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**INTERVIEW WITH FR. H.W., CATHOLIC EXORCIST,
ON DEMONS, GHOSTS, APPARITIONS,
AND THE DIVINE ECONOMY OF AUTHORITY**

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INTRODUCTION

This dossier is the result of an interview conducted by the author via telephone on the evenings of September 16 and 17, 2021. The interviewee is Father H.W.,¹ a Catholic priest and exorcist. The topic of the interview is the nature of demons and their behavior in the context of the divine economy of authority.

Father H.W. is an elderly priest. Details as to his physical appearance could not be obtained because the interview took place over the phone. He speaks fluent English, despite it not appearing to be his native language. His accent is appreciably foreign—by any reckoning, it is not American. In addition, the choice and use of his words is exceedingly proper. He speaks the language too formally for him to have acquired fluency except through training.

Out of respect for the interviewee's privacy, and the sensitive nature of his line of work, considerably more personal identifiable information has been omitted than is typical for these dossiers.

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Q: Thank you for taking my phone call, Father. I'd like to speak with you about the divine economy of authority and how it relates to demons.

A: My goodness.

Q: A topic for light conversation if ever there was one. If time permits, I might also have a few ancillary questions.

A: I will do my best. Go ahead.

¹ It should not be assumed that the initials chosen to replace the interviewee's name are representative of the letters of his actual name.

Q: Let's start from the top. How would you define the divine economy of authority?

A: You can think of the divine economy as the distribution of authority from top to bottom across everything that exists. For example: in a corporation you have one chief executive, some middle managers, and a large number of laborers at the bottom.

The chief executive calls all the shots, but he does not do all the work. He delegates decision-making power to managers whom he hires. Those managers delegate duties to the people they hire to work under them. The chief executive's authority is thereby distributed across the corporation, so that when he takes one action or another, his will is implemented throughout the business.

God is the universe's chief executive. All legitimate authority comes from Him, regardless of the form it takes. We know this because Christ said to Pilate: "You would have no power over me unless it were given to you from above."²

Christ is God, and yet He submits Himself to judgment by man. In doing so, He tells us that all authority comes from God, and that God can delegate this authority. He also tells us that authority can, in certain contexts, be fluid. For instance, when Judea was an independent kingdom, the Jews were subject to no one but God. Judea was then conquered by the Greeks, and later, the Romans. At no point did they ever come out from under God's authority. But, from time to time, they were subject to an intermediate governance between them and God.

Q: So if God is at the top of the authority structure, who is at the bottom?

A: The bottom position—but by no means the least important—is the family. The family is the basest unit at which authority is measured. A family's default authority figure is the father.³

Q: How is the concept of authority even knowable?

A: Because it is part of the natural law. You do not have to be highly intelligent, or even a philosopher to understand authority. I would wager that, in Scripture, the person who knew authority best, at least instinctually, was the centurion whose servant Jesus healed.⁴ The centurion was no scholar. However, from what is recorded of him, the man grasped authority quite well. He knew that all Jesus had to do was say the word and the man would be healed. Neither he nor Jesus was in the sick man's physical presence when Jesus healed him. And yet the centurion knew Jesus had this authority, because Jesus is authority incarnate.

When God created the universe, He wrote into it laws that are not always readily apparent, but that are cognizable through observation. Some are more obvious than others.

² *The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version*, John 19:11.

³ Ephesians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5:25.

⁴ Luke 7:1-10.

For instance: gravity. Even without a mathematical understanding of how gravity works, you can know certain things about gravity by watching it in action. Anytime you see something fall to the ground, that is gravity at work. The first thing we learn is that gravity exists. The second thing we learn is what it does. Gravity pulls matter to the lowest possible position until they cannot fall any further. Knowing this, we infer that gravity is a force, because forces work upon matter.

By the same token, we understand things about authority by watching it in action. People have a natural inclination to obey authority figures—not always, but generally. The example I like to give is of a child and his parents. The child obeys his parents, not because he is afraid of getting spanked, but because it comes natural to him to obey. Of course, there are always exceptions, but those are so infrequent that they tend to prove the rule.

Q: Why do you refer to this abstract, metaphysical concept of authority to explain why people obey authority figures, when psychology seems to do a better job of explaining it?

A: With all due respect to psychologists, their methods are not as precise as I would like them to be.

Q: So we're clear, you're talking about people with Ph.D.'s in psychology.

A: Yes. And?

Q: I should think a doctor of psychology might grasp the subject better than most.

A: My qualm is not with the extent of their knowledge but with their methodology. It is entirely too subjective, to the point that it can be used to drive one agenda or another. To be fair, I am certain there are many who approach the discipline in an unbiased manner. But, these days, all one has to do is pick up a tabloid to read the latest pop psychology.

Getting back to your question, psychology has tried to explain how authority works, but it is a Johnny-come-lately compared to classical philosophy. The answers psychologists offer pale in comparison to what we have already known for centuries to be true.

Q: Tell me more about how authority works.

A: Regardless of the form it takes, authority is authority. This same authority is reposed in a head of state over his country, in an employer over his laborers, in parents over their children. This is true when you consider what authority means: it is the right to compel obedience. But notice—the right to compel obedience does not itself produce obedience. The state has authority to outlaw murder and thereby compel its citizens not to kill each other, and yet murders occur.

Here is where we must discuss power. Power is another law of the universe. As with authority, all power comes from God.⁵ Power is the ability to effect change. More specific to this context, it is the ability to compel obedience. Notice that I did not say the right to compel. Power does not contemplate a right. A tyrant has power but not legitimacy. What confers legitimacy is authority.

Authority encompasses the right to power. It is the context of power. This is why a man with a gun might be perceived as an outlaw, but if that man wears a badge and swears an oath to uphold the law, he is a police officer. Both the outlaw and the policeman have the power to use a gun, but the police officer has the authority to use it in a licit context. So if the outlaw going about his criminal activities shoots a man on the street, he is a murderer, but if the policeman carrying out lawful duties shoots a man, he is exonerated for preventing a crime.

The outlaw has no authority. He does not have the right to the legitimate use of power. The policeman, despite having authority, recognizes that this grant of rights does not originate from him. Rather, it is conferred to him from a higher power—in his case, the state. This authority is not given for his benefit; rather, he has it so that he may benefit others by it. Thus, it should be understood that authority is never intended to benefit the one to whom it is given.

Q: What purpose does authority serve?

A: Its immediate purpose is to govern and protect others, not for one's own purposes, but for the benefit of those over whom this authority is exercised. Proper government implies right order, because with order comes peace.

St. Thomas teaches that peace cannot be willed. Rather, peace is the tranquility of order. Nothing you do can directly bring about peace. And yet we have a word for people who work to bring about peace: Jesus called them peacemakers in His sermon on the mount.⁶ If you want peace, you must lay the groundwork for it to come. This groundwork is called order.

Left to their own devices, objects in their natural state are unlikely to order themselves. Right governance is necessary to put everything in its place. Power—the ability to effect change—is required to do this. By this I mean someone has to expend the effort to impose order. People need to be told what to do, and the right people need to tell them. In a perfect world, the exercise of sufficient power by those with legitimate authority produces right order. When there is right order, there is peace.⁷

Q: What about illegitimate uses of power and authority?

A: What about them? A person with all authority and no power is impotent. A person with all power and no authority is a tyrant.

⁵ Romans 13:1.

⁶ Matthew 5:9.

⁷ James 3:18. "And the fruit of justice is sown in peace, to them that make peace."

Q: Let's say we find ourselves in a scenario out of *Brave New World*.⁸ The government maintains peace by keeping the populace drugged-up on a substance that induces euphoria. And then there's rampant state-sanctioned prostitution and distractions of every variety. It's been a while since I read the novel, but in such a case I suppose the government might step in and compel people to take these drugs or engage in immoralities if they were not inclined to. Therein lies the question: when you have all power and no authority, might that not also bring about peace?

A: Not actual peace, I should think. It is not a legitimate use of authority to compel immoral conduct. Immorality is a wrong. It corrupts people. Authority is properly used when it seeks the good of another. This is why a father spanks a child for misbehavior. He wants to teach the child that what he did was wrong.

Q: Building off this imagery: power is the ability to spank, while authority is the right to spank.

A: If you want to put it that way, yes.

Q: I suppose this would explain why no one bats an eye when a parent spanks his child, but everyone is up in arms when an adult hits a child that is not his.

A: Precisely, but in different times, certain adults were allowed to discipline children who were not their own. Up until the 1960's, I believe, school principals in this country were permitted to discipline students with corporal punishment.

Q: Why, would you say, were parents not upset about strangers disciplining their children?

A: Parents understood this was happening in their children's schools. For families with unruly children, this was a selling point.

