spirituality. For these reasons, he was in great demand as confessor and as spiritual director. Padre Pio said of him: "Father Candido is a priest after God's heart."

However, he is best known because of his activity as exorcist for the diocese of Rome—a position he held for thirty-six years. People flocked to him from all over Italy and the entire world; he would see up to seventy or eighty individuals every morning. He was invariably patient, always smiling, and his advice often turned out to be inspired.

He had a great love for the Blessed Virgin, which he expressed in his book *Il Mistero di Maria*.¹ In the end, it was prayer (he would also pray all night) and his ministry that completely absorbed his life, so much so that he had no time to write. In 1990, I began to feel that his health was failing, and I was afraid that the wealth of his experience as an exorcist—experience that he had tried to teach me with so much patience—would be lost. That is why I rushed to write *Un Esorcista Racconta* (English: *An Exorcist Tells His Story*) and begged Edizioni Dehoniane to print it as quickly as possible: I was afraid that Father Candido would not be able to read and correct it.

Instead, he flew to his reward on the eve of the publication [in Italy, 1992] of this second book, *An Exorcist: More Stories*, to which he had also contributed. I am grateful to him, and I ask for his intercession from heaven.

G. A.

WANTED: EXORCIST

When Cardinal Ugo Poletti, in June 1986, assigned me as an assistant to Father Candido Amantini, to help him in his ministry as exorcist, he opened up a new, completely unknown world to me. Contrary to what one might think, my strongest impressions were not provoked by extreme cases, by the most unusual phenomena, those that we believe only if we see them. The strongest and most lasting impression, for a beginner-exorcist, is coming in contact with a world where suffering of the soul—more than of the body—is the norm. Those who live in this realm approach the priest with trust and openness, in much need of his help and his advice.

For the most part, the exorcist's main task is to comfort the discouraged, enlighten the ignorant, and remove false fears and misguided behavior (going to magicians, card readers, and such). To do this, he must encourage souls to be reconciled with God, to resume a regular life of faith, prayer, and reception of the sacraments, and to resolve to embrace God's Word. Despite my long priestly ministry, I have never had so many occasions to bring back to God and to the Church so many individuals and entire families. The majority of those who call an exorcist do not need exorcisms, but a real conversion.

I would like to give a brief account of a series of events that, in my opinion, were very meaningful because they not only increased my awareness and knowledge in the field, but also were instrumental in opening doors to all sorts of contacts at the national and international level. At the end of September 1990, my book *Un Esorcista Racconta (An Exorcist Tells His Story)* made its debut. I did not think that it would cause a *furor*. However, a few days after it first appeared in bookstores, a middle-aged priest stopped me and told me: "I devoured your book, from the first to the last word. I assure you that no one had ever told me anything about what you wrote." Then I began to receive a number of very welcome letters from other exorcists: they all indicated an unconditional approval of the book. Then began the long series of reviews and interviews; television, radio, almost all the major periodicals, mostly secular. In 1991, *Radio Maria*, which reaches all of Italy, broadcast a series of discussions on the book, from February 12 to September 24, under the expert leadership of Father Livio. Needless to say, this was the quickest way to spread word about the book and its contents. In addition, a great number of meetings, letters, and conferences had a role in bringing to the attention of a large audience what I had gradually discovered during my ministry as exorcist, that is: how great—and growing—is the demand for exorcists and also, unfortunately, how inadequate is the action and the preparation of the men of the Catholic Church. I will expand on these two topics in this introductory chapter.

First: Why, today, is there such a high demand for exorcists? Can we make the case that the demon is more active today than in the past? Can we say that the incidence of demonic possession and other, lesser, evil disturbances is on the rise? The answer to these and similar questions is a decisive Yes. Rationalism, atheism—which is preached to the masses—and the corruption that is a by-product of Western consumerism have all contributed to *a frightening decline in faith*. This I can state with mathematical certainty: where faith declines, superstition grows.

The many factors that promote the present growth in superstition include movies, television, radio, and newspapers. The media not only broadcast pornography, but also promote so-called magic: spiritism, the occult, oriental rituals. Certain kinds of mass gatherings, tapes, and discos also disseminate subliminal messages, satanic rock, and more. Eventually, the police are called in to deal with the consequence of these excesses: crime. It is a well-known fact that the horoscope is the most widely read section of newspapers in the West. There is more: in Italy, we are all too familiar with two evils that are often tied to satanic rites—the legalization of abortion and the spread of illegal drugs. Finally, on October 31, 1991, the third penal section of the Italian Constitutional Court officially sanctioned the activity of fortune-tellers—as well as those dealing in graphology, astrology, and paranormal disciplines—as a legitimate source of income subject to taxation.

While estimates vary considerably, it is estimated that, as a result of the legalization of the above-cited “professions”, more than twelve million Italians visit magicians, sorcerers, card readers, and so on, every year. This figure comes from the March 1991 Perugia congress, *Magic, New Religions, and the Esoteric in Italy*. When we add the explosion of satanic sects, we can assert with confidence that Italian citizens are not protected either by the State or by the men of the Church (see the following section of this chapter for a physician’s opinion).

I wish that those twelve million Italians, instead of approaching a magician, had visited a priest; unfortunately, they did not, because the flame of their faith had been dimmed to a mere spark. According to a survey by ISPES [Istituto per la Promozione della Sviluppo Economico e Sociale], commissioned by [the Italian Catholic magazines] *Famiglia Cristiana* and *Jesus*, only 34 percent of Italians believe in the existence of demons. Still, even if a larger percentage believed in it, what sort of help could they expect? The January 1992 edition of *Vita Pastorale* [an Italian Catholic magazine] published an interesting article by Armando Pavese, a scholar in this field. Among other assertions, he states that at least 100,000 experienced “professionals” of the occult operate in Italy. This compares to fewer than 38,000 priests—who, in the field of demonology, are practically illiterate.

At the end of this chapter I will give an example of the painful path our faithful must walk in search of an exorcist. How difficult it is to be heard with that minimum of empathy required by Christian charity! We are confronted with an ignorance that cannot be justified and that I will address in the second part of this chapter.

Now for the second question: How prepared are the men of the Church to deal with this challenge? In the Catholic world, exorcism has been almost extinct for countless decades. It is otherwise in some Protestant denominations. The following is a statement of fact that is not meant as an insult: Catholic bishops, almost without exception, have never performed or witnessed an exorcism. How, then, can they be expected to believe in phenomena that are hard to accept even for those of us who, as exorcists, experience them firsthand?

The truth is that Sacred Scripture is very clear on the subject. We also have the witness of Christian praxis and teachings throughout the history of the Church. Finally, there is Canon Law. With few exceptions, a wall has been erected between us and yesterday's praxis and the teachings of the Church: an absence of exorcisms. And there is a wall of silence as regards Sacred Scripture and, worse, there is an incorrect interpretation of Scripture by some theologians and biblical scholars. Priests, from whose ranks bishops are appointed, should be taught about this topic when they study the three branches of theology: dogmatic theology, spiritual theology, and moral theology.

Dogmatic theology speaks of God the Creator. It also covers the existence of angels and demons and should present Sacred Scripture and Church teaching on the subject.

Spiritual theology, no matter how we structure it, incorporates both ordinary demonic activity—temptations—and extraordinary activity, which consists of all evil maleficence up to and including diabolic possession. Exorcism and other remedies against demonic activity should be taught in this context. The well-known manuals by Tanquerey and Royo Martin are still valid references. Unfortunately, spiritual theology has been neglected for many years. As a result, spiritual direction is almost nonexistent.

Moral theology should teach about the sins against the First Commandment, including superstition. It should enlighten the faithful about what is in conformity with God's will and what is against it, such as magic and necromancy. Sacred Scripture very clearly condemns superstition with particularly strong words. For instance, Deuteronomy's list (18:10-12) ends with a comprehensive condemnation of superstitious practices with the words: "Anyone who does such things is an abomination to the Lord." Unfortunately, many moral theologians today are no longer able to distinguish good from evil. They no longer teach what is a mortal sin and what is not. As a result, the faithful *have never heard about these prohibitions*. To verify this statement, all we have to do is look in the latest dictionaries of moral theology: *superstition* is no longer clearly defined.¹

I have asked many priests, from the youngest to the oldest, whether they learned about any of the topics I just mentioned in their theological studies; the answer was invariably negative. The only way to correct such a serious deficiency is to *begin with programs of studies in seminaries and universities*.

When, to these deficiencies, we add that certain theologians and biblical scholars disseminate erroneous information concerning exorcism, plus a lack of practical experience with it, we can readily understand how we reached this level of ignorance and disbelief. Errors include serious doubts about the very existence of demons and, even more

so, about the reality of demonic activity; the whole is camouflaged under the guise of “up-to-date interpretations”. Some go so far as denying that Jesus cast out demons, explaining that the examples we find in the Gospel should be interpreted simply as physical healings. The voice of ecclesial authority has spoken loudly and clearly against such errors in a document on demonology. The document was published in *L’Osservatore Romano* on June 26, 1975, and has since been included in the official documents of the Holy See.² For more information, refer to my book *An Exorcist Tells His Story*.

In summary: our people turn to magicians, and our clergy adopts an unbelieving attitude toward exorcisms for three reasons:

- Lack of knowledge and of preaching
- Insufficient practice of exorcisms
- Doctrinal errors

I will never tire of repeating that today’s clergy face an objective condition, partially through no fault of their own: the seminary formation of our priests does not address the existence of Satan, his activities, and the means to counter them, nor does it teach about the ways in which we can fall into the evils of malefice. As I have just stated, the reason is that theology classes neglect to mention the arguments of dogmatic theology, spiritual theology, and moral theology on the subject.

The majority of priests have never performed an exorcism or attended one. Often they have been influenced by scholars of theology and Sacred Scripture who no longer follow the sound doctrine of the Church because they believe that it is outdated, medieval, in its dealings with demons, their existence, and their actions. And we wonder why people are unable to find instruction, understanding, help, or even simply a sympathetic ear from priests. That is why they turn to sorcery.

To illustrate my point, I will quote the latest statistics concerning theologians; they are particularly revealing and terrible. I say “terrible” because they lead to the following conclusion: one out of three theologians does not believe in the existence of Satan; almost two out of three believe in his existence but not in his practical actions and refuse to take it into account in pastoral activity. This leaves very little room for those who believe and try to act accordingly. The few exceptions are forced to act against the tide, and often they are ridiculed and ostracized by the rest of the clergy. These statistics were gathered in West Germany in 1974 and were published in *Concilium*.³ Similar statistics were published in *Diavoli, demoni, possessioni*.⁴ These data correspond with my own direct knowledge and are evident in many articles written by experts in theology. In the following section I will present the dissenting opinion of one of France’s best-known theologians. Although the statistics I mentioned refer to theologians, their influence on the current mentality of the clergy is evident. If the evidence of their practical behavior is any indication, I believe that a poll among priests would yield similar results.

Some marveled, or were scandalized, because in my book *An Exorcist Tells His Story* I quoted the response of some bishops when they had to deal with evil phenomena. These answers are representative of a majority of the episcopate, it is true, but I also cautioned the readers not to generalize because, whenever a diocese has an exorcist, it also has a bishop who is aware of the problem. Here, I will repeat some of the bishops' more frequent statements that were included in my prior book: "I do not appoint exorcists as a matter of principle"; "I believe only in parapsychology"; "I would like to know who put these idiocies into your mind." Currently, I am exorcizing a young man who was rebuffed by his ordinary. This bishop refused to see him, refused to appoint an exorcist, and, when the parents demanded help, chastised them with the following accusation: "It is the two of you who are possessed."

Although they have not provided much practical help, bishops have always treated me very cordially. Since I have never lost the feistiness of my university days, I once told a bishop: "You are a successor of the apostles by appointment. It is up to you, however, to imitate them. If you refuse to exorcize, you do not act as they acted." I was even more forceful with another bishop. I suggested that he post a big sign on the door of his chancery, with the statement: "In this diocese we do not perform exorcisms because we do not believe in the Lord's promises that we can expel demons in his name. Anyone asking to be exorcized should seek out Anglicans, Pentecostals, or Baptists. They believe in the words of the Lord and practice exorcisms." I was rewarded with the following promise: "I will rethink this question." My next chapter outlines the basis for his second thoughts.

EXAMPLES

Letter to my bishop

Instead of one of the many letters of complaint, I chose to publish one of thanks that the head of a family wrote about the sufferings his wife had endured. He describes fifteen years of needless torture that could have been avoided if priests had believed in the words of Christ and in the powers that he conferred on them. I invite you particularly to reflect on the final questions.

Your Excellency: I was emboldened to write to you after watching a television program dealing with the problems caused by all forms of depression. According to a specialist, the only three remedies for this disease are: drugs (tranquilizers, sleeping pills, etc.); electroshock (electrical impulses); and psychotherapy (psychiatry, psychology, psychoanalysis).

One of the guest doctors cited the example of a patient at Saint Anne's Hospital (it could have been my wife). She claimed that no doctor in this world could ever heal her, because she was convinced that she had lost her soul and could find no peace. The psychiatrist concluded: "Here we have an instance of depression in which the patient believes herself to be damned. The Church speaks of the *devil*, but it is *just melancholy*."

The doctors never even considered contacting a priest. Why? As I listened to that program I was surprised by the ignorance of doctors who, supposedly, are experts on the topic of depression. I asked myself: What does psychiatry do for these individuals? It is possible that my wife's experience is not unique. It is possible that others who are languishing in the beds of psychiatric hospitals could be healed just as she was healed. Or could it be that the Church believes demonic possession is a psychological disorder? We read of many examples of possession in the Gospel. Unfortunately, after many conversations with priests and nuns I am convinced that they prefer to dismiss the existence of Satan. What do they teach in seminary that produces such ignorance?

Lately, the mother superior of a religious order, who helped my wife for many years during her illness and is, therefore, very familiar with her trials, asked me how she was finally healed. (I must explain that my wife was considered mentally ill.) I told her about Satan and his powers and of my good fortune in finally finding an exorcist priest. At the end of our conversation, she exclaimed: "Then Satan really exists! Our chaplains never speak about it."

These are not theories. I speak as the witness of a concrete event—my wife's; I watched her as she suffered for fifteen years. She led a normal life until she was ten; then her troubles began. Her grandmother used to invite a practitioner of the occult to her house to invoke certain spirits and, through them, to contact deceased members of her family. Sometimes my wife, then a child, was present during those sessions. That was the beginning of her mental instability. Her parents, who knew nothing of what was happening at the grandmother's house, watched their daughter's behavior change, becoming aggressive, wild, etc.

Gradually, her illness became so severe that she began to lose consciousness. Doctors found her behavior incomprehensible, because there was no sign of disease. Often she ran away from home; all visits to psychologists and psychiatrists were useless. The diagnosis was always the same: nothing was wrong, especially since her family life was peaceful and her parents loved her very much.

We were married in 1976. The first years of our marriage were fairly peaceful, but after three years her problems began to surface. Once again, she experienced loss of consciousness. We visited professionals, seeking help, but they could not find a reason for her condition, so they persisted in prescribing tranquilizers. Gradually, my wife began to experience serious problems in her faith life. She no longer wanted to go to church, no longer wanted to pray. When she came to church with me, she stood stiff, frozen, and only wished to leave as soon as possible. She felt guilty because she used to be committed to practicing her faith; at the same time, she did not understand her own actions. Thus, her behavior caused an even greater depression.

How many times she tried to explain her feelings to priests! They never understood her. They simply gave her palliative advice, such as: "These things happen. . . everyone is subject to doubts. . . you need to pray." But that was precisely her torment: prayer was so repugnant to her that she could not overcome the feeling. Thus she became more and more depressed, crying all the time. The doctors simply prescribed larger doses of tranquilizers and sleeping pills. Not surprisingly, she became addicted.

She then went through a period of heavy drinking. Alcohol had always revolted her, and, throughout this tormented period, she was unaware of what she was doing, including three attempts at suicide, by swallowing the contents of entire boxes of medicine, slitting her veins, etc. Fortunately, we were always able to save her at the last minute!

Finally, after they discovered that the alcohol concentration in her blood was 3.8 grams, the doctors decided to admit her to the hospital for detoxification. There, the staff was amazed to find no physical illness and no evidence of any signs of alcoholism: my wife was coherent and told everyone at the hospital of her problems with her faith. The doctors simply increased the dose of her tranquilizers, and she began to behave like a drug addict: she did not react to stimuli and did not remember anything.

Because I did not know what else to do, I took her to a medium. At first, my wife responded positively to these visits, but then things quickly went from bad to worse; clearly, I was on the wrong track.

We found out early in our marriage that my wife could not conceive, so, before our troubles began, we had started the process of adopting a child. Now, in the middle of this difficult period, we were offered a three-month-old boy. The news filled us with joy, and we hoped that our problems were at an end.

Instead, the illness resurfaced with greater violence and with multiple symptoms. For instance, she went through a period when sudden blindness would strike, at random; in her panic, she would yell at everyone. Alternately, she behaved like a deaf-mute or would cry out with horrible screams. She even tried to shoot the baby and me with a rifle and to throw herself out the window. She formed the habit of taking the car and leaving the house for hours; I had no idea where she went! At night, she would rise and run through the streets or see diabolic visions. Once, I had to give her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation because I found her senseless in the bathtub, with her head under water. She was also in an automobile accident but could not even remember getting into the car. I constantly had to leave work and run home for emergencies: it was a nightmare.

Still, through it all, I was convinced that if she could only find her faith, if she could pray again, things would improve. Unfortunately, she could not pray. The mere presence of a priest enraged her. I began to despair. My wife could no longer be left alone in the house and was unable to take care of our son. The future looked very bleak indeed.

Then I saw a glimmer of hope. A priest mentioned that my wife might be victim of an evil presence, and I found out, by chance, that there were two women in Portugal with the power to cast out demons. Against the advice of doctors and relatives, I drove there with my wife. No sooner had the women prayed over my wife than they told me she was possessed by demons. Their prayers achieved incredible results; for the first time in many years, my wife slept through the night with a restful, quiet sleep, without pills or tranquilizers. She felt well. She drove home from Portugal with a confidence that astonished me.

Before we left, the Portuguese women told us to recite certain prayers every day, and, for a while, we were able to lead a normal life, but the sickness came back. Finally, a priest helped me to contact an exorcist. The latter was so overwhelmed with work that he could not arrange to see us until two months after I contacted him. I will not elaborate on the prayers of exorcism and my wife's awful reactions. At the end of each exorcism she felt well, completely healed. After every relapse, the exorcist saw us immediately and taught us how to protect ourselves against Satan.

In addition, an individual who is endowed with the charism of discernment of infested objects [I will speak about this in a later chapter] and works with the exorcist who healed my wife came to our house and found three infested objects. I am convinced that my wife became the victim of an evil influence when her grandmother—in her presence—invoked the spirits of the dead. People should be warned that this practice is extremely dangerous. How is it possible that all the priests we consulted knew nothing of these things?

Now the attacks are less frequent. My wife can smile again, she is happy to be alive, to pray, to take care of our son, and to renew old friendships. She is a completely different person. Words are not sufficient to thank the exorcist who healed her. The fifteen years before we found him were terrible. It seems strange that, at the dawn of the third millennium, man is able to walk on the moon; we take computers, electronics, and robotics for granted; but we no longer know anything about realities of whose existence and dangers we were warned at least two thousand years ago.

Is it right to allow individuals to suffer the pains of hell only because we refuse to believe in the reality of diabolical possession? Does the Church provide a sufficient number of exorcist priests in response to our current needs? And are all other priests at least aware of these Gospel truths? Must we abandon all the victims of demonic persecution to the mercy of charlatans, who simply take advantage of all this pain to fatten their wallets?

I apologize for this angry outburst, but I am convinced that what seems to have been forgotten must be announced again. Finally, I want to thank you, Your Excellency, for appointing the exorcist who healed my wife.

The opinion of a famous French theologian

I believe that after the Second Vatican Council, perhaps as a reaction to past restrictions, some theologians often broadcast their opinions in a totally inappropriate manner. They began to teach as truth what were, at best, hypotheses requiring further study. There is no doubt that they contributed to the confusion and the derailment we see today. I do not,

however, intend to generalize, because the work of many theologians, who remained within the boundaries of their expertise and did not seek to encroach on the domain of the official Magisterium of the Church, is very valuable. I concur with the following statements published by one of the more famous French theologians, Henri de Lubac, with whom I am often in agreement.

On December 5, 1968, I refused to be associated with a “Declaration” issued by the theologians of the “Concilium” group; it seemed to me completely improper and demagogic and, in addition, without purpose (for these theologians were in reality enjoying full freedom of expression and were seeking in fact to impose their own dictatorship). Here is my text:

1. I have always been hesitant with respect to manifestations made by means of the press. [This declaration was destined for publicity.] One thereby makes appeal to the most incompetent, easily impassioned and in large part non-Christian opinion. I have more than once noted the improprieties of such proceedings.

2. In the present context, the proceeding seems to be doubly inopportune:

a. It risks increasing the trouble and agitation that are presently a sign, not of vitality, but of disintegration.

b. All the remaining chances for a true renewal in the Church depend on a sustained or reestablished awareness, affirmed in deeds, of Catholic unity. Before demanding for themselves additional freedoms and guarantees, even legitimate ones, theologians in the present circumstances have the incumbent and urgent duty to defend and promote this unity. That is an essential part of their “duty to preach the Word, in season and out”. Otherwise, proceeding in a unilateral way, they enter into the round of demands, nothing more.

3. To express my entire thought: too many facts show as well that the plurality of theological schools is today really threatened by all sorts of pressures, propaganda, intimidations, exclusivisms, which come from sources other than the legitimate authority. And seeing all that is or is not done, I have acquired the firm conviction that the freedom of action of the Magisterium of the Church is more seriously hindered than the freedom of speech of the theologians who are making the demands.

Finally, one question: Before having recourse to this path of collective declaration and manifesto, has any one of these theologians proposed to the competent authorities, with the required deference and freedom, a plan of reform or reorganization on the points close to his heart?⁵

Slowing down advancing impostors

This is the title of an article, clear and to the point, that Professor Silvio Garattini, the director of the Mario Negri Institute, published in the November 1991 issue of *Corriere Medico*. Exorcists fully support any doctor’s efforts to expose charlatans operating in the medical field.

Never before have impostors been so numerous and pervasive in the medical field as they are today. All we need to do is turn on the television set and tune in on private and public stations alike, and there they are: magicians, parapsychologists, or healers talking about diseases and how best to heal them.

The effrontery of these individuals—for now—stops only short of discussing cancer. They claim the therapeutic abilities to cure everything, from heart attacks to arthritis, from diabetes to sciatica. With incredible boldness, they answer the questions of complaisant reporters, or grant telephonic interviews to individuals who often have been primed. At the same time, they fail to mention that the viewer is watching a paid advertisement.

The presence of a doctor, who is always in agreement, is meant to reassure the audience that the interviews are legitimate, and to avoid potential problems. Magazine advertisements pick up where television leaves off. They offer a wide variety of merchandise, from weight loss products to natural foods, from hydro massages to herbs, and countless products to defeat cellulite and hair loss.

The barrage of advertisements increases in response to the credulity of the public. The results are to be expected, and include not only useless spending but also, more seriously, the risk of wasting valuable time before consulting a doctor who could really help. Anyone with a minimum of common sense should ask himself if duping one's neighbor should be legal.

What is Italy's secretary of health doing about all this? Has he ever raised his voice to try and alert the public? How about the Federation of Doctors? Couldn't the Federation expel from its ranks any doctor who lends credibility to activities that are contrary to good medical practice? These questions have gone unanswered for years. But, maybe, taking a stand in favor of public health would be unpopular!

CHRIST AGAINST SATAN

Everything I am about to say is based on the actions of Jesus, his teachings, and the powers that he bestowed on his disciples. Without these foundations, it is impossible to understand his redemptive activity.

We can frame Jesus' program within the following three statements:

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8). These words are very precise. We must take them into account if we seek to understand the work of the Divine Master.

“[H]e went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38). Peter uses this sentence to summarize Christ's redemptive action within the important context of Jesus' encounter with Cornelius (the first pagan to be converted to Christianity).

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:11-12). This is how Paul urges his audience when he outlines, in depth, the fight that a Christian must undertake to be faithful to his Lord.

In light of these words, we understand the great emphasis that the Gospels put on the direct battle between Christ and Satan and on the fundamental importance of the devil's total defeat.

From the beginning, immediately after the Father's solemn proclamation after the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the public life of Christ is shaped by his confrontation with temptation. Mark paints the encounter with the evil one with short but pointed words: “[H]e was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan.” Matthew and Luke tell us the object of the temptations, which is very revealing, because it is an echo of our own trials. In other words, we are asked to choose between the desires of the flesh (food, success, power. . .) and the will of the Spirit. We must choose between Satan's snares and God's promises.

The first Adam chose Satan's snares. The second Adam, Christ, chose obedience to God, even though his faithfulness meant rejecting the kingdoms of this earth and, in the end, embracing death on a Cross.

Satan was defeated from the beginning. The goal of the Master's preaching is to install the Kingdom of God and to pre-announce his final victory against Satan. Throughout the Gospels, the divinity of Christ becomes increasingly apparent and is highlighted by extraordinary signs: his miracles. Precisely because his action is bent on destroying Satan's power and freeing humanity, the dominion of Jesus over unclean spirits acquires particular value. Therefore, the evangelists persistently point out these events—which I will highlight throughout the book—making a very clear and precise distinction between healing from diseases and casting out demons.

To illustrate my point, I will start with Mark. At the very beginning of his Gospel, in the first chapter, he stresses Christ's power over demons *three times*. “[T]here was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.’ Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him’ ” (Mk 1:23-27). Note how perceptive: the crowd associates Jesus’ teaching with his power to expel demons. Both are equal proofs of his authority.

“That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered together about the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him” (Mk 1:32-34). Jesus does not want the witness of demons. His witness comes from the Father, and it will lead us to be his witnesses. Further, the demons’ witness is dangerous because they are liars by nature and they would disclose facts about Jesus’ person that he prefers to reveal in his own time and on his own terms.

Finally, Mark concludes the first chapter of his Gospel with the following sentence: “And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons” (Mk 1:39). Here, again, we have Jesus’ preaching tied to his victory over Satan.

Mark shows us Jesus’ power over demons in other chapters as well: “And whenever the unclean spirits beheld him, they fell down before him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’ And he strictly ordered them not to make him known” (Mk 3:11-12).

The meeting with the Syrophenician woman—a pagan whose great faith will be rewarded with the liberation of her daughter—is worthy of notice: this deliverance was accomplished “long-distance”, as the victim was not present (Mk 7:25-30).

The following two examples of liberation are significant because of the wealth of details Mark uses to describe them: *the Gerasene demoniac* (Mk 5:1-20) and *the boy with a demon that the apostles were unable to cast out* (Mk 9:14-29). Matthew and Luke also report the same events as particularly significant.

I conclude this review with some examples from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and I shall then point out some aspects of these events. I will focus on the value that Jesus himself places on these occurrences and the power that he bestows first of all on his apostles, then on the seventy-two disciples, and, finally, on all believers. Lastly, John, the fourth evangelist, chooses not to dwell on individual episodes, preferring to paint the concept of Jesus’ dominion over Satan in broad strokes.

At times, Matthew also writes of liberations in generic terms, without mentioning numbers. “[H]is fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them” (Mt 4:24). “That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with

demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick” (Mt 8:16).

Luke narrates examples of liberation in collective terms as well as in individual episodes such as that of the woman whose demonic possession had kept her bent over for eighteen years (Lk 13:11-17). “Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But he rebuked them, and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ” (Lk 4:40-41). “[A] great multitude. . . came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came forth from him and healed them all” (Lk 6:17-19). “[A]nd also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out” (Lk 8:2).

Now I will dwell on the two episodes that are more complex, richer in details. We begin with the *liberation of the Gerasene demoniac*, who was affected with the most severe form of complete diabolical possession, drawing primarily from Mark (5:1-20). We see that the demoniac’s superhuman strength enables him to break chains and shackles; his rage is such that it is dangerous to cross his path. (Other examples of possession manifest different symptoms; for instance, the diabolical torment can appear as a physical illness: see the narration of the liberation of the deaf-mute and the bent woman. The effects of possession still take many forms today.)

Significantly, Jesus asks the demon for his name, and the answer is very revealing: “My name is Legion; for we are many” (Mk 5:9). This happens today, too. Interestingly, Jesus grants the demons’ request, allowing them to enter the swine rather than sending them “out of the country” (Mk 5:10) or even “to depart into the abyss” as Luke reports (Lk 8:31). Similarly today, the demon often tells the exorcist where he would like to go, or the exorcist himself may name a location. The Gospel narrative ends when Jesus calls the healed man to a particular apostolate: speaking out as a witness to his liberation. It is not by chance that, while Jesus asks those whom he heals from a disease not to speak about it, he never commands a possessed individual to keep silent about his liberation.

The second liberation that is rich in detail is *the healing of the boy with a demon that the nine apostles could not liberate, while Jesus was on Mount Tabor with Peter, James, and John*. I refer to Luke 9:38-43, which describes another extremely serious case of possession. This time, first the demon’s victim becomes mute, then he is tormented by the evil spirit, who throws him on the ground and convulses him with seizures, like an epileptic. Worse: this demon is destructive and wants the death of his victim, his father’s only son, by throwing him now into fire and now into water (this is Mark’s description, 9:14-27).

I call your attention to two important details. First, Jesus asks: “How long has he had this?” (Mk 9:21). The Gospel never tells us the cause of a particular possession, but in this instance, it mentions the length of time, “from childhood”. Why is this important? Because it reveals that, obviously, the victim is guiltless.

The second important detail is Jesus' prescription for liberation. He asks the father to have faith: "All things are possible to him who believes" (Mk 9:23). To the apostles, who were amazed and discouraged because of their lack of success, he says: "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting" (Mk 9:29). Is this a limitation to the power he gave the apostles? Rather, I believe it is a precise indication that casting out demons is a most important and difficult reality. The success of exorcisms is not automatic and often requires much time, in addition to faith and prayer.

Now that we have seen with what power and frequency Jesus expels demons, it is time to reflect. First, we must realize that Jesus *recognizes the power of the evil one*:

He can enter a man: "Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him" (Jn 13:27), describing the end of Judas.

He can return with seven additional spirits more evil than himself, even after leaving (Mt 12:43-45).

He can astonish people by his actions, as Simon the Magician did (Acts 8:9).

At particular times, he has greater power: "[T]his is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Lk 22:53).

He can especially display this power during the last days, as the eschatological discourses of Revelation tell us.

