



DIVISION OF METAPHYSICS
RESEARCH & APPLICATIONS

File Number: 04-291220

Release Date: March 26, 2021

FIRSTHAND ACCOUNTS OF INCUBI AND SUCCUBI EXAMINED THROUGH THE LENS OF CATHOLIC SCRIPTURE AND HOLY TRADITION

ANTONIO SIMON, JR.

INTRODUCTION

The colloquial understanding of the incubus can be expressed as a “lewd male demon who pursues women for sex.”¹ Its female counterpart, the succubus, is thought of as a “demon who takes the form of a beautiful woman in order to seduce men.”² These fanciful descriptions work a disservice upon the reader, because they are based on so superficial an understanding of these creatures that they fail to warn of their perfidy. What they truly are, and what the Catholic Church has known them to be for centuries, is demons – ancient, malevolent beings with a take-no-prisoners attitude toward mankind, their enemies.

Predominantly, this topic has been one of academic discussion in the spheres of anthropology, metaphysics, and theology, although it has in recent years been broached in such practical fields as clinical psychiatry.³ This study seeks to define incubi and succubi in a historical Western European context, delineate their theoretical and observed capabilities, and proffer evidence against a prevailing contemporary viewpoint which holds these creatures to be little more than licentious accompaniment for lonely nights.

THE NATURE AND BEHAVIOR OF ANGELS AND DEMONS, GENERALLY

Incubi and succubi are demons. Of this, there can be no doubt. There exist no angels except the holy and the demonic, and there is no way incubi and succubi can be considered holy. No holy angel would utilize so momentous an act as the procreative union in a manner for which it was not designed, because, as Aquinas teaches, to use a thing contrary to its nature is to do it violence.

¹ Guiley, Rosemary Ellen. “Incubus.” *The Encyclopedia of Demons and Demonology*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2009.

² Guiley, Rosemary Ellen. “Succubus.” *The Encyclopedia of Demons and Demonology*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2009.

³ See: Grover, S. Aseem Mehra and Devakshi Dua. “Unusual Cases of Succubus: A Cultural Phenomenon Manifesting as Part of Psychopathology.” *Industrial Psychology Journal*. 2018, 27, 1, 147-150; Grover, S. and Aseem Mehra. “Incubus Syndrome: A Case Series and Review of Literature.” *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*. 2018, May-June, 40, 3, 272-275; Raschka, L.B. “The Incubus Syndrome. A Variant of Erotomania.” *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*. 1979, October, 24, 6, 549-553; Malik, Y.K., and Sandeep Grover. “Incubus Syndrome in Late-Onset Schizophrenia.” *Journal of Geriatric Mental Health*. 2019, 6, 2, 99-100.

Moreover, as angelic creatures have no proper gender, these demons necessarily accomplish the union by false pretenses. This pattern of conduct is abhorrent to proper order. Behavior which cuts against the natural order of things is not befitting of a holy angel, but suits a demon perfectly.

To more fully understand these particular creatures, one must have some grounding in the overarching class of beings to which they belong. A demon is a type of angel. St. Augustine and St. Jerome observe that “angel” denotes the creature’s office (i.e., what it does). Put succinctly, angels are “ministering spirits.”⁴ Scripture provides examples of angels serving in various capacities: as attendants of God’s throne,⁵ as functionaries who implement God’s will,⁶ as guardians of entire species of creatures⁷ and individual human beings,⁸ and as messengers of God’s revelation to mankind.⁹

As to their natures, St. Thomas Aquinas posits that angels by nature are spirits.¹⁰ While they have been known to assume physical bodies¹¹ (or, it can also be argued, that which to the human senses only appeared to be physical bodies¹²), in their default state, angels are perfectly incorporeal,¹³ disembodied intelligences.¹⁴ The appearance humanity ascribes to an angel is metaphorical to its essence. To depict an angel as a powerful humanoid with wings only serves to inculcate in the viewer that the angel possesses capabilities surpassing those of mankind. The image nonetheless falls short of being an accurate rendition of what the angel actually is.

When contemplating an angel as an immaterial intelligence, it is easy to fall prey to the trap of thinking they are impersonal beings. This is likely so because of the emphasis human beings place upon material bodies, not only when discerning one’s own sense of self, but that of others. As much is apparent in how easily a person can perceive a reflection in a mirror as his own, and not that of someone standing next to him. One subconsciously presupposes his own personhood and links it to what his senses tell him is his body. From this, one can extrapolate like from like. If one is a person, then others who resemble oneself must also be persons.

Humanity is so acclimated to making immediate, seemingly subconscious decisions premised upon data collected by the physical senses that it is easy to think of material reality as all there is. If seeing really is believing, then to keep out of sight is not merely to go out of mind but to remain permanently outside the realm of the possible. For any who adhere to this view, it