Q: I mean to ask: what is the difference between our first scenario of a stranger beating some child on the street and a teacher disciplining a student at school?

A: The difference is that the school has been conferred authority to act in the parents' stead, with the parents' consent and approval.

⁸ Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.

Q: Tacitly or expressly?

A: Both. Either. It's hard to say. One or the other suffices. You could say the parents implicitly conferred this authority to the school by their course of dealing, regardless of how they felt on the matter, if the parents knew the school kept the practice of corporal punishment and they sent their children there anyway. Though, I would wager that many schools had some kind of written agreement in case misunderstandings arose.

Q: There's a concept in the law called fiduciary duty. I can delegate to you the right to act in my best interest, even in things I normally could do myself. In some respects, you would become my caretaker. You can act in my place, but only when it would be to my benefit, even if it is to your detriment. How would you say this concept relates to the economy of authority?

A: Charity underpins authority. Charity is measured by the extent you are willing to sacrifice. You might hold the best of intentions for someone, but until you put those intentions into action, can you say you acted charitably toward him? Of course not. Similarly to how you described fiduciary duty, charity means seeking the good of others even at a cost to oneself. If you do not have charity, selfishness will get in the way of legitimate exercises of authority.

Q: If I've understood you correctly, authority seems to have two aims. The immediate aim is to care for those over whom you hold authority. The broader aim is to instill order. Am I off-base in saying so?

A: I would agree with you on both.

Q: Okay. Now, our so discussion so far has been focused on the responsibilities of those who hold authority, but what about those subject to authority? What is expected of them?

A: Things are the way they are for a reason. As a parent, you have authority over your child. You have the right to order him out of the kitchen because you do not want him to accidentally touch a hot stove and burn himself. You have the right to spank him for disobeying your command to keep away from the stove. But, if he should disobey you and touch the stove, there are consequences. In this case, getting burned is what results. You did not want that to happen to your child, but it is the natural consequence from touching something that is hot. And what results from your child's decision to disobey you and touch the hot stove? Pain.

It is the same way with God. Because God is the author of the universe, He is also its lawgiver. Not only does He have the power to compel what He wants, He has the legitimate authority to do so. But, because He is infinitely wise and merciful, He undoubtedly will exercise this authority as it ought to be used. That is, He utilizes it to provide and protect.

We, as creatures with free will, can choose to abide by this authority. When we choose not to, this is called sin. St. Thomas tells us that you do not get the benefit of another's legitimate authority if you do not abide by it. For this reason, a drug dealer cannot complain to the police when thieves steal his illicit goods.

Here, we must introduce another concept: the state of grace. To be in the state of grace means to be in friendship with God. Because sin amounts to voluntarily turning away from God, it has the effect of distancing oneself from God.

When we lose something dear to us, it causes pain. That pain is all the greater when the thing lost is of greater value. Since God is goodness itself, a consequence of sin is the loss of that good. But God is *infinitely* good, and so the loss of an infinite good is a loss of infinite magnitude. Mortal sin cuts us off from the state of grace entirely. It is the complete loss of friendship with God.

Ultimately, God wants us to be happy; not superficially but in a lasting way that only He can provide. In His wisdom, He knew we would be gravely unhappy if the universe He created were arbitrary; this is to say, not bound by any laws. There would be no justice, and lawlessness is contrary to the character of God, who is justice personified.

But there is the rub: any law that confers a right also sets forth responsibilities. In our nearsightedness, we may think God punishes every transgression. This is not to say He doesn't from time to time—every parent has to discipline his children when it is appropriate. But, just as touching a hot stove will cause a painful burn, so too will sin cause pain. God does not want for there to be sin, He does not approve of it, but He does tolerate our bad choices in the hopes that we might one day repent and return to Him.

Q: All right, let's talk about how this all relates to demons. I hate to put it this way, but—if pop culture is any indicator, it would seem that Catholic priests are the ministers of last resort when it comes to the demonic. If there is anyone who can get demons out of someone, it's the Catholics.

A: That is a fair assessment of us. I would disagree with you only when it comes to calling us ministers of *last* resort. Yes, we get the job done; all the more reason to come to us *first*.

Q: Good point, Father. Why would you suppose it is, then, that people are hesitant to seek out an exorcist when they have a problem with demons?

A: I can think of several reasons. Not everyone is Catholic. Some Christians think Catholics are misguided and say awful things about what we believe. Some people are not Christian at all. Others believe in Christ but put greater stock in folk practices. Then you have skeptics who refuse to accept the existence of demons. Some of those are atheists, but not all. You would be surprised to learn how many Christians do not believe demons are real. Still others believe their problems arise solely from natural sources, like childhood trauma or a family history of mental illness. It is indeed the case that natural causes might be responsible for a person's condition. The problem here is that, at times, people are so insistent on these being to blame that they might rule out preternatural phenomena.

Then you have people who believe in Christ, and who may or may not believe in demons, but nonetheless have experienced phenomena they cannot explain. The foundation is laid for them to come to the Church for help, but they stay away because they fear ostracism. They do not want to be thought of as crazy or evil or possessed. They fear that others will regard them in this manner if they go to the Church.

Other times – and this is quite sad to say – they seek help but, when they are told what must be done, they do not carry it through. A confirmed case of demonic possession is not easily dispensed with. Generally, the person did not get that way overnight, and so the remedy will not be immediate. It takes effort. Sometimes, it is even painful.

Q: Painful how?

A: In every sense. Demons can hurt people in all manner of ways. But what I think is more pertinent toward answering your question is the detachment people must adopt with respect to the things that brought about the possession in the first place.

The very things a person aspires after – money, power, fame, drugs, sexual gratification, just to name a few – can result in his becoming possessed if his relationship toward these things is unhealthy. In instances of overt demonic interaction, a person may bargain with a demon to obtain these things; whereas a more subtle approach is for a demon to instill in the person an inordinate – that is, sinful – desire for them.

In either case, the demon knows this person considers these objects desirable. It will leverage this person's attachments to these objects to the person's detriment, in the same way a drug pusher takes advantage of his users to turn a profit. Breaking that attachment can be compared to kicking a drug addiction.

Some people, by the grace of God, make it through. Others prefer to roll in the mud of their depravity. And it is a sad thing, because you see what a waste of a life they become. As a priest, you know better than anyone where their souls are destined if they do not shape up, but there are too many people who need your attention, and there is only so much you can do for those who refuse to work with you.

Q: Who among us on earth has authority over demons? Nowadays, if you browse the Internet long enough, you'll come across images of lay pastors in big-top style tents shouting demons out of people in the congregation. Call me skeptical, but something about that just doesn't look right. Does just anybody have the authority to exorcise demons?

A: There is a chain of authority between God and the priests of the Catholic Church. That chain is unbroken despite the passage of time since Christ founded the Church.

As I mentioned earlier, God the Father is the source of all legitimate authority and power. He gave this power to the second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, while Christ was on earth.⁹ Christ instituted the Catholic Church and lent His authority to its first bishops, the apostles. The apostles then appointed successor bishops and priests.

In every exorcism it is Christ, not the priest, who is the exorcist. The priest is simply the instrument through which Christ acts. Working alone, the priest cannot compel a demon to do anything. But, when the exorcist invokes the name of Jesus, it is Jesus who commands the demons, and they must obey Him.¹⁰

⁹ Matthew 28:18. "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth."

¹⁰ Philippians 2:10. "That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth..."

Q: So there's nothing to those videos of Benny Hinn smacking people with his suit jacket and making them faint, ostensibly because they've been exorcised of some demon or another?

A: Not having seen the videos in question, I do not feel qualified to answer.

Q: Then why aren't all priests exorcists?

A: Traditionally, they were. The Sacrament of Holy Orders, as originally instituted, set out a number of steps a man had to pass through on the way to becoming a priest. The order of exorcist was one such step. The modern priesthood has subsumed many of these orders into the state of being a priest, but if memory serves, the orders were never formally abrogated. Thus, a priest is by definition an exorcist, because he possesses all other orders attained on the way to the priesthood.

However, just because a person has the ability to do something does not mean he has lawful permission to do so. The current state of the priesthood forbids a priest from acting as an exorcist unless he has permission from his bishop, whom we refer to as the "local ordinary." When the local ordinary grants his permission, this is called "conferring faculties" on the priest of his choosing. He can do this on an as needed basis, or he can make the priest the designated exorcist in his diocese.

In the absence of a priest exorcist, the local ordinary is the diocese's default minister of exorcism. By virtue of his office, he is a successor to Christ's apostles. Every bishop was made so by another bishop laying hands upon him, all the way back to the time Jesus walked the earth. Because of this link, when Christ conferred upon his initial apostles the authority to drive out demons in His name, that authority carries forward to today's bishops.

Q: Does your bishop perform exorcisms?