Additionally, *the demon is in opposition to God's plans*:

In the parable of the sower, it is he who steals away the seed of God's word that falls on the path (Mt 13:19). In the parable of the good seed and the weeds, he is the enemy who sows the weeds (Mt 13:39).

He tries to change the children of God into his own children: "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (Jn 6:70). "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires" (Jn 8:44). "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (Acts 5:3). "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat" (Lk 22:31).

In light of these realities, the power that Jesus displays against Satan assumes the greatest implication and provokes a crisis among the scribes and the Pharisees. They try to explain it away with an excuse: he casts out demons through their prince. For instance: "As they were going away, behold, a mute demoniac was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds marveled, saying, 'Never was anything like this seen in Israel.' But the Pharisees said, 'He casts out demons by the prince of demons' " (Mt 9:32-34). This accusation is repeated often: "The Jews said to him, 'Now we know that you have a demon' " (Jn 8:52). "The scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons' " (Mk 3:22).

This allegation touches upon one of the most fundamental points of Christ's mission. He came to destroy Satan's works and to liberate all those who were under his power. Jesus' answer to the scribes' and Pharisees' statements is clear, comprehensive, and hinges on three arguments.

First argument: The accusation is completely absurd, because, if it were true, it would achieve the self-destruction of the kingdom of Satan. “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. . . . And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end” (Mk 3:23-26).

Second argument: even stronger than the first. While the first explanation shows the absolute absurdity of the accusation, the second gives the true meaning of what is happening. Therefore, it opens the eyes of the listeners to the real significance of the power that Jesus displays against unclean spirits. “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Mt 12:28). The expulsion of demons marks the arrival of the Kingdom of God into this world. This event is of fundamental importance: “[N]ow shall the ruler of this world be cast out” (Jn 12:31). “[T]he ruler of this world is judged” (Jn 16:11). It is for this work that Jesus came to earth, therefore: “At that very hour some Pharisees came, and said to him, ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.’ And he said to them, ‘Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course’ ’ ” (Lk 13:31-32).

Third argument: the clincher. Jesus clearly reveals his absolute superiority and the defeat of Satan. “When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace; but when one stronger than he assails him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoil” (Lk 11:21-22). The reference is obvious. The strong man is Satan, who believes himself to be safe. When Jesus comes, the demons complain through the demoniacs: “Have you come to destroy us?” Because Jesus is the stronger one, he overcomes the demons. “The ruler of this world. . . has no power over me” (Jn 14:30). “The ruler of this world is judged” (Jn 16:11). And the Kingdom of God begins. This is why, when Saint Paul is questioned by King Agrippa, he repeats the Lord’s words: “I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles—to whom I send you, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:17-18). After his defeat at the hands of Christ, Satan fights against Christ’s followers. The Second Vatican Council reminds us that this battle of the evil spirits will continue until the last day (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 37). This is why the Lord has given particular power to the apostles and to all those who believe in him.

EXAMPLE

Who is Satan? Who are demons?

We know very little of the visible world. We know even less of the invisible world. That is why it is easier to deny its existence than to investigate it. When we deny its existence, however, we unwittingly deny God’s omnipotence and wisdom. The majesty, perfect order, and precise end with which he created everything is inconceivable to the human mind.

When someone asks me how many angels there are, I quote Revelation, which speaks of myriads of myriads: an immense number, incomprehensible to our mind. When I am asked how many demons there are, I answer with the words that the demon himself spoke through a demoniac: “We are so many that, if we were visible, we would darken the sun.”

If you want to glean a faint idea of the grandeur of creation—of which we seldom think and which we cannot grasp—I invite you to reflect on the bodies that revolve around the sun. Astronomers can describe the marvels of the universe much better than I can, and one of them affirmed: “I do not believe: I see.” If we really thought about the universe, we would be stunned. Perfect wisdom connects the forces that hold it together. For instance: the earth binds the moon by force of attraction; the wise laws govern forces that allow it to rotate around our planet rather than crash into it [or fly off into space]. The entire solar system is part of a galaxy that comprises billions of stars. We know that all the bodies in this galaxy are held by one single source of attraction, which, astronomers think, is about thirty thousand light years from the solar system. The axis of our galaxy is about ninety thousand light years. We are speaking of unfathomable dimensions! From the distance of a few million light years, our galaxy appears simply as a bright dot.

We can see many other galaxies that are millions of light years from ours. How many? It is impossible to say. Astronomers would like to identify the center of the universe. They would like to pinpoint the central point of gravitation of all celestial bodies: up to now, they have been forced to be satisfied with these hypotheses. While we admire all that is immense in the cosmic system, scientists admire what is infinitely small, the coordination of atoms.

If the material order is astounding, what should we say about the spiritual order? The same God who created myriads upon myriads of celestial bodies, with marvelous order and with astonishing laws, used the same omnipotence and wisdom to create myriads upon myriads of celestial spirits. The Bible describes nine choirs of angels. The Fathers and the Scholastics have studied and written much about it. Modern theologians, on the other hand, are busy with sociology. Through it all, even among the celestial spirits there is such order, hierarchy, and fine intellect (since we are speaking of intelligent and free beings) that just to contemplate it is cause for joy, happiness, and beauty. All is ordered for the praise of the Creator.

Based on the biblical account, it is generally held that God first created the angels and then the cosmos. The mystery of the creation of the material world is marvelous in itself because it proceeds from the omnipotence and wisdom of God. However, its meaning is fulfilled only with the creation of man. It is only through man that the entire sensible creation, to which man belongs, is united with God, its Creator.

Man is a rational being because he was created in God’s image and likeness (Gen 1:26). This means that he can become reunited with his Creator and communicate with him. The material world, on the other hand, although also originating from God, is completely passive and depends on him for everything. Therefore, of itself, it cannot enjoy a direct and immediate relationship with its Creator.

The angels are celestial spirits who, because of their nature, are not subject to an immediate relationship with anything material. Since they are pure spirits, they did not understand the meaning of the world that God was creating under their very eyes: it was beyond their intellect. In fact, the creation of the universe seemed completely absurd to them until the very end, when, finally, there appeared a rational creature: man. As an intelligent and free being, man was able to have an immediate relationship with God and made the entire material world meaningful by using it to praise the Creator.

We believe that the angels' rebellion precedes man's creation. It has been theorized that, before the cosmos was completed and ennobled by man, some of the angels thought that the very creation of a material world was scandalous. From the very beginning, these angels did not praise God, and, from their perspective as spiritual creatures, they thought the material world was an absurdity and questioned God, setting the stage for their revolt. It appears that, in their arrogance, they were unable to give due credit to divine wisdom, just as man seems to be unable to give God's wisdom due credit when he is confronted with the problem of suffering.

Who is Satan? Rabbinical tradition asserts that he was the most important spirit standing by God's throne. He had twelve wings, twice as many as the Seraphim (cf. *Pirkè* of Rabbi Eliezer, 13). Let us pretend that our galaxy rejected the laws that rule the unceasing movement of the planets and decided to crisscross the sky at leisure. They would drag along with them innumerable bodies, with devastating repercussions throughout the firmament. The majority of the Fathers attribute the beginning of Satan's fall to pride, which fueled his desire to become greater than his condition of creature, to affirm his independence from God, and to covet the place rightfully belonging to God. Throughout the centuries, others have advanced different theories; however,

CHRIST AGAINST SATAN 41 everyone agrees that Satan's rebellion was made in freedom and is irreversible and that he dragged with him a multitude of angels who, also with perfect freedom and an act of willfulness, chose to follow him. Their implacable enmity against God stems from this event.

Man's creation also finds its end in God. The appearance of man marked the beginning of Satan's efforts to draw him away from his intended end and to embroil him in the rebellion against the Creator. Satan was the preeminent being created by God: the prince of all creation. Once he, consciously and with the fullness of his being and his will, rebelled against God with a rejection so complete and perfect that it was without the possibility of return, he became the creature most distant from God. The sin of rebellion remains inherent to his essence and will remain so throughout eternity. The Bible addresses him with many names: Satan, Lucifer, Beelzebul, ancient serpent, red dragon, and so on. Perhaps the most precise name, the one that fits him best, is *blasphemy*. If evil can be objectively personified in someone, its hypostasis is Satan.

What are the consequences of Satan's fall? As I have already said, because of the primacy and authority that he enjoyed when he rejected the moral and spiritual order of God, Satan dragged behind him a number of angels as numerous as the stars of a planetary system. These angels willed to follow him, with full consent of the intellect and in freedom. Not satisfied with that, he is now attempting to drag along with him as many men as he can—again, with full consciousness and freedom. God never rejects his creatures: it would be the equivalent of rejecting himself. It follows that Satan still retains the power that he was given. He was the paragon of creation and he would still be, if he had not chosen otherwise; that is why Christ's Incarnation through the Virgin became necessary. Christ came to destroy the works of Satan and to gather all things celestial and terrestrial to himself through the blood of his Cross.

Still, Satan remains "the prince of this world", as Jesus calls him three times, or "the god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4), as Paul defines him. He who had been created by God to bring order to creation has become instead its tireless destroyer. Satan is like those "black holes" that exist in the cosmos, devouring all matter around them. He is the source of every form of evil: sin, illness, suffering, and death. Christ's salvation has restored order within the universe, which, through him, has been made even more marvelous than it was in the beginning. Redemption is the first, true, great exorcism; Jesus is the first exorcist, and all the power in every battle against the demon derives from him.

Before redemption and deliverance from the power of the evil one can become applicable to man, he must accept the graces given by Christ. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk 16:15-16). Baptism is the first act of liberation from the power of Satan. Through this sacrament we are grafted into Christ; that is why baptism includes a rite of exorcism. All the while, the demon will continue his work because, as the Second Vatican Council tells us, Satan, defeated by Christ, engages in constant battle against his followers. The Lord warns us that the fight against evil spirits will continue until the last day (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 37).

“IN MY NAME THEY WILL CAST OUT DEMONS”

We have discussed the fundamental importance of the power to cast out demons. It is a “sign” that demonstrates that Christ is the stronger One; that he has the authority to destroy the kingdom of Satan and to install the Kingdom of God; and that his preaching decisively points man toward God. To continue the work of humanity’s redemption, to destroy Satan’s works, and to free man from the slavery of the demon, this “sign” had to continue. That is why Jesus handed down the power to drive out demons to the twelve apostles first, then to the seventy-two disciples, and, finally, to all those who believe in him.

Mark mentions right away that the first power Jesus conferred on the apostles was that of casting out evil spirits. “[H]e appointed twelve [whom he also named apostles], to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons” (Mk 3:14-15). “[H]e called to him the twelve, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. . . . [T]hey cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them” (Mk 6:7 and 13).

The other synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Luke, are very similar. “And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity” (Mt 10:1). “And preach as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons” (Mt 10:7-8). “[H]e called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases” (Lk 9:1).

The witnesses obviously agree; the Master places particular importance on this power and authority. Subsequently, the same power is extended to the seventy-two disciples. It is significant that, even though the power to expel demons is often coupled with that of healing the sick, the former is particularly stressed and takes precedence over the latter. When the seventy-two disciples return from their mission and report their activities to the divine Master, they speak with the greatest awe of their ability to dominate the demons: “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” (Lk 10:17).

Jesus builds on this enthusiasm to highlight the demon’s defeat, saying: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Lk 10:18). At the same time, he teaches us an important lesson: Nothing can harm us. “Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Lk 10:20). It is clear that what is most important for Jesus is the substantial defeat of Satan.

John makes some very strong statements in his first letter: “By this it may be seen who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil” (1 Jn 3:10). “He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8). Finally, “We know that

anyone born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him” (1 Jn 5:18).

Casting out demons is a great power, but the power to withstand this seduction is greater; some will have the power to command unclean spirits, but it will not be sufficient to save their souls. Matthew quotes the terrible words that Jesus speaks on this subject: “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers’ ” (Mt 7:22-23). We can presume that Judas also performed miracles and expelled demons; nevertheless “Satan entered him.” This is why we must not rejoice in the powers that the Lord can give us, but instead we should delight in the fact that our names are written in heaven.

Mark ends his Gospel with the words that Jesus uses to grant the power to cast out demons to all who believe in him: “[I]n my name they will cast out demons” (Mk 16:17).

The Acts of the Apostles show us that Jesus’ followers used the powers that their Master granted them right away. Concerning the apostles: “The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed” (Acts 5:16). Concerning deacon Philip, “And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice” (Acts 8:6-7).

Paul’s examples are even more numerous. I will mention only two. “As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. . . . Paul. . . turned and said to the spirit, ‘I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ Then it came out that very hour” (Acts 16:16-18). “And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them” (Acts 19:11-12).

Now that we have established a solid scriptural foundation for our subject, we can continue with a few brief examples about the *practice of exorcisms in the history of the primitive Church*. Those who want to pursue the topic in depth should read the few books available that deal with this specific matter.

Briefly, here are the facts. At the dawn of the Church, everyone could expel demons, on the strength of Christ’s mandate. This factor played a significant role in apologetics, because it positioned Christians in direct confrontation with pagan exorcists (more on this later). Fairly soon, the Church began to limit the authority to exorcize, establishing a particular category of individuals. In the East, recognition of charisms became the prevalent criterion. In the West, ecclesiastic appointments of exorcists became the norm. In both traditions, exorcism developed in two distinct forms: (1) self-contained prayer intended to liberate the obsessed and (2) prayer inserted within the sacrament of baptism.

It is indispensable to keep in mind that every civilization has always been sensitive to the presence of evil spirits. The description of these spirits and the methods used to fight against them vary according to customs. We know of exorcists in ancient Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt, as well as in Israel: for example, in the book of Tobias, we find that the Archangel Raphael himself liberates Sarah. Jesus clearly refers to Hebrew exorcists (cf. Lk 11:19). Flavius Josephus points them out. From the beginning of time, and among all peoples, magicians and witch doctors claimed the power to command evil spirits. We encounter their activity in every place and in every era.

This brings us to the apologetic meaning of exorcisms, highlighted by the earliest Christian authors. Justin is the first to write on the subject. “Christ was born because of the Father’s will; for the salvation of believers and the ruin of demons. What you see with your own eyes will convince you of this. In the entire universe and in your city [Rome] there are many demoniacs that other exorcists, sorcerers, and magicians were unable to cure. On the other hand, we Christians were able to heal them. By commanding them in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, we reduced to impotence the demons who possessed men” (2 *Apologia* 6, 5-6). This text is precious because of its antiquity (middle second century) and because it transmits to us a formula used for exorcism.

Justin expands the theme in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. “Any demon who is commanded in the name of the Son of God—who was generated before any creature, born of a Virgin, became man, suffered, was crucified by your people under Pontius Pilate, died and resurrected from the dead and ascended into heaven—any demon, I say, who is commanded in this name will be overcome and defeated. On the other hand, just try to admonish them in the name of all kings, righteous men, prophets, or patriarchs who lived among you, and see if a single demon will run away in defeat.”

Irenaeus reports: “By invoking the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, Satan is driven out of men.” It is interesting to see how the different formulas begin with the same words that Jesus and Paul used and continue with references to the main events in the life of Christ. In a nutshell, we see the beginnings of the first professions of faith.

Tertullian, who confirms that Christians can efficaciously cast out demons from other Christians as well as pagans, is the first to report some of the gestures used during an exorcism; for instance, the laying on of hands and the blowing of the mouth. He confirms that the strength of the exorcism lies in speaking the name of Jesus. We find all these elements in the baptismal rite.

The ancient Church, in obedience to the mandate received from Jesus, exercised the power to exorcize the obsessed and those who were slaves of evil instincts. She also performed exorcisms in a society that was filled with idolatry and evil influences. Tertullian is explicit: “If it were not for us, who could release you from the evil influence of those spirits who secretly infiltrate and damage your bodies and your minds? Who could liberate you from the powerful assaults of demonic forces?”

The same nefarious influence has always been exerted by demons on society as well as on individuals. For a current perspective, I will quote a passage from one of Pope Paul VI's three addresses about the devil (February 23, 1977). "We should not marvel, therefore, if our society has gradually been degraded from its level of authentic humanity and has deteriorated toward the current pseudo-maturity of morality, which finds its expression in indifference and insensitivity to the difference between good and evil. No wonder Scripture sharply admonishes us that '*all the evil in the world (as we can observe) lies under the power of the evil one*' "

Cyprian offers a moving witness to the power of exorcisms. "Come and hear the demons with your own ears. Come and see them with your own eyes when, defeated by our entreaties and our spiritual flagellations, and by the torture of our words, they abandon the bodies that they had possessed. . . . You will see how they, whom you set in high places and honor as lords, are bound by our hands and tremble within our power" (*An Address to Demetrianus*, no. 15). Truly, each time we exorcize, we experience that the words of the exorcist are as torture for the demons, gradually becoming more unbearable. According to their own admission, demons prefer the sufferings of hell to our words of blessing.

Origen, writing against Celsus, speaks of the power of the name of Jesus to cast out demons. "The strength of the exorcism lies in the name of Jesus, which we pronounce while, at the same time, we announce the facts of his life." Origen adds some new elements with respect to his predecessors. For instance, he tells us that, in the name of Jesus, we can cast out demons not only from people but from things, places, and animals as well. He is adamant against the use of magicians and entreats Christians not to use any secret formulas or sorceries, but rather to express their faith in the strength of Jesus' name.

Righetti writes that "all of Christian literature of the first three centuries frequently recalls the work of our brothers in the faith who were gifted with a particular charism and exorcized with prayer and fasting, according to Jesus' mandate. Every community had a fair number of these individuals, who, gradually, formed a separate corporation and called themselves exorcists. They soon obtained official recognition within the ranks of the minor clergy. In this way the Church clearly differentiated her exorcists, who operated with right intention and in the name of Christ, from frauds and pagan witch doctors. The *Canones Hippolyti* warn us against the latter and denies them access to the faith."¹

From this chapter of her history, the modern Church could learn much more than just the need to provide a number of exorcists that is sufficient to satisfy the requests of the faithful. She should also endeavor to warn against the activities of charlatans, magicians, and witch doctors who fill newspaper ads and certain television programs; instead, we never mention such things in our churches.

Eusebius mentions a letter in which Pope Cornelius lists exorcists after acolytes, followed by lectors and hostiaries, showing that, in Rome, the order of exorcist was already established during the middle of the fourth century.

From the very beginning, the Church took steps to differentiate the true demoniacs from the sick, and requested the input of bishops to help with the classification of symptoms. Pope Innocent I, who was consulted on the matter in A.D. 416, declared that deacons and priests could not perform exorcisms without their bishop's mandate.

The earliest documents of the Church already identify the various elements that make up an exorcism. They are: a *prayer* beseeching the Lord to come to the aid of the possessed; an injunction to the demon in the name of Christ—which we have already seen; and some ritual gestures. The *laying on of hands*, which Jesus himself used with the Capernaum demoniac, is the most ancient. Then, we have the *sign of the Cross*, of whose efficacy Lactantius (who died ca. 317) gives witness; the *blowing of the mouth*, which we find in the writings of Tertullian and Dionysius of Alexandria; *fasting*, which, along with prayer, was suggested by the Lord himself (cf. Mk 9:29); *anointing with oil*, this is the same oil used for all the sick and has proven to be efficacious for demoniacs as well. For instance, the holy monks Macarius and Theodosius used anointing to liberate the possessed. I will add the *use of ashes and hair shirt*, which played an important role in penitential discipline.

Some centuries later, two more instruments acquired great significance, and they are still used today. They are: *blessed water*, which was absent from the old ritual, and *laying of the stole* on the shoulder of the patient, which was introduced in the tenth century. More and more frequently, the Church recommended receiving the Holy Eucharist, which was distributed at the end of an intercessory Mass celebrated specifically for the success of an exorcism.

Exorcism formulas. As we have seen, initially the formulas were very simple. With the exception of a few prayers of later date, we still use the formulas that were first compiled by Alcuin (who died in 804) toward the end of the eighth century. They were published in the *Ritual* of 1614 and were not changed until the special commission charged with updating the *Ritual* added some new ones in the 1997 edition.

EXAMPLES

Only an exorcist could help me

Mine is a hard story to write. I do so only because I think that it may help others and because it seems to be in accordance with the Gospel. The demon began to torment me in 1974. Doctors could not explain my strange condition, and psychiatrists were baffled. For instance: all of a sudden I choked and started to shake as though I were being electrocuted. Sometimes, the phenomena were so alarmingly violent that my husband called the doctor on duty in the middle of the night.

At the same time, I began to distance myself from the Catholic Church and discredit her every time the subject of religion came up. Keep in mind that I had always been a practicing Catholic and I actively participated in my parish. I was one of the leaders of Catholic Action [an Italian Catholic lay movement]. At first, I thought that I was going through “growing pains”; instead my bitterness against the Church lasted for more than ten years. Spending time in adoration in front of the Blessed Sacrament used to be a joy; now I desired nothing more than to run away from

him. Everything seemed ridiculous: I dismissed religion as priestly theatrics and the idiocies of the faithful.

My husband was a practicing Catholic and my actions were a source of great pain for him, not only because I was alienating myself from the Church, but also because I began to push him away. In 1978, I started to associate with marginal groups, seeking exotic experiences, and my period of true self-destruction began. I was more and more compulsive. I was attracted to dangerous people, and I felt a perverse pleasure in abandoning myself to their power. For years I visited all sorts of gurus, healers, witch doctors.

My physical condition deteriorated along with my psychological state. My body seemed to be in the grip of a vise. My digestive system was blocked, my kidneys and joints were malfunctioning, and I was always tired and listless. I felt alive only when attending some “psychology” classes that provoked strong emotions in me. I am sure that if I had known about exorcists, I would not have turned to gurus for help and I would have escaped the hell I was in a lot earlier. It is incredible that, in all my long and active years within the Church, I had never heard of exorcists.

As my trials continued, I began to study astrology with a passion. I saw everything that was happening through the eyes of astrology and reincarnation. In 1981, I met a mad psychiatrist; he was the vilest individual I have ever encountered. Later, he ended up in a hospital because of his psychosis, and I discovered that he had sworn a pact with Lucifer, pledging to destroy as many souls as possible. This individual invited me to his office with some excuse, and, through hypnosis, he toyed with my body and my soul for one year. We can be hypnotized only if we allow it, but the demon induced me to allow this lunatic to torture me. I am convinced that it is only through the protection of our Lady—to whom my parents consecrated me as a child—that he was not successful in his attempts to strangle me to death.

I do not know how I managed to escape from that nightmare. Eventually, I had to be hospitalized, and there I attempted suicide. After two months, I was beginning to make some progress, but the demon was still with me, and, under his influence, I started to meddle with psychoanalysis. At this point, I severed my last ties with the faith and became a Buddhist. I practiced Zen meditation, and I felt as though I was disconnected and unhappy. I attended a school for teachers of yoga, and I began to teach hatha-yoga in my village. I felt a real hatred of the Church, but deep down I was desperate. I did not care about anyone, not even my husband and my children.

In 1984 I found out that I was pregnant with my fifth child, and I was overjoyed. Unfortunately, my physical condition was extremely weak as a result of a series of strange diseases. My doctors could not believe the severity of my migraines or my physical weakness. After two months of this, a severe hemorrhage caused a miscarriage, and my pregnancy ended. I had to undergo surgery, but the Lord was waiting for me at that hospital. He sent his Mother to comfort me. I felt the spiritual presence of the Virgin by my side, in my hospital room, helping me, reproaching me for my past and inviting me to follow her. I felt so full of peace and light that I was happy to agree. This extraordinary experience brought me back to God.

The following years were very tough. On the one hand, our Lady helped me clean up my unconscious, which was filled with filth. On the other hand, the evil one assaulted me with terrible temptations and doubts, urging me to go back to him. I am certain that an exorcist would have been of great help during this period. At night, I felt the physical presence of the demon, who repeated: “I will get you back.” I asked priests to help me, but they could not: they understood nothing of my condition because they had no experience of this kind of demonic assault. I am sorry to say that I personally experienced their complete ignorance in this field.

In 1988 my struggles increased, but my decision to follow the Lord was firm, and I did not turn back. So the demon retaliated against my husband and children, striking them with inexplicable sickness, and within a thirteen-month period, they were rushed to the emergency room fourteen times. The spiritual warfare escalated; the evil one was trying to break up our family. At night I would wake up suddenly, filled with such despair that I could not pray, no matter how much I wanted to. Then, as suddenly as it came, despair would leave me and I was able to praise the Lord with all my heart.

When I first returned to a life of prayer, I thought that I was going to be free of the demon. I learned the hard way that I was wrong. He was determined to undermine my resistance, and his actions became subtler. For instance, if I attended spiritual retreats, I fell prey to obsessive doubts, which became desperate thoughts. If I went on a pilgrimage, I came back feeling that my body had been beaten to a bloody pulp. The more I prayed and tried to do good deeds, the more the demon tormented me with evil thoughts. I ached in every part of my body, I could not sleep, and I lost my memory. At times I wanted to run away from my family. I spent two terrible years. No one understood me. I am convinced that all this could have been avoided with the help of an exorcist.

Finally, and almost by chance, I met an exorcist in a way that, I am sure, was arranged by the Immaculate Virgin. With his support, I was able to escape from the long, dark, and painful tunnel in which I was living. From the moment he began to pray over me, everything changed. The pain is still with me, but I now live it in the light; my suffering has a meaning. The exorcisms give me serenity and peace for some hours. When the battle flares up, I pray with greater intensity and full abandonment to the will of the Lord. I understand and love my family members better, and they, in return, can confide in me.

My spiritual life is also improving. I feel a stronger desire to live in union with God. Even my crosses, which I live in light of the passion of Christ, are not heavy anymore. I still have my struggles, but I also have moments of true peace and real joy. I can feel the progress with each exorcism.

I conclude my story with a statement that is not meant to be critical. My bishop and the priests in my diocese are always proclaiming their full solidarity with the poor. How about those who are tormented by the evil one? Aren't they poor? I belonged to this needy category for eighteen years, but every priest I contacted understood nothing, absolutely nothing of this poverty of mine, and gave me no help. Jesus said: "In my name you will drive away demons!" I think that this is an obligation, a legacy, and a very clear duty.

I found the right way

My name is Alessandro and I live in Rome. The devil tormented me, physically, for five years. I had the sensation that needles were stuck in every part of my body, especially in my vital organs. I felt bitten, stabbed, and other, similar, pains. I visited every exorcist in Rome and joined various charismatic meetings, hoping for deliverance. I am grateful to all, because everyone helped me, but no one brought me healing.

A year ago I finally found the right path to complete liberation: daily Mass and fasting. In my experience, this is the most powerful way to deliverance, besides confession of sins and Communion. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus himself showed us this road, when he said: "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting" (Mk 9:29).

I now thank and praise the Lord for all the sufferings he has allowed me and my family to endure.

Note the difference between the two experiences. Since there are different kinds of demons and different types of possession, the treatment cannot be identical for every case but always, and in all instances, prayer, sacraments, and fasting are required.

SATAN IN ACTION

“[W]hile men were sleeping, his enemy [the devil, God’s enemy] came and sowed weeds among the wheat” (Mt 13:25). This is true in every age, but it seems that the patterns we see today are the most disconcerting because, unlike what we read in this parable, we refuse to believe in the presence of weeds, much less in the existence of the enemy: the devil. We could say that the servants’ sleep has become extremely sound. I have given three reasons that explain, in part, the reluctance of our modern Catholic clergy to deal with these realities, and they are: *lack of formation, lack of experience, and widespread doctrinal errors.*

The Magisterium, on the other hand, has never failed to teach what is right. In the last decades, the Church’s unchanging biblical-theological doctrine about Satan and his activity has been reiterated in no fewer than eighteen texts of the Second Vatican Council, three speeches of Pope Paul VI, and twenty-two speeches of Pope John Paul II. These voices are clear and authoritative, but, as Homer would say, “My poor verses, thrown to the winds.”

It was Pope Paul VI who set in motion the first shock wave, and the lay press felt its reverberation, if no one else did. How? On June 29, 1972, the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, he mentioned Satan in his homily and scandalized the lay world with this statement, “From some crevice, the smoke of Satan has entered into the temple of God. . . . This condition of uncertainty reigns within the Church as well. After the Second Vatican Council, we believed that the history of the Church would enjoy a period of sunshine. Instead, the day became ugly, dark, cloudy, and stormy.”

On November 15 of the same year, Pope Paul VI returned to the subject and gave a fundamental talk on the devil. After briefly listing all the elements of biblical / theological demonology, he condemned all theologians who spread errors, in the past and today. I have included the full text of the speech at the end of this chapter. The Pope asked what are the principal needs of the Church today. He said that one of our greatest needs is the defense against an evil that he calls “the demon”. This initial declaration sets the tone of the entire talk. The Pope begins by defining the demon’s role in the divine plan, starting with a look at the design of creation as a whole. “This is God’s work. God himself admired it in its substantial beauty, as the external mirror of his wisdom and power. . . . The Christian view of the cosmos and of life is triumphally optimistic.”

The next observation is complementary, rather than contrasting: “Is this the full vision? Is it accurate? Are we unable to see how much evil is in the world? There is a dark, inimical agent within us: the demon.” The next sentence strikes a blow against some theologians of our times: “Evil is no longer a deficiency but an efficiency; a living being who is spiritual, perverted, and perverting. This is a terrible, mysterious, and frightening reality. Whoever refuses to acknowledge its existence, or tries to explain it away as a

conceptual and fantastic personification of unknown reasons for our evils, *diverges from the field of biblical and ecclesiastical teaching.*”

Quoting the Bible, the Pope continues: “Here is why it is important to detect evil. . . . How can we forget that Christ, referring to the demon as his adversary, calls him *the prince of this world* three times? Saint Paul calls him *god of this world* [2 Cor 4:4] and warns us of the battle against darkness that we, as Christians, must undertake, not with just one demon, but with all his frightening plurality.” He concludes with the following statement: “The demon is at the root of the first human disaster, original sin. . . . It is a story that continues to this day. Reminding us of this reality, the rite of exorcism during baptism, the liturgy, and Sacred Scripture frequently refers to the aggressive and oppressing *power of darkness*. He is our number one enemy. He is the tempter par excellence. *Thus we know that this dark and perturbing being truly exists* and continues to act with treacherous cunning. He is the hidden enemy who sows errors and calamities in human history.” These words are so clear and forceful that we should repeat them often, learn them by heart, and explore them in depth.

So far, we have acknowledged the existence of Satan and his dark and perturbing action of a perverting nature. In this book I will only sketch a description of his activity because, on the strength of my experience as an exorcist, I prefer to expand on what is useful for prevention and healing.