A: He certainly could, if he wanted to, but he is far too preoccupied running the diocese. I do not believe very many bishops these days perform exorcisms themselves, especially in the larger dioceses. They tend to appoint priest exorcists for the task, although the priest and his bishop work closely together in this respect.

Q: Is it not enough for an exorcism that the priest stands *in persona Christi*?¹¹

A: No. That suffices for some of a priest's functions, but not for the solemn exorcism of an individual.

¹¹ A Catholic priest, by virtue of his orders, acts in the person of Christ when pronouncing the words of a sacramental rite; for instance, the words of institution employed in the Sacrament of Communion whereby bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.

Q: I take what you say to mean that there are some exorcisms which can be done without the bishop's approval being given beforehand.

A: Naturally, yes. Only a solemn exorcism of an individual in a case of actual possession requires the bishop's approval. Other forms of exorcism are considered minor. For instance, the rite of Baptism includes an exorcism; the rite by which holy water is consecrated calls for exorcism of both the water and the salt; the blessing of a home, or of objects, may include a minor exorcism as well. All of these, a priest may do without first resorting to his ordinary.

Q: But what about the exorcism of a person under some demonic influence short of full possession of the body?

A: Possession of the body is one of the most extreme forms of demonic activity in the affairs of individual human beings, but there are less apparent forms as well. Starting with temptation, which we call ordinary demonic activity, it can progress to oppression and obsession. Oppression has to do with a person's externals; while obsession deals with a person's interior life. All are awful. Thankfully, a person wrestling with temptation, oppression, and obsession can turn to the appropriate form of minor exorcism for relief. Prayers of this sort are sometimes referred to as "binding prayers" because the priest, or the afflicted person himself, calls upon God to bind the demons from acting upon him.

Q: But it's no "magic bullet."

A: None of this is magic. All exorcisms are fundamentally a type of intercessory prayer.

Q: I mean to say, these must involve effort aside from just saying the words.

A: Yes, of course. The entreaty for divine assistance must be made with faith. That means more than just putting stock in the effectiveness of the prayers. It requires that one understand God will act whether, and when, He deems it is best for us.

It is never enough to pay lip service. A series of life changes are called for as well. An afflicted person who genuinely desires deliverance must have true remorse for the bad conduct that brought about his condition. Aside from begging forgiveness, he will need to stop sinning. It helps, also, to worthily participate in the Sacraments.

Those who do not strive to permanently abandon their vices will find themselves back in them. This, necessarily, will impede their progress in holiness. A person with even one mortal sin on his soul cannot partake of the Eucharist;¹² thus he is deprived of its salutary effect unless he first makes a proper confession.

¹² 1 Corinthians 11:27, 29. "Therefore whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord... For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord."

But how genuine might one's repentance actually be, if he leaves the confessional only to dive headlong into his vices? He may fool a priest, who is just a man, but he will not fool God, and God is not mocked. And as for what becomes of him, Christ says that his condition will be all the worse for persisting in his vices.¹³

Q: What must a priest do to get ready for a formal exorcism?

A: The exorcist will go to confession beforehand. He will fast from food and drink, and also celebrate mass ahead of time. In his prayers, he will request the aid of God in the work set out for him. The exorcism then takes place in some discreet location, such as a chapel. It is to the priest's advantage to choose the ground on which the battle is fought. Ergo, the ritual is celebrated in a place dedicated to God.

The priest attends the exorcism in surplice and stole. He will have brought with him a crucifix, holy water, and a relic. With the holy water, he blesses himself, the possessed person, and any others assisting him. He recites the litany of the saints. Thereafter, he says the exorcism prayers. If deliverance is not obtained by the end of the session, he prepares for the next one.

Q: I figured it might be more involved than just that.

A: The ritual is the way it is because it is meant to be followed as promulgated. There is no room for improvisation. Having a formal method of operation is helpful for when the demon starts with its antics. Besides, deliverance is a marathon, not a sprint. It is meant to be repeated until it achieves the desired objective.

Q: What is the vetting process for exorcists like?

A: Foremost, I think, the priest exorcist must not want the job. Anyone who volunteers himself likely suffers from a defect that will impair his effectiveness.

Q: Like pride, in this instance?

A: Pride can serve as a stumbling block, yes. Curiosity as well. Also, the bishop ought to select a priest whom he knows to be of unimpeachable character. The priest should be prudent, have a solid grounding in morality, and be of sufficient maturity. Discipline is required of an exorcist, both in session and out. When not in session, he fasts and prays. During session, he must have sufficient faith and intestinal fortitude to hold his ground against the demon's antics.

¹³ Matthew 12:43-45.

Q: You call them antics?

A: Bad as their actions in session can be, that really is all they are—antics. Gabriele Amorth¹⁴ calls them such in his books. Not all the things you hear in popular culture about demons and exorcisms are false. Some are true, but the media have a way of sensationalizing things.

Everything a demon does while in session is calculated to make the exorcism stop. They are distractions. The demon knows that if the exorcism is completed, it will be expelled back into hell, where it will face worse torment for its having failed in its mission. A prudent exorcist ignores this behavior and presses on with the rite.

Q: What antics have you, personally, witnessed?

A: I worked on a case with a young lady who was possessed. When it comes to persons of the opposite sex, you need to be highly circumspect. We had two other women in the room to assist us. The young woman—she could not have weighed more than one hundred pounds—stood up from her desk and made as though to lift it over her head with both hands. It was an old-fashioned wooden desk that weighed more than she did. When the women moved in to stop her, she dropped the desk and shoved them to the ground. These women were in their middle-age, matronly, a little husky, and yet the girl pushed them away like they were nothing.

Another time, I witnessed a man's face change whenever the demon manifested. From one moment to the next, he went from looking like himself to looking like someone else, as though he had put on a mask. His features changed in impossible ways. His cheekbones accentuated, his eyes became sunken, his skin sallow. When he spoke, he spat his words through gritted teeth, whereas normally he was a pleasant, even-tempered young man.

I have also seen the possessed vomit up iron nails—things which he could not have hidden in his mouth or swallowed without showing signs of severe internal distress.

Q: How big were these nails?

A: Two, maybe three centimeters long.¹⁵

Q: You don't suppose he could have hidden them somewhere on his body to make it look like he vomited them up when he did?

A: I had been working with this person for some time. He would not do something like that. Furthermore, if he had swallowed them in order to cough them back up later, this would produce severe pain from the internal damage those nails might cause. On the day of that session, he entered the chapel under his own volition. He was not observed to be in any discomfort. He spoke normally, not like one hiding something in his mouth.

¹⁴ Fr. Gabriele Amorth was a preeminent Catholic exorcist working in the diocese of Rome until his death in 2016.

¹⁵ One centimeter is roughly 40% of an inch, and so each nail was approximately an inch in length.

During session, however, his demeanor changed entirely. This made it clear we were not speaking with him any longer, but with the demon possessing him. The demon made it appear as though he vomited the nails.

Q: Wait, you just said the demon “made it appear” as though he coughed up the nails, as opposed to actually coughing up nails. Explain.

A: Unlike you and I, when demons can change position, they do not have to traverse any intervening spaces. When they take hold of matter, they can transport matter in the same way. And so the nails may not have been physically present in the possessed person’s bowels; the demon only made it appear to be the case by causing the possessed to cough them up. This does not make the nails any less real. They are actual nails, made of iron. The circumstances made it look as though they came from the possessed individual’s stomach.

Q: What makes you so certain that these phenomena can’t be ascribed to mental illness?

A: It can be difficult to tell one from the other. That is why, for centuries, the Church has observed procedures to vet cases of actual possession. But, when you boil it down, all an exorcism amounts to is reciting a specific formula of prayers. A case of mental illness will not react to prayers similarly to a case of possession. For such instances, there is medicine. But observe: it is also true that a case of possession will not react to medicine in the same way as a person with mental illness.

Q: Have you seen anyone levitate?

A: Not me personally, though I have heard from others that demons might resort to this antic. It is quite rare, however, all the more so because actual cases of possession are rare themselves.

Q: And these phenomena, these antics, don’t they frighten you?

A: I would be lying if I said they never did. But you get accustomed to it. Eventually, you come to understand that the sole reason they do this is to distract you. And then, of course, you must have faith that God will protect you.

St. Paul tells us that God will not permit a soul to suffer trials it cannot conquer.¹⁶ This is as true for the person who is possessed as it is for the exorcist when faced with demon activity. God provides grace sufficient to overcome any hardship. Therefore, if a soul should falter, it is not due to any failure of grace but the result of a soul’s decision not to cooperate with that grace. The exorcist must therefore remain steadfast in the knowledge that God wishes for us to prevail over evil, and that God will protect us in furtherance of that objective.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Q: I've read a number of accounts of demonic possession where a loved one attempts to lessen the possessed person's suffering by offering to take his place; essentially, asking that he be possessed instead.

A: That is a terrible idea. That is how you go from one person being possessed to two, even if the person offering himself acts with charity.

Q: How can it be bad to want to shoulder some of another person's suffering?

A: Jesus knew He would have to die on the cross. When the time came near, He begged God the Father to have the cup of His suffering pass Him by.¹⁷ There is wisdom in this. God never tests us beyond our capacity, but we should not take ourselves out of our depth, because to do so implies that we know better than God.

Q: What permits things like this to happen?

A: It comes down to the legalistic nature of spiritual warfare. A person has authority over his own body. Demonic possession consists of a demon acquiring rights over a body to use it as if it were its own.

Generally, when a person is possessed, the root cause is grave sin. Sin consists of a choice. Because we use our bodies to carry out our choices, the medium of the sin is the body, but it is also that which becomes affected by it.

For example: a gun becomes a murder weapon when it is used to murder someone. The gun is evidence of the crime because it was used in furtherance of the offense. But you can also say that, by dint of having been used to carry out the offense, the character of the gun is changed to that of a murder weapon. Ergo, when we sin, our bodies are used to carry out that sin, and we extend demons greater rights to our bodies with each sin.

In the case of people voluntarily taking on another's possession, the person—ostensibly driven by charity—has given over rights to his body, which the demon accepts. However, the demon is under no obligation to exchange one body for the other. No—instead, it takes both.

Q: Why ever would a demon want to possess someone?

A: The short answer is: they possess us to torment us because they hate us, but also because the act mocks God in His incarnation.

Demons are doomed to experience hell forever. Hell means many things. Chiefly, it is a permanent separation from God. Since God is all good things to an infinite degree, this means demons experience the constant pain of an infinite, irreparable loss. This infuriates them, because they know they have only themselves to blame for why they are the way they are.

¹⁷ Luke 22:43-44.

Another reason they hate us: no matter how evil a human being may be, God gives each of us the chance to repent and make amends. What is more, God, as Jesus Christ, sacrificed Himself for our sake. The angels were never given an opportunity to repent, nor did Christ offer to redeem them of their sins.

One of the other torments of hell is the company of demons. Because they are cut off from God, demons have no charity – they are so self-interested that they are incapable of genuinely willing the good of another. All they are interested in is glory, and they grasp at it through power. Power is the only thing that maintains the pecking among the demons. Because spirits can never change, some demons will always be naturally more powerful than others. The stronger ones compel the weaker ones to act, to send them on missions, as it were. Sometimes, these missions consist of possessing someone in order to have that person damn himself and others to hell, which, ultimately, is the demonic agenda.

When a demon possesses a body, it can be likened to a reprieve. This is not a terribly good analogy, but bear with me. The demon still is no less damned. But, in my experience, as an exorcism reaches its successful conclusion, the demon will beg not to be sent back to hell. From this, I can only reason that the state of being in a body is less painful than actually being in hell. It could be the case that, upon the demon's arrival in hell, its superiors punish it savagely for its failure, but this is only a conjecture.

Q: With this talk of hell, I feel compelled to ask: dare we hope that all men be saved?¹⁸

A: Absolutely not. Hell exists, and it is not empty. Christ spoke more about hell than any other topic. If hell did not exist, Christ would be a liar, and there would be no reason to call Him a savior.

Q: What makes you so sure that the Catholic understanding of the universe is correct?

A: When we say the creed, we profess that our Church is one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic. To understand what this means, we need to look at these terms more closely.

Christ is the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to God the Father except by Him.¹⁹ He founded one Church—the Catholic Church. Catholic means universal. This is to say, Catholicism is the one religion founded by God for the proper worship of God that is to be observed throughout the universe.

It is practically an adage that what your enemies honestly think of you says much about what you are. All demons are Catholics. Hell is full of Catholics. Do not take that the wrong way, because heaven is full of Catholics too. This would appear to indicate that if you are not Catholic in this life, you will be in the next, when the fullness of truth is revealed.

¹⁸ von Balhasar, Hans Urs. *Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved?* San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988.

¹⁹ John 14:6.

Q: How are demons Catholic? I thought demons were opposed to all things Catholic.

A: Demons are Catholic in their worldview. This is no accident, nor is it so because Catholics say it is. The demonic understanding of how the universe is ordered comports with the manner Catholics believe it is. If things were the other way around, it would insinuate that Catholics might arbitrarily have injected their views into how demons are thought to operate, but this is not the case. Through centuries of study and observation, we have learned that what demons know to be true is what we know to be true, because that truth came from God.

For instance, in both the Old and the New Testament, you will find evidence of the Catholic view of authority. Satan, and by extension all demons, abide by these precepts. Satan can do nothing unless God allows him to. We see this in the Book of Job.²⁰ In the Gospels, Christ tells Simon Peter that Satan desires to “sift Peter like wheat”²¹ – in other words, to thresh him, to destroy him utterly – except that Satan cannot unless God permits it.

Q: How do we know this? If we set Scripture aside for a moment – how do we know that this is true of demons?

A: They’ve said as much.

Q: The demons? I thought there was a Scriptural prohibition against talking with demons.

A: There is. I presume you are referring to the proscription of divination and mediumship. That holds true in this context as well. Exorcists are trained not to engage in needless banter.

Demons are liars and cheats. Unless they are compelled in the name of Christ to tell the truth, they will lie. They will also attempt to bargain with the exorcist to have him cut the session off. We are trained to ignore this, and to order the demon to be silent unless it is answering questions pertinent to deliverance. But, getting back to your question, in terms of practicality I do not see how you can carry out an exorcism without some form of communication or another.

Q: Describe the means of communication you use. Do you speak to the demon out loud?

A: Yes, mostly.

Q: What do you mean by “mostly”?

A: When I speak to the demon, I use my voice. When the demon speaks, it predominantly uses the body of the possessed individual as its mouthpiece, but not always.

²⁰ Job 1:6-12.

²¹ Luke 22:31.

Q: And when it doesn't, how is it that you perceive what it is trying to tell you?

A: The shortest way to put it is: telepathy. This is not a novel concept. Even without expressly using that term, St. Thomas described it in the thirteenth century.

When we speak, we use words to form sentences. Words are the building blocks of meaning. But we don't want to just pass along the individual words, we want to convey a full thought. This thought is a concept. In speaking with you, I order my words to form concepts, and my voice transmits those words to you. It is then up to you to interpret those words, hopefully in the manner I desired, so that you might grasp the concept I wish to convey; otherwise, there is confusion between us.

Spirits do not have voices similar to ours. They do not rely on words to transmit concepts. When they converse, they literally download—as it were—an entire volume of understanding into another spirit's mind.

Q: I understand you may have experienced this—maybe that's what you meant a moment ago by "mostly" communicating with them using your actual voice. How would you describe the act of suddenly coming to grasp a thought that originated from outside of yourself?

A: It can be unsettling. Sometimes, you grasp the concept word by word, as when you engage in dialogue with someone. Rarer still, you take the concept as a whole, as though it were an intuition, and your mind has to unpack the meaning. This can be confusing at times.

Q: What is it like?

A: Let us say I wanted to share with you everything there was to know about ice cream. If I used my words, I could tell you that it is cold, sweet, creamy, and so on. Assuming I could identify every quality of ice cream and recite these to you in a way you might understand, our method of communication would take a long time.

Let us now assume that instead of words, I could put into your mind sensory knowledge of what each of those concepts is. Because you have eaten ice cream before, you already have memories of what it is like to enjoy an ice cream cone. You can recall the smell, feel, taste, image, et cetera. Understanding the context is important to grasping the meaning. For instance: outside of the context of ice cream, cold might mean standing out in the snow.

When you consciously recall your memories, they have a context. You willed that these impressions be brought to the fore of your mind. When they arrive, you were expecting them. It is like intuiting the contents of a piece of mail by its envelope. When a letter from the utility company arrives, and you know the company only writes to send you a service bill, you can reasonably predict this envelope will contain a bill. You know this from the context of your dealings with the company.

Now let us assume it was not you who called up those memories. All of a sudden, your mind begins considering these things independent of any given context. You are now trying to put together a puzzle without knowing what it ought to look like. It becomes a guessing game. Sometimes, you can parse out what it intends to mean, but other times it is not so clear.

Q: Then what do you do?

A: When in doubt, ignore it and press on with the session. It's a distraction. If the demon refuses to make sense, keep beating on it until it submits.

Q: What information might an exorcist want to obtain from a demon?

A: The colloquy ought to be kept narrow, tailored predominantly toward the person's liberation. To that end, the exorcist will ask the demon's name, along with the number of demons present. It is also crucial to know the time and the sign of its departure.