Exorcism is a specialized study of a particular aspect of theology—Satan’s actions; therefore, we must go beyond what spiritual theologians write in their papers and include actual incidents. For instance, Royo Martin’s text on demonic activity speaks only of temptation, obsession, and possession. The old text of Tanquerey’s is even more concise. We must take the next step in developing these concepts because they form the very basis of all our practical activity: diagnosing and healing. That is why we will explore the subject in great detail, in light of both theory and practice. To do so, I must relate some of the innovative solutions, including words, that I have used. These have not been officially recognized yet, but I hope that those in authority will reward my efforts with their approval and, when necessary, with clarifications.

The basic, universally accepted subdivision of satanic activity is the following: the demon operates an *ordinary activity*, temptation, and an *extraordinary activity*, which includes the entire range of evil disturbances, of various degrees of seriousness and nature. The famous French exorcist De Tonquedec insisted on the value of this long-standing truth.

Here, I will not deal with ordinary activity: temptation. Let us just say that everyone is a victim of his activity; in fact, Jesus himself accepted to undergo this trial. Demonic temptation, coupled with the original wound of our nature (the Bible calls it concupiscence) and the occasions offered by the world, is a battlefield in which we can earn great merit. The Bible tells us that victory against temptation is a blessing (cf. Jas 1:12), and that he who “has had the power. . . to do evil and did not do it” (Sir 31:10) is also blessed.

How can we resist? “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Mt 26:41). Every Christian must resolve to grow constantly in the two commandments of love: love of God and love of neighbor. Another direct method of resisting temptation is to use the commonly available means of grace. This first goal, overcoming temptation, is not really disconnected from the second: prevention and healing of the ills that Satan causes through his extraordinary activity.

I have subdivided Satan’s extraordinary activity in six categories. The definitions that I will use throughout the book are neither official nor universally accepted. The boundaries between one category and another are not clear-cut, because there is a lot of mingling and compounding of symptoms.

1. *External pain* deals strictly with physical suffering. This includes the beatings, scourgings, and injuries caused by inexplicable pushing, falling objects, and so on, that we read about in the lives of many saints, such as the Curé of Ars, Saint Paul of the Cross, and Padre Pio. These occurrences are not as rare as we may think, and the demon’s activity is usually confined to external activity; internal activity, if any, is only temporary and limited to the duration of a particular disturbance.

2. *Diabolic possession* is the gravest form of demonic activity, which allows a continuing presence of a demon in a human body. The evil symptoms do not have to be continuous but can alternate between periods of crisis and periods of rest. Possession implies intervals of temporary suspension of mental, intellectual, affective, and volitive faculties. Symptoms can include the knowledge of languages unknown to the victim, superhuman strength, and the ability to know the occult or someone else’s thoughts. Typically, there is an aversion to anything sacred, often in conjunction with blasphemy. There are also frauds who pose as demoniacs; therefore, we need to be extremely wary.

3. *Diabolic oppression* is a random discomfort. We must remember that symptoms and gravity differ greatly case by case. This oppression can strike health, job, affections, relationship with others, and so on. Its symptoms include unexplainable rages and a tendency to complete isolation. Oppression can affect both individuals and groups (even very large groups).

4. *Diabolic obsession* causes an almost split personality. Our will remains free, but it is oppressed by obsessive thoughts. The victim experiences thoughts that may be rationally absurd but of such a nature that he is unable to free himself. The obsessed person lives in a perpetual state of prostration, with persistent temptations to suicide. We must be aware that the temptation to commit suicide is also present in *diabolic possession* and *diabolic oppression*.

5. *Diabolic infestation*. In this case, the malefic activity is directed toward places (houses, offices, stores, fields), objects (cars, pillows, mattresses, dolls) and animals, therefore it only indirectly affects man. As I mentioned in a previous chapter, Origen tells us that the early Christians resorted to exorcisms in these situations.

6. *Diabolic subjugation*. The term indicates a voluntary pact—implicit or explicit—with Satan, by which we submit to the lordship of the demon. There are also involuntary ties with the evil one; these cases fall into the preceding categories, especially the most severe: possession.

Before we continue, I would like to explain how we can fall into these extraordinary diabolical evils. There can be *four principal causes*, two culpable and two innocent, and we must discover the root of the problem before we can speak of prevention and liberation.

1. *Pure divine permission*. Clearly, nothing happens without divine permission, but God never wills evil, suffering, or temptation. He gave us freedom and allows the existence of evil, but knows how to turn it into good. When he gives the demon his permission to torment us, he does so to strengthen us in virtue, as in the biblical example of Job, as well as of many blessed and saints. We must keep in mind that diabolical harassment in itself has nothing to do with the state of grace of its victims.

2. *Subjection to a curse*. Here, too, the victim is innocent, but there is culpability on the part of whoever casts and / or commissions the curse. By the word *curse*, I mean the intention of *harming others through demonic intervention*. This can be achieved in many ways: malefice (or spell), binding, evil eye, malediction, and so on. The matter is serious, but we need to be on guard against misconceptions. By their nature, curses lend themselves to all sorts of abuses, especially when we consider the current escalation in the number of frauds, suggestions, manias, and more.

3. *Grave hardening in sin*. Judas Iscariot is the classical Gospel example. The many individuals who abandon themselves to sexual perversions, violence, and drugs fall into this group. The heinous crime of abortion aggravates this situation; its terrible repercussions are clearly seen during exorcisms, because to liberate a victim who is guilty of abortion usually requires a very long period of time. Due to the current devastation of the family and laxity of morals, the repercussions that stem from the scourge of abortion are much more common than in the past. When we take all these factors into account, we can understand why the number of individuals stricken by evil ailments has multiplied.

4. *Proximity to evil places or persons*. This includes attending spiritualistic sessions, dabbling in magic, or consulting magicians, witch doctors, and some card readers; also, practicing the occult, belonging to satanic sects, or participating in rites that climax with black masses, and so on, put us at great risk.

To this category we can add the influence of mass media, such as pornographic shows and violent horror movies broadcast by many TV stations. We witness the effects of the widespread presence of rock music, culminating in satanic rock performed in what we could easily refer to as “churches of rock”, such as stadiums, parks, and discothèques. We should not be surprised that, today, there is an explosion of these activities: a decline in faith life is directly connected to an increase in superstition. I will not tire of repeating that *members of the clergy have done nothing to oppose, or at least warn against, all these evils*, because they are completely ignorant even of what the Bible explicitly says on the

subject. This fourth category has greatly contributed to the increase in evil ailments in the last decades, especially among the young.

This brief summary, besides outlining generic principles about the existence and activity of the demon, reminds us of the ailments that Satan can inflict and their causes in order to help us prevent and cure them.

EXAMPLES

Paul VI speaks about Satan

On June 29, 1972, Pope Paul VI spoke some deliberately strong statements about the demon: “From some crevice, the smoke of Satan has entered into the temple of God.” The Pope did not hesitate to identify the negative force that seeks to suffocate the fruits of the Council: his name is devil.

His speech provoked a near scandal in the international press. To speak of the devil today—journalists were quick to accuse—is like going back to the Middle Ages. In their ignorance, they did not realize that we go back farther than that: to the Gospel, to biblical history, to Adam and Eve! A few months later, on November 15 of the same year, the Holy Father expanded on the subject during a general audience. He did so clearly and thoroughly, beginning with all the biblical and ecclesial teaching on the matter. I transcribed the complete text of the speech from a recording. We previously quoted from it with the variations published in *L’Osservatore Romano*.

I feel that I must to talk to you about an unusual subject that fits within the logic of the teachings I have been developing in my pastoral audiences.

What is the subject? I am referring to the needs of the Church. The one need that holds my attention this morning is unusual and difficult: *defense*. The thought haunts me. Defense against whom? Saint Paul tells us that we must fight. We know that, but against whom? Saint Paul reminds us often that we must fight, like soldiers. He says that our fight is not against visible things, such as flesh and blood. Still, we must engage in battle. I call it “combat against the darkness”. We must fight against spirits, the spirits that swarm all around us.

In other words, we must fight against the demon. We do not think about this reality anymore, but now I wish to draw your attention to this terrible and unavoidable subject. We must fight against this enemy, terrible and invisible, who sets snares for our life and against whom we must defend ourselves.

First of all: Why do we not speak about it anymore? We do not speak about it because we lack a visible experience. We believe that what we do not see does not exist. Instead, we fight against evil. But, what is evil? We are speaking of evil as a *deficiency*, a lack of something. If someone is ill, he lacks health. If someone is poor, he lacks money. And so on. This is not the case when we speak about the devil; that is why this is a terrible reality. We are not dealing with a deficiency, an evil caused by the lack of something. We must realize that we face an *efficiency* that is evil in itself; an *existing* evil, an evil that is a *person*; an evil that we cannot classify as corruption of goodness. We are speaking of an affirmation of evil, and if this does not frighten us, it should.

Anyone who refuses to acknowledge the existence of this terrible reality *departs from the truth of biblical and ecclesiastical teaching*. We must realize that we are confronting a reality that is mysterious and scary. If someone says: “I do not think about it”, or “Your thinking is not with the Gospel”, we must ask: Why? The Gospel is full of—I would almost say it is populated with—the presence of the demon. If I want to set a Gospel environment,

psychology, atmosphere, or ambiance, I must at least feel this mysterious presence that I will not be able to identify. What I am telling is not my delusion, nor am I encouraging you to be superstitious. I am simply telling you that this reality exists. I repeat, the Gospel speaks to us about it on many, many pages. That is why it is important that we perceive evil. We must have a correct, Christian conception of the world, of life, of salvation.

How many times does Christ himself alert us to the importance of the reality that is Satan? At the beginning of his public life, as the Gospel's history unfolds, the Lord announced his engagement in the battle. Remember his three well-known temptations; they are narrated in one of the most mysterious pages in the Gospel, very rich in significance. The famous, great Russian novelist Dostoevsky thought so. In one of his masterpieces, he gives us what is almost a catechesis based on the three temptations of Christ.

What is the meaning of Christ's encounter with hunger? It is the confrontation with every form of modern-day materialism. Then we see Christ's conflict with spiritual temptation: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you, to guard you' " (Lk 4:9-10): this is spiritual presumption. Finally, we are told of his bout with pride: "To you I will give [all the kingdoms of the world] if you. . . will worship me" (Lk 4:6).

And Jesus rejects temptation: "*Vade retro* (get behind me), Satan!" When it was over, the angels come to feed him and assist him. The exegesis of this text is staggering, truly unfathomable. How can we fail to see that Christ defines the devil three times? He calls him "his adversary", "prince of this world", and again, "ruler of the world".

Who is the ruler of the world? The Gospel tells us: "The devil is the prince of the world." We are all subject to dark temptations that dismay us, captivate us, make us ill, cause uncertainty, meanness, and so on. When we continue with the Gospel, we find demoniacs scattered here and there, and Jesus first heals the one and then the other.

Saint Paul echoes the Gospel and calls Satan "god of this world" in his second letter to the Corinthians. Whoever would have thought of addressing him with the name that belongs to the Supreme Being, to God? Yet, we hear the title of "god of the world" in reference to the demon from the mouth of the Apostle. As I mentioned before, Saint Paul continues with a warning: We must fight against spirits without knowing where they are, how they are, and so forth. He teaches us the correct methodology to defend ourselves against this sort of enemy. I will not cite any more examples because I would run out of time, but you can easily find them throughout Christian literature.

Why is it that every liturgy mentions the demon? Take baptism, for instance. I do not know why we have shortened exorcisms; I am not sure that it was very realistic or fitting [*I want to call attention to this public and obvious disappointment of the Pope, with which all exorcists agree*]. Still, the exorcism is there.

Baptism is the first action of the Lord's Providence. Through this sacrament, he puts the mortal enemy of man, Satan, at a distance. Why? Because, from the very beginning of man's history, since the fall of Adam, the demon has taken central stage. At that time, he acquired a certain dominance over man, and only Christ's redemptive action can liberate us. This drama continues today, because we do not inherit original sin through guilt or accident: we inherit specifically through procreation.

To be born means to be in the arms of the demon rather than the arms of God. Baptism ransoms us from this slavery and makes us free, children of God. Therefore [the demon] is our number one enemy. What is his art? The art of temptation, of taking advantage of our own self against ourselves. He is the enemy, the tempter by definition.

Thus, we know that this dark and disturbing being truly exists and is still active with predatory cunning. He is the hidden enemy who sows error, misfortune, decadence, and degradation in human history. We must remember—this is also genuine Gospel—the revealing parable of the weeds sown among the wheat. The servants, those who cultivated the fields, marvel at this: "Where have the weeds come from?" The master of the field, who symbolizes God, answers: "*Inimico homo hoc fecit*", it is the enemy of man who did this.

Evil, which is spread throughout the world, has its own personal, intentional history. God himself tolerates, almost defends this state of affairs: "Do not pull up the weeds because you may uproot the wheat along with them. . . then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, 'first collect the weeds and tie them.' " The day will come, the last day, when this distinction will be made and the judgment will be absolute.

Jesus also calls the demon “murderer from the beginning”, “father of lies”. He is the sophisticated seducer of man’s moral balance. He is the evil and cunning charmer who knows how to infiltrate everyone’s individual psychology. He finds the open door and comes in: through our senses, our imagination, and our concupiscence—what today we call *fomite*. Again, through utopian logic, disordered social contacts, bad friends, and bad worldly ideas, [he slips] into our actions and introduces deviations that are all the more deadly because they appear to conform to the physical or psychological and instinctive structure of our person: this is why temptation is so seductive. These structures run deep and influence our personality. He takes advantage of our own fabric, our makeup, to enter our psychology subtly.

We should rediscover the chapter of Catholic doctrine that deals with the demon and with the influence that he is able to exert on individuals, communities, entire societies, and events. Instead, today we seldom think about it. Some believe that the study of psychology and psychiatry can define the mystery of the demon. Others, in great countries such as America, seek the answers in spiritualistic séances. We are afraid—although some are foolhardy—to fall into old Mani-chean theories, that is, theories that were based on a double principle: either God or the demon. Some fall into frightening digressions that are both fantastic and superstitious. Yes, it is easy to do so.

Today we would rather appear strong, daring. We pose as positive, concrete individuals while, at the same time, putting our faith in all sorts of gratuitous magical and popular whims, in superstition such as: beware of the number thirteen; beware of this or that! We believe in imaginary entities, to which we pay exaggerated, almost ridiculously scrupulous observance. On the other hand, when the Lord says: “Watch out, there is much more than this!” we refuse to believe. Why?

Our doctrine becomes uncertain when we speak of the devil. But it is more certain when we speak of our own diabolic temptations; the concept of multiple existence excites our curiosity: there is more than one devil. Let us take the Gospel narration of the demoniac of Gerasa, for instance. “What is your name?” “My name is Legion”, that is, an army. An army of demons had taken possession of that poor, unfortunate individual whom Christ liberated. Then the demons entered into a great herd of pigs, and they rushed into the nearby Lake of Gennesaret, causing consternation among their poor herders.

I will now answer two questions. First: “Are there signs of diabolic presence? If so, what are they?” Second: “What means can we use to defend ourselves against such an insidious danger?” Although the answer could be very lengthy, I will be brief.

The first question requires a very cautious answer. What are the signs of diabolic presence? The marks of an evil presence seem obvious to some, even to some of the Church’s Fathers—for instance, Tertullian says: “It is the demon, it is evident!” He was blessed with a sharp eye! We can surmise that his sinister activity is present wherever denial of God becomes radical. While our natural tendency is toward God, wherever the devil is active we find a radical denial, which can be as subtle, difficult, or sophisticated as you please, but it is radical denial nevertheless. For instance, have you heard about “the death of God”? Who could ever invent such a thing?

Secondly, we can see the hand of Satan in every hypocritical and powerful lie against the truth. We can identify the prodding of the devil wherever love is absent, dead, and where selfishness is cold, cruel, and so on, and where the name of Jesus is defamed with conscious and rebellious hatred. Saint Paul tells us: Whoever denies Jesus Christ, *Anatema sit* [may he be condemned]. The condemnation goes to the demon who is behind man’s denial. The devil is also active where the spirit of the Gospel is mystified and contradicted: he achieves victory wherever despair has the final word.

While an accurate diagnosis is too complex and too difficult, and we do not presume to arrive at a definite diagnosis, the topic excites a dramatic interest in some. Modern literature devotes famous pages to the demons. I caution you: the subject cannot be confined to dreams, fantasy, or recreational reading. There is an entire genre about the devil; some great authors wrote great novels on the topic: some seek to magnify the devil, while others propose to discover the most subtle and in-depth diagnosis. Bernanos, one of the foremost writers of our time, is one of these authors. He gained much respect and fame because he spoke with great wisdom on this subject. You may have heard of his book: *Sous le soleil de Satan (Under Satan’s Sun)*. Many other books discuss the phenomenology of the demon within souls, his ability to dissolve, disintegrate, and so on. Their authors are trying to pinpoint something within the make-up of human psychology: an imprint of the devil, of the demon. John the Evangelist writes that we know we were born of God, but the entire world “*totus in maligno positus est*”, *is placed under the dominion of evil, of the evil one*: a person.

The second question is: “What is our defense”? “Vigilate et orate ut non intretis in tentationem.” (*Be vigilant and pray that you do not enter into temptation.*) What tools do I have to help me oppose demonic action in my soul, in my integrity? The answer is easy to give but difficult to put in action. I would say: All that defends us from sin protects us against the invisible enemy at the same time.

The decisive defense is grace. These days we see a decline in reception of the sacraments, especially penance. This leaves us in grave danger, because we no longer have sufficient grace to forestall the invader who besieges us. Innocence is a great fortress: a child is stronger than we are against the devil because he is innocent. Remember, the apostles listed the virtues that could make a Christian invincible and compared them to a soldier’s weapons.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul lists the inventory of the Roman weaponry: the helmet of salvation, the armor, the sword, and so on (Eph 6:13-17), to teach us that defense, to be effective, must be manifold. Being militant requires the Christian to be vigilant and strong; he must make use of special spiritual exercises if he wants to vanquish certain forms of diabolical attacks. Jesus himself teaches this truth to the apostles, when they are unable to cast out a demon: “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting” (Mk 9:29). Therefore, these are the means that we must use when we need to overcome some forms of diabolic attacks. The apostle suggests the main line of defense: “Do not allow evil to win [but become all the more good]. . . win evil with goodness.”

I am aware of the adversities that face our Church, our soul, and our world today; I call your attention to the invocation that we pray daily in the Lord’s Prayer with a sense of special urgency: “Our Father. . . deliver us from evil!” This is my special intention, as I give you my apostolic blessing.

Nefarious influence of certain music

Many Catholic authors have alerted us to the corrupting influence of satanic rock, particularly Pietro Mantero, *Satana e lo stratagemma della coda* (Segno Editions), and Corrado Balducci, *Adoratori di Satana* (Piemme Editions). I will now draw from a text published in the magazine *Lumière et Paix*, May—June 1982, p. 30.

In the United States there exists an association of witches and other adherents to the occult called WICCA, which has now expanded internationally. This organization boasts many members. It is said that they own three record companies and produce each record with the goal of contributing to the corruption and inner disintegration of the psychology of young people. They practice satanism and consecrate themselves to the person of Satan. Every one of their records describes with precision the inner condition necessary for a disciple of Satan and invites everyone to celebrate his glory, honor, and praise. . . . Because they are consecrated to the cult of Satan, they also disseminate their satanic principles in many of their songs—even if not in all of their music. [These organizations] produce music with a single purpose: to lead youth into satanism, that is, Satan’s cult.

Records consecrated to Satan are based on the following four principles:

- *Beat*. The first important item is the rhythm, called *beat*, which mimics the sexual act. Abruptly, the listeners are caught up in a frenzy designed to produce a sort of hysteria. It is the result of the sexual instinct, which is aroused through the use of beat.
- *Volume intensity*. The volume is deliberately set to at least seven decibels above the tolerance level of our nervous system. Prolonged exposure to such a noise level induces a type of depression, rebelliousness, and aggression. When this happens, we tell ourselves, without realizing the implications: “After all, I did nothing wrong. I only listened to music the entire evening.” [Many educators and parents who are completely in the dark about the reality of these records are under the same delusion.] On the contrary! We become victims of a well-devised and calculated strategy to bypass the nervous system and achieve a precise goal: to bring the audiences into a state of disorder and confusion. At this point, the listeners, in a frenzy to actualize the beat, the rhythm they have heard all evening, risk being lured as new recruits into the ranks of Satan’s apprentices, and then the songwriters will have

realized their ultimate goal.

- *Subliminal signal*: the third principle. Subliminal signs are transmitted at such a high pitch that we are unable to hear them. The signal is meant to disorient; at an intensity of 3, 000 kilocycles per second, it acts on our unconscious, but our ears cannot capture it precisely because it is supersonic. Unbeknownst to us, the brain produces a natural drug as a result of the stimuli it receives, and it disorients us. Suddenly, we feel strange. This strange feeling induces us to seek real drugs and causes drug addicts to increase their intake.

- *Ritual consecration of every record during a black mass*. This is the fourth element. Before each record is released on the market, it is consecrated to Satan through a ritual that is a true black mass.

If you ever take the time to analyze the words of these songs [words that may be hidden and only perceptible by listening to the record backwards], you will realize that the general subject is always the same: rebellion against parents, against society, against all that exists; the unleashing of all sexual instincts; and the urge to create an anarchist state with the ultimate triumph of Satan's universal kingdom. A few songs are hymns specifically dedicated to Satan.

After what we have said, who would dare to deny the danger of the evil one's influence? He can count on many accomplices on the way to rebellion and hatred. In Revelation, we read: "Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus" (Rev 12:17).

HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE PRESENCE OF EVIL

Now we enter into the heart of our subject: *What are the symptoms* that allow us to discern whether a disturbance is of evil or of natural origin? This is important because, based on our conclusion, we will either refer an individual to a doctor, pray for deliverance, or even perform an exorcism. What I am about to discuss is the fruit of personal experience. The few rules suggested by the *Ritual* are quite insufficient, and there are no books that deal with this subject. Therefore, each exorcist proceeds in a different manner, according to the experience that he has gained during his ministry.

A few exorcists use a questionnaire as a starting point. However, the majority start by interviewing the suspected victim and his family members. The witness of relatives is very important because, often, anyone affected by these ailments is not able to analyze his own behavior and reactions. Preliminary enquiries are fundamental to understand which symptoms are meaningful and which are not and to recognize whether what confronts us is of evil origin.

First: no matter how severe, a single symptom is never sufficient for an accurate diagnosis; we need several, but, in the end, *it is only through exorcisms that we are able to achieve moral certainty.*

Personally, I prefer to begin with *a brief interview*, to determine the presence of “suspicious” symptoms; in their absence—and this happens frequently—I simply give some appropriate advice, but I do not grant an appointment. Due to the extremely large number of requests, I conduct this first interview by telephone or by mail, and I keep it very brief, out of necessity.

If I notice some “suspicious” signs, I set a date for an appointment and immediately begin with an experimental exorcism. This initial exorcism is fundamental for two reasons—curative (liberation) and diagnostic. Depending on the reaction, this first blessing may be brief or lengthy. It is very important to observe the behavior of the subject during the exorcism, but, more often, the reactions after a few days are even more meaningful. It is critical to keep track of progress as it evolves through a series of exorcisms, not only for the benefit of the victim, but also for the success of the sessions. Sometimes I have been able to reach a clear diagnosis after the first round of exorcisms, but it is not uncommon for the behavior of the victim to evolve in a completely unforeseen manner as the nature of the ailment is increasingly manifested during the process of deliverance.

At the beginning of my preliminary interview, I ask the caller why he is contacting an exorcist and what signs decided him to make the call. The reasons are often banal, and I deny the request after only a few sentences. For instance: “I heard of evil ailments and I want to find out if I have any”, but there are no significant symptoms. Before I close the

case, I usually recommend: “Pray, receive the sacraments often, live in accordance with the laws of the Lord, and dismiss all false fears.” Or: “Father, my son is becoming irritable; I am afraid that someone cast a spell on him.” Here, again, after a few questions I determine the absence of any suspicious symptom; therefore, I limit myself to the usual advice. Yet again: “Father, my husband left me for another woman. He loved me so much! I am certain that he is the victim of some malefice.” After a few questions, I once more ascertain that there are no abnormal signs. There is no malefice, and some good advice is all that is needed.

Sometimes the call raises a red flag: For instance: “Father, please, give me an appointment; I have a malefice.” “Who told you?” At this point my caller, realizing that his reason is lame or deserves some reproach, is embarrassed. When I insist with my questions, these are some typical, revealing answers: “It was a gypsy”, or “It was a holy, prayerful person: she blessed me”, or “I went to the card reader; she told me that someone had cast a spell on me and asked me for \$2,500.00 to liberate me. I thought I should come to you.” Another, “I belong to a group of praise; after they prayed over me, they determined that I have some evil ailments and told me I need the help of an exorcist.” “I went to a very good priest, who blessed me although he does not exorcize. I reacted very violently: I screamed, threw myself on the ground and blasphemed. Finally, the priest told me that I needed an exorcism.” “I went to a healer, or prana-therapist, I am not sure. He performed some rituals, made me drink some peculiar water. After this I felt very sick and I realized that something was wrong.” And more on this vein.

Today, too many persons are reputed to be saints, healers, card readers, magicians, gypsies, charismatics, seers, and so on. It is not easy to get one’s bearings. I am against the easy solution of “it is all nonsense. Lies.” We need to be discerning because even if, for the most part, we are dealing with false alarms or frauds, occasionally we run across serious symptoms that deserve our attention. Often the fraud or the magic is evident. When I am in doubt, I continue with the interview as I mentioned before, in search of suspicious symptoms. When I find them, I grant an appointment and proceed.

What are the *first suspicious symptoms* that convince me to see the caller? Here is a list of some of the more common.

The family (generally it is the relatives who call, more rarely the person directly affected) tells me that doctors are baffled and all medicines have failed. When I speak of medicines that “do not work”, I do not mean that they do not heal the sickness: I mean that medicines do not even achieve the immediate, palliative effect that should always be expected, no matter what. For example: sedatives or sleeping aids are completely ineffective or cause the opposite results, even when taken in very strong doses. When doctors are unable to formulate a diagnosis and medicines produce no effect, there is good cause to suspect evil interference.

The relatives then continue and reveal that this family member, who once practiced his faith, is no longer able to pray, no longer goes to church, and becomes angry when invited to do so. He even blasphemes, and the sight of sacred images sends him into a rage. Aversion to the sacred is, without a doubt, a significant symptom of evil interference.

Here are more suspicious signs: the individual experiences out-of-character outbursts of rage or uncontrollable violence—even though all these are common signs of psychological ailments—and is prone to insults, blasphemy (especially blasphemy) followed by a lack of recollection.

At this point, I ask another series of questions, such as: When did these symptoms begin and can they be connected to a specific event? Some significant data that may come to light include: attending spiritualistic sessions; frequenting magicians; friendships with drug addicts or persons who dabble in the occult or who patronize certain discos. Usually, the start of the troubles can be traced to one event, often to a particular person. Then I watch for the description of specific changes in the suspected victim and for the presence of any unusual behavior. For instance: strange actions, violence, and anything that seems to trigger and exacerbate it. Often, during the interview, the relatives themselves are surprised to remember facts and specific incidents to which they had not attributed any significance and that, instead, prove to be very meaningful.

The first “blessing” (this is how I refer to exorcisms when I speak to others) usually reveals very little, especially since the caller tends to exaggerate his symptoms in order to be granted an appointment, and I end the session by saying: “This is not a matter of exorcism, but of conversion.” Unfortunately, those who come to see me are often strangers to prayer and the sacraments. They casually miss Sunday Mass and avoid the sacrament of reconciliation. I have noticed that failure to confess sins is a trend that has been on the rise for years; it has been too long since God’s commandments and the Church’s precepts have been taught. Increasingly, I run across irregular, abnormal, and complex marriage situations. Today, families do not pray: they watch television. It is no wonder that dialogue among their members is also disappearing.

When I determine that there is no reason to suspect an evil influence, I impart a simple blessing and recite the prayer for the sick suggested by the *Ritual*, if appropriate. Otherwise, I conclude the first appointment with an exorcism that is usually brief—but that can be expanded according to the reaction of the victim—and with the usual admonitions about prayer, sacraments, and the life of grace. In my experience, a good general confession—which I always recommend as a starting point—in conjunction with an intense life of prayer and grace, is sufficient to end the afflictions. Without prayer and grace, exorcisms are ineffective.

Then I monitor the results of each exorcism, especially if I have doubts. Often, in fact, during the blessing there is no particular reaction. Any positive effect—which is often brief but which can be persistent—is felt later and is an indication that we must continue with the exorcism. As the blessings progress, the victim manifests increasing evidence of evil presence: one of the first signs is the movement of the eyes, either upward or downward, in

a manner that is well known to exorcists. The patient becomes more furious, exploding in screams and blasphemy. Finally, the strength—or weakness—of the demon, who by now is completely unmasked, is revealed by his willingness to answer questions. I have worked with victims whose evil tormentor disclosed his full strength only after months (once after two years) of exorcisms. Anyone who waits for the three signs listed in the *Ritual* as examples of evil interference, such as speaking in unknown tongues, displaying superhuman strength, and revealing the occult, will never reach the exorcism stage.

I need hardly mention that, the more severe the situation, the more urgent it is to pray and ask for prayers. It is also necessary to discover whether there are impediments to grace in the life of the victim, such as an irregular marriage, work problems, financial difficulties, or grave injustices. If there are, they must be removed.

Forgiveness from the heart is of paramount importance and deserves particular mention. Sometimes we are almost certain about the cause of an abnormal disturbance. Often it stems from a grave injustice that caused bitter tension among relatives or other individuals. When this is the case, we must be able to forgive with our whole heart and, abandoning all resentments, pray intensely for those who harmed us. Forgiveness often removes all obstacles to grace and obtains liberation. It is important to realize that, before *liberation* can begin, all the evil must emerge.

Do we always reach complete liberation? What is the time frame? These are tough questions to answer. Saint Alphonsus, speaking about exorcisms, warned us that, while we do not always attain deliverance, we always provide some relief for the victims. When I became discouraged because I could see little or no results for all my efforts, Father Candido reminded me that we can do no more than our best, and then we must leave the final decision to God. He never tired of repeating: “If you knew how many lives we save!” In fact, I often feel and almost “touch” the fact that exorcisms provide the victim with the strength to accept his condition and to go on.

In the great majority of cases, we obtain healing, and often the healing is complete. On the other hand, we cannot foresee how long it will take. This depends on the gravity of the ailment and the strength of its hold on the victim. It also depends on commitment to prayer and total abandonment to God on the part of the patient, his family, others who are willing to help, the plans that God has for the individual, and his motives for allowing this torment. It is not uncommon that, to heal particularly severe disorders, we need three to four years of exorcisms.

Personally, I believe that the length of time required to achieve liberation is directly related to a *double benefit*:

First: for the victim, who returns to a life of constant and habitual prayer, grace, and trust in God. This does not always happen when liberation occurs quickly. In fact, I have often noticed that when a victim is healed quickly and completely, he discontinues all religious practice, and the subsequent relapse is more severe than the original condition.

Second: for relatives and friends, who feel a greater incentive to pray and to believe, with faith, in the existence of invisible realities. I only wish that the many who claim not to believe in what they cannot see could witness an exorcism! Many ecclesiastics would also benefit from this experience. It is certain that, whenever God allows evil to happen, it is always for a greater good.

Before we proceed, I would like to raise a couple of very important and practical questions, which I will try to answer in the next chapter: Are exorcisms always necessary? Are there no other means of liberation?

EXAMPLES

A well-organized religious community

Giancarlo, a twenty-five-year-old professed religious, was studying theology in preparation for the priesthood. When I went to see him for the first exorcism, he was experiencing one of his crises: he was tossing on his bed, while five brothers were struggling to hold him down. Day and night, the members of his congregation took turns to watch over him and help him. When his crisis struck, he attempted to jump out the window, and five or six more men were called in to help restrain him. One of his hands was bandaged because he had broken two windows with his fist.

The diocesan exorcist blessed Giancarlo weekly; I was summoned to express a second opinion and to provide supplemental exorcisms. The psychiatrist who was following his case and the diocesan exorcist appointed by the bishop reached the same conclusion: he was possessed. However, some of the symptoms did not convince the major superiors of his congregation. Since they had some doubts, they arranged for additional tests with a famous Roman psychiatrist, which were scheduled for a week after my visit.

Giancarlo, a very intelligent religious of sound character, was highly esteemed by his superiors and companions alike. Throughout his postulancy, novitiate, temporary vows, and permanent profession, he had demonstrated all the qualities needed to become a good religious and a good priest. He was very faithful to his prayer life and was a good student with a pleasant disposition. No one could have foreseen the trouble that appeared to strike him suddenly, even if, in retrospect, some incidents acquired a new significance. For instance, suddenly he found it impossible to pray, to remain in church, and, after one violent crisis, he attempted suicide for the first time.

From then on, he was subject to violent crises several times a day (and even at night), each lasting two to three hours. Strong reinforcements were needed to hold him while he screamed and alternated blasphemies with sarcastic laughter. He frantically thrust about, trying to injure himself. He was also subject to long spells of immobility, lasting up to three or four hours. During these periods he had no control over himself, did not speak, and did not react to external stimuli (not even pin pricks). Nevertheless, he remained conscious and

later recalled all that had happened.

After a long exorcism, I was convinced that I was in the presence of total demonic possession. I admired the wonderful assistance that his order provided, beginning with his superior, who believed in the possibility of demonic possession (this is uncommon among the clergy). He had done everything possible to obtain healing; he even took upon himself the hardest tasks, such as the night vigil. I also admired his brothers, who, besides constantly praying for his healing, took turns to assist him. My visit confirmed that they had taken all the right steps, while they waited for the visit from the Roman psychiatrist for greater certainty.

Unfortunately, the psychiatrist decided to bring along his wife, a psychologist, who, in my opinion, completely conditioned his diagnosis. This visit consisted of a short and peaceful meeting with the patient. The two left, after refusing to stay and witness one of the victim's violent crises, which happened shortly after their interview. Not surprisingly, they diagnosed that Giancarlo was hysterical and suggested that he could be cured by sending him away from his religious house for one month, on vacation. During this time he would have to suspend all religious practices, exorcisms, and assistance. The superiors were very perplexed with the prescription of the famous doctor, because they were aware that Giancarlo's violent attacks and suicide attempts required constant watchfulness.

In the meantime, I could see that the exorcisms were beginning to obtain positive results. I advised the superiors to ask for a third opinion: they had already heard the opinion of two psychiatrists; it would do no harm to ask for a third. I also suggested that, as a minimum precaution, they choose one among the few psychiatrists who are aware of, and have experience in, demonic possessions. Thankfully, they followed my advice. The psychiatrist who was consulted performed a thorough examination and reported that the patient was in perfect psycho-physical condition, confirming what he had observed personally, that is: Giancarlo manifested a horror of the sacred that is typical of diabolic possessions.

Thus Giancarlo continued to be under the treatment of intensive exorcisms and the other means we use in similar circumstances. The Lord lavished his graces on him; he began to improve gradually and rapidly, beyond the most optimistic expectations. I could see the progress every time I visited him for my monthly exorcism, while the diocesan exorcist continued his weekly sessions. I believe that this case was successfully resolved thanks to the prayers of the entire community and Giancarlo's full cooperation. He followed our instructions with an iron will and earnestly fought against the attacks of the evil one.

His healing was almost complete within three years: the few consequences that remain are rapidly disappearing. Considering that the reason for his possession went back to his birth (he was rejected by his father, who did not want any children, particularly male children), the healing was truly rapid. We were later able to discover that the incidents that led to his possession had been accumulating throughout his entire life and culminated in his first violent attack, which exposed all the evil that had built up through the years.

Even though no two cases are alike, during my long years as an exorcist, I have run across several situations where liberation required longer periods of time. Sometimes, the best I could do was make life easier for the victims.

I am a psychiatric nurse

After reading an article that a priest wrote on the demon for a renowned Catholic magazine, I feel compelled to write a rebuttal. I am sure that the author of the piece was in good faith, but I am here to attest that what happened to me is directly contrary to what the priest asserts in his article.

I am fifty-four, and I have been a psychiatric nurse for sixteen years. Despite all my failings, and the fact that I was not very faithful in practicing my faith, I have always believed in God. In my infancy, I received the usual basic instruction in preparation to receive the first sacraments, but I never troubled to continue my education and my knowledge of the faith. Not surprisingly, my beliefs eventually collapsed, and I did not set foot in a church for decades. I continued to pray for a while, in my own way; then I stopped even that, but, at the same time, I was unhappy; I felt that I was rejecting a much-needed love.

Seven years ago, after my grown children left home, I began to have more time for myself, and I felt the desire to deepen my relationship with God. I tried, but it required a great effort. I felt dry, bound, closed within myself, almost unable to communicate. This scared me. At the same time, I noticed that many of my co-workers gradually became affected by mental illness, and I was afraid that I was going to be next. All attempts to help me were unsuccessful, including those of the hospital chaplain. I rejected everything: I woke up in the morning full of hatred for everyone and everything. I felt within me a homicidal violence that was rooted in the distant past but that I had managed to repress thanks to my upbringing. I held unreasonable grudges; I wanted to scream, but I looked calm and sweet on the surface because of my habit of self-control. I had been prey to suicidal thoughts since adolescence, but I always managed to repress them. I lived in a state of constant anguish.

On and off, for many years, at night I suffered the same two strange nightmares. In the first dream, I saw a man at the bottom of an empty pipe: I am not sure if it was a paper roll or a sewer line. I never saw the head of the man, but he kept repeating: "You will be mine." That is when I would begin to scream: I was terrified, but at the same time, I wanted to follow him. The nightmare only ended when my husband, realizing what was happening, would wake me up. In the other dream, someone would place in my arms a nine- or ten-month-old baby girl, which I accepted with great joy. Suddenly, her gentle weight became heavy as lead, and I struggled trying to hold her and save her from falling, but, despite all my efforts, I ended up wounding the small creature, hurting her. After my husband woke me up, I would be full of sadness, praying to God for deliverance from these nightmares or premonitions.

In 1989, I met an exorcist, seemingly by chance, but I believe that the Lord had a hand in it. I did my best to explain my feelings to him, the many strange events in my life, and my inability to pray. He told me that I was under demonic attack and that he could help to heal me. It was wonderful. Without any theatrics or spectacular gestures, he began to bless me. Everything took place in the most discreet, delicate manner. Slowly, gradually, I lost all feelings of hatred, all desire to lash out at everyone. I stopped holding grudges, and I was no longer the victim of suicidal or violent thoughts. My nightmares vanished. It was as though all the evil that had accumulated inside me during my entire life, and that was trying to spill out, had disappeared.

I began to practice my religion faithfully. Now I pray a lot, but I know that I am still "marked". The evil one does not let me go, and at times he strikes me physically and psychologically. When the attacks are unbearable, I go back to my deliverer, the exorcist, who restores my peace and guides me to accept my sufferings in union with the passion of Christ. I willingly accept this mission of suffering, as an intercession for all who are tormented by Satan.

I always beg the Holy Spirit for help, and I think that he is guiding me, by showing me how to help others in light of my own painful experience. It is common knowledge that one thief knows another, and a liar knows a liar; in fact, even though I act with circumspection, to avoid jumping to conclusions, I think I have the ability to recognize those who are tormented by a demon. For instance, I suspected that the illness that was tormenting Cecilia, one of the hospital's patients, was caused by an evil influence. She had been under psychiatric care for fifteen years, but some

of her behavior was atypical; it did not fit with her diagnosis. I suggested a visit to an exorcist, and often I went with her. After several exorcisms, she is almost completely healed. The psychiatrist in charge of our department admits that she is cured and honestly acknowledges that he does not understand why. Cecilia is still burdened by some of her former habits; she needs to rebuild herself psychologically, but her official diagnosis can be tossed in the wastebasket. She and her family are very happy with the success of the exorcisms.

Again, I hesitated before speaking to the exorcist about two other patients in my department, Rachele and Silvia. He never saw them, but offered some specific prayers for both of them. You will be amazed to know that this was sufficient to deliver both of them from all forms of violence, and they were discharged from the hospital. All the doctors at the hospital marveled that “their” efforts produced such a rapid cure. They make me laugh! Just as an example, before leaving the hospital, Rachele revealed to me that, for a whole month, instead of swallowing the medicine they gave her, she spat it into the toilet. Why do we find it so hard to admit that God can heal? It is true. The exorcist does not want to hear me say: “You healed me.” He always repeats that God listens to those who pray with faith.

That is why I wrote this letter. I wanted to tell the priest who wrote the article in that Catholic magazine that, in my humble opinion, there are many degrees of demonic influence. I did not study these things in school: I saw them in action. I wish I could tell him that we need really qualified, specialized exorcists and that the majority of priests know nothing of these things. I believe that today the reality of evil activity is more widespread, and it is more urgent to be aware of it than when they were in seminary.

The author of the article that prompted this letter is probably right when he claims that cases of possession are rare. To say otherwise would be almost like promoting the evil one. However, that article failed to mention that there are many other, less severe forms of evil influences that are not possession. The article concludes by recommending a visit to a good psychiatrist as soon as we become aware of strange phenomena / behaviors. I, who have been working in a psychiatric ward for sixteen years, would like to tell him: “If you know a truly competent priest, go to him first”

I pray for all exorcists and I ask for prayers on their behalf. May the Lord give them all the graces they need to carry out their difficult task. I pray that the Church will realize what is evident to all who work in the field of demonic activities: we need to form competent exorcists, because the current void is immense, as is abundantly evident to all those who are engaged in this arena.

EXORCISMS AND PRAYERS OF LIBERATION

“[T]hese signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons” (Mk 16:17). First, Jesus gave the power to cast out demons to the twelve apostles, then to the seventy-two disciples. With these words, he granted the same power to all those who believe in him. There is one condition: we must act in his name. The strength of those who expel demons, whether or not they are exorcists, lies in their faith in the name of Jesus. As Acts tells us, “[T]here is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Therefore, this power derives directly from Christ, and no one can limit or misinterpret it.

In order to provide greater help to the victims of evil ailments, and to protect us from charlatans, the Church has instituted a specific sacramental: exorcism. By using the words appropriately, we avoid misconception and confusion: *Exorcism is a sacramental, and, as such, it is instituted by the Church. Only those priests who have received a particular and express mandate from their bishops can administer it* (and never a lay person). All other prayers that are intended to deliver from the demon, whether they are recited by priests or lay people, are private prayers and can be identified as “prayers of deliverance”. I will not allow any other connotation, because to do so would only cause confusion, especially when those who misuse the term *exorcism* are noted authors. For example, I do not accept the distinction that some have proposed between “solemn exorcism”, if performed by an exorcist, and “simple exorcism”, if performed by any other priest. We speak of exorcism only when we are referring to the sacramental instituted by the Church, which can *only be administered by the exorcist*, using the specific prayers listed in the *Ritual*. All other forms of prayer currently used by priests and lay people, by single individuals or groups, are not exorcisms. Baptism is the only sacrament that includes an exorcism.

What is the difference between an exorcism and a prayer of deliverance? Which one is more efficacious? I will say that the aim is the same: deliverance from an evil presence or influence. Efficacy differs in degree and is a more complex matter.

A lay person who prays for deliverance from demons offers a private prayer, calling upon the common priesthood of the faithful and the power granted by Christ to all believers. The priest who prays for the same purpose also recites a private prayer. Everything being equal, it is more efficacious than the first, because he calls upon his ministerial priesthood and his mandate to bless. When an exorcist administers an exorcism, the efficacy is greater still, because he is practicing a sacramental, which is a *public prayer*, invoking the intercessory power of the entire Church.

However, let us be clear on this: *The Lord takes faith into account*. Therefore, the simple prayer of a lay person, even though it is private, could be more efficacious than the prayer of anyone else. Just as it is possible that the private prayer of a priest who is not an exorcist, if offered with great faith, may be more effective than the prayer of the exorcist authorized by the bishop, but who acts with lesser faith. For instance, Blessed Raymond of Capua, confessor and biographer of Saint Catherine of Siena, tells us that when an exorcist could not liberate a demoniac, he would send him to Saint Catherine. Then the saint would pray and obtain liberation. Her prayer was not an exorcism; she was neither an exorcist nor a priest. But she was a saint! Let us also keep in mind another factor: we are not only talking about the degree of faith of the person who recites the prayer of liberation, but also of the faith of the victim, his relatives, and the friends who are praying for him. The Gospel narrative of the miraculous healing of the paralytic tells us that his friends had opened a hole in the roof so they could drop him in front of Jesus. At this point Christ, seeing “*their faith*”, granted the miracle. Therefore, he took into account not only the faith of the paralytic, but also the faith of those who were with him.

There is not much more to say about the relationship between exorcisms and prayers of deliverance, besides the fact that the only goal of both is to free from the presence or influence of the evil one. There is no clear distinction between the two, and they can both be used for the same victim. I should add that exorcisms are reserved for the most serious cases. Canon Law speaks of exorcism relative to those who are possessed (CIC 1172), in other words, those who are victims of a true demonic possession. While there is nothing to forbid the use of exorcism for all other forms of evil influence, and all exorcists do so, there are other types of interventions for minor or less severe circumstances, such as deliverance prayers. The usual means to obtain grace—prayer, sacraments, fasting, charitable works, and so on—may also be sufficient.

The following are practical observations. As I have mentioned many times before, unfortunately today it is difficult to find an exorcist; therefore, it is useful to know that, in the majority of circumstances, their ministry is not required. In fact, especially given their small numbers, it is best to resort to them only in the most severe cases, to avoid overwhelming them with work when others can deal with a particular situation. This book deals almost exclusively with exorcisms, but I believe it is still worthwhile to make a few observations about prayers of liberation.

- First observation. *There is no clear distinction between the ordinary activity of the demon* (temptation) and *extraordinary activity* (the evils that I have listed in previous chapters). This statement is also pertinent when we speak about remedies. For instance, we can become completely possessed by demons if we persist in giving in to temptation and particularly serious sin, as in the example of Judas Iscariot. The same is valid for remedies, prevention, and liberation: the usual means to obtain grace are fundamental not only to overcome temptation, but also to obtain deliverance from possession.

- A second observation. *Through pastoral activity we must awaken, in the consciences of Christians, a sense of fidelity to Christ and a desire to fight against the demon.* Every believer, through baptism and confirmation, must feel engaged in the battle against the demon. We know that we are temples of the Holy Spirit; the demon would like to wrest that privilege from us. We know that Jesus came to “destroy the activity of the devil” and that we have to cooperate with his work. Just as the demon fights against us daily, so we must battle daily against him. Through the strength of the Spirit that was given to us, we are certain of the victory. To live in a state of grace means always to say Yes to Christ and No to Satan, according to our baptismal promises: if we do not, we fall into sin. Today, it seems that this sense of battle is absent from our preaching and our catechesis. And yet, the entire Bible, particularly the New Testament, insists on it. We need to recapture this concept. *Safeguarding and increasing the state of grace is a victory against the ordinary activity of the demon (temptation), and, at the same time, it is the best prevention against his extraordinary activity.*
- Now I will move on to prayers of deliverance. Let us be clear: *all prayer is good*, particularly prayers of adoration and glory to God, as Paul says: “psalms, hymns, spiritual canticles”. Prayers can also be spontaneous: learning how to pray spontaneously is always a good thing. When we pray as a group, the leader, whether layman or priest, must guide it to ensure an orderly flow.

In recent years, the charismatic renewal groups have providentially promoted and developed prayers of liberation. However, since these groups lack experience, they need specific guidelines, which the Church has provided.¹ I am especially grateful to the charismatic renewal prayer groups for their sensitivity to those who suffer from extraordinary demonic activity and the help they provide to those in need. Their work is all the more meritorious since today we rarely find understanding in other quarters.

Still, we need to act prudently. That is why it is important to keep in mind the Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that was sent to all bishops on September 29, 1985. I will now explain some of what is forbidden and what is required, according to these guidelines.

- First, *official exorcisms are not allowed*; they are reserved exclusively for the exorcist. The same holds true for the exorcism of Leo XIII, even though it is now part of the public domain. The private use of such exorcisms is another matter; at least, this is how I understand the above-cited document.
- We must avoid *addressing the demon directly* to find out his name and—I add—anything else. All other considerations aside, a direct dialogue with the demon can be dangerous to anyone who dares to initiate it without the due authorization of the Church, and therefore without her protection.

At the end, the document reminds us of *the importance of prayer*, the sacraments, and the intercession of the Virgin Mary, the angels, and the saints. In addition to the document's guidelines, we should be aware of the following:

- *Prayers of deliverance* do not have a set format. They can be offered *individually* by the victim, alone or in the company of some friends. They can be recited in *prayer groups*; the group can be very large and pray on behalf of several victims. No matter what the circumstances, it is very important to foster a spirit of recollection, which allows heartfelt and trusting prayer.
- We can use the usual means, *such as blessing with holy water and the presence of a Crucifix*. It would be beneficial if, whenever the group is large, it is a priest who gives the blessing with water. I also believe that the practice of a mother or a father blessing their children during family prayers—by tracing the sign of the Cross on their forehead with the thumb dipped in holy water—is very useful and should be promoted even independently from prayers of deliverance.
- It is very important, especially when dealing with groups, *to avoid everything that can arouse curiosity*, because it detracts from the fervor of the prayer. For instance, a victim who screams and twists around during the prayer must be held tightly or helped only by his family or those specifically designated. If a prayer group includes individuals who are poorly prepared, the prayer of deliverance should be held in a separate place and only by competent persons. Participating in these sessions only out of curiosity, without the desire to cooperate actively in the prayer, can be harmful.
- I also recommend *extreme discretion in gestures*. I know of groups where everyone has a tendency to put his hands on the head or on the shoulders of the individual for whom he prays. The placing of hands on the head is a customary biblical gesture, but *it is advised that only the priest* or the individual who leads the prayer do it. The others, if it is their custom, can extend the right arm, or both, in the air toward the person being blessed, but without touching. Praying in tongues is allowed, but always in an orderly manner, avoiding all appearance of excitement. As I have already mentioned, the most efficacious prayers are those of adoration and praise to God.
- Prayer groups provide a great service, whether they pray for deliverance or they help an exorcist, because *they provide a guide to the victims in their walk of prayer and catechesis*. I make frequent use of groups because, unfortunately, parishes all too often are unable to offer this service that, by rights, should be their responsibility. Every victim of evil activity should pray frequently, but needs help to do so. He should go to church, but needs to be taken there and to be supported, because he is constantly tempted to leave; he needs to be escorted to receive Communion, because he is not able to do so on his own. He also needs to enroll in a program of catechesis, because

the victim usually has no knowledge of the faith. This is the “new evangelization” upon which the Holy Father insists so much. We can do all of these things either individually or collectively. In our work, we run into ground that is exceptionally fertile for individual instruction.

- Finally, I must stress that there is a *substantial difference* between behavior that is appropriate during an exorcism and what is appropriate during deliverance prayers. The latter are much more informal, because, with the exception of the few that I mentioned, there are no particular norms to guide them. What is important is to proceed in an orderly manner and with faith, following the guide of the leader. When someone who practices deliverance prayers is invited to offer prayerful support with his presence during an exorcism and to assist the victim, it is the exorcist who acts and who administers the sacramental in accordance with the norms of the *Ritual*. If other priests are present, they can recite the same prayers of the *Ritual*, under the guidance of the exorcist. The participation of lay persons is limited to silent or whispered prayer, avoiding any gesture (laying on of the hands, and so forth) or any initiative that is inappropriate according to the procedures established by the Church for the administration of the sacramental. The presence of prayerful individuals is a valuable help to the exorcist, as long as they know their role.

“In my name you will expel demons.” The power that Christ bestowed on all those who believe in him is astounding. Practical application requires much faith, much humility, much self-effacement. I remember that once Father Jozo (well known to anyone who traveled to Medjugorje), prayed for the deliverance of one individual in his parish church. The prayer lasted practically all night; the church was full of people, especially pilgrims, who were trying to support him with their personal prayer. In the end, Father Jozo, who is an expert in the field, said that the victim could not be liberated because too many among the crowd were motivated by curiosity and insisted on remaining in the church only to see the end of the exorcism. I have noticed myself how the presence of even one individual who attends for the wrong reason can jeopardize the success of an exorcism.

EXAMPLES

Some examples of liberation

I will now report some examples of liberation, among the many that I have experienced, because I believe they may be helpful and represent particular situations. While no two cases are alike, I find that some can be grouped by similarities.

Liberation of self. Once more, let me repeat that the power Christ bestowed on all believers—“In my name they will cast out demons” (Mk 16:17)—refers to the liberation not only of others, but also of oneself. Again, we must remember that the best means of prevention is to abide in the grace of God, pray, receive the sacraments, and ask for the intercession of the Virgin Mary, the angels, and the saints. We have seen that it is possible for the demon to focus his attacks on certain individuals, through no fault of their own. Also, sometimes the Lord will allow the demon to attack souls successfully for their own purification and as an example to others. For instance, the Lord allowed the biblical Job, many saints, and good souls to undergo such trials, just as he allows all of us to be tested by every form of suffering.

In this chapter, I will specifically highlight the fact that, the majority of times, these victims overcome their trials and are completely liberated from the evil influence through their own efforts, without the need for prayers of deliverance, and much less of exorcisms. We could say that they provide their own deliverance prayers. To drive away some demons, it is sufficient to use the common means of grace and the three great tools that the Lord lists in the Gospel, after the nine apostles failed to liberate the demoniac boy. What are they? First, Jesus tells the father of the boy that he needs *much faith*. Second, he tells the apostles that, before they can cast out certain demons, they need *prayer* and (third) *fasting*. We must keep in mind that we are speaking of the biblical meaning of fasting.

The following are two fairly recent examples of self-liberation: Saint John Bosco and Blessed Giovanni Calabria. From the life of Saint John Bosco, we know that he was subjected to extraordinary demonic activity for two years. We do not know exactly how he liberated himself; on this point, Don Bosco was particularly reticent. However, reading between the lines, I sense that his humility prevented him from revealing to us the extraordinary penances that he practiced to overcome his trial. One thing is certain: he did everything himself. That is, he did not need someone else’s deliverance prayers, much less exorcisms.

The other example is that of Blessed Giovanni Calabria, who founded a religious order and who was beatified by Pope John Paul II on April 17, 1988, when he visited Verona. During the last years of Father Calabria’s life, the Lord allowed him to go through periods during which he was subjected to true demonic possession. It is obvious that the object of this trial was purification and expiation. The official documents of the canonical beatification process clearly demonstrate that this holy priest accomplished his own liberation through his faith, his humility, and his prayers. He needed no prayers of deliverance or exorcisms. I believe that these encouraging examples are valid for everyone, even if not everyone would be able to achieve as much.

Liberated with the help of a nun. This interesting case is a good example of what can happen through no fault of one’s own. The narrator is Sister Maria Teresa, an Italian missionary nun who taught at a secondary school near São Paulo (Marília), in Brazil. About seven hundred girls attended the school: eighty of them were not local and lived at

the institute with the nuns. Among them was Gloria, a diligent, well-mannered, helpful girl who was the oldest of six siblings and in her last year of training as an elementary school teacher. Her father had died, and her grandfather was paying for her tuition, hoping that, once she became a teacher, she would support her siblings.

Shortly after Gloria returned from her vacation to her hometown, Sister Maria Teresa started to notice something that had never happened before: the teachers were complaining about Gloria. She had changed: she seemed distant and frequently skipped her classes. So the concerned Sister sent for her, pretending to be interested in her geography lessons. The girl arrived with her textbook and, as soon as she opened it, out came a small, folded handkerchief, brightly colored in red, green, and yellow. When the nun tried to grab it, the handkerchief seemed to avoid her outstretched hand, disappearing into thin air. When Gloria saw this, she paled and exclaimed: "Oh, my! I cannot lose it!" At that point, the class bell rang, and Sister sent the girl back to class, telling her she would help her find the missing handkerchief later.

Next, the nun went to Gloria's private desk and thoroughly leafed through each book and work paper, page by page. Finally, she found the handkerchief at the bottom of the last book and had to grasp it tightly because it seemed electrified, as though trying to escape. This event was so bizarre that the nun was immediately suspicious, and, with some trepidation, she begged for our Lady's intercession. Then she addressed the small handkerchief as though talking to a demon, saying: "Shame on you! The Most Holy Virgin Mary has already crushed you", and, running to the kitchen, she threw it into a large stove, where the fire was burning hot. After the handkerchief burned, Gloria could no longer keep food in her stomach; she seemed to be wasting away, day by day. A worried Sister Maria Teresa took the girl aside and convinced her to tell her what had happened during her visit to her family.

The story was one of hard work, sleepless nights, and a strange encounter. From the very beginning of her visit, she was busy all day, watching her younger siblings and taking care of the house, so her mother could earn some money as a house cleaner. At night she could not sleep because a deafening noise—which seemed to come from her pillow—kept her awake. Then, one day, a woman walked into her house and told her peremptorily: "As soon as you graduate, you shall marry my son. In the meantime, take this handkerchief and guard it carefully: if you lose it, you will no longer be able to study, you will fail your exams, and you will die."

Crying, the girl continued with her story, saying that she tried to do as she was told, because of her love of her mother and her siblings. Sister Maria Teresa listened intently, then reassured her and said: "Trust in our Lady and follow my advice." First, they went to church, where Gloria made a good confession. Then they went to the girls' dorm when there was no one around; the nun inspected the "noisy" pillow and told Gloria to tear it apart. Shaking with fear, the girl obeyed. There, they found a bulky object, wrapped in cloth: as soon as she saw it, Gloria blanched and exclaimed: "My hair!" Then she remembered that, on the day of her strange encounter, her visitor had deftly snipped a lock

of her long hair and had taken it with her. However, finding a small handkerchief in her pillow, identical to the one that had been burned, was an even bigger surprise.

On one side of the schoolyard there was a trash can for burning paper. The two lit a fire and threw in it everything that was in the pillow: the wrapper, hair, and other small objects burned quickly, but the handkerchief was more resilient, so they added more paper to the fire before it finally burned. All the while, they were praying—which is very important in these circumstances—and Sister Maria Teresa kept repeating: “May the feet of our Most Holy Virgin Mary continue to crush you, damned spirit.” After this, Gloria’s appetite came back, she was able to sleep soundly, and she did well in class: she felt at peace and free. Sister Maria Teresa concluded her story by telling me that she had never believed that hexes were real, but now. . .

In 1987, *two prayerful priests, who were not exorcists*, agreed to bless an eleven-year-old boy at the request of his parents, who were their parishioners. The boy was obedient, calm, and amiable; he did not manifest any abnormal signs. While the relatives remained in the church to pray, the priests led him into the sacristy for the blessing. They no sooner began to recite some prayers when the boy began to scream and lash out, spitting drool, blaspheming, and yelling threats. For two hours the priests continued to bless him, using anything they thought might be helpful: signs of the Cross, blessing with holy water, lighting blessed candles, and burning incense. All the while, the small demoniac was lashing out with great fury. After two hours, they decided to stop.

Fifteen days later, the parents brought the boy back to the church. This time, he was nervous, and as soon as the priests began to pray he went into a rage, which grew in intensity as they asked for the intercession of our Lady, Saint Francis, Saint Benedict (the patron saint of that parish), and Saint Michael the Archangel. Throughout the second session, one of the priests kept tracing signs of the Cross with a great Crucifix, and the demon became more and more furious; it was obvious he was about to give in. In fact, he started to cry out for help, invoking the names of other demons, particularly Lucifer, and all the damned, with no visible success. Suddenly, he cried out: “Oh, no, not our Lady! [Maybe he could see her coming.] No, not the White Bird! [Could he be seeing a manifestation of the Holy Spirit?] The Bird is here! He is the most powerful!” With this last cry, the boy jumped and then fell back on the ground, exhausted.

There followed absolute silence. It was over. The two priests shed tears of joy and so did everyone else who had been praying in the church, who, guessing what had happened, rushed into the sacristy. In the days following the liberation, the boy went from being possessed to being a visionary (this is a common occurrence; a *delicate and dangerous transition*; it is a real trick of the demon, who is trying to return). This period did not last long, and the boy has enjoyed excellent health since then. He now attends church regularly and is happy when it is his turn to serve at Mass.

A bishop promotes prayers of liberation

In a pastoral letter dated June 29, 1992, the Very Reverend Andrea Gemma, bishop of Isernia-Venafro, issued an important directive to all of his priests, and I wish that every bishop would follow his example. I will transcribe only the crucial elements of the directive, without quoting its biblical and theological arguments, because they simply repeat what I have already mentioned before. It is enough to say that Sacred Scripture mentions the demon more than one thousand times: almost five hundred times in the New Testament alone. This letter gives me great hope, because I can point to at least one courageous bishop who is able to see realities that, apparently, the Catholic world is no longer recognizing.

I undertake this initiative in full possession of my faculties and my pastoral responsibilities. I wish you to accept the directives of this letter and put them into practice with trusting theological hope. If the Lord will see fit to grant us the fruit of our labor, I will be happy to share the news with you. At this point, all I can do is trust.