Q: Let's take these in turn. Why the name?

A: For practical reasons. You want to know with whom you are speaking. In session, after the demon has manifested, the possessed person from time to time experiences periods of lucidity. And then, not all demons are expelled at once. Generally, the weakest are the first to leave, while the stronger ones tend to stay for longer. That is why you ask how many there are.

Q: How do you know whether you are speaking with one demon or another?

A: They have their cues.

Q: Like what?

A: Different speech patterns, different personalities. Some are terribly violent; others laugh incessantly. Some resort to profanity. Others are silent. There is no way to cover them with a blanket description.

Q: And why their names, particularly? Practicality aside, what purpose is served by knowing the demon's name?

A: When each angel was created, it was given a particular destiny and gifts with which to carry out its purpose. The best example is St. Michael the Archangel. He was responsible for expelling Satan from heaven. When Satan thought himself to be like God, Michael countered with, "Who is like God?" which is the meaning of Michael's name in Hebrew. Thus, we are given to understand that each angel's name tells us something about its character and destiny.

Q: What about the sign of departure? What does that mean?

A: Spirits by nature are invisible. Barring a sign, we would have no way of knowing whether they have departed. Because they are liars, they have been known lay low and pretend to have left to fool the exorcist into believing the person has finally achieved deliverance. This is why we compel them in the name of Christ to be truthful and reveal what the sign of their departure will be.

Q: Why can't they lie when you invoke Christ?

A: Christ controls all of spiritual warfare, down to the minutia. He knows everything—how a possession began, what caused it, what it will take to end it, when it will end, and the sign that it is over. If Christ compels a demon to speak the truth, it must speak the truth, just as when He tells it to leave, it must leave, its complaints notwithstanding.

Q: What is a sign of departure like?

A: It differs from case to case. I am familiar with cases where the sign given was a knock at the door despite there being no one there, or the overhead lights flickering three times. At times, the sign can be violent. A fellow exorcist told me he once had a sign whereby all the windows were blown out.

Q: The windows exploded?

A: Yes. Outward. As though a wind from inside the building pushed them out of their frames from within.

Other times, the possessed will go into what looks like a religious ecstasy. He does not appear to be aware of what is around him, yet he is fixated on something only he is able to see. Later, he relates that the Blessed Virgin, an angel, or a saint appeared to him. Some even say that the ceiling disappears to allow for a view of heaven. Others say that when the demon leaves the body, the floor opens up, and they catch a glimpse of hell as the demon is plunged down below.

Q: What is the extent of the exorcist's authority over demons? We know he can order them out of the victim, but what else can he command them to do?

A: We must be very clear here. Scripture tells us that Christ did not grant everyone authority to cast demons out, nor did He grant this authority to every baptized Christian. That is what the Protestants believe, and it is a dangerous mode of thinking. Christ bestowed this authority upon His apostles. We know this because, in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, a group of first-century Jews familiar with the exorcism practices of St. Paul attempted to cast out demons in Christ's name as he did. Not only did they fail, but the demon beat them within an inch of their lives.²²

What is more, Christ did not grant unconditional authority over demons; only authority to cast them out.²³ Therefore, a priest acting in the name of Christ may command a demon to do what is necessary to expel it. Thus, the exorcist commands the demon to not harm anyone, to remain still, to keep quiet unless spoken to, and to answer truthfully.

Q: Tell me about lay deliverance ministries. I'm made to understand that these are groups of well-meaning Christians who pray over people and lay hands upon them when they suspect a person suffers from demonic activity. Some of these are overseen by a Catholic priest, but I've heard that some are conducted in laypeople's homes with no priest in attendance.

A: That is ill-advised.

Q: Why?

A: There is nothing wrong with a prayer group. I myself have a prayer team for whenever I go into session. But my instructions to them are clear: they are to stand back, pray, and observe. The exorcist must retain control of the session and everyone in attendance. All others are instructed not to interact with the demon. With few exceptions, they are not to interact with the possessed either.

Now, this other setting you have described, this lay ministry, I find problematic. Laypeople should not be imposing hands on other laypeople. The imposition of hands is a sign denoting hierarchy. Bishops lay hands on men to ordain them as priests, with the understanding that priests are subject to bishops. That connection is absent among laypeople. Except in extremely limited circumstances, laypeople do not have authority to cast demons out of other people.

Q: Why wouldn't they?

A: There are three things you must understand about demons. The first is they will do nothing unless they are compelled. This includes the possession of a human's body. They do not go in unless they are forced—say, by another demon—and once they are in, they do not leave until they are forced out.

²² Acts 19:13-16.

²³ Mark 16:17.

Q: Didn't you say a moment ago that demons seek to possess people? Why should they refrain from doing something they might want to do, unless they are forced into doing it?

A: Despite whatever solace might be afforded in possessing someone, they know that they will be subjected to torment—from God, from an exorcist, or from other demons. An exorcism may be tough on everyone involved, but it is brutal for the demon. When a demon is eventually cast out of a person and into hell, its fellows will berate it for having failed at its task. What is more, the demon knows that its actions are contrary to the will of God. As a result, these actions are objectively foul, and it knows this. It also knows it will be judged at the end of time for its misdeeds, and its eternal punishment will be all the greater as a result.

The second thing is that demons are legalists. They are literally lawyers from hell.

Q: Hm.

A: Because they can perceive the universe to a much finer degree than we can, their understanding of the natural law exceeds ours. They are also vastly more intelligent. We have no hope of winning if we debate them.

Q: So a *Devil and Daniel Webster*²⁴ scenario is out of the question?

A: I'm afraid so.

Third, they play by God's rules, not ours. Because they are more powerful than any of us, even if we could convince one to do what we ask, it would still refuse because we do not have the power to compel its obedience.

The only thing they obey is power, and power couples with legitimate authority. The only power accessible to humanity that surpasses that of the demons is God. Without the proper authority to serve as a conduit, one's relationship to that power becomes attenuated.

Laypeople are not configured to Christ in the manner necessary to conduct a solemn exorcism. Baptism alone does not suffice, not even Holy Orders in the case of a priest without faculties from his ordinary.

A real-life example is seen where a priest without faculties from his bishop attempts the solemn exorcism of a person who is possessed. Without the grant of authority, the priest has no power to compel the demon's obedience. The demon laughs in his face. But if that same priest were to have faculties conferred, then from that moment forward, the demon's demeanor changes. It fears him, not because of what he is, but because he has the backing of Christ and His Church, against which it knows it cannot stand.

Q: What, then, would you say about folk religions that claim to dispel evil spirits?

A: No baptized Catholic should resort to them.

²⁴ Benét, Stephen Vincent. "The Devil and Daniel Webster." *The Saturday Evening Post*. 24 Oct. 1936.

Q: My question relates to their effectiveness. After all, I think you'd agree that demons are demons anywhere in the world and regardless of what anyone thinks they are.²⁵ How might some tribe on a far-flung Pacific island that has never heard of Christ successfully expel a demon from the body of someone possessed?

A: If demons are demons anywhere, then God is God everywhere. It is by the power of Christ that they are driven out.

Q: But we just established that this tribe has no notion of the Christian faith.

A: It does not matter. In the complete absence of Catholic rites, God nonetheless observes the charity of those who work to relieve the suffering of others who are possessed, even if they have no idea who Christ is. This remains a mystery to us, short of saying that God is merciful. But this act of His mercy serves as testimony that He exists, and that He wants them to know the true faith.

For baptized Christians, this is another matter altogether. Baptism initiates a person into the kingdom of God. He becomes obligated to live his faith, and to do so requires that he learn his faith. A Christian should know better than to turn to incompatible faith practices. This is called vain observance—behaviors that do not promote faith in the one true God.

Q: Can you give me an example of vain observance?

A: Belief in luck is a big one. Luck, magic, and superstition are all the same thing, and all are inimical to faith. A lucky rabbit's foot has no power to influence your life circumstances, but believing it does causes you to repose some of your faith in an inert object when instead all of your faith should rest in the person of the living God.

Likewise, the certain indigenous practices that have caught on of late, like the burning of sage or smudging, are superstitious. Those objects have no power in themselves to bring about the desired effects—in this case, the removal of evil spirits. Any belief that they can do this is misplaced.

And then there are things of the Church, sacraments and sacramentals. Sacraments were instituted by Christ to confer grace, while sacramentals are blessed objects of devotion that promote faith. Your baptism was a sacrament; the holy water used in the ritual was a sacramental. None of these constitute magic, but if used incorrectly, they can result in vain observance.

²⁵ Psalm 95:5. "For all the gods of the Gentiles are devils..."

Q: How might a something holy—a sacramental, in this instance—be used in a vain manner?