Believe me when I tell you that Satan's nefarious and dark activity—as Pope Paul II calls it—is more widespread and deadly than we think. The skeptical sarcasm of worldly pseudoexperts, and sometimes even Christians and teachers of religion, is the fruit of disinformation and, therefore, of superficiality. This skepticism is itself one of the main components of the victory that the evil one wants to win, under the cover of silence. I ask you, who are the pastors of the people of God, not to treat this subject lightly. It would be a culpable omission and a scandal if you did. I know that one of my priestly duties is *listening to all my brothers* with great, great patience. Of course, everything must be subject to healthy discernment, especially by the pastors. However, we should *never, never, never* treat a soul in pain, who may be unconsciously vexed by the evil one (after all, isn't it his job?) in a superficial way, minimizing problems or, worse, refusing to hear them. This is not how Jesus acted! Are our presbyters not aware that it is precisely because of their indifference that so many simple and unaware souls *turn to magicians and sorcerers* and to other aberrations? These, unfortunately, are the preferred instrument of the demon's intervention, and his triumph. Never tire of preserving our faithful from harm!

Groups of Prayer of Deliverance are among the weapons that I propose to use against the infestations of the evil one. I will delegate these groups only when an ordained minister presides over them. Every faithful can—rather, must—always pray. However, in this instance, because only the clergy can practice ritual gestures, the bishop can and must decree that an ordained minister must lead all prayer groups that are entrusted with the particular ministry of intercession and deliverance from the evil one [here, the bishop adds that he will personally preside over one of these liberation prayer groups once a month].

Only after making full use of these means will we resort to an exorcism, which, as we all know, is reserved solely to the bishop and his duly appointed priests.

Priests may bless individuals or places at any time. However, it must be clearly stated that *no blessing is efficacious if the person who requests it has no faith*, or if there is no evidence of rejection of sin, frequent participation in the sacraments, and a regular prayer life. When this faith is absent, the blessing itself is simply viewed as a sort of talisman and, therefore, as superstition.

In order to provide a public and constant witness of our call to arms against the enemy of good and of our souls, I decree that, at the end of the Eucharistic celebration, and before the blessing, the following prayers must be recited. [The bishop, calling upon his authority, imputes a particular liberating power to these prayers, and requests the celebrant's compliance.]

Celebrant: In communion with the Pope and our bishop, we recall with gratitude our baptism and confirmation, and we reject Satan and all his works and seductions.

All: We reject!

Celebrant: Mary, conceived without sin.

All: Pray for us who trust in you.

Celebrant: Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protector against the wickedness and snares of the devil; may God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls.

All: Amen.

Celebrant: *bleses the congregation (in communion with the intention of the Pope and the bishop).*

SOME CAUSES OF EVIL PRESENCE AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

So far, I have summarized the principal causes of possession and of evil ailments. I will now endeavor to explore the topic in greater detail, keeping in mind that there are times when the origins cannot be discovered. The Sacred Books do not help us here because, although Jesus and the apostles often liberated individuals from demons, they never disclosed the reason for the possession.

The lives of the saints also tell us of many instances of liberation, but once again, we are usually not told what caused the possession in the first place. We are simply given the bare facts, which are insufficient for a diagnosis. For instance, we are told that demons would immediately fall at Christ's feet, or Jesus immediately recognized their presence in individuals. The same is true when we about read similar situations in the lives of the saints.

Unfortunately, it is not so easy for us exorcists. Occasionally, some demoniacs recoil, contort violently, and scream the minute they see us (but this could also be due to hysteria, self-delusion, or similar reasons). Others react the instant we put a hand on their head. However, this does not happen in the majority of situations, because the demon tries to hide, to mask his presence by disguising it as a physical or a psychological ailment. No matter how hard he strives to hide his reactions, in the end he must give in. He cannot withstand the prayers and the rites of the exorcist. Often, even before the exorcist is called in, he cannot resist the prayers of the family, of priests, and blessings with holy water. He is forced to come into the open and manifest his presence.

Still, diagnosing an evil presence with certainty is only the beginning. We need to answer the following questions: What kind of possession is it? How did it happen? What is the bond that allows the evil presence to persist? The exorcist asks himself all of these questions because there is a sense that today, for the most part, to obtain deliverance requires more time than was needed in the past. We know that timing belongs to God, and we cannot anticipate how long we will need to obtain liberation; still, it is our duty to do all we can to shorten the period of suffering of all victims who come to us. That is why every exorcist gradually acquires some personal techniques, gestures, and investigation tactics. He may also ask for the cooperation of individuals who have been effective in the past, whether through their prayer or through some charism or sensitivity that can provide useful information.

The topic we are discussing now is a difficult one; it cannot be unanimously authenticated precisely because it reflects personal experiences that, as such, cannot be common to all exorcists. Nevertheless, despite all shortcomings and risks, we cannot avoid investigation. One of the risks is the temptation to rely solely on human research, as though

deliverance rested on our abilities. Instead, it rests entirely on the strength of the name of Christ and on the three prerequisites listed in the Gospel: faith, prayer, and fasting. There is also the risk of becoming dependent on some methods or some expedients, because they give good results. Unfortunately, when he uses them, the exorcist himself runs the danger of slipping into the realm of magic formulas, whose strength no longer comes from Christ, but from some other unknown sources. For example, I have met exorcists who fell into the trap of using the pendulum to detect an evil presence. Others experienced some success by pouring a few drops of oil into a dish full of water. There are more “shortcuts”, but I will not dwell on these methods because, in my opinion, they are suspect. Instead, I will describe some techniques that I can comfortably guarantee.

1. With each successive exorcism, we discover new facts, or we arrive at a better understanding of some elements that we had discovered in earlier sessions. One general, suspect category that emerges and must be investigated, especially if we see no progress, is *impediments to grace*. For instance, the most frequent obstacle to grace is a lack of forgiveness. Forgiving our enemies is possibly the hardest Gospel precept. We must forgive with our whole heart, leaving all resentment behind; pray for those who harmed us; and take the first step toward reconciliation. These are hard tests of our resolve.

The impediment can also be a life-style that does not follow the laws of God. I often meet couples who, only much later, admit that they were living in an irregular marriage situation. Today’s permissiveness has clouded many consciences, especially on this topic. Someone else may be carrying the weight of *former grave sins*, for which they have insufficiently repented or made reparation, even though the sins were confessed (for instance, abortion). These, and more, are obstacles to divine grace and block the progress of liberation. Once the impediments are removed, we notice immediate progress.

2. *Absorbency*. I notice that, often, victims of evil ailments act like sponges or absorbent paper. They very easily soak up all negativities that come their way and suffer for it. The source of the negativity can be a place or an object, but, most often, it is a person. Someone may notice that being near particular individuals (going to their house, or receiving a visit from them, or even just being near them) causes suffering that lasts for hours, or even days. It is important to mention that, often, the carrier of this negativity is unaware of it and has no evil intention. Victims of negativities often are able to feel when someone else is a victim, and their presence is a source of pain. In this case, they must try to avoid contact with the person who causes the affliction—although it may not always be possible—because the contact is a source of pointless suffering. We may even have regretfully to break relationships with friends or close relatives and reduce contact to a minimum.

We may also absorb negativities from places: houses, offices, or shops. Without going into the topic of infestations, I will say that an “absorbent” individual may experience pain when entering a particular house, or shop, or even a certain church. This type of suffering is also useless, therefore we should avoid such places as much as possible, or, if it is impossible (just as at times it is impossible to avoid persons with negativities), we should adopt whatever means of defense we find most effective, for instance, holy images and,

most of all, prayer.

Objects can transmit negativity as well. When we discover the source objects, it is easy to avoid contact with them or to destroy them. I have also found that, as an individual moves closer to freedom from evil influences, his absorbency decreases. I like to say that, when complete healing is achieved, the victim is transformed from “absorbent paper” to “waterproof paper”.

3. *Particular gifts.* Particular sensibilities tend to go hand in hand with evil disturbances, for instance, predicting the future; intimate knowledge of the presence of evil forces or of unusual powers in some individuals; most of all, hearing *voices* and seeing *visions*. These voices may simply be an inconvenience, but most of the time they suggest something: some behavior, prayers, or blasphemies. They may reveal strange events concerning others or communicate something completely irrational.

We must always reject all these sensitivities with all our strength, even if at times we may consider them singular gifts or if their suggestions may appear advantageous. These sensitivities can be “gifts of Satan”. Speaking of “voices” in particular, we must make every effort to reject them, always refusing to listen to their suggestions. We must always act independently from the voices’ advice, according to what we believe is the best course of action, no matter how hard it is: it is these struggles that help us during the healing process. Although these peculiarities may appear to us as powerful gifts, it is very dangerous to be attached to them. Our attachment may even prevent healing, and all these phenomena cease altogether after deliverance.

4. *Ties with the demon.* We often hear of a bond with Satan, which may have been established either through:

- our own will,
- our thoughtless behavior, or
- the will of others.

Whatever its motive, the bond must be broken to obtain liberation. Of the three, the easiest to remedy is the first: own free will. All we need to do is to renounce the demon. The other two causes require an investigation before we can determine what is blocking the healing process.

Consecration to Satan, a pact of blood with him, and participation in satanic rites or attending satanic schools (already numerous in Italy) to become priests of Satan are all direct and willful ties. Healing requires decisive rejection of Satan, renewal of baptismal promises, and reparation of all evil committed against God and neighbors.

There are many ways to contract a bond with the devil through carelessness. For instance, when we visit magicians or card readers committed to magic practices we forge a bond with them and, through them, with the demon. The same is true when we befriend practitioners of necromancy and spiritualists’ séances. We also risk developing ties with the demon by practicing the occult, basing our actions on the careless use of the pendulum or the horoscope, and so on. All these bonds must be severed.

Yet again, bonds can be forged in a subtler, almost unconscious manner. For instance, out of thoughtlessness or curiosity, we may participate in a satanic meeting; “play the game” of the glass or of the coin; we imitate magicians by following the instructions of one of the many manuals readily available; or we watch “how to” shows on certain television networks. Once, I was at a loss to understand what caused signs of negativity in a sixteen-year-old girl who was no longer able to study or do anything else. Her parents were desperate. I could not discover if she had taken part in something dangerous. Then, knowing that she lived in almost total isolation, I ventured a chance question: “Do you like to play cards?” At her affirmative answer, I continued: “Are you trying to predict the future or guess what someone did?” Again, she nodded. Then I asked: “Are your predictions always or almost always correct?” For the third time, she answered “Yes.” “Who gives you the power to guess right? Could it be God?” The girl did not know how to answer. It is possible to contract ties with the demon as naïvely as this.

Finally, we can incur ties with Satan through someone else’s ill wishes. For instance, sometimes a baby is consecrated to Satan from the mother’s womb. The field of curses is vast and varied, including a type of consecration that not only provokes ailments of evil origin, but also forges true ties. We often discover these bonds when their origins are progressively revealed as we attempt to heal a victim of possession. In addition to the usual means of liberation (prayers, sacraments, consecration to Jesus and Mary, exorcisms), these situations require breaking the ties by renewing the baptismal promises and rejecting any relationship or reliance on Satan, no matter what the cause.

5. *Types of curses.* My first book, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, speaks at length about this subject. Here, I repeat that if a curse was used, we must know the particular details and whether it caused the demonic ailments. For instance, the most widely used curse is the malefice, or hex. We need to discover how it was made and its aim and, if necessary, find and burn any hidden, cursed objects. If the hexed substance was added to food or drink, the victim must physically eliminate or vomit it, with the help of three sacramentals: exorcized water, oil, and salt, which, when used with faith, are very beneficial in these situations.

A curse can also originate from such things as maledictions by close relatives, a habit of blaspheming, membership in the Freemasonry, spiritic or magic practices, and so on. Remedies include prayers, forgiveness, reparation, and intercession (also for the dead), and they vary according to each circumstance.

6. *Rejection.* Evil spirits who provoke particular reactions, and attack and torment the soul, can emerge either during the exorcist’s interview or the prayer (which can be simply a prayer of liberation). For instance, the spirit of anger, vengeance, impurity, or suicide may surface unexpectedly. In my experience, reciting prayers that specifically reject one or another spirit is very beneficial. Rejection includes denying every tie with the spirit, proclaiming one’s own will to reject the temptations, and praying to be liberated. Often, when the victim is struggling to recite a prayer disavowing a particular spirit, I know that I have hit the target. When we are constant in our efforts, we see a change in behavior, a gradual improvement in personality, and an increase in serenity and peace. It is like

watching Saint Paul's lengthy list in action. This list enumerates the fruits of the flesh versus the fruits of the Spirit. Gradually, we see that all the fruits of the Spirit begin to replace those of the flesh.

7. *Relapses*. The path to liberation is never a constant ascent, but it includes constant highs and lows. Sudden regressions may be due either to a new curse (if this is the cause of the evil ailment) or to a meeting with the person that causes the negativity. This is especially true if the meeting cannot be avoided, as in the case of a relative who practices magic or spiritualism.

I vividly remember one of the first individuals whom I attempted to exorcize: a girl who is still affected by negativities. It was as though the malefice were periodically renewed. When this happened, it was very noticeable, because she came to her appointment as though "recharged" by negative forces. Discouraged, I asked my teacher, Father Candido, if my work was useless and how this case would end. Without hesitation, he replied: "God is the strongest. Liberation can be delayed, but it cannot be blocked." The demon uses many weapons in his attempts to discourage the victim and the exorcist himself. He tries to wear out both of them, to convince them that their efforts are useless.

Usually, the most serious situations are *the result of a series of factors*. They almost never stem from one single event. We tend to blame one thing, what I call the "catalyst incident", which can be a curse, a meeting with an evil individual, or an innocent mistake. For instance: a good friend invites us to his house. We arrive in the middle of a séance. Shortly after, we notice serious physical symptoms that land us at the psychiatrist and, eventually, the exorcist. We think that the meeting or the curse is what caused the evil influence, but, usually, this is not the case. For example, when we investigate the life of the victim, we may discover that he had already been targeted from infancy, or even from his conception. Another "relapse" may have occurred when the victim was six or eight years old and again at eighteen or twenty years of age. Every time the victim felt some discomfort, but never really paid much attention because it was not severe. Finally, the "catalyst incident" is the straw that breaks the camel's back, but it is not the only cause of the ailment.

Before healing can take place, *much patience is required, as all the wounds are healed, one by one*, after they are discovered. This is another reason why healing serious situations usually requires a long time and a lot of effort.

8. *Never trust*. Before I move on, I would like to add one important observation. We can never trust people who used to practice magic or hexes or curses, even when they are close relatives. We must certainly forgive, let go of all grudges, and pray for these individuals. However, we must stay clear of them, even when they claim to be converted. As long as they are alive, their conversion is always possible. Still, they are guilty of the gravest of sins: strong ties with Satan. I have found that the *worst* always happens when, believing that a change has truly taken place, we resume our friendship with these individuals. It is not my intention to judge in condemnation; the judge can only and always be God. I am merely suggesting practical norms of behavior, based on many painful experiences. This is

the dark realm of sins against the Holy Spirit. Although only the Lord can judge, we must defend ourselves and guard against silly naïveté.

The following experience shows how causality and liberation are connected. I will highlight the research into the origins of the ailment, how it was approached, and what obtained deliverance:

The Community of the Lion of Judah and of the Immolated Lamb, which is now called the Community of the Beatitudes, is a French Catholic community dedicated to the contemplative life. In 1977 it gave birth to the Saint Luke Medical Group, a spiritual and charismatic therapeutic team that handles deliverance from psychological or demonic ailments. The formation of a group with the specific aim of helping individuals who are the victim of evil ailments is a very worthy endeavor. I gladly mention it because, although since the birth of the Church religious communities have assisted every need of the faithful, this is the first to be established for this purpose. Evidently, in the past it was assumed that the task of liberating from evil influences belonged strictly to the bishops.

I will give an example of the work performed by this team by quoting from Dr. Philippe Madre's book *Ma liberaci dal male*:

Mr. E. S., a twenty-eight-year-old pharmacy student and a practicing Christian, came to us because he had become the victim of sudden, self-destructive urges, such as throwing himself off a balcony, jumping under a train, hanging himself. The impulses came and went without any apparent reason. They started several months ago and became increasingly frequent, despite the individual's determined efforts to resist them. This is a particular nervous phobia that is difficult to explain and to interpret psychologically.

Anamnesis gave no concrete results, either physically or spiritually. Through the collective discernment of our team, we reached the conclusion that this man was the victim of an evil spell. When we questioned him, he finally remembered that, when he was eight, a woman full of hatred had told his mother that she had cursed her and her son and would lead him to self-destruction through magic practices. After we found the cause of the ailment, one simple prayer of deliverance was sufficient to deliver the young man from his phobias.¹

Different exorcists use different approaches, and I try to make good use of what seems to be useful. When I am confronted with methods such as the one I have just cited, I wait until I have more information, but I still voice some doubts, because I believe that there are better ways to heal both psychological and evil ailments. When it comes to the latter, our strength rests solely in the mandate that Christ gave us, in his name, that is: "Human ability is useless, what is needed is faith."

EXAMPLES

An evil journey

Nadia and her husband, a successful businessman, belonged to traditionally Catholic families: daily prayer, Sunday Mass, frequent confession, weekly Communion. After coming to terms with the reality that they were unable to bear children, they decided to adopt a boy and a girl legally.

This event instigated a relentless and dangerous jealousy on the part of some relatives, who feared the loss of the financial help they were currently receiving from the couple, as well as their future inheritance. Nadia's brother was married to a woman who practiced the occult, especially spiritualism and witchcraft.

In 1978, Nadia began to experience physical ailments. In particular, she was suffering from strange heart, liver, and spleen disorders that defied all medical remedies. Then came spiritual difficulties. She began to find it hard to pray and receive the Eucharist. She was tempted to blaspheme against the Crucifix and the Virgin Mary. She could no longer take part in religious ceremonies and meetings.

Then years later, in the summer of 1988, Nadia's gall bladder was removed, but still her health did not improve, and her doctor recommended visiting a famous thermal spa. There, Nadia's pain became so severe that she consulted a local doctor. After hearing the medical history of his patient, he asked her if she was a believer. At Nadia's positive reply, he firmly told her: "Your sufferings go beyond anything that medical science can cure. I advise you to seek out a good priest: if you wish, I can recommend one close by who could help you."

She followed this suggestion. The priest was able to help Nadia improve her prayer life; he urged her to engage in the spiritual battle to which every militant Christian is called; and he recited deliverance prayers over her for a period of time. Finally, noticing that progress was slower than expected, the priest began to suspect foul play and told her: "You need an exorcist. Ask your bishop for a name; if he cannot help you, try another bishop."

When Nadia and her husband returned home, they immediately called the chancery and found the name of the diocesan exorcist. They went to see him on August 16, 1988. After three appointments and a thorough examination, the priest began his prayers of deliverance, aimed at breaking the ties between Nadia and anyone who might wish to harm her, which included the following: a friend who was jealous of the children she had been able to adopt; the sister-in-law who dabbled in the occult; and some domestic helpers who had been hired to take care of the couple's country home.

This house was in the middle of some farmland, but despite its rural location, it was eerily noisy. Nadia and her husband were eventually able to discover that the former owners, who were members of satanic sects, had used the place to host magic rituals and black masses. After the priest began to exorcize the house and burn all suspicious objects, all noise ceased and peace was reestablished. Still, the "blocks" that prevented Nadia from attending church, praying, receiving Communion, and reading the Word of God remained.

Continuing his journey of discernment, and after consulting a psychiatrist who regularly helped him, the priest decided to exorcize Nadia. Although the first exorcisms did not produce any improvement, the patient's reactions clearly revealed the absence of any psychological pathology, while, at the same time, her satanic reactions became progressively worse. Finally, Nadia became so furious that all the strength of the demonic possession was revealed.

Following well-tested methods, the exorcist addressed the demons, in an attempt to sever all ties between any negative individual and Nadia. This is the formula he used: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the merits of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, through the intercession of Saint Michael the Archangel, the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul and all the saints, I break every occult tie of black magic (sorcery, curse, and so on) between you, foul spirit [when he discovered the name of the demon, he spoke the name] and Nadia. I bind every power of this spirit and I command him to leave Nadia and go to the foot of Jesus' Cross." [The reader is referred to page 96 regarding addressing demons directly. The above prayer and others quoted in this book are to be reserved to duly appointed exorcists—Ed.]

The invocation of the names of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Saints Peter and Paul, and Saint Michael, and the other names that the priest would call out, such as Padre Pio, John Paul II, and the Curé of Ars, caused strong reactions in Nadia (many exorcists ask the patient for the names of their favorite saints). Gradually, she began to find it easier to pray and to receive Communion. Her husband was of great help: he prayed with her, joined her at prayer meetings, and interceded whenever he felt she needed it. It is very important that someone who is close to them assist the victims.

As the exorcisms progressed, the priest increasingly used prayers of intercession: psalms, litanies, the Rosary, praise. These prayers so enraged the demon that he sought a compromise: "We could strike a deal." At first, he stopped blaspheming and "just" insulted the exorcist. Finally, one day the demon suggested: "Leave me the following six relatives [and named those he wanted], and I will leave Nadia." At this, the exorcist invoked the Holy Spirit, praying to break every bond with black magic, malefice, and witchcraft with every one of the six individuals whom the evil one wanted for his own. Throughout this, the demon was becoming increasingly furious. Finally, when the exorcist consecrated each of the six individuals to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the demon screamed desperately: "If you take them away from me, what will be left for me? What will I become?"

At the time of this writing (1992) Nadia is still not fully healed, but she shows constant progress. I want to mention that Nadia makes extensive use of holy water, both for blessing herself and for drinking. During exorcisms, she responds very well to anointing with holy oil and has received the anointing of the sick with great devotion. The presence of many demons became obvious; they were under the leadership of one of the strongest demons. The priest often exorcized Nadia on the anniversary of her baptism, with excellent results. Once, a bishop assisted during one of the exorcisms and was well pleased, both because of the progress of the healing, and because he was allowed to participate. Now she often goes

to confession, as does her husband, and she claims that this sacrament strengthens her greatly; her adopted children, twenty and twenty-two, are also reaping the benefits of this intense prayer life.

The prayers of the Pentecostals

Once, I agreed to see a tall, large military man because, from our telephone conversation, I sensed that there were more than enough grounds to suspect a diabolic possession.

Even when we suspect that the description of the symptoms is exaggerated or even completely fabricated, a direct meeting is always necessary before we can rule out evil activity. Fortunately for me, the individual came with his father and an uncle: both husky “gorillas”, well able to help, if needed. And did I ever need it! From the moment I placed my hands on the young man’s head, he became furious. The results were already obvious after only three exorcisms.

(As an aside, I would like to mention that the most deeply rooted possessions are not always the most violent, and their healing does not require the greatest length of time. Sometimes, the strongest reactions to exorcisms come from individuals whose liberation requires only a few appointments. On the other hand, I have encountered seemingly minor reactions in victims whose demonic possession was so rooted that it required several years of exorcism before a successful conclusion.)

Continuing with the story of the young soldier: he called me to cancel our fourth appointment, citing military duties. Several months later, I received a letter from him. He told me that he had to leave Rome because he had been suddenly transferred to northern Italy. He gratefully thanked me for the help I had provided and joyfully reported the events that had led to his complete deliverance.

I am completely healed. It was the Spirit of Jesus Christ who cast out the demon I had inside. I did not believe I could be healed because the pain was so strong. Even less did I believe that I could be healed so quickly. By pure chance, I met a member of an Evangelical Christian group who perceived my condition and invited me to receive the prayers of his community. I did, and the group prayed over me for a long time; the next day I could already notice a great improvement. The following Sunday, I was invited to visit their church, where they invoked the Spirit of Jesus Christ over me. This provoked the same strong reactions that I experienced when you were blessing me. After praying and doing battle with the demon for half a day, they took a break and asked me to come back late in the afternoon. When I returned, they began praying again, and when they helped me to invoke the cleansing Spirit of Christ, I fell to the ground. When I was able to stand up again, I was free from pain; I felt liberated, light. I was myself again, the person I used to be.

I thank you again for all you did for me. I felt it was my duty to write to you and give witness to what Jesus Christ has done for me. The Lord accomplishes all sorts of miracles; he heals drug addicts, and he frees victims whose curse is much worse than mine was. I want to give him glory with the witness of my deliverance.

The letter included his name and address and the address of the Pentecostal Evangelical Christian Church that the Lord had used to heal him. I must confess that, at first, the letter was a bit disconcerting. Then I thought about the Gospel of Mark and the rebuke that John the apostle received from Jesus because of the following words: “Teacher, we saw a man

casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us” (Mk 9:38). Instead, I tried to admire the faith of that community and to learn from the soldier’s experience. It is important to pray as a group and not individually whenever possible. Most of all, we should pray at length and with faith. It is the Lord who acts, and he decides what instrument to use.

An unresolved issue

I cannot deny that, among the many cases that remain unresolved, several point to a lack of pastoral care by the clergy. Since I believe I have already discussed this question, I will not go into details about the many disconcerting answers and examples of behavior that reveal both a complete lack of conformity with the Gospel and a wide divergence from ecclesiastical rules. One example that, in my opinion, is fairly representative will be sufficient to illustrate my point. I was granted permission to say that it happened in Bologna, which, at this writing (1992), is the only major Italian diocese without exorcists. When an exorcist is appointed, Bologna will hold the dubious honor of last place (and this has nothing to do with the fact that I am from the neighboring diocese of Modena).

Sonia was eighteen, and, as it often happens these days, she had already traveled widely and experienced all sorts of adventures. Among others, she had formed some ties to the dark groups, of punk extraction, and had participated in many satanic rituals and séances with them. For all her efforts, she had been rewarded with a number of very strange phenomena.

She was immediately striking, because she always wore a black scarf around her neck and large black sunglasses. She could not stand daylight: if by chance she was momentarily exposed to it, she would scream, writhe, and run to hide. She claimed that often at night she was visited by ghosts who did not let her sleep. At times she sang strange slow songs, Oriental-sounding tunes. She was subject to frequent, sudden fainting spells that caused her to swoon anytime, anywhere.

Sonia and her parents were nonbelievers; they had visited many famous doctors in an effort to find a cure for her, but not one had been able to arrive at a diagnosis, let alone improve her condition. She always looked in pain. When she spoke of her suffering to trusted friends, she appeared terrified. She was convinced everyone thought she was crazy. She fell off things frequently: a step, a chair, while stepping down from a bus or out of a car. She always claimed that “someone” pushed her. Her falls never really caused her serious harm: she would feel an undetermined soreness, but nothing really hurt, not even the parts of her body that bore the brunt of the fall. Once, at school, she was literally tossed down the stairs while a terrified friend was looking on: nothing happened. She simply said that she had felt a violent push, and the one witness of the incident confirmed this statement, saying that she saw Sonia being “pushed down” the stairs by an invisible force.

Finally a friend of the family who, because of her work, was well known at the chancery and by some of the auxiliary bishops (this was 1986) asked one of them for advice and for the name of an exorcist. Not only was she told that there were no exorcists and that there was no need of one, but she was also ridiculed for her fears and told not to give in to her imagination, because priests had much more important work to do than to deal with foolishness. She then approached other priests, with the same results; to all of them, dealing with this situation seemed contemptible, a worthless effort.

At this point, Sonia no longer left her house; she lost the few good friends that she had left, and no one knew how to help her.

Since this is all I know of the case, I cannot say with certainty what caused Sonia's ailment. However, what little I know clearly provides more than sufficient evidence to warrant the intervention of an exorcist. It is deplorable that one was not contacted; the actions of those ecclesiastics who were consulted were shameful. Unfortunately I must add that I have documented many, too many, similar experiences, including the names of those who had been approached and their answers. "Believers in Christ" would certainly have acted otherwise (see Mk 16:17).

DIFFICULTIES AND ONGOING PROBLEMS

In general, unless it is clear from the preliminary interview that no evil influence is present, the matters that are brought to the exorcist's attention are never simple. In the first case, a few good words and recommendations are all that is needed. A thorough confession should be followed by a true conversion of the heart, which includes a return to the life of grace, nourished by prayer and constant sacramental practices.

If, instead, the first contact reveals any one of the many suspect signs that I mentioned before, we begin the serious task of investigation. During the last few years I have met many exorcists, of all nationalities; each uses his own methodology, based on experience and habit. I tried to, and did, learn much from them, but very seldom do I imitate them. I come from the school of Father Candido, to whom I remain faithful. I also realized that, sometimes, a method that is successfully used by one exorcist does not have the same results when used by another.

1. During the preliminary phase, there are *two commonly used procedures*:

Method one: the exorcist begins with a lengthy investigation and interrogation, and only after many appointments does he begin to bless or exorcize.

Method two: The exorcist—and this is what I do—begins with brief prayers of exorcism as soon as he detects suspect signs. Then he lengthens the prayers as the need becomes evident. I have already stated that, before all else, exorcisms are diagnostic: only later the goal becomes liberation. It is only through the exorcism itself that we can reach the moral certainty of an evil presence or absence. This second method—partially due to necessity—is used primarily by those exorcists who are besieged by requests. If we spent many hours in interrogations and investigations, we would waste much time on situations that do not need our help. By shortening the wait-and-see period, the exorcist tailors his intervention to the needs that are progressively revealed by the exorcisms. I can imagine someone like Father Candido, who saw between seventy and eighty people every morning, trying to precede every meeting with a two-hour interrogation! This is an area of our ministry that requires a lot of experience, but most of all, grace.

As I said, we start with preliminary tests, we read the medical history, and we verify the reasons that make us suspect an evil influence. At this point we watch for reactions, both during the exorcism and after—that is, the reactions to the exorcism during the following days or weeks—as well as the developments that we notice as the exorcisms progress. It is possible that the matter can be resolved quickly, or that it is completely devoid of evil influences, and we stop the exorcisms. It is also possible that the incident confronting us is hard to interpret, is complex, or is perplexing. When I see positive results, even if just for a few days, I will proceed with my ministry, although I realize that the effects are probably due only to psychological factors. If that is the case, I stop the exorcisms, but I do not

abandon the patient; instead, I continue to assist him with other prayers. The positive effects are real even when they are simply psychological.

All too often, the situation is baffling. Medical opinions are not convincing, neither is the therapy that was prescribed and the findings of the exorcisms. Then, more than ever, I ask for the cooperation of doctors—almost always psychiatrists—but I do not stop there. When in doubt, I continue to bless. It is important to point out that, many times, the matter was resolved and I was able to reach a morally certain conclusion precisely thanks to the exorcisms. Even when we are unable to reach a conclusion, continuing with the exorcism never harmed anyone; on the contrary! When a patient is faced with doubts on the medical front, exorcisms are often the only reason to hope, even if later it becomes clear that there was no diabolical possession.