A: Holy water reminds us of our baptism. When used piously, it has the effect of removing venial sin. Vain observance would be blessing yourself “for good luck,” as I have heard some people do when they board an airplane. No—you bless yourself to ask God to impart the blessing. It is also licit to ask for God’s protection during the flight. It is not proper to seek good luck from holy water. It cannot do that. That is not what it is for.

Q: Earlier, you explained how authority is like a valve for power. A close coupling of the two results in one’s being able to compel a demon to leave. I also see how attenuation leads to a demon retaliating against someone without authority, as in the case of St. Paul and the Jewish exorcists. But I feel we’ve overlooked something. What is it about authority that prevents retaliation from a demon?

A: Things done in a proper manner produce right order, which comes from God. God desires the observance of right order. And so, where the authority of Christ is properly invoked, He will typically not allow retaliation. This is not to say the possessed or the exorcist will never experience negative effects that are the demon’s doing, but generally, Christ blocks the demon from retaliating.

Q: Why wouldn’t He?

A: What kind of question is that?

Q: An honest one. Why would Christ block the ill effects of demonic possession in some instances but not all? Or to some people but not everyone? Particularly when His name is properly invoked and everything is done according to plan?

A: Because God is God, and you are not. God never tests anyone beyond their capacity; and even in the worst of trials, God’s grace abounds.²⁶

Q: Let me ask you this: how does someone become possessed?

A: The term you may hear among exorcists and people who work with them is “portals.” These are the doorways—figuratively speaking—through which demons enter into the lives of people. There are many, but they mostly all boil down to one form of sin or another.

²⁶ Romans 5:20.

Authority is meant to provide and protect others, but one cannot benefit himself of a system to which he does not subscribe. Because sin is a violation of the order established by God, it takes the sinner out from under the protection of God. By his voluntary act, he has spurned God and God's authority. Apart from God, the next most powerful force opposed to God is Satan. There is no gray area here; a person is either in one camp or another.²⁷ That is why sin, in any of its forms, is a primary doorway to possession. Venial sins can be thought of as cracking open the door, while mortal sins throw the door open wide.

On occasion, severe physical or mental trauma may serve as the portal for demonic activity. Superstition is another. The practice of magic, divination, and the occult also are major contributors to demonic infiltration.

Q: If sin leads to possession, is it fair to say the opposite is true; that a life without sin is a life without the risk of possession?

A: I would say yes, in general. Because sin is the cause of separation from God, the natural effect of each and every sin is to move the sinner under the authority of something that is not God, and by that I mean demons. In essence, possession is what ought to happen upon the immediate transgression of any one mortal sin—possession, or death. This typically does not occur by the mercy of God.

Q: You say “typically.”

A: Possession and death certainly can occur at first instance, because it ought to, these being the natural consequences of sin. St. John Bosco tells of a youth under his care who was struck dead upon commission of his first and only mortal sin, and he went straight to hell.

Q: How did St. John Bosco come to know this?

A: Firsthand. His guardian angel took him to hell and he saw the boy there. He recognized the boy. He wanted to save him but could not, because the boy had already died and been judged.²⁸

Q: What do you look for in a person whom you suspect is possessed?

A: We run a thorough battery of tests to ensure it would be appropriate to perform an exorcism. These consist of investigations into the person's mental and physical health. Once we are sufficiently convinced that an exorcism is needed, we look for such things as inexplicable knowledge, inexplicable strength, antipathy toward holy things, preternatural fluency in languages, and a gamut of other factors.

²⁷ 1 John 3:8. “He that committeth sin is of the devil: for the devil sinneth from the beginning.”

²⁸ Bosco, John. *Forty Dreams of St. John Bosco*. Fr. J. Bachiarello, ed. Charlotte: TAN books, 2012.

Q: Which of these is the most important?

A: They are all important. Relying too heavily on just one or two may result in your falling prey to a clever hoax. Generally, the more signs are present, the more confidently you can diagnose a case of actual possession, but it takes time and experience to hone your judgment.

Q: I've heard that there are verbal challenges exorcists use. The one I am familiar with is: "Who is the Word of God made flesh?" It's based on the first epistle of John, which reads: "Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God."²⁹ The idea is that spirits who are not from God are unwilling to admit He became incarnate. Is this phrase one that you have used in the past? How effective is it?

A: Verbal formulae are useful as diagnostic tools. There is power in name of God, which is why we invoke the name of Christ. This would explain the efficacy of the passage you cite.

Q: What efficacy? How is it efficacious?

A: A demon will not want to utter the name of God. That is why they speak in epithets. Rarely do they call holy persons or things by their name, because to do so aggrieves them.

The form of the challenge—as you call it—is usually a phrase with which the listener is unfamiliar. The exorcist speaks the phrase and asks the person suspected of demon possession to repeat it. The aim of this challenge is to see whether the person responds as expected. Sometimes they do. Other times, they do not. If they do not, that is one piece of evidence tending toward possession. They might remain silent, or yell, or cry, or carry on in an inappropriate manner. They might also respond in what sounds like gibberish but is actually the phrase spoken fluently, but backward, or with certain letters removed.

However, if they do respond as expected, it may be a sign of no possession, but then again, some demons are more resilient against certain holy things than others. Some demons withstand holy water or application of a relic to the body without cringing; while others cannot stand them at all. Because of this, the Church takes a prudent approach to diagnosing suspected possession, essentially ruling out all natural causes for the situation.

Q: What formula do you use personally?

A: "Oh Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee."³⁰

Q: That's it?

A: That's it.

²⁹ 1 John 4:2.

³⁰ The phrase spoken by the Blessed Virgin to St. Catherine Labouré in 1830, when the Mother of God requested that medals be cast bearing these words. These medals are now known as miraculous medals.

Q: But this does not invoke the name of God, so how does it hold any sway with demons?

A: Immediately after the fall of man, God ordained that the Virgin Mary would crush the head of the serpent, Satan.³¹ The head is the place of pride. What is more, to be struck there is to be dealt a killing wound.

Now consider Satan. At one time, he was the pinnacle of creation on both the natural and supernatural order. The Blessed Virgin is a human being, beneath the angels in the order of nature. But in terms of supernatural grace, she possesses more than all of creation put together. Her humble cooperation with God opposes Satan's prideful rebellion. This results in great humiliation for Satan. She is, in a manner of speaking, his polar opposite, and thereby his nemesis. He cannot stand the Blessed Virgin, nor can he withstand her when she becomes involved in deliverance, because Christ, her son, sends her.

Q: When you speak this formula, what signs do you look for?

A: I look to see whether the supposedly possessed person will repeat the line as I have spoken it.

Q: And when they don't, what do they do instead?

A: They might ignore me, pretending not to have heard what I said. They make up an excuse—"I don't have time for this"—and attempt to leave. They might say some other prayer, or they will speak gibberish. But they will not say this prayer.

Q: Why would the fact of her Immaculate Conception aggrieve demons so terribly?

A: To put it briefly, because it is a special grace that mankind did not deserve, and that the angels did not receive. Despite demons knowing that we are beneath them in every way except potentially in grace, they envy us. Predominantly, they envy the fact that, through grace, we can attain the positions in heaven they lost when they rebelled.

In addition, demons envy the mercy God shows us. God did not give the angels an opportunity at redemption. Instead, He became a man. With His suffering and death on the cross, He paid the price of our transgressions for all time, for all humanity that was and will be. He did no such thing for any angel. The Immaculate Conception, therefore, is recognition of God's mercy. It is the fulfillment of His promise that one day a descendant of Eve would stamp on the head of Satan.

³¹ Genesis 3:15.

Q: What other diagnostic tools might an exorcist use?

A: Before we get too far ahead of ourselves, it bears mentioning that the Church always tries to vet out any natural causes for a suspected possession case. To that end, we seek assistance from medical professionals who analyze the subject's physical and mental health. If, in their opinion, there is no medical justification for why the subject behaves as he does, that is an indication that we are dealing with something beyond merely the natural.

Now, to answer your question, here is another tool an exorcist might use. Suppose I have three boxes. Into each, I place one object, and then shut them. This is done outside of the subject's view so that he cannot see what is inside. Then, I bring the boxes to the subject and set them down onto a table before him. Inside the first is a mundane object—a coin perhaps, or a prayer card, but nothing of great spiritual significance. Inside the second is a first-class relic of a saint. Inside the third is a consecrated host.

Without showing him the boxes' contents or insinuating what is inside, I point to each box, one at a time, and ask how it makes him feel. In true cases of possession, the subject will not have much to say of the box containing the mundane item, the subject might express unease at the box with the relic, and the subject will be greatly disturbed by the box with the blessed host within.

This test is useful for determining whether, and to what extent, the subject has occult or hidden knowledge. By this I mean: can the subject discern information that would otherwise be unknowable through the physical senses? It also serves to demonstrate the subject's degree of antipathy of toward sacred objects, another factor we use in diagnosing these cases.