Possessions can surprise us with their vast, unimaginable range of manifestations and their just as vast spectrum of reactions. I will present two opposite and extreme situations. I have dealt with demoniacs who needed to be firmly held by at least six people. They could speak languages unknown to them, or strange tongues, and reveal facts that were completely unfamiliar to them or to those who were present. I have also exorcized demoniacs who were always silent, remained completely calm, and gave not the smallest sign of reaction; I will describe an example of this later.

Can we make mistakes? Of course. However, every time I, or any other exorcist I know, has missed a diagnosis, something eventually has pointed to our error and led us in the right direction. It should be clear by now that our most frequent challenge is to discern between possession and psychological illness. One important clue of possession is that it invariably alternates between moments of crisis and times of calm, while a psychological illness is constant. As the exorcisms proceed, the experienced exorcist is able to determine whether the patient's reactions show symptoms of possession, just as a good psychiatrist knows whether the phenomena displayed by the patient are consistent with psychological illness.

In the most complex cases the exorcist and psychiatrist, after comparing notes, realize that there are signs of both demonic and psychological ailments and that the victim needs the cure of both practitioners. The way things are today, it is very common for the exorcist to send a patient to the psychiatrist. Unfortunately, it is rare for the psychiatrist to seek the input of the exorcist when he realizes that the reactions of the patient exceed the parameters of all known ailments, not only because of the symptoms, but also because of the reaction—or lack of one—to prescription drugs.

2. We are not always able to identify the *causes of an evil ailment*. Many believe that it is possible to be the victim of “generational curses” and cite, as proof, several biblical texts according to which the “Lord. . . keep[s] steadfast love for thousands, forgive[s] iniquity and transgression and sin, but. . . will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation” (Ex 34:7). Actually, this text speaks of the greatness of God's mercy (a thousand generations), compared to his punitive justice (three or four generations). I believe that this interpretation becomes clear when we compare it to other biblical

statements that explicitly say everyone pays for his own sins.

What we should ask ourselves instead is whether there are natural predispositions that make us more vulnerable to these ailments. For instance, the nervous system of some individuals is more fragile than that of others, and doctors should consider this possibility when faced with psychological illness. Evil ailments are something else. They require the full cooperation of the victims and of those who wish to help them—family members, friends, and prayer groups. Some patients come to me with more or less the following attitude: “Father, a devil is tormenting me; you take it away from me.” I always answer: “I can help you, but the battle is yours to fight.” We need tremendous willpower and a commitment to seek abundant means of grace—prayer and sacraments—and to live a true Christian life *without any compromise with sin*. It means engaging in a constant battle against the attacks of the evil one. Sometimes we can even help from a distance: I often perform brief exorcisms over the telephone for individuals whom I see regularly, and the results are good.

3. I have been asked if *it is possible to liberate someone without his knowledge*. Based on my own experience and that of my exorcist friends, it is possible to liberate someone without his knowledge but not without his consent, whether expressed or implied. It is impossible to exorcize those who reject it. Often, a victim will explicitly tell me: “Father, I came to see you to please my family, but I do not believe in these things and I do not want you to perform any rite over me.” Clearly, we must respect the will of the individual; limit our efforts to an appeal to reason; and speak the truth about what we see. On the other hand, we can exorcize anyone who requests our ministry, including non-Christians.

4. *The question of presences* deserves a book by itself, therefore I will merely touch upon it. I am referring to the possibility (or not) that souls of the dead can dwell in the living. These may be souls of the damned, of people who died a sudden or violent death, of ancestors, or of total strangers. A related question deals with the possibility (or not) of the existence of so-called “wandering souls” (here I refer to souls that have yet to find their final path); or even the likelihood of the existence of so-called “guide souls”.

These remain open questions. I wish that theologians would address this issue and develop the subject within the context of Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium, as well as the experience of the saints.

What we know for certain from Scripture is the following:

- We have only one life in which to determine our eternal future. We do not believe in reincarnation but in resurrection. We know that everyone will be resurrected: some to eternal glory and some to eternal torment.
- We know that the souls of the deceased, after death, go immediately to hell, to heaven, or to Purgatory. This truth is clearly revealed in Scripture, and it has been formally defined as dogma by two ecumenical councils: Lyons and Florence. This seems to exclude the possibility of wandering souls or guide souls.

We know very little else. Saint Thomas Aquinas himself affirms that it is extremely difficult to demonstrate rationally how souls could live without their bodies, and how they could be happy without their bodies (for those who are in heaven). He adds that we know so little about the life of the souls of the deceased that we must take into account the private revelations of saints. The truths that we know about the mystical body tell us that souls are active after their bodily death. The saints and the souls in Purgatory can pray for us; we can invoke the intercession of saints, pray for the suffrage of souls in Purgatory, and ask for their help.

Still, many unanswered questions remain. For instance, how do we establish with certainty the moment of death? Theologians ponder whether the condition in which the souls of the defunct live is a state or a place: this can be a determining factor when we consider their eventual activity. Let me say right away that the introductory norms of the *Ritual* warn the exorcist about possible diabolic disguises. Norm number 14 states that we must not fall into his trap, when *the devil wants us to believe that he is the soul of a saint, or a deceased, or an angel.*

I will just add that, when I asked other exorcists about this issue, I heard different opinions, according to different experiences with this phenomenon, but every one always carefully explained his rationale. For instance, both Father La Grua and Father Ernetti suggest a possible solution within the natural sphere, and neither pretended to have a good answer. I believe that we must continue to study the issue of souls after death, keeping in mind, but not limiting the research to, the conciliar definitions that I have already quoted. Historical research would also be useful. For instance, a holy exorcist, the patron saint of Modena (A.D. 310-392), the Bishop Saint Geminiano, who was a contemporary of Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine, pondered the same subject.

5. Some of the questions that I have been asked bring up more problems, such as the issue of *healers, prana-therapists, automatic writing, recording of ultra-terrestrial voices, and paranormal phenomena.* This entire domain is outside the scope of the exorcist. As a sector, it is wide open to speculation and deception. Each of the phenomena listed above requires accurate research, sifting what is good from what is not, what is due to natural causes and what involves the evil one, that is: the distinction between magic and true magic.

Let us take healers and prana-therapists, for example. The real ones possess a paranormal power (which is of natural origin), and their activity is beneficial in dealing with ailments of natural—but not malefic—causes. Unfortunately, there are also many so-called healers and prana-therapists who are simply swindlers or who practice true magic.

Concerning automatic writing and recording the voices of the deceased, let me remind you that this is not God's way, therefore we are probably dealing with phenomena of either natural or evil origin. We must be very leery of paranormal phenomena, which we now call parapsychology: some are valid, but many are not. Today, we tend to label everything we do not understand or do not believe as parapsychology. Therefore, the paranormal becomes the great tent that hides our ignorance.

6. I referred to healers and prana-therapists because I want to discuss another issue: *We do not love the Church enough*, and this is one of the obstacles to liberation. Some even come to an exorcist without realizing that he is a man of the Church, who acts in the name of the Church. Often, we only approach him as we would any other healer, ascribing to him personal powers that are totally separated from faith. This is a significant problem that probably touches the core of the religious crisis of our times.

Cardinal Ratzinger, in an interview with Vittorio Messori, expressed his feelings on the subject with marvelous clarity. *Question*: “So, it’s a *crisis*. But where, in your opinion, is the principal point of rupture, the crack which, by widening, threatens the stability of the whole edifice of the Catholic faith?” No doubts existed in Cardinal Ratzinger’s mind. “The alarm must focus before all else on the crisis of the understanding of the Church, on ecclesiology: ‘Herein lies the cause of a good part of the misunderstandings or real errors which endanger theology and common Catholic opinion alike.’ ”¹

During an interview, Father Candido was asked: “Don’t you feel alone? What goes through your mind when you exorcize?” Quite openly, he replied: “It is the same feeling I have when I celebrate Mass, even if they are two different things. My interior disposition is the same: I am carrying out a ministry that is linked not to my person but to my priesthood. It is linked to Jesus’ command: ‘*Cast out demons*’. It is an action of the Church, the militant Church.”

So, the beginning of every exorcist’s challenge is this: to speak of the Church, to foster love for the Church. We must help those who come to us to realize that they are not seeking a man endowed with untold miraculous powers; instead, they are reaching out for a minister of God, whom the Church has entrusted with the task of exercising a particular ministry. One of the dispositions that is most absent in our patients is love for the Church and faith in the Church, beyond personalities. This is why fruits are scarce. Some victims travel from exorcist to exorcist, quick to accuse: “So and so is worthless; that one does not understand a thing”, and so on. They fail to understand that, if they have no faith in the Church, if they are not aware of approaching the priest as someone who acts in the name of the Church, they would do better to remain at home.

7. *Signs of liberation*. I have already said that the timing belongs to God. Exorcists cannot foresee how long will be required to obtain *deliverance* from an evil ailment or a demonic possession. Some signs, though, are helpful. For instance, the victim may feel progressively better from the very first exorcism, and his ailments will lessen right away. Alternately, as the exorcism progresses, the patient will become more and more furious, and his disturbances will increase: this is a sign that the hidden sickness is emerging. Then, the intensity of the occurrences will lessen, indicating that the disturbances are regressing. When this happens, it is a sign that we are progressing toward full deliverance.

Sometimes the demon’s own words reveal that liberation is imminent: “You are killing me! I am leaving! You have defeated me!” and so on. Or the demon, feeling progressively weaker and unable to resist the exorcist’s demands, asks for help, invoking other demons for help. Here is another sign of weakness: in the beginning, when the exorcist asked him

When are you leaving? he would answer, *Never*. Toward the end, he starts to answer, *Soon*, and sometimes he even sets a date for his departure. Often, it is the wrong date, but sometimes, thanks to the divine will, it is correct. Whenever demons lose their strength and arrogance, liberation is near, although it may not be imminent, and he may still hang on for quite some time.

When the demon is finally driven out, the victim's reaction can vary from unrestrained weeping (for joy) to loss of all strength. Occasionally, the feeling is one of amazement and almost disbelief as, step by step, the awareness of interior freedom sets in. At this point, it is more important than ever not to lose sight of all that sustained and helped during the struggle with the evil one: a rhythm of prayer, union with God, sacramental practices, and forgiveness.

8. I end this chapter with a reflection that keeps recurring to me and that becomes stronger as I practice my ministry. I would like to ask other exorcists to confirm if this is their experience as well. I have come to believe that there is an *intermediate layer* of ailments. I know many individuals who seem to be pursued by troubles, more or less serious. I am speaking of disturbances that are not detectable at the medical level; neither are they serious enough to warrant exorcisms. Nevertheless, many of these troubles were healed through prayers of deliverance, forgiveness, and the rejection of any and all malefic ties. Often, these ailments began in infancy and, therefore, are rooted in the family. Or they may have originated with unwholesome encounters, wrongdoings, or unconsciously held grudges. *It is important to identify the origins* of these afflictions. Prayers of deliverance or healing are always beneficial, and so are pilgrimages and lengthy prayer retreats. I have found that the seminars guided by Professor Tarcisio Mezzetti of Perugia are also efficacious; I hope that, through his courses, many will find new and effective forms of help and healing.

I am also convinced that these disturbances are evils in the early stage, and, if caught in time, they can be cured relatively easily. On the other hand, the longer we wait to address them, the more severe they become, and when they finally emerge in all their strength, they are difficult and lengthy to heal. It is also possible that the condition remains constant and the cause of suffering remains unknown and unhealed because the symptoms are so peculiar that neither the doctor nor the exorcist understands their origin.

EXAMPLES

Team exorcism

The French psychiatrist Maria Domenica Fouqueray poignantly reports this severe case of possession.

In April 1986, I was hired by a medical-psychiatric office, and I have been cooperating with the diocesan exorcist for four years. Our Bishop, René Picandet, who believes that demonic possession is possible (not everyone is like him!), supports us and monitors our work. My Christian formation began when I was an infant, and I have built on this foundation all my life. Thanks to the guidance of an excellent priest, I was able to attend biblical-theological classes during my medical studies.

In 1974 I discovered a charismatic movement, Renewal in the Spirit, and I became familiar with prayers of healing and of deliverance and with exorcisms. When, in view of my qualifications in the field of psychiatry, I was offered the opportunity to cooperate with the diocesan exorcist, I was glad to accept, and we developed a good working relationship. One of the first times I was asked to help, we had to deal with a forty-year-old married woman, the mother of four children, who was working in special education. She had been a member of a satanic sect for more than ten years, and her troubles were rooted in this relationship. When she came to us, she was trying to leave the sect for the third time.

Surprisingly, this woman was very close to priests, and it was one of them who brought her to us: she was leading a double life. While she knew many priests and played the organ during Mass every Sunday, she never received the sacraments. At the same time, she was the great priestess of a sect called Wicca, whose head is Lucifer. Her initiation into the sect had been gradual, and, once she was accepted, she knew that she would be able to leave only through suicide, the violent death her new “master” had reserved for her. She was very scared: she wanted to leave the sect but knew the risks.

When we met her for the first time, she appeared depressed, tormented, emaciated. She had trouble sleeping but had no history of psychiatric problems. After careful examination, the exorcist decided to proceed with exorcisms, every two weeks at first, and then weekly. For me, this became an experience full of discoveries, which enriched and energized my faith.

As a psychiatrist, I tried to find “the open door”, that is, the motivation that had impelled her to enter a satanic sect. Briefly, this is her story. Her Christian education had been very rigid, based on strict observance of traditional practices, but she had not discovered God’s love. She attended a boarding school run by nuns, where she received a good intellectual formation, but little spiritual support. Her marriage was no better. She married a successful businessman, who earned a good living. He forced her to leave her job and remain home with the children. She would have liked to go out on occasion, but her husband was against it. Even during summer vacation, she was forced to remain in a small country village with her elderly parents. She found her life boring and was looking for diversion.

One day, in a secular magazine, she saw an advertisement that invited the reader to join a group for a few days of fun. She answered and became part of the group, even though she realized that the members were very peculiar. For instance, all newcomers were encouraged gradually to increase their alcohol consumption; they were offered illegal drugs and then were initiated into the sect. The leaders of the group appeared to be very solicitous, compensating for her uninteresting home life. She became more and more involved: she rejected her baptism, accepted a new baptism into the sect, and was given a new name. She was branded with a secret mark on her thigh and, after burning her Christian baptismal certificate, she signed a pact with Satan, with her blood.

Her initiation progressed to attendance at black masses and the celebration of the “fifteen hours” every Friday. She clearly saw that these ceremonies transformed and “demonized” Christian rites and prayers. The black mass is a parody of the Eucharist and, at the moment of communion, it becomes an orgy. The exorcist must know the various steps of the satanic pact because, on the way to liberation, the victim must be invited to reject them one by one, radically and completely renouncing Satan during exorcisms, with the formula: *“I reject you, demon [here, the speaker would name the specific demon], I do not want you anymore, and I renounce all the practices that you inspired.”*

These are the twelve steps of the satanic pact: (1) Abjuring Christian baptism (Pastors, be careful when you are requested to supply a baptismal certificate). (2) Abjuring all faith in the Eucharist. (3) Refusing obedience to God and accepting the will of Satan, Lucifer, or Beelzebul. (4) Rejecting the Virgin Mary. (5) Rejecting the sacraments. (6) Stepping on the Cross. (7) Stepping on images of the Virgin Mary and the saints. (8) Swearing eternal allegiance to the prince of darkness by swearing on diabolical scriptures. (9) Being baptized in the name of the devil, and choosing an appropriate name. (10) Receiving on the thigh, by means of a diabolical imprint, the mark of the sect. (11) Choosing a godfather and a godmother within the sect. (12) Profaning the Host without profaning the

Tabernacle, that is, receiving Communion and preserving the Sacred Particles, which will be desecrated during a black mass.

I discovered these points one by one, as we proceeded with the exorcism. During the rite, the victim's eyes were beast-like. She forcefully rejected the Crucifix that we held in front of her. At the end of each session, she vomited (even only water), and her temperature would reach 106 degrees. The fever decreased only when she was sprinkled with the water of Saint Sigismund (which is known in our area for healing unexplainable fever). Magdalene (I will call her by this name) had taken part in a great number of black masses. She was an attractive woman who inspired confidence, because she played the organ during liturgies.

I would like to stress that, in this instance, the action of the exorcist by himself would not have been successful. Twice before, two different exorcists had failed because they did not give sufficient weight to the facts that the victim was revealing, and because they minimized the pressure and threats that the members of the sect were exerting. The third time, the exorcist was able to liberate Magdalene thanks to the help provided by our team. This is an example of what was involved: the victim needed to be reeducated in the Christian faith. She needed support and assistance when she was attacked by suicidal impulses and by unexplainable fever. We never left her alone; we were always very close to her.

This process lasted three years. After her deliverance, Magdalene still found it difficult to attend Mass in churches where she was known, but she was able to pray and receive Communion. Now, she still needs appropriate catechesis, but she is becoming increasingly free of those "blocks" that made it difficult for her to pray and read the Bible. In the beginning, we had to avoid any Scripture that spoke of blood and sacrifice. What struck her the most were the letters of Saint Paul and the Gospels. *Healing the memory* and purifying images required a long time: she was the victim of many visions and nightmares.

We suspended the exorcisms only after Magdalene was able to fight the spiritual battle on her own. She was able to pray, go to confession, receive Communion, and use the ordinary means to fight against the demons. I will add two important facts. First, Magdalene had never been confirmed. After her deliverance, she asked for the sacrament and received it from the vicar general, in the presence of her husband, her children, and the members of the liberation team. Second, after some time, she was solemnly reinstated into the Church, in the presence of the bishop and all those who had witnessed her confirmation. Over the years that were required to obtain full deliverance, she wrote beautiful prayers to our Lord and the Virgin Mary.

Stillness and silence: Angelo Battisti

The next case may well be the most difficult one that I have personally experienced. The situation was extremely difficult both to diagnose and to heal because there were almost no symptoms. I believe that only an exorcist of Father Candido's caliber and experience was able to understand something of it, even if God gave another priest the satisfaction of bringing the matter to a happy ending. Often, we work without seeing any fruit, or we reap fruit where others have worked before us. What is important is that always, and in every case, we give glory to the Lord.

Angelo's Calvary began in 1981, immediately after he reached the age of retirement, and lasted seven long years. When the symptoms first appeared, everyone thought that he had an unidentified illness. This included the family doctor, who had known Angelo since his youth and therefore was familiar not only with his various ailments, but also with his personality and behavior. It all started with a strange aversion to bathing and leaving the house. Here was a man who had always been extremely active and who was suddenly spending his days between his bed and an easy chair. He did not feel like eating and refused to walk to the dining room, so his wife, to appease him, would set a table for him

in the living room.

Gradually, he refused to see even his closest friends when they came to visit him. He would just lie in bed, behind his bedroom's closed door. He neither sat up nor watched television or listened to the radio. He no longer went to church.

To understand the gravity of the change in his behavior, we need to know what sort of man Angelo had been and how he had lived up to the time of his retirement. He was gifted with the brightest intellect and an extraordinary willpower, was extremely active, and his brilliant career was solely the fruit of his hard work. He had reached the top level of a job that required the utmost dedication and trustworthiness. He loved his firm, and everyone at work enjoyed talking with him; his honesty, integrity and many other virtues earned him high esteem. Throughout his life, he had been committed to knowing and nurturing his faith. He never missed daily Mass and Communion; just one example is sufficient to show his determination to receive the Eucharist daily. Before the changes following the Second Vatican Council, the faithful were required to fast from midnight before receiving Communion. Angelo, who often returned from work very late at night, refused to take even a drop of water, rather than forego Communion the next morning. He was always very considerate with his wife, treating her with respect and love.

Therefore, the sudden change in his personality was as radical as it was incomprehensible. His sickness progressed to the point that he no longer left his bed and stopped eating altogether: his loved ones could only coax him to drink a cup of tea and eat one slice of pineapple twice a week. From his bed of suffering, holding tightly onto a small statue of Saint Michael the Archangel, he would cry out: "Help me! I can't take it any more!" Or he would forcefully shout: "Go away, you louse! Leave me in peace! I spit on you!" These words evidently were directed at the evil one. In fact, he would spit with all his might against someone that he alone could see.

This behavior continued for a long time; it seemed as though he had truly gone mad. At the beginning, he was diagnosed with "depression", but it seemed that his condition was evolving into a form of obsession or lunacy. I may add that, given his intelligence, his good reputation, and all his apostolic commitments, retirement did not mean lack of activity for him. He was looking forward to dedicating more time to activities that were important to him. Thus, while retirement often causes depression because of the transition between hard work and inactivity, this was not Angelo's case.

A long succession of neurologists were unable to cure him. They prescribed medicines of all sorts, especially psychological drugs and tranquilizers, but they only served to make him listless and lethargic. If he tried to leave the bed, he would fall on the floor, and his wife would have to lift him up almost bodily, because he was unable to help himself.

One morning, Angelo was complaining and hugging the Saint Michael statue as his wife and a dear friend of his, a doctor who was also a devoted Catholic, were looking on. Suddenly, the doctor turned to the woman and said: "What if he is right when he says 'leave me alone or I will spit on you'?" So they decided to call the renowned diocesan exorcist, Father Candido. The doctor himself contacted the priest and drove him to

Angelo's house.

Seated in an easy chair, the victim welcomed the exorcist; throughout the exorcism he almost always kept his eyes shut, behaved with the utmost calm, and said not a word. Then he spoke very amiably with the priest.

This behavior was repeated every time Father Candido went to exorcize him and to bring him Communion. After the exorcisms, they talked of common acquaintances, and Angelo was articulate, kind, and completely normal. The reaction—his usual lethargy, apathy, and silence—would come afterward. The fact remained that there was no noticeable improvement. His wife's discouragement reached its peak when he—who used to attend daily Mass—categorically refused to attend Christmas Mass.

The family called another exorcist, a friend. The reaction was the same: utmost calm, devout reception of Communion, final conversation and. . . no changes. Every time the exorcist left, Angelo would furiously accuse his wife: "Did you call the exorcist? Now you'll see what happens to you!" In fact, she began to experience all sorts of misfortunes. Once she fell and broke her nose. Again she fell on an old sheet of metal and sustained a cut that missed her eye by a miracle. Another time she broke her ankle. Again, while getting out of her car, she felt a strong push that almost threw her under a passing car; instead, she escaped with such a severe shoulder injury that it still bothers her after many years of physical therapy.

Then this second exorcist became seriously ill and could no longer visit Angelo. His wife heard of a priest in Tuscany who, besides being an exorcist, had a special charism for healing. Angelo agreed to visit him because, at the time, he had a severe sore throat that he feared was caused by cancer. The priest immediately said: "Forget cancer! This is nothing more than the devil's work. If you remain in the area for one month I can help you." With difficulty, Angelo resisted for eight days. His desperate wife went to the priest, and he comforted her with these words: "Take him home. You will have to come back, but do not say anything and do not answer him if he speaks."

The warning was timely. Angelo became unbearably arrogant. In the years that followed, he would insult his wife using vulgar language, but she remained firm in her resolve to keep silent. Once, at Father Candido's urging, I went to visit him and performed a forty-minute, full exorcism. I still remember him, calmly seated in his easy chair, silent, with very kind parting words. Still, I obtained nothing. Angelo's physical suffering increased, and he visited many doctors in Italy and abroad in hope of a cure. No doctor ever diagnosed his disease, and no medicine ever helped him. For instance, once he complained of an unbearable pain in his eyes—they felt full of water—eighteen ophthalmologists could do nothing for him!

His wife continued to encourage him to visit the priest in Tuscany, but Angelo firmly refused every time. At the end of her rope, she went by herself, and the priest calmed her fears with these words: "Be at peace. This time he will come. Tell him that I wait for him next month." When she repeated these words to Angelo, he replied: "Prepare my suitcase; I go immediately." Suddenly, he was full of energy again; he seemed a different person. He

traveled alone and remained in a small hotel in Tuscany for one month. On his return, he was the same person he had been seven years before: kind, affectionate, concerned. When asked for an explanation, he would only say: “*You know, he is no longer here. When he was, he would give me no peace.*” After this, he lived peacefully for a few more weeks, then he went to the Father’s house with a smile on his lips.

After Angelo’s death, Father Candido and I spoke about him several times. I wanted answers to some puzzling questions. First, how did the exorcist understand that he was in the presence of demonic possession, since the victim never reacted during exorcisms? There is no doubt that Father Candido, in light of his vast experience, was able to evaluate the various elements of the case: a sudden change and a particular aversion to all that involved prayer and the sacraments; the clinical tests and related diagnosis—or lack thereof—of so many physicians; the particular nature of the constant demonic attacks to which Angelo was subjected and that he kept trying to control, thanks to his deep faith and strong willpower. Finally, during the exorcisms, Father Candido was able to sense a presence that to him was all too familiar, despite the absence of visible reactions. All these considerations became very useful to me when I faced a similar case.

Then, I was also trying to understand the motive, the initial cause of Angelo’s evil sickness. He had not taken any false steps (such as visits to magicians or spiritualist sessions); nothing pointed to a malefice. The most probable cause—even if we could not be certain—seemed to be Satan’s revenge for the vast amount of good that Angelo had accomplished throughout his life. God permitted this trial as a means of additional purification, to prepare him for the great, final meeting with his Savior, when he would finally receive the reward promised to his faithful servants.

I had one final doubt: How was it possible that the Tuscan exorcist liberated Angelo with relative ease, when his exorcist friend and Father Candido were unable to do so? Here again, the Lord is the key. Obviously, he wanted Angelo to undertake that particular journey of purification. In addition, even though all the exorcisms seemed fruitless, they always provided some relief and allowed the victim to receive many sacraments, in particular Communion and reconciliation, that otherwise would have been denied him and that sustained him in his trial. When all is said and done, the Lord used whomever he wanted for the final liberation. Saint Paul would say that this prevents anyone from boasting about anything other than the Lord.

Some biographical data: Angelo Battisti, the victim of whom I have written, worked in the State Secretariat. He had been administrator and first president of the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza [House for relief of suffering] founded by Padre Pio, of whom he was an intimate friend. His demonic possession lasted from 1981 to 1988. The exorcist whom the Lord used to deliver him was Father Angelo Fantoni of Monte San Savino (Arezzo), who is now deceased.

A strange visit

I am an exorcist in a large French city, and I carry out my ministry under the protection of our Blessed Virgin Mother. In this capacity, I welcome many unfortunate individuals who are tormented and persecuted by Satan. I also hear many healing confessions, and the Lord grants me the joy of being witness to many liberations and cures, which I can only attribute to the merciful intervention of the Mother of God, through the exorcizing prayer of the Church, whose servant and instrument I am. I would like to share one of my many experiences, because it left me somewhat perplexed and because I believe that it might help others.

One day, a strange, bizarre man came to my office. Everything about him was unusual: his appearance, his behavior, his extravagant clothes, and, most of all, a strong, repulsive, fetid smell! It was not the odor of vice, but something I could not define—something between rotten eggs and sulfur. Immediately, I remembered a type of incense used in some blasphemous sects that, if used often enough, will eventually impregnate the clothes of the members.

I felt that this individual, with his enigmatic and inquisitive behavior, intended to probe me, to guess my thoughts and feelings. Still, I had the impression it was not I whom he suspected, but someone else, because, as he was talking, he would suddenly turn toward the door or lower his voice so that only I could hear him. But who? We were alone! At first, I thought that he was afraid of being seen or heard by some other penitent. Finally, I realized that he was afraid that a member of his sect—or even the despicable one to whom he had become enslaved—had followed him to spy on him.

The man's odd suit was ash-purple and strangely fashioned. Slowly and gradually I remembered that I had seen one like it in a magazine, in conjunction with a satanic mass, and I knew that I was seeing one of those liturgical vestments. Then he confirmed my intuition: "My master works mostly at night", he said. That's when I recalled that the magazine article I had seen was describing a liturgy in honor of Lucifer. My visitor told me that he practiced the occult and black magic. I had heard this confession from many others before him, when they were asking for deliverance. On the other hand, I could not understand the reason for this visit because, while he confessed to be tied to a satanic sect that practiced a certain ritual, he did not seem to want to break those ties.

I kept thinking: Why did he come to see me? Surely he wants to be freed from Satan. Or maybe he wanted some consecrated Hosts, to be profaned that same evening? Did he hope to entice me into his sect? Did he simply wish to proclaim the victory of his master? In fact, he continued to speak of victory. The conversation was entirely one-sided; it seemed that he had a momentous message to deliver to me, a small priest of Christ.

The following sentences are taken from notes that I started to jot down as soon as he began to speak: "My master has won over you! We are destroying your Church. My master holds the balance of power between nations and is overwhelming your Church. You will have to recognize it! Yes, Satan's strength in the world, of which the Virgin herself warns in her apparitions, is evident. And it is just as evident that the three pillars (Eucharist, our Lady, Pope) are crumbling among you Christians. As a result, their faith is also crumbling. Paul VI and John Paul II spoke about it; but mostly it is the Book of Apocalypse that talks about it, Satan's battle. It is his hour; but it is also the hour of the Woman clothed with the sun."

When he interrupted his monologue and allowed me to speak, I pointed out that the victory of the demon is only temporary and illusory, of short duration. Jesus, with his Cross, defeated Satan at the exact time Satan believed he had won. And the same will be true for his Church: His current passion brings about the internal renewal that is preparing us for the new Pentecost, which has been so often announced and is so eagerly desired. Satan is one of God's many creatures; he was created good and, through his own fault, became perverted.

"No! Satan is equal to God", my interlocutor quickly interjected. I realized that he did not want to speak about Jesus, only about God. He insisted: "The rebellion was a success!" From time to time he would ask: "Are you not afraid of my master?" He repeated this sentence often, and at first it sounded like a menace. Then I realized that he was voicing his own intimate fears, because Satan sees everything and hears everything. I replied that I was speaking to him in the name of Jesus, whose priest I am, and that nothing could happen to me without his consent. In addition, I was under the protection of the Virgin Mary, especially during exorcisms.

He did not like it when I spoke about the Virgin Mary; he kept trying to change the subject and direct it toward his master, Satan. Then I reminded him of the protogospel: "I will put enmity between you and the woman" (Gen 3:15). He accepted my speech but with his own, different interpretation: "*Satan will bruise her heel* (Gen 3:15) means that he will vanquish her." I replied: "How can he vanquish her, if the Woman will bruise his head?" Then I proceeded to explain the vision in the Apocalypse, about the Woman clothed with the sun, who fights with the red

dragon, and his defeat at Michael's hand. I thought that even in Christ's temptations, as narrated in the Gospels, the biblical texts present us with a battle. But every time I spoke of *Mary*, the direction of our conversation changed. Against that argument, he felt ill at ease, anguished, and, in the end, desperate.

I told him that his master could not give his heart peace, much less happiness. Jesus, instead, brings peace and joy. He freed us precisely from the slavery of Satan, who, at most, could promise us money, power, and human glory. All the while, I was inwardly praying to the Virgin Mary, and I could see that my visitor was losing ground, falling behind. It was clear that all he felt for his master was fear. Then I spoke to him of the love of my Master, who died to save me and who forgave us everything. He spoke of his own *blasphemy* (his apostasy) with true desperation. Only later, as I reflected on the conversation, I thought of the Gospel reference to "sin against the Holy Spirit"; it seemed to me that this poor, pitiful individual was fully guilty of it.

I invited him to repent, to leave his master; I told him that every night I begged God's forgiveness for every sin, even blasphemy. The man seemed perturbed, torn between two feelings: hope and despair. I asked him if he would accept my prayers on his behalf. He seemed to assent, and I performed a brief, inward exorcism, to banish Satan; then I repeated it out loud. This was too much! He rose to flee, but first he hurriedly revealed his name: Peter. Then he ran out.

I still ask myself about the meaning of that visit. Was that man an emissary sent by Satan to derail me? Did our Lady send him so that I would convert him, or at least pray for him? One thing is certain: This encounter made me touch with my own hand how difficult it is for someone who has been a member of a satanic sect and who has consecrated himself to the demon to return to God.

(Narrated by Father Christian Curty, O.F.M., exorcist of Avignon, France.)

INFESTATIONS

In an earlier chapter, I stressed the great significance of Origen's observations on the subject of infestations. From his writings, we know that exorcisms were already commonly used not only for individuals, but also for houses, objects, and animals from the early days of Christianity. Until the Church develops a specific language for each of these phenomena, we refer to evil disorders that affect places, objects, and animals, rather than individuals, as *infestations*. This field is anything but new, because it is documented that such disorders have been identified, and dealt with since the most ancient times and among all peoples. When we talk of infestations, we cannot ignore the following facts:

1. It is impossible to speak about this topic unless we have actually experienced it. Every exorcist can testify that in the course of his ministry he has had to deal, firsthand, with phenomena so strange that they defy the imagination. Therefore, lack of experience would in all likelihood cause unbelief. It should not surprise us that we see so much skepticism, especially on the part of ecclesiastics who, I repeat, have clearly demonstrated a lack of knowledge in this matter.

2. Neither can we deny that this matter is often susceptible to blunders, suggestions, false fears, even outright fixations. We must be aware of these dangers, otherwise we risk believing that. . . pigs fly.

Let us begin, as always, with the words of Sacred Scripture. More specifically, I will quote from Exodus, which is the most emblematic book for the people of Israel and a vast source of information in many areas. For our purposes, a reflection on the *ten scourges of Egypt* is especially meaningful for two reasons.

First, the book shows us that both Moses (in God's name) and the magicians (in Satan's name) can call forth the same phenomena. This means that when we are confronted with an unusual occurrence, we must be able to discern its origin. Sometimes, the events themselves do not tell us whether the author is God or Satan, whether the agent is a charismatic or a magician. To understand the difference, we need a specific discernment process.

Second, the ten plagues of Egypt are of extraordinary significance today because we are seeing the same phenomena in our times. Since, as I have already stated, we tend to believe in the existence of something only if we see it, I will give you an example. In the first Egyptian plague, water is turned into blood. I can attest that many of my exorcist friends have seen blood instead of water come out of faucets in recently built homes whose plumbing was connected to municipal water lines. In my first book, I also spoke of two famous professors from the University of Padua—two analysts who observed these phenomena with ironic sarcasm and took a bottle full of that "blood", in obvious disbelief, to their laboratories. After they analyzed the contents of the bottle and realized that they

were indeed dealing with human blood, they were so filled with fear that we could not convince them to go back to the house. I have often observed that this is a common pattern among “rationalists”, whether atheists or priests: first disbelief, then terror.

Let us talk about the second, third, and fourth plagues: the invasion of frogs, mosquitoes, and horseflies that infested the Egyptians’ homes. We can include the eighth plague, that is, the infestation of locusts. Often I have been told, or I have seen with my own eyes, that houses suddenly became infested with flies, flying ants, repulsive insects (such as scorpions or other unidentifiable pests), which just as suddenly and completely disappeared after we sprinkled holy water throughout the rooms or exorcized the place.

Exodus also tells us of a mysterious disease that kills livestock. The fifth plague describes “a very severe pestilence”, while in the sixth plague we are told of “festering boils” that strike both men and beasts. The demon has the power to cause illness both of organic nature, which can be cured by doctors, and of purely evil origin, which resists every known drug and can only be cured by the usual means of grace, including exorcisms. Every exorcist will tell you of cysts, tumors, and other variously diagnosed diseases that disappeared after only one exorcism, leaving the doctors dumbfounded. Parallels with current occurrences can also be drawn for the ninth plague: three days of darkness. Some victims find themselves suddenly blind due to evil causes; however, here we are entering the field of oppression rather than infestation.

Houses, shops, fields, and so on. Infestations of specific locations are always difficult to diagnose and to liberate; every exorcist uses his own methodology, with the greatest leeway. Let us be frank: Canon Law and the *Ritual* deal only with exorcisms of demoniacs, ignoring all that has to do with infestations. In my opinion, this is a grave omission because, on the one hand, it means that anyone, priest or lay person, is free to intervene; on the other hand, it means that charlatans, magicians, and witch doctors also have a rein in this field.

Still, among the wealth of prayers within the *Ritual*, we find some that fit every circumstance, including infestations. For instance, there are rites for the blessing of homes, places, schools, and fields. Priests and exorcists often use these prayers. In addition to holy water, some use incense or exorcized salt. I repeat, in the absence of guidelines, we have total freedom of action in dealing with infestations. I want to reiterate that, while I will only mention my own personal experiences, the phenomenon of infestation does not require an exorcist. For instance, I found that a Mass, which any priest can celebrate, is very effective in these situations, and so are prayers recited on the infested location by a group of faithful.

When exorcists are called in cases of infestations, they normally follow the same rites recommended for individuals and adapt them for houses or places. Of course, it is very useful to discover the reason for the malefice and act accordingly.

What are the most frequent causes of infestation? Here are some among the many:

1. The house was used to hold séances or magic sessions, or it was used as a base for some type of satanic cult. These infestations are the most difficult to remove.

2. Someone was killed or committed suicide in the house. Abundant prayers of suffrage are the best remedy.

3. The house was used for prostitution or homosexual encounters or was the residence of blasphemers, Masons, criminals, leaders of criminal organizations, drug dealers, and so on. All these instances require much prayer of reparation.

4. The house was hexed. We need to make a full investigation of the reasons for, and methods of, the hex, because, if a cursed object is on the premises, it must be found and burned. As long as the object is in the building, no amount of prayer will bear much fruit. Those who live in a hexed house can be of invaluable help during the investigation, because they are able to say when the troubles began, if someone gave them a certain piece of furniture, and if they suspect anyone of willfully cursing them.

I will not speak of *poltergeist* phenomena; these are natural events that are tied to one specific individual, generally do not last long, and need to be addressed by a psychiatrist. To avoid confusing poltergeist occurrences with infestations, we must know their origin and the phenomena they cause. There are some superficial similarities between the two, but a little experience is all that is needed to diagnose them accurately. Conversely, sometimes it is very difficult to discern between malefice and psychological ailments.

INFESTED OBJECTS

With infested objects, more than ever, we need to beware of useless fears, groundless suspicions, and insinuations. Before contacting a magician or a pious person, we need to be on the alert for charlatans. Practically the only reason for infestation of an object is a hex. In theory, every object can be cursed through a satanic rite performed by a witch doctor or anyone who has tied himself to Satan in any way. However, in reality, these occurrences are very rare; therefore we need to proceed with great prudence before claiming that something is infested. True wisdom, in this case, requires initial skepticism.

How do we become aware of the possible infestation of an object? Sometimes by its provenance, other times by its effects or by consulting a charismatic individual or a sensitive. Usually, the primary indicator is the provenance: if a magician gives us something, it is probably infested. Talismans are a typical example. They are often very expensive, and either they are hoaxes or they are contaminated with extremely harmful negativities. When I say that an object is infested, I do not mean that the devil is in it! I simply mean that it was exposed to an evil rite, generally with the intent to harm a particular person, and with the intention of achieving a determinate goal; therefore, it was made particularly harmful.

The effects give us a second warning sign. For instance, someone is unable to sleep or experiences severe headaches or other pains in his own bed, but, if he sleeps in a different bed, none of these phenomena is present. At this point, we can suspect either the mattress or the pillow. Let us suppose that if we change pillows the discomfort stops, and it resumes

when using the old pillow. Then we can expect that the pillow was cursed, and, if we open it, we will probably find one or more of the strange objects that I described in my earlier book. The curse is removed by burning the pillow after sprinkling it with holy water and taking all the precautions I recommended for this occasion: burning it in an open area while praying and throwing the ashes into flowing water, such as a river, the sea, or the sewer; we can throw it in the trash if we are certain that it will be incinerated. When the curse is mild, it is sufficient to sprinkle the object with blessed water, without destroying it.

It is also possible for someone to experience difficulties without any reason to suspect foul play, but a charismatic person or a sensitive warns him of the presence of a cursed item. Here, again, our common sense tells us that we must guard against false fears and useless suspicions about objects, especially from impostors (magicians, card readers, gypsies, and so on).

CHARISMATICS AND SENSITIVES

I mention both although we mistakenly tend to lump them together as one.

—*Charismatics* have received a particular gift, or charism, from the Holy Spirit, which is to be used for the good of the entire Church, and not for their own personal benefit.

—*Sensitives*, by nature, have higher levels of sensitivity (we often refer to a *sixth sense*) and are able to perceive things that cannot be detected by most individuals.

Let us be clear right away that, for our purposes, sensitives are of no benefit because they are able to detect only natural phenomena—for instance, diseases—and not ailments of evil origin. Therefore I will speak only of charismatics, even if we often incorrectly refer to them as “sensitives”.

What is a charismatic? There are many charisms or gifts of the Holy Spirit. Here, we are particularly interested in the charism of deliverance from evil and evil presences (and this is an extremely rare gift) and in the charism of discernment. The latter can either be discernment of evil presences, which is useful for diagnosing, or an ability to detect the causes of evil presences, which is useful for determining the appropriate remedies. This topic deserves a separate study, which is beyond the scope of this book. Determining that someone is endowed with particular charisms requires a lot of prudence. In the meantime, I will recommend two conciliar texts: *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 3, and *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12, which affirm: (1) Whoever is gifted with individual charisms has the right and the duty to exercise them; and (2) it is up to the bishop to discern charisms and to regulate their use.

I hope that bishops will address this topic, perhaps by appointing a panel of experts to study each case and report to the particular ordinary, who can then make an informed decision. In the meantime, since we lack some basic guidelines, I have found the following criteria useful:

1. The alleged charismatic must be a person highly regarded for his prayer life, his faith, his charity, and his judgment.

2. He relies solely on the Word of God and uses common prayers, without any strange attitudes or theatrics.

3. He is completely detached from monetary concerns: “What we received free, we must freely give.”

4. He is profoundly humble. Even when it comes to charisms, whoever advertises his so-called gifts probably has none. The true charismatic treasures obscurity. The charism becomes known by indirect means and with great discretion, never through self-promotion. He speaks with great humility and with the full knowledge that only discernment—which is independent from any one person—can guarantee the value, or lack thereof, of any intervention.

5. “The tree is known by its fruits.” The only way to know if God has truly given someone a charism is by experiencing his gifts. As the Bible reminds us, the difference between a true prophet and a false one is this: what the true prophet says will come to pass.

When an exorcist discovers a true charismatic, or is blessed with the aid of several charismatics who possess different but complementary charisms, he undoubtedly receives great help. I know several exorcists who openly acknowledge they receive valuable insights from a carefully selected group of individuals who support them with their prayer and their ministry.

INFESTED ANIMALS

It is possible, although rare, for animals to become infested. The Gospel tells us of the legion of demons who, after being cast out of the Gerasene demoniac, were allowed by Christ to invade two herds of pigs. The crazed animals rushed into the lake and drowned. I have never experienced this situation, but, if I had, I would have simply recited a prayer of deliverance—which is certainly permissible.

Conversely, it is, unfortunately, frequent that witch doctors use animals for their magic rites, especially for burning their entrails or as messengers of a hex. The animals most frequently used for this second purpose are toads and, especially, cats. The experience of other exorcists, as well as my own, confirms these statements. For example, we feel the presence of invisible cats, or other unidentified animals, in a house and then find their prints on the floor or the scars of their claws in sheets.

I know of a girl who, one day, was sitting in her car, which had been carefully locked, and saw a big, black cat seated in the back seat. She immediately stepped out of the car to let the animal out, but it disappeared as though through thin air. I could give many such examples. To reassure my most apprehensive readers, I quickly add that these phantom-animals have never attacked or harmed anyone. How can we explain these phenomena? These incidents usually happened to individuals who were already victims of evil disorders. Therefore, they seemed to be part of a pattern of ongoing evil activity against them. Increasing the usual means to obtain grace usually is sufficient to end this type of diabolic harassment.

A doctor in a Roman hospital who, among other things, practiced magic arts kept harassing a young nun who worked with him as a nurse. One evening, when she returned to her locked room, she found that a cat had managed to get inside. She tried to chase it out the door, but it avoided her, running around the room. The exasperated nun finally threw her keys at it, and at last the cat fled, bleeding from a wound. The next morning, at work, she ran into the doctor. He had one band-aid on his nose and one on his upper lip. “What happened, doctor?” she asked him. “You did this to me, with your keys”, was the answer. This incident is well documented by witnesses, but I have no easy explanation. I believe that, through a curse, the doctor wanted to spy on or frighten the nun. This time—as occasionally happens—the curse fell back on him.

EXAMPLES

First the psychic, then the exorcist

This is the brief and truthful summary of the evil torments that a small-town family had to endure for one entire year. Some may think this is all fiction, but exorcists are familiar with stories like this one. Our society calls itself “rationalist”. It has thrown all biblical teachings out the window and replaced them with esoteric items such as sects, the occult, and all sorts of magic. All too often it is the police who discover these events, and not doctors or priests, because the victim usually hides what is happening for fear of being labeled insane.

The target of the demon in this case was a family, the Rossis. The fifty-year-old father was a blue-collar worker; the mother, Enrica, was a housewife; two of the four children were newly married, the other two, fifteen-year-old Domenico and eleven-year-old Alba, lived with their parents. Financially, the family was doing well, and in 1987 was able to build a house with a yard. This event sparked unjustified jealousy among some members of Enrica’s family.

The trouble began in 1990. When the family gathered together in their new house, they heard loud banging noises against the shutters. The blows were so violent that the Rossis, believing someone was trying to break in, would call the police. In December the police were called in for the third time, and they were able to pinpoint the location of the noise, but not the source. The chief of police was familiar with such incidents and advised the Rossis to consult a psychic.

As soon as the town's well-known psychic, Marilena, investigated the case, she declared that the phenomena originated from jealousy or hatred of close relatives: an uncle or an aunt. She advised them to place some salt near the infested doors and windows. She also instructed them to repeat a lucky word often, such as: wealth, success, and peace. Still, the noises continued, and Marilena visited the house, where she performed a series of rituals and blessings.

The effects of this visit were devastating. Immediately Alba, the daughter, began to suffer from nightmares. Marilena, who was consulted one more time, was forced to admit that her actions had been useless and honestly confessed her impotence. She herself suggested an exorcist.

The Rossis went to their pastor, who refused to believe what they told him—as is unfortunately all too common—and gave them a small Crucifix. I am not sure if he did it for their protection or to send them away. Next, the Rossis sought help in nearby parishes, all the priests they knew and all those who were suggested to them. They were unable to find a single priest who would agree to bless their house. Finally, one priest listened and suggested they ask their bishop for the name of the diocesan exorcist.

The Rossis were uncomfortable about approaching the bishop; they felt that he was beyond their reach. (They were wrong. This bishop would have welcomed them as a father, and they would have discovered that a bishop is not as unapproachable as a government official would be.) So the Rossis turned to a prayer community instead, who sent a group to pray at the infested house. They recited the Loreto litany, a prayer to Saint Michael, and the Rosary. They also blessed every room in the home and encouraged the father to repeat the blessing every day, with the entire family.

Even during the group's blessings knocks against walls, pipes, chairs, and Alba's bed could be clearly heard. The first blessing was followed by two days of quiet, but then the disturbances resumed with increasing violence. Members of the prayer group, who were familiar with the diocesan exorcist, asked for his intervention. He headed for the house without wasting any time. First, he recited a prayer to break the ties with Marilena, the psychic. Then he prayed to break any infestation pact that could have been directed against the Rossis. Finally, he entered the house and performed a first exorcism when the children were absent.

Immediately, there was a marked improvement, but it unfortunately did not last long, despite the ongoing prayers of the group. Poor Alba was the most victimized. She was no longer able to sleep in her bed and spent the night with her parents, in their room. Even there, in the middle of the night, she was awakened by violent blows on the headboard and

on the nightstand. Then her physical torments increased. She felt pain in her head and her stomach and began to experience unexplained fevers and bouts of vomiting. The doctors did not understand any of it. An ultra-sound of the abdomen, blood tests, and other analyses revealed nothing abnormal.

The family called the exorcist again, and he arrived with a psychiatrist who often cooperated with him. After a complete exorcism, there were no visible improvements. The prayer group persevered in their efforts and was awed by the obvious faith that the family demonstrated, both in God and in the Church. In spite of everything, matters became worse. It seemed as though the powers of evil were venting their revenge against the exorcisms and the prayers. Unfortunately, the exorcist, who was old and overworked, could not intervene more often.

At this point, a second form of psychological torment began. Notes, handwritten in pencil, started to appear on the windowsills or behind shutters, with sarcastic messages such as these: “I suppose that the malefice has not been removed yet. Are you well? Thanks.” The irony was evident. “The malefice is about to strike two victims.” “Tonight, in your *magnificent* home [a sign of jealousy?] you will enjoy a marvelous show.” The members of the prayer group, as a sign of support, took turns sleeping in the Rossis’ house. The threats never materialized: they were only intimidations.

Strangely, these messages were signed: Marcella. It was the name of an aunt with whom the family had lost touch for years and whose whereabouts were unknown. The torments increased. The malefice against Alba appeared to escalate rather than abate: she wanted to go out at night and tried to destroy sacred images. The other family members were not unscathed: they began to suffer strange physical pain, such as the feel of hands on their throats, choking them. Domenico was experiencing the same nightmares and hallucinations as his sister.

As I write this book—1992—things are still the same. The reader will be disappointed because I cannot report a happy ending. The timing is out of our hands, and it can be very long. Still, I can promise that the Rossis will be delivered, because they chose the way of God. I do not know all the remedies that have been tried so far, but, in similar situations, I have experienced some success by asking the family to spend one week, in the summer, away from the house, to see whether the attacks on individuals persisted. I am always very reluctant to recommend moving because, when this is done, usually the afflictions follow the victims to their new house. The surest path to deliverance, even though slow, is the one the Rossis are following: much prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments, and exorcisms for individuals and for the house.

From infestation to possession

Armida, a married woman with a seventeen-year-old son, was born in 1936. Her family was nominally Catholic but did not practice the faith; they attended church only for baptisms, marriages, funerals, Easter, and Christmas, and so did Armida. However, deep down, she felt the need for true spirituality and desired to follow a Christian way of life that was more than just a formality. She tried to compensate for her lack of religious formation with a great love for our Lord. She was able to see the divine presence everywhere: in a seed that grew into a tree, in the succession of the seasons, in the wonders of the human body with all its functions, and in all the marvels of creation.

In 1957 Armida married an engineer and lived a serene, normal life until 1978, when something bewildering happened. Armida does not hesitate to name its source: Satan. The first symptoms were almost insignificant. A lamp turning on and off on its own; furniture creaking unlike anything made of wood; and pictures inexplicably falling off the walls. Then appliances began to malfunction, and, soon thereafter, more serious phenomena started.

Husband and wife were no longer able to sleep quietly, so they were always tired and irritable, and they inevitably ended up fighting. This had never happened in the past. At first, the altercations were not violent and remained within the boundaries of mutual respect. Gradually, however, the quarrels increased in intensity, voice levels rose, and soon insults were flying, profanities were exchanged, and this degenerated into full-blown fights; things were invariably thrown around and broken. At this point, the relationship was based only on violence.

One day, Armida visited a Catholic priest. She told him her troubles and that she felt she needed an exorcism. His answer was short: "It is out of the question. The Church no longer does these things", and he advised her to pray. In vain Armida tried to explain that she was trying to do just that, but was unable to remember even the simplest of the prayers she used to recite every day. When she tried to pray the Our Father the words seemed to scramble in her head so much that she could not even think them, let alone say them. He did not listen.

She then tried to go to church and stand in the Communion line, but when she was nearly in front, she was seized by the strangest thoughts that prevented her from approaching the rail or the priest, who, with ciborium in hand, was ready to distribute the Eucharist. These were irrational thoughts, such as: "The priest could be contaminated by a contagious disease and could pass it on to me through the Host." Thus, with all possible tact, she would move on without receiving Communion and leave the church, convinced that God did not want her in his home. Or she would imagine that Saint Michael the Archangel had betrayed the Lord, had joined the opposition, and was stopping her prayers from reaching God.

At home, things went from bad to worse. The fights between husband and wife were increasing in violence and were not even checked by the presence of their son, who was troubled by his own nightmares. The boy would suddenly wake up at night and see faceless, terrifying people. Soon Armida began to suffer from the same hallucinations: the most frequent was the mocking, jeering face of a man. She became desperate and began to

think that suicide was the only way to deliverance. Only love and concern for her son gave her the strength to fight this temptation.

In the summer of 1980, as was their custom, mother and son went to spend one month in London, where they enrolled in English classes. One day, while she was reflecting on the absurdity of the fights between herself and her husband, Armida met an Anglican priest. She thought: "If a Catholic priest does not want to believe me, this one will also send me away. Still, at least I can ask him what he thinks of Christianity." She proceeded to tell him of her troubles, including the most absurd, the most illogical events. Much to her surprise, the priest did not become angry but listened to her story with the greatest attention and promised to do everything he could to help her. He asked her to return the following day, with her son, and he would exorcize them both with the help of another priest, an exorcist.

These two charitable pastors performed the exorcism after Mass. Throughout the rite, Armida's reactions were normal; she just felt extremely tired, and when she left the church she experienced great fatigue. Her son also felt exhausted, although less intensely so, and instead of going to their English lesson, they decided to go back to the hotel and rest. As soon as her head hit the pillow, Armida fell asleep. She dreamt of an Arab with a wound on his nose. He had died a violent death but was standing in front of her, dumbstruck, not knowing what to do. Armida woke up and saw that the man was indeed standing by her bed. Instead of being afraid, she chased him away forcefully.

From that moment, mother and son experienced an extraordinary peace; they felt they had wings on their feet. They were laughing at everything as they had not done for a long time, and they returned to that church, to thank the Anglican priest. He rejoiced at the success of the exorcism, but sternly warned them not to be deceived. He cautioned them that the troubles that had so recently left them could easily come back and stressed that they should see a Catholic priest immediately after their return to Italy.

Mother and son felt so good, so liberated that they did not heed the priest's advice. They thought that he had spoken out of excessive caution. But he was right. As soon as they returned home, the troubles resumed. Armida would have liked to go back to London, but it was not possible. Instead, thinking that she was going insane, she visited a psychiatrist. This was a great mistake! The doctor she consulted was materialistic and dull. He was not able to help in any way, and she quickly realized that he would not bring her any relief.

Following a friend's advice, she visited a woman who was renowned as a soothsayer. After greeting Armida, she looked at her with a terrified expression, and, claiming to be frightened by the vast number of suffering souls who were tormenting her and her family, she refused to become involved. She suggested that a local community of Protestants might be willing to pray for her liberation. The community, in fact, welcomed her with great warmth and generosity; their prayers brought about some improvement, but not complete healing.

Armida continued her quest, but she had the impression that the devil was guiding her steps. She ended up at a so-called Orthodox church, where a young priest, after charging her a large fee, told her to burn some grass, at a specific time, once a week. He charged increasingly higher fees for each weekly follow-up visit. Still, the waiting room was full of “clients”, and Armida deluded herself that it was a good sign. Eventually, she was invited to attend their Sunday Mass and to meet the owner of the house, a disturbing individual who called himself “Monsignor”. He made such a negative impression on Armida that, even though the place was full of people with problems similar to hers, she resolved to go elsewhere.

Meanwhile, at home, things went from bad to worse. The company that had remodeled their house was owned by skillful frauds, with contacts at the highest levels of the judicial system, and eventually the couple were cheated out of a large sum of money. The next blow came when the husband was suddenly and inexplicably fired, after forty years of faithful service with the same firm. Armida was mugged; some days later, she fell and broke a leg. This series of freak accidents spared no one, not even their pets: their young and well-cared-for canaries died suddenly; the cat disappeared; and their young and healthy dog was run over by a car, on the sidewalk. The son, who was a brilliant student, suddenly flunked.

At last, Armida found the right path. She learned that an exorcist, duly appointed by the bishop, was practicing in their diocese. He was old, and much overworked, but he recommended a friend of his, also an exorcist, who, as soon as he heard Armida’s story and her family’s woes, took them to heart and began to help them almost immediately.

During the first exorcism, Armida felt alternatively cold and hot, then she was overpowered by a nauseating smell, and finally she felt the same sense of great tiredness that she had experienced in London. Her son was exorcized immediately after. He did not show particular reactions other than a feeling of disorientation.

Following the exorcisms, the relationship between husband and wife was restored: they no longer fought but treated each other with love and respect. As the exorcisms continued, all three experienced complete deliverance, even though they feared the return of the demon. Fortunately, this time he did not return. Instead, they became fully reconciled with God and experienced the deep peace that comes only with the forgiveness he grants. Gradually, they severed all ties with Satan and felt that, one after the other, the chains that had bound them were broken.

Today the family lives peacefully. They can enjoy the beauty of a flower, the sky, a walk, and music. These things can seem banal to us, but they are like new experiences for those who have gone through the frightening experience of becoming a prey of evil forces. Armida remains grateful to everyone who helped her through her troubles, from the first Anglican priest to the last Catholic exorcist. She decided to write about her experiences, including her mistakes, because she hopes they will help those who might be suffering through the same trials.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The success of my book *An Exorcist Tells His Story* propelled me to the attention of the media, through no merit of my own. I have been interviewed more than one hundred times by television, radio, and popular newspapers, in addition to uncounted minor meetings, invariably followed by discussion. For example, during my program with *Radio Maria*, I would be interviewed for one hour each time, and then I would spend up to two hours answering questions on the telephone. After this, I began a series of monthly interviews, each lasting one and a half hours. I also regularly contributed to the monthly magazine *Eco di Medjugorje*, where I answered many queries. I will now list some frequently asked questions.

EXORCISTS AND MAGICIANS

Are there stronger and weaker exorcists, or are they all alike?

There is a difference among exorcists. Their effectiveness varies according to spiritual factors such as intensity of prayer life, degree of union with God, sacrificial practices; I would almost say, their degree of sanctity. Other differences, of course, are based on human qualities such as experience, intellect, specific education, and intuition. It is not easy to evaluate all these factors, and comparisons would be wrong, because God is the only judge. When a French bishop asked one of his exorcists this very question, the priest rightly answered by listing all that he had learned, year after year, during his long ministry. Effectively, the exorcist's answer was: "I can only compare myself to myself, and I realize that I always have something to learn. But I also realize the benefits that come with experience."

Let us not forget that many other factors come into play in an exorcism, such as the faith and the commitment to prayer of the victim and his relatives; faith in the intercessory powers of the Church; and the awareness that the exorcist is an instrument of God because of the appointment he received from his bishop. Some exorcists are more efficacious than others against particular forms of evil activity. In the end, it is always the Lord who decides which exorcist will receive his grace, according to his will, because all thanksgiving must, always and only, be due to him.

What is the difference between a magician and an exorcist?

A true magician, not simply an illusionist, acts under the power of Satan. The exorcist acts under the power of the name of Jesus and the intercession of the Church.

How should we behave toward so many who are not exorcists but bless us anyway: priests, nuns, lay people?

All prayer is efficacious when made in faith, humility, charity (therefore, without any expectation of material reward), and simplicity. The recommendation that we pray for each other certainly comes from God. Everyone can bless by the power of the common priesthood of the faithful, which derives from baptism. A priest adds the power of his ministerial priesthood to his blessings. Therefore, a priest's blessing is a very good thing indeed: would that more priests did this! It is obvious, however, that these are all private prayers, which have nothing to do with the sacramental of exorcism.

The next things we look for are results. I know many whose prayers and blessings bring much fruit. I also know of many who have achieved the fame of "sainthood", while they are nothing more than impostors or hypocrites or, even worse, magicians. We cannot expect an ecclesial pronouncement on each case, because there are too many, and they do not merit official recognition. It is up to us to use our common sense and decide. Pastors should also be able to advise their parishioners when they are approached on the subject.

We turn to magicians because we cannot find good exorcists. Is this a sin? Can magicians really heal us?

Unfortunately, it is really difficult to find exorcists. However, many also turn to exorcists when there is no need, because the ordinary means of grace would be sufficient. No matter what the reason might be, consulting magicians is a sin of superstition against the First Commandment and is specifically condemned in the Bible. What if the magician truly heals? Experience has taught me that, almost always, the healing is temporary and is followed by greater troubles. In every case, woe to the victim who is healed by a magician, that is, by someone tied to Satan, because this individual acquires a bond with the demon through the magician. All bonds of this nature bring grievous consequences, and they are very difficult to break.

Is it a sin to visit a card reader?

It is a sin of superstition that, depending on the circumstances, can be more or less grave. For example, if someone asks for a card reading out of sheer curiosity, to hear what he will be told, he commits a venial sin. But, more importantly, he also risks forming a habit and aggravating the sin. I usually divide card readers into three categories. First, impostors,

who are in it to make money off naïve victims. Second, those who have some paranormal power and use it as a diviner would use his stick to find water. In this case, there is neither culpability nor damage, as long as the practitioner knows his limitations and remains within them (for instance, no one can predict the future). Finally, there are card readers who add some forms of magic to their divination. In this case, I can only repeat what I said before about magic.

Can a person be exorcized “long distance”, without his knowledge?