Q: So far we've discussed how a person can become possessed by his own actions, but tell me: in your experience, is it possible to become possessed through the actions of others?

A: In general, I would say no, because possession tends to require moral agency on the part of the person who becomes possessed. However, there are exceptions, the biggest being the generational curse.

Q: Tell me about that.

A: There are two operative terms here: generational, and curse. A curse is the opposite of a blessing. When you ask for a blessing, you make an appeal to God so that He may bestow His grace. A curse is requesting that harm be inflicted upon another. The curse is generational when it attaches to the lineage of the affected person. He and his descendants will be affected.

Q: How do these come about?

A: What tends to happen is that a person with authority over others commits a grave sin whose effects carry over into ensuing generations. For instance: a father, the head of his household, commits adultery. Because he had a sacramental marriage in the Church, not only has he committed adultery, he has also committed sacrilege by breaking his matrimonial vows. Presume this act alone suffices for a demon to attach to the lineage. Everyone under his headship is now subject to demonic activity. Not only his children, but his wife, and if the woman he slept with should conceive a child, it also will be affected, as early as in the womb.

The person who sins may not be cognizant of the generational effects, but these effects are no less present. Sometimes, though, a person commits a sin with the specific purpose of bringing about a generational attachment. On the lower side of intentionality, you have the spirit mediums who believe they can take spirits into their bodies and eject them when they deem fit. The truth is, the bodily rights those mediums give the spirit are not extinguished when the spirit claims to have left them. At the upper side of the spectrum you have people who willfully offer their children for possession.

Q: Why would anyone do that?

A: Material advantages, naturally. These people are so obsessed with the ruthless pursuit of worldly goods that they would offer the bodies of their innocent children to demons while they are still alive—though others prefer to offer them already dead.

Q: Who are these people?

A: It could be anyone—ordinary people going about their ordinary lives. However, I am coming to understand that their masks are beginning to slip. The media are becoming wise to the ghastly practices of abortionists. You will not find it reported in the large outlets, but smaller media companies are bringing these abuses to light.

It is all related, you see. The murder of innocents is a sin that cries to heaven for vengeance;³² and what better bargain is there for the succor of the demonic enemies of God?

Exactly what, indeed, do some abortionists do with the human remains?

I would have you understand that not all abortion clinics dispose of them as medical waste.

Q: What, then, is the intersection between abortion and demons?

A: Abortion is not a novel problem—and it is a problem, mind—but it is not as new as most think it is. It has existed for ages, under different names. We do not call it infanticide because we associate that term with the practice of savages from a bygone era.

Us, sophisticated men and women of the modern age, savages? Perish the thought.

³² Genesis 4:10.

It is also for this reason that we do not call it child sacrifice. In practice, however, that is precisely what it is: the ritual killing of an innocent human being. Aside from the name, all that has changed is the setting. Instead of some pagan priest sacrificing infants at an altar, we have men and women in medical scrubs doing the same thing in a clinic.

In keeping with the discussion at hand, the killing is decided upon by one who possesses authority over the child—that is, one or the other of its parents, the child’s natural guardians. As such, the act goes beyond a violation of the natural law—it cuts against the very grain of justice. In short, God abhors the practice. Demons, knowing this, will want to promote the behavior.

Demons are remarkably consistent, so much so that they are boring. This is so because, aside from being strict legalists, they have the least freedom of all creatures. Hell is indeed a jail, and Satan is its warden in residence. It is because of this consistency that we have detected patterns of behavior among demons. I am painting with a broad brush here, but it has been conjectured that abortion is an end-result of demonic interaction with a society at large.

Here is how I understand it to work. Like the angelic choirs, hell is structured into a hierarchy. Satan is chief among the demons. Under Satan there are five generals: Baal,³³ Asmodeus,³⁴ Leviathan,³⁵ Lilith,³⁶ and Baphomet.³⁷

³³ Baal was prominent among the gods of the ancient Canaanites. Its name denotes lordship, bearing a similar meaning to “master,” and used likewise in certain contexts. The cult of Baal was known to require human sacrifices; specifically, the immolation of first-born children. This would not have been lost on Abraham, himself a Canaanite, when God directed he sacrifice his only son, Isaac. The prophet Jeremiah observes that the practice of child sacrifice continued well beyond the days of Abraham; notably, at Hinnom (Jeremiah 32:35), a valley south of Jerusalem. Because of its sordid past, it was unfit for use as anything but a place to burn the city’s refuse. Hinnom is therefore associated with Gehenna, the lake of fire, the eternal punishment of hell. By extension, it is associated with Baal because of the human sacrifices offered to the demon there.

³⁴ Asmodeus is the demon who afflicted Sarah in the Book of Tobit. Sarah had been married seven times before she met Tobias. Each time, Asmodeus had killed her husbands on their wedding nights before the marriage could be consummated (Tobit 6:14). This was through no fault of Sarah’s but instead on the part of her suitors, for only Tobias could rightfully marry her. The demon’s connections to sexual lust and impropriety can thereby be inferred, but so to can a connection be made to contraceptive mindset. Sarah could have no children except with Tobias; all of her prior marriages were barren because the previous men approached her, and the sexual act, in an improper manner.

³⁵ Leviathan has been associated with envy, which is fitting considering the behavior which it drives in mankind. It should not be confused with the Old Testament leviathan, which has been described as a large sea creature. Because the leviathan sea creature was thought of as great and powerful, it has been used as a metaphor for Satan’s power. However, Scripture makes it apparent that the leviathan is a material creature, subject to being pulled out of the sea by a hook (Ezekiel 32:2) or a net (Daniel 14:22). It is therefore not a spirit, as demons are, because demons cannot be detained by material implements. Ergo, the demon known as Leviathan is a separate entity.

³⁶ Ancient traditions of the near-east associate Lilith with infant death. References to her are found in Isaiah 34:14. Depending on the translation, she is depicted as a lamia (a child-eating monster from Greek myth), a screech-owl, and a night creature. None of these place her in a favorable light, as all equate her with odious wasteland beasts. She also features in the *Alphabet of Ben Sirach*, a work dating to between 700 and 1000 AD. While this account is apocryphal, it sheds light on what people from that time considered the demon to be. Here, it serves as Adam’s first wife and equal, unlike Eve, who was subject to Adam. Lilith is the very picture of a home-wrecker, having abandoned Adam to copulate with Samael, an archangel. The demon thenceforth became associated with sexual depravity.

³⁷ With the exception of Satan, Baphomet would appear to be the demon most in the contemporary public consciousness since 1966, when the Church of Satan adopted its visage to represent Satanism. The best-known depiction of Baphomet comes from Eliphas Levi, a nineteenth century French sorcerer, who rendered the demon as a goat-headed humanoid with androgynous features sitting cross-legged. The origin of its name is unclear. One theory

If hell were a corporation, its product generally would be impurity. Each of the five generals can be thought of as a division head responsible for sales of a product. So, just as an engine manufacturer might have a primary sales division, a marine and airline sales division, and a parts sales division, hell has demons who specialize in different types of sins.

Baal drives impurity in the form of moral degradation, with particular emphasis on fornication. Once a society reaches a level of moral depravity, next come Asmodeus, Leviathan, and Lilith. Asmodeus promotes homosexuality in men. Leviathan and Lilith promote homosexuality in women, but in separate ways. Leviathan tends toward the masculine aspect—inciting women to assume qualities that are properly masculine. Lilith approaches the sin from the vantage of seduction, espousing bisexuality and androgyny.

These four demons convince humanity into believing sexual contact is only about pleasure. Make no mistake, sexual congress is good, but it must occur for the right reasons and in the right contexts. That pleasure might result from it is ancillary to what it is about; but making pleasure its reason for being is to lose sight of what it is, and what it is for.

Doing what is right and required of us is difficult. When men seek only pleasure, they shirk their duties as men. This is the very definition of effeminacy. If men do not carry their burden, then someone will perceive themselves as having to do so. Here is where gender role confusion emerges. Women start to behave like men.

Once they have had a taste of the perceived advantages of this conduct, women become intractable. They will not willingly release what they believe is proper to them, because they fear the loss of any advantages that come with the masculine role—money, prestige, power, casual sex without responsibility. All of these advantages ultimately boil down to pleasure, because people either derive pleasure from having them, or, as in the case of money, by exchanging them for pleasure.

Women so committed to acting like men will seek to emulate them in other ways; such as by taking wives (so called) themselves. When you have men taking men as wives, and women taking women as wives, there will come an intermediate category who cannot discern which of the two they are.

We know these practices offend God. St. Paul writes that no fornicator, adulterer, nor the effeminate, nor those who practice homosexuality shall enter the kingdom of God.³⁸ But worse is yet to come.

Afterward comes Baphomet, the demon of child sacrifice. Once a people have been sufficiently desensitized to the purpose of sexual contact, they will abhor the responsibilities that arise from it. This is to say: they will view the natural product of sexual contact, the child, as a curse and not the blessing it is. In their view, there remains no other option but to do away with the child, lest it impede their pursuit of pleasure.

holds that it is a corruption of Muhammad or Mahomet. Occult historian Montague Summers suggested the name comes from two Greek words—*baphe* and *metis*—which together would render: “absorption of knowledge.” If this holds true, then it would explain why occultists, New Agers, and their ilk flock to Baphomet. The demon offers the empty promise of occult knowledge. Knowledge being functionally equivalent to power in the right settings, the draw is readily appreciable.

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. “Know you not that the unjust shall not possess the kingdom of God? Do not err: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, Nor the effeminate, nor liars with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor railers, nor extortioners, shall possess the kingdom of God.”

Q: I take it more demons than just these are responsible for the current goings-on today.

A: There are. The Church knows the names of many demons. These, however, are particularly important under this context.

Q: What about damned souls? If the saints in heaven intercede for our salvation, what role might damned souls play in spiritual warfare, if any?

A: Damned souls are not spirits in the same sense as an angel is a spirit. When a human being dies, he becomes a disembodied soul. We know this because, at the last judgment, he is reunited with his body, and both his body and his soul will experience his eternal fate. Ergo, humans do not become angels when they die. Angels are angels and humans are humans. Furthermore, human souls, when encountered on earth, react dissimilarly to exorcism prayers, but I am getting ahead of myself.

Q: We'll come back to that.

A: Because a human soul is not an angel, it does not have the powers of an angel. Nor does the fact of one's death confer upon the soul the powers of an angel. A damned soul, having removed himself from under the authority of God, falls under the command of Satan. Angels being more powerful than human beings, the wicked angels compel damned souls to do their evil bidding under threat of punishment. And indeed, I know damned souls play a role in spiritual warfare because I am familiar with an exorcism in which the spirit identifies itself as the soul of Judas Iscariot.

Q: The apostle Judas?

A: The same, the betrayer of our Lord.

Q: How can we be certain this isn't some demon named Judas, or one passing himself off as Judas Iscariot?

A: Good point. Demons are liars, remember. I did not conduct the exorcism in question, but I am given to understand that certain details led to the credible belief that it was indeed Judas.

Q: Circling back to the question, if demons are so powerful, why would they use human's souls? Couldn't they just do the work themselves?

A: The community of the damned in hell is a mockery of the communion of saints in heaven. What is more, there is strength in numbers. Pious tradition holds that one-third of the angels fell from grace and became demons. At the start, already they were outnumbered. This is not to say any number of creatures can hope to defeat God, who is infinite, but the impossibility of their aims has never stopped a demon from trying.

If Satan perceives a damned soul might lend him an advantage in leading additional souls to hell, he will grasp at the opportunity. I will explain. Let us assume that a damned soul was someone's father in life. Satan will use this soul to attack the children because the office of fatherhood confers authority over one's children. This does not mean this soul can compel obedience in his children still living, but it does have advantages with respect to the children that other souls do not.

Q: A moment ago you mentioned something about the souls of the dead appearing to the living. Please explain.

A: When a person dies, there are two potential outcomes. They are heaven and hell. Both are mutually exclusive and permanent. Nothing imperfect enters heaven,³⁹ but only those who die in the state of mortal sin merit hell. If this were all there was to it, there would be a gap in our understanding of the afterlife, because some people die who do not merit hell and yet are imperfect. What would become of these people?

As a result, we have a third outcome: purgatory, which is heaven's safety net. St. Paul tells us that people in this category are saved, "yet so as by fire."⁴⁰ Thus, we understand that purgatory is a temporary state where souls bound for heaven must first undergo purification before they arrive there.

It is rare, but God may allow a soul undergoing purgation to appear before the living to beg for prayers. These do not exhibit behavior anticipated of demons. They do not "haunt" houses or needlessly cause a ruckus. They do not shirk at the sight of the cross. Nor do they flinch when holy water is used or when rebuked in the name of Christ.

Generally, they beg for masses to be said for their benefit, in reparation for their sins while alive—something no demon would do. Once sufficient penances have been done, they depart. Sometimes, when this occurs, one may experience a final apparition as though to signify that the soul has at last moved on to heaven, but this too is rare. Typically, the sign of a purgatory soul's departure is that it never is witnessed again.

Q: What would you call such a phenomenon?

A: This is a purgatory ghost.

Q: Right, but if it involves a ghost, wouldn't you consider it a haunting?

A: No. Hauntings, so called, are not part of the Catholic lexicon. The manifestation of a purgatory ghost is more appropriately called an apparition.

³⁹ Revelation 21:27.

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:15.

Q: In the same sense as the Virgin of Guadalupe was an apparition?

A: To be clear, the Blessed Virgin is not a ghost. The manifestation of a purgatory ghost is an apparition in a way similar to how the appearances of the Virgin were apparitions. However, it is not appropriate to think of an apparition of the Virgin in the same manner as the manifestation of a purgatory ghost.

Q: You use different words to describe the act of one or the other appearing—apparition and manifestation. Where is the distinction?

A: A major distinction is that a purgatory ghost has been separated by death from its body. When it manifests, it makes appear to our senses something that would otherwise be invisible—that is, the invisible spirit of the person in purgatory.

As to the Mother of God, pious tradition informs us that she was assumed, body and spirit, into heaven. Thus, she has her body. St. Catherine Labouré touched the Blessed Virgin during one of her apparitions. By this reckoning, when the Virgin appears, she appears in the flesh, not at all in the same manner as a purgatory ghost might.

Q: Let's shift the subject back to demons. If several demons can possess a person at once, does each do its own thing, or do they coordinate their efforts?

A: Demons work in packs. In cases of possession, you will never find them working alone. So yes, it is fair to say that they cooperate, albeit grudgingly. There is no joy to their work. Unlike us, they know without error that their actions are unambiguously offensive. Even they find their work repugnant. Worse, they are aware that they will suffer all the more for their misdeeds when at last the Day of Judgment arrives.

Q: Then why do they do it?

A: Several reasons. Demons are bullies. The weaker ones fear the immediate punishment they will receive from the stronger ones if they do not comply. Also, they derive cold comfort in vindicating themselves against God by attacking mankind. They want mankind to share in their miserable state, which is hell.

Q: Misery loves company.

A: Truer words were never spoken.

Q: So if demons work together, there has to be some manner of coordinating their efforts. How do they do this? Do they talk to each other?

A: Certainly.

Q: What about?

A: In session, they speak about what they will do to the demon engaging the exorcist if the demon gives up information that might frustrate their efforts.

Q: How can you tell this is what they're talking about?

A: They will tell you. The demon speaking to the exorcist will sometimes refuse to answer questions, stating that the other possessing spirits will punish him for this. The exorcist must press on until he obtains the information he needs.

Q: What is the rite you use in a formal exorcism?

A: *Rituale Romanum*, section eleven, Major Exorcism. It underwent changes in 1999, but prior to then, it had been the same ritual since 1614.

Q: You're saying the Church lacked a ritual for expelling demons until 1614?

A: Oh no. That year was when the ritual was promulgated more or less in the form we have today. The actual means themselves had existed since Christ walked the earth. The year 1614 was when the Church instituted a uniform procedure whereby potential cases could be vetted and actual cases resolved.

Q: How long does it take for the formal rite of exorcism to result in the complete deliverance of someone who is possessed?

A: Every case is different. Deliverance can take months to a year, even multiple years. In my estimation, the length of time it takes is increasing.

Q: Why would that be?

A: You must understand, certain things done in the Church function by virtue of the work done, while others do not. The Sacrament of Baptism, for instance. If the priest has valid holy orders, then his act of baptizing you bestows the graces concomitant to the sacrament. This is because sacraments function *ex opere operatio*—by virtue of the work performed. Thus, it does not matter whether the priest who baptizes you is holy or wicked. An *ex opera operatio* function operates without regard to the worthiness of the doer.

In contrast, the rite of exorcism is not a sacrament but a sacramental. All sacramentals function *ex opere operantis*—according to the state of the one performing the activity.

Exorcism, in particular, operates *ex opera operantis Ecclesiae*—according to the state of the Church. I do not think I need to elaborate much on the state of the faithful, but these are not virtuous times in which we find ourselves.

And so, while the earnestness of the person wanting deliverance is a factor, we must also consider the state of the Church at large, which has its own impact on the ritual's efficacy.

Q: I think that is all the questions I had. Thank you very much for your time, Father.

A: God bless you, and be well.

END OF INTERVIEW