Yes, it is possible. I have already said that I have successfully exorcized over the telephone. I also exorcize (that is, I pray for) victims who have asked for my help even when they do not know I am doing it, especially at night. Exorcizing someone against his will, however, cannot be done: the Lord offers his gifts, but he does not force them on anyone. For instance, when I am told that someone is possessed, but does not go to church, does not pray, does not believe in God, and would never consent to be blessed by a priest, all I can do is pray for him.

Can an exorcist be wrong? I brought my father to an exorcist, who found nothing suspect. Still, his behavior suggests an evil presence, and a “sensitive” claims that he is the victim of a malefice.

It is possible for an exorcist to be wrong. In your case, I would suggest consulting another exorcist. Let us not forget, however, that some people are hysterical. That is, they go from exorcist to exorcist until they find one who tells them what they want to hear. In this case, what is needed is a good doctor or, if the subject cooperates, a cycle of prayers for liberation from specific phobias.

What are the major obstacles encountered by an exorcist?

There are many obstacles to an accurate diagnosis, even when a specialized doctor agrees to help. When we face a disorder of evil origin, the victim’s lack of cooperation is a barrier. What is needed is a sincere conversion, a life of grace, much prayer, and frequent sacramental reception. People are lazy, and they tend to be passive. They tell me: “Father, free me from the demon.” “No, you need to liberate yourself. I can only help you and show you the means.” Other obstacles are impediments to grace, such as difficulty to forgive with a sincere heart, to change a sinful life; problems in breaking ties with the enemy when this requires severing a particular relationship; sinful friendships; deeply rooted vice. *The basic task of the exorcist is to bring souls to Christ, but it is he who delivers. All that prevents a life of union with God is also an obstacle to the work of the exorcist.*

DOCTRINAL QUESTIONS

Everything comes from God. Good and evil have existed forever. We accept this reality because it is useless to fight it.

Everything is *allowed* by God—“Not a leaf falls that God does not allow”—but not everything is *willed* by God. It is not true that good and evil have existed forever. Some philosophies and religions are based on this false concept, as though good and evil are two eternal and equal forces. If this were true, the two would cancel each other out. Dante would say: “I do not permit this contradiction.” The only one who has existed forever is God; he is the only beginning of everything, and he created only what is good. The Bible reveals to us a God who is pleased because he has created everything beautiful and good, with the goal of life and happiness.

Evil entered the world when God willed to create beings of extraordinary greatness because he made them intelligent and free. Freedom, both for angels and for men, is an irreplaceable greatness. Evil came into being because first an angel and then man abused this gift of God. Therefore, evil did not always exist. It originated when some of the angels rebelled against God and when Adam and Eve disobeyed their Creator. Even then, God manifested his divine mercy and wisdom, because, even though he tolerates evil—he never rejects his creatures, nor does he take away their power to harm others—he is able to bring about good from evil. Therefore, even though diseases, suffering, persecutions, perfidy, and all the evil in the world did not originate with God, he can use them for our sanctification and, therefore, for our own good.

I would like to know what is the relationship between freedom of the will and temptation, and between freedom of the will and diabolic possession.

Every man is subject to Satan’s ordinary activity: temptation. Still, we can overcome this test thanks to our free will. Scripture assures us that God does not allow us to be tempted beyond our strength; we can and must withstand Satan “firm in [our] faith” (1 Pet 5:9), and if we resist, he “will flee from [us]” (Jas 4:7). We can do so, however, only by using the means of grace that the Lord so generously gave us, according to his admonishment: “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Mt 26:41).

The relationship between freedom of the will and diabolic possession is more complex. Culpable possession occurs when we misuse our freedom; as a result, we pay the consequence of the mistakes that brought about demonic possession. When possession is not culpable—because it stems from divine permission or from a malefice—man suffers it against his free will, but he is called to respond to his trial as he would to any other human adversity, such as disease. No matter what the origin, possession does not deprive us of freedom except during times of acute crisis, when we are not responsible for our words

and actions. Freedom of the will, nevertheless, remains. We are still free to commit good or evil actions, to sanctify ourselves or to damn ourselves.

Why does God allow an innocent child to be born with evil disorders or even with diabolic possession?

This is another situation that must be understood in light of the larger picture of pain and evil. When we look at the Cross of Christ and the Resurrection that followed, we can understand something about suffering. Some pain has no rational explanation if we only look to life on earth, but it acquires meaning when we look at it in the context of eternal life. To understand better, let us compare a child who is born suffering from an evil influence to another child who is born with a physical ailment, for instance, with Down's syndrome. Why does a God who only wants what is good allow it? Let us credit his wisdom and accept that, in this case as in all situations, he wants and knows how to derive what is good from what is bad.

Why did Jesus not liberate Judas from Satan?

God always respects our freedom, even when we use it for a bad purpose. We know that he wants all of us to be saved, that Jesus died for us, and that no one is predestined to hell. We know that, when we sin, God wants our conversion to life, and not our death. However, God simply offers us his gifts; he does not force them on us: we are free to reject them. I believe that Judas was given extraordinary graces: he not only knew Jesus and lived with him, but I am convinced that he was given the means to overcome his miserable tendency to steal. Who knows how many times the Lord tried to convert him! He ended up where he did only because he had persistently hardened his heart against grace. We must keep in mind that what was true for Judas is true for us all.

We were very distressed by strange nightly noises we would hear in our house. Later, we found out that the former tenant had committed suicide by hanging himself there. Following the advice of a friend who belonged to Renewal in the Spirit, we had many Gregorian Masses celebrated for his soul, and the noises ceased. I could tell you other phenomena that can be attributed to the dead. What should we believe?

This is a very broad field, and we should explore it more carefully than it has been up to now, focusing on a theological-biblical perspective, by answering questions such as: What sort of life do the dead—and the demons—lead prior to the Last Judgment? What are their activities? I have already covered some of these questions, but I will gladly revisit them.

The common teaching of the Church covers some of these topics. Let us consider angelic spirits first. We know that angels and demons have an influence over us, which can be either benevolent or malevolent, depending on whether we are speaking of angels or demons. Peter and James are in agreement that demons are chained in Tartarus, waiting for the final judgment. Paul tells us that the just will join Christ in judging the angels. Both angels and demons made an irrevocable and definitive choice, the ones for, and the others against God. The fact that demons are chained does not stop their activity, whether ordinary or extraordinary. As we have seen, this activity will continue until the end of the world.

When we speak of human souls, we know that their trials end with death. While they wait for the final judgment, how can they relate with the living? The dogma of the Communion of Saints tells us of the activities of the blessed souls. They can accept our supplications and intercede for us. The same dogma tells us of the activity of the souls in Purgatory. They can receive our suffrage and intercede for us. So far, nothing has been said about the souls of the damned.

The secular world shows great interest in these topics.¹ Unfortunately, what has been lacking, especially in the last decades, is interest on the part of theologians. They have supremely ignored the topic of the afterlife. Since the mood of the theologian always spills over into pastoral action, our priests have adopted the same lack of concern. As an example, we can cite a frightening absence of reference to the subject both in homilies and in catechisms, beginning with the catechism of the Dutch bishops. This catechism was much attacked when it was first published, but, unfortunately, it was all too imitated by other post-Vatican II catechisms.

It would be useless to deny that, given the circumstances, exorcists find themselves at a loss when faced with problems that go beyond their own theological formation. This is why exorcists have advanced, with much humility and hesitation, the possibility of phenomena such as *presences*. We would have to be blind not to be aware that today's world looks to us priests for answers to new problems or issues that are represented under new circumstances. Unfortunately, they find that we priests lack knowledge of or certainty about some topics, and other topics find us divided if not completely uninterested, even though they fall under our direct and specific ministry. In the absence of more accurate guidelines, I can only approve of what the caller did in this particular case.

MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS AND PARTICULAR SYMPTOMS

Do satanic ills strike more men or women, the young or the elderly?

All exorcists bless more women than men. I believe that this is partly because women are more open than men to ask priests for a blessing. However, this factor alone does not justify the magnitude of the difference, and neither does the statistical reality that women outnumber men. I believe that women are more vulnerable to demonic attacks because the

devil believes he can use them as bait to victimize men as well, almost like an extension of his action against the first Eve. Still, while I am uncertain about the causes, I am sure of the answer: more women are struck by demons than men.

I have no doubt about the second category as well: the young are struck in greater numbers. We can understand why simply by rereading what I wrote about the causes of satanic attacks; it is easy to see there how youth are more exposed to becoming victims.

Is demonic possession contagious? Can we be victims of some form of satanic revenge if we help a demoniac?

Evil activity is not contagious, but it is possible for an entire family or a large group to be victimized. But at times, when one individual in the family is affected, no other member is affected, for instance, a spouse or children. More distant relations are even less likely to be struck.

Helping these victims is very meritorious, just as it is very praiseworthy to help anyone in trouble. We can help by our constant prayer, by receiving the sacraments, and by our daily actions. Those who assist the exorcist may have to hold the writhing demoniac tight or wipe the foam from his mouth, and so on. I have never noticed any repercussions against my helpers. I repeat, especially for those priests who fear Satan's revenge if they perform exorcisms, the evil one already harms us as much as the Lord allows. The belief that "if I leave him alone, he will leave me alone" is nothing more than a silly delusion. It is just as foolish to believe that he would strike most violently those who fight him the hardest. For example, let us look at the saints. Generally, we see that the demon fears the most those who fight him the hardest. This is the norm. Saints who suffered physical harm from the demon, such as the Curé of Ars, are exceptions and generally were not exorcists.

My life has been marked by one illness after another. I have been rushed to the cardiology department sixty-five times. My family has been struck by one disaster after another.

Unfortunately, this difficult life experience, which was told live on *Radio Maria*, is anything but rare. Every exorcist is aware of many extremely painful examples of lives that seem full of misfortune, in which nothing ever goes right: health, friendships, or work; lives that are punctuated by events such as automobile accidents of the weirdest kind, sudden deaths, and so forth. If, when we perform a preliminary exorcism, nothing out of the ordinary comes to the fore, there is no reason to suspect an evil influence. It is almost as if the demon persecutes a family from without, without taking possession of any of its members.

In similar circumstances, any priest can play a very important role: that of trusted, prayerful support. It may not be feasible to contain the troubles, but it is always possible to avoid despair, to recognize the value of suffering. Whether the demon or an unexplainable set of circumstances is to blame for the sequence of misfortunes is not important. What is important is to give comfort and support. There is no doubt that suffering is the greatest trial against our faith; it causes us either to lose it or to strengthen it. That is why every situation that can only find meaning through the light of faith is precious ground for Christian charitable works, whether by a priest or by other generous souls.

I have often noticed that individuals who have symptoms of neither psychological nor physical illness, but who suffer from other afflictions, such as hypothermia, tiredness, sleepiness, seem to become absolutely passive, inert. Have exorcists found this to be the case, as well?

I was also asked this question live, on *Radio Maria*, by a psychologist who could be a valuable asset for any exorcist. The answer is: Yes. We also note these symptoms, and they are becoming more frequent, especially among the young. To these, I add: loss of faith, tendency to close oneself in one's home, or complete inability to study or perform work of any kind, almost as though the brain were frozen. Eventually, they develop a complete repugnance for all sorts of food, and a feeling of inferiority that leads them to isolate themselves from everything and everyone, reaching the point of closing themselves within themselves, with a growing feeling of despair. For instance, at the Gemelli Hospital, in Rome, I successfully exorcized an anorexic girl. I do not hesitate to repeat that, in situations like these, exorcists and *psi* (I use the French abbreviation for all practitioners of psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and so on) must cooperate closely, especially psychiatrists.

LET'S TALK ABOUT SATAN

What does Satan's face look like? How should we picture him? What is the origin of his depiction with horns and tail? Does he really stink of sulfur?

Satan is a pure spirit. We have given him a physical image in order to picture him in our minds. When he appears to us, he takes on a concrete form. However ugly we can picture him in our minds, he is infinitely uglier still. I am not speaking of physical ugliness, but of perfidy and distance from God, who is the summit and culmination of every beauty. I think that the horns, the tail, and the batlike wings that we use to represent Satan are intended to indicate the degradation of a spiritual being who was originally created good, the apex of beauty. Therefore, we tend to picture him as a man who has been debased to the animal

state (horns, claws, tail, bat wings). This is simply our imagination. It also happens that when the demon wants to make himself visible to us and takes on a tangible form, he can appear as a frightening animal or a horrible man but he can also masquerade as an elegant gentleman. He changes his appearance according to the effect he intends to achieve: fear or appeal.

As far as smells (sulfur, burning, dung, and so on), they are also effects that the demon intends to create, just as he can bring about physical effects on matter and physical illness on the human body. He can also affect our psyche through dreams, thoughts, and imagination. He can transmit his own thoughts to us, such as hatred or despair. All these phenomena can appear in victims of satanic ailments and, most of all, in victims of possession. The true perfidy and ugliness of this spiritual being is greater than anything we humans can imagine or depict.

Can the demon be confined within a human body or in a portion thereof? Can he cohabit with the Holy Spirit?

Since the demon is a pure spirit, he cannot be confined in a place or a person, even if we think he can and does. It is not a matter of becoming confined within a body, but to act, to constrain. His presence is not like that of someone who lives in someone else or, like our souls, is part of our bodies. His is a force that can act in the mind, in the whole human body, or in any portion of it. That is why we exorcists sometimes have the impression that the demon (I would rather say the “evil”) is, for example, in someone’s stomach. In reality, it is only a spiritual force that acts within the stomach.

It would be a mistake to think that the Holy Spirit and the demon could inhabit the human body, almost as though they were two rivals living in the same room. They are both spiritual forces that can act concurrently, but in a different manner, on the same subject. For example, let us say that a saint is tormented by diabolic possession. Without a doubt, the saint’s body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. This means that his soul, his spirit, is in full union with God and follows the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If we think that this union is physical, then even a normal, physical illness would be incompatible with the presence of the Holy Spirit. Instead, his presence sanctifies the soul and guides our thoughts and actions. That is why the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can coexist with the suffering of an illness or of anything else, such as a demon.

Why couldn’t God block Satan’s action? Couldn’t he stop the activity of witch doctors and magicians?

God does not do it because he created all creatures, both men and angels, free. He allows them to act according to their free and intelligent nature. In the end, he will take everything into account and treat everyone according to what they rightly deserve. I believe that the parable of the good seed and the weeds is very appropriate at this point. When the servants asked their master to allow them to pull up the weeds, the master refused and asked them to wait until harvest time. God does not turn his back on his creatures, even when they behave badly. If he stopped them, then the judgment would have already been rendered, even before the creature was able to express itself in its fullness. We are finite beings; our earthly days are numbered, and we do not like God's patience. We would like to see immediate reward for good deeds and punishment for evil actions. God waits; he allows man sufficient time to convert, even using the demon to give man the opportunity to prove his faithfulness to his Lord.

Many do not believe in the devil because they were cured by psychologists or psychoanalysts.

In this case, it is obvious that the individuals were not affected by evil disorders or evil possession. It is not necessary to be subjected to evil activity in order to believe in the devil. The Word of God is very explicit on the matter, just as the demon's influence in human and social life is very clear.

Exorcists question the demon and he answers. But if the demon is the prince of lies, can anything useful be accomplished by questioning him?

It is true that the answers of the demon must be sifted. However, at times the Lord orders the demon to speak the truth, to demonstrate that Satan has been defeated by Christ and has been forced to obey Christ's followers who act in his name. Often the evil one admits that he is forced to speak, something that he avoids at all costs. For instance, he is humiliated when he is forced to reveal his name; it is a sign of defeat. Woe to the exorcist who asks questions out of curiosity. The *Ritual* itself expressly forbids it. Allowing the demon to lead the conversation would be just as imprudent! Precisely because he is the prince of lies, Satan is humiliated when God forces him to speak the truth.

Can we say that today Satan is more powerful than in the past?

It is possible. There have been times in history when corruption was greater than at other times, even if good and evil are always present. For instance, if we look at the Romans during the last days of the empire, there is no doubt that corruption was more widespread than during the Republic. Christ defeated Satan, and, where Christ reigns, Satan is forced

to concede. That is why in some areas where paganism is prevalent we find an unleashing of demons that is greater than in areas where Christianity is prevalent. For instance, I researched this phenomenon in some areas of Africa. Today the demon is also much stronger in some areas of old Catholic Europe (such as Italy, France, Spain, Austria) because there is a frightening drop in faith among these nations. As I remarked when I was speaking about the causes of evil ailments, crowds of people in these nations have given themselves to superstition.

MEANS OF LIBERATION

People are often liberated from the evil one during our prayer meetings, even though we limit ourselves to prayers of deliverance and we do not exorcize. Do you believe that our efforts are truly successful, or do you think that we are deluding ourselves?

I believe that you are truly successful, because I believe in the power of prayer. As I mentioned in the second chapter of this book, the Gospel shows us the most difficult type of liberation: the young man over whom the apostles prayed in vain. Jesus says that to cast out a particular kind of demon three things are required: faith, prayer, and fasting. These are still the most efficacious methods. Undoubtedly, group prayer is stronger than individual prayer, as the Gospel tells us. I will never tire of repeating that we can be liberated from the demon with prayer alone, without any exorcism, but never with exorcism alone.

I will add that, when we pray, the Lord gives us what we need, independently of our words. We do not know what we need to ask for; it is the Spirit who prays for us “with sighs too deep for words”. Therefore, the Lord gives us much more than what we ask or dare hope. I have often watched while victims were delivered during Father Tardif’s prayers of healing. I have also witnessed healings during Archbishop Milingo’s prayers of deliverance. Let us continue to pray: the Lord will give us what we need.

Are there privileged localities for liberation from evil ills? We often hear about it.

We can pray anywhere, but there is no doubt that—from the beginning—there have been some privileged places of prayer where the Lord chose to manifest himself particularly, or that have been particularly consecrated to him. Even among the Hebrews there were a host of such sites, where God manifested himself to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and so on. Then we think of our sanctuaries, our churches. Often, liberations from demons do not occur at the end of an exorcism, but in a sanctuary. Father Candido had a particular affinity to Loreto and Lourdes, because many of his patients were liberated in those sanctuaries.

There are also sites that are used with particular confidence by those who are victimized by the demon. For instance, Sarsina, where the iron collar that was used as a penance by Saint Vicinius has often been instrumental in achieving liberation. In the old days, demoniacs used to visit the sanctuaries of Caravaggio and Clauzetto, where relics of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord are venerated and where often victims of the demon were healed. We should also remember that visiting holy places is useful for increasing our faith; in the end, this is what counts.

I liberated myself. Prayer and fasting helped me more than exorcisms, which produced only temporary benefits.

This testimony is also valid. Basically, I have already answered this question. I repeat a very important concept. The victim cannot be a passive spectator, as though the exorcist should do all the work, but must take an active part in the process of deliverance.

I would like to know what difference there is between blessed water and the water from Lourdes or other sanctuaries. Also, what difference there is between exorcized oil and the oil that seeps from some sacred images, or that burns in sanctuary lamps, or that is used with devotion.

Blessed or exorcized water, oil, and salt are sacramentals. However, even though they are particularly efficacious because of the Church's intercession, their effectiveness in particular situations is due to the faith with which we use them. The other objects listed in the question are not sacramentals. Their efficacy is due to the faith with which we use them when we invoke the intercession of the saints who are the object of our devotion, for instance, Our Lady of Lourdes and the Holy Infant of Prague.

I constantly vomit dense and frothy saliva. I have visited many doctors, but none has been able to find its cause.

If you feel better after vomiting, you could be experiencing deliverance from some evil influence. Often, the victims of a malefice that was acquired by either eating or drinking something that was cursed are healed by vomiting thick, frothy saliva. If this is the case, I suggest the usual remedies to obtain liberation: much prayer, sacraments, heartfelt forgiveness. In addition, you could try drinking blessed water and exorcized oil.

I do not know why, but I am the target of much envy. I am afraid that this may be harmful in the end. I would like to know if jealousy and envy can be the cause of evil ills.

They can only cause evil ills if they lead to a malefice. Otherwise, these feelings harm those who harbor them more than their target, but they undoubtedly disrupt harmonious relationships. We have only to think of the trouble that jealousy causes between spouses: while it does not cause a malefice, it damages an otherwise good marriage.

I was advised to recite the formulas of rejection of Satan on a regular basis. I have never understood why.

Renewing our baptismal promises is always extremely useful. We confirm our faith in God, our commitment to him, and we reject Satan and all that comes from him. Whoever gave you the advice suspected that you have some bonds that need to be broken. Anyone who visits magicians contracts an evil bond—both with the magician and with the demon—that must be severed. The same goes for those who attend séances, join satanic sects, and so on. The entire Bible, and especially the Old Testament, is an invitation to break the bond with idols and to turn decisively to the One God.

Is there any value in wearing sacred images around the neck? Medals, scapulars, and crucifixes are very popular.

These objects are surely effective if they are used with faith and not with superstition, like amulets. The prayer that is used to bless the sacred images upholds two concepts: to imitate the virtue of the saint on the effigy and to obtain his protection. Then, if someone believes that he can expose himself to dangers such as a satanic cult and be protected by wearing a sacred image around his neck, he would be grossly mistaken. Holy images should encourage us to live a coherent Christian life.

My pastor claims that the best exorcism is confession.

He is right. It is the most direct means to fight Satan, because it is the sacrament that tears souls from the demon's grasp, strengthens against sin, unites us more closely to God, and helps to conform our souls increasingly to the divine will. I advise frequent confession, possibly weekly, to all victims of evil activities.

What does the Catechism of the Catholic Church say about exorcisms?

Four paragraphs deal directly with the subject. Paragraph 517, speaking of Christ's Resurrection, reminds us of his exorcisms. Paragraph 550 specifically states: "The coming of God's kingdom means the defeat of Satan's: 'If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Mt 12:26, 28) Jesus' *exorcisms* free

some individuals from the domination of demons. They anticipate Jesus' great victory over 'the ruler of this world' (Jn 12:31; cf. Lk 8:26-39)."

Paragraph 1237 of the *Catechism* deals with the exorcisms that are incorporated in the baptismal rite. "Since Baptism signifies liberation from sin and from its instigator the devil, one or more *exorcisms* are pronounced over the candidate. The celebrant then anoints him with the oil of catechumens, or lays his hands on him, and he explicitly renounces Satan. Thus prepared, he is able to *confess the faith of the Church*, to which he will be 'entrusted' by Baptism (cf. Rom 6:17)."

Paragraph 1673 is the most detailed. It tells us that, in exorcism, "the Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One and withdrawn from his domination". Thus the Church exercises the power and the duty to exorcize that she received from Christ. "Exorcism is directed at the expulsion of demons or to the liberation from demonic possession."

I call your attention to this important distinction that recognizes other forms of demonic influences besides possession. See paragraph 1673 for the complete text.

CONCLUSION

When a writer reviews his finished manuscript, he often has the strange feeling that he has said too little of what he had intended to say. I have the same feeling as I end my book. The topics that I wanted to cover are so vast that each deserves much greater space.

Again, I tried to remain within the boundaries of prudence; therefore I addressed only what I consider the more important aspects of each topic, of each question. I did not go into boring, minute details, because I wanted to appeal to a wide audience, rather than writing a heavy tome that would daunt everyone but the very few specialists. I hope that what I have written will encourage many to research the subject further. Too many doors still remain closed, with the exception of a few, isolated endeavors. I would have liked to address seminaries and pontifical universities and suggest reintroducing neglected historic-patristic studies in their curriculum.

The future is in God's hands.

Please, allow me to say that I have placed a work rich in original material in the hands of those who will read this volume. This material is not the product of speculation and theory, but of Father Candido Amantini's intense and personal experience and my own: suffice it to say that, in eight years, I have administered more than twenty thousand exorcisms. Many of the answers, observations, challenges, and attempted solutions have never before been recorded.

I will be particularly grateful for the response of my fellow exorcists.

Finally, I think that I have provided a service on which, the Lord willing, I will continue to build.

PRAYERS OF LIBERATION FROM THE SPIRIT OF EVIL

To our Lord Jesus

O Jesus our Savior,
My Lord and my God,
My God and my all,
With your sacrifice of the Cross you redeemed us
And defeated the power of Satan.
I beg you to deliver me from every evil presence
And every evil influence.
I ask you in your name,
I ask you for the sake of your wounds,
I ask you for the sake of your blood,
I ask you for the sake of your Cross,
I ask you through the intercession of Mary,
Immaculate and sorrowful.
May the blood and the water that flow
From your side
Wash over me to purify me,
Deliver me, heal me. Amen.

To Mary

O Most High Queen of Heaven
And of the Angels,
We humbly beseech you,
Who received from God
The power and the mission
To crush Satan's head:
Command the heavenly host
To pursue the demons in battle wherever they are,
To rebuke their daring,
And to thrust them into the abyss. Amen.

Prayer to Saint Michael

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protector against the wickedness and snares of the devil; may God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

Litany of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, hear us.

Christ, graciously hear us.

God the Father of Heaven, *have mercy on us.*

God the Son, Redeemer of the world,

God, the Holy Spirit,

Holy Trinity, One God,

Blood of Christ, only begotten Son of the eternal Father, *save us.*

Blood of Christ, Incarnate Word of God,

Blood of Christ, of the New and Eternal Testament,

Blood of Christ, falling upon the earth in Agony,

Blood of Christ, shed profusely in the Scourging,

Blood of Christ, flowing forth in the Crowning with Thorns,

Blood of Christ, poured out on the Cross,

Blood of Christ, price of our salvation,

Blood of Christ, without which there is no forgiveness,

Blood of Christ, eucharistic drink and refreshment of souls,

Blood of Christ, stream of mercy,

Blood of Christ, victor over demons,

Blood of Christ, courage of Martyrs,

Blood of Christ, strength of Confessors,

Blood of Christ, bringing forth Virgins,

Blood of Christ, help of those in peril,

Blood of Christ, relief of the burdened,

Blood of Christ, solace in sorrow,

Blood of Christ, hope of the penitent,

Blood of Christ, consolation of the dying,

Blood of Christ, peace and tenderness of hearts,

Blood of Christ, pledge of eternal life,

Blood of Christ, freeing souls from Purgatory,

Blood of Christ, most worthy of all glory and honor, *save us.*

Lamb of God, who take away the sins of the world, *spare us, O Lord.*

Lamb of God, who take away the sins of the world, *graciously hear us, O Lord.*

Lamb of God, who take away the sins of the world, *have mercy on us, O Lord.*

V. You have redeemed us, O Lord, in your Blood.

R. And made us, for our God, a kingdom.

Let us pray. Almighty and eternal God, you have appointed your only begotten Son the Redeemer of the world and willed to be appeased by his blood. Grant, we beg of you, that we may worthily adore this price of our salvation and through its power be safeguarded from the evils of the present life so that we may rejoice in its fruits forever in heaven. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of blessing for buildings

O Father, come and visit our home (shop, office, and so on) and protect us from the lures of the enemy; may your holy angels come to guard our peace and may your blessing remain with us forever. In Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your apostles, “In whatever home you enter, greet it, saying, ‘Peace be in this home’ ”, let this same peace, we pray, abide in this place. We beseech you to sanctify it by the merits of our trusting prayer.

Pour your blessings on it, and make it a place of peace. May salvation enter our abode as it entered the house of Zacchaeus, when you graced it with your presence.

Entrust your angels to guard it and banish from it every evil power.

Grant that all who live in it may please you with their good works, and so receive from you, when their time comes, the reward of your heavenly home. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Prayer against the “evil-eye”

O Lord our God, King of the ages, omnipotent and almighty, who create all things and who, by your mere desire, transform all things; who changed into dew the seven-fold furnace and its fire in Babylon, and who kept safe your three holy children: physician and healer of our souls, haven of those who hope in you; we beseech you and we implore you; remove, banish, and expel every diabolic energy, every satanic attack and every plot, every wicked curiosity and harm, and the evil-eye of mischievous and evil-minded people from your servant(s) (N); and if anything has happened because of beauty or because of bravery or because of good fortune or because of jealousy and envy, yourself, O Master who love mankind, extend your powerful hand and your mighty and most high arm, and as you look upon everything, look upon this (these) your creature(s), and send him (her) (them) [a] peaceful and powerful Angel(s), guardian(s) of soul and body, who will reprove and expel

from him (her) (them) every wicked intention, every witchcraft, and the evil-eye of ruinous and envious people, and the one(s) who supplicate(s) you, as he (she) (they) is (are) protected by you, will sing to you in thanksgiving: “The Lord be my helper, and I will not fear; what will any man do to me?” and again: “I will not fear bad things, because you are with me; because you, O God, are my strength, a mighty ruler, leader of peace, father of the age to come.” Yea, O Lord our God, spare your creature(s), and deliver your servant(s) from every harm and every influence caused by the evil-eye, and preserve him (her) (them) higher than every evil thing; through the prayers of our all-blessed, glorious Lady Theotokos and ever-Virgin Mary, of the luminous Archangels, and of all the Saints. Amen.

—from *The Euchologion*

NOTES

In Memory Of Father Candido Amantini

¹ Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1971. [Back to text.](#)

Wanted: Exorcist

¹ For an accurate definition of the term, one must go back to the 1961 Studium edition of Roberti-Palazzini (in English translation: *Dictionary of Moral Theology*, comp. Francesco Roberti, ed. Pietro Palazzini, trans. Henry J. Yannone [Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1962]). There, one will find exact descriptions of such terms as *superstition*, *idolatry*, *magic*, and *superstitious observance*. [*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* also addresses superstition, in sections 2110-11—Ed.] [Back to text.](#)

² *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, vol. 5, no. 38 (Bologna, Dehoniane). [Back to text.](#)

³ 1975, no. 3, p. 112. [Back to text.](#)

⁴ K. Lehmann, *Diavoli, demoni, possession* (Queriniana, 1983), pp. 27, 115. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), pp. 366-67. [Back to text.](#)

“In My Name They Will Cast Out Demons”

¹ *Manuale di storia liturgica* (Ancora, 1959), 4:406. [Back to text.](#)

Exorcisms and Prayers of Liberation

¹ I mention two books that can be very useful: L. J. Suenens, *Renewal and the Powers of Darkness*, with a foreword by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983); Matteo La Grua, *La preghiera di liberazione* (Palermo: Edition Herbita, 1985). [Back to text.](#)

Some Causes of Evil Presence

¹ Philippe Madre, *Ma liberaci dal male* (Rome: Ed. Rem, 1980), p. 151. [Back to text.](#)

Difficulties and Ongoing Problems

¹ *The Ratzinger Report* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), p. 45. [Back to text.](#)

Questions and Answers

¹ Even before *Life after Life*, by Raymond A. Moody, was published (St. Simons Island, Ga.: Mockingbird Books, 1975), but most especially after, many similar books have been published. [Back to text.](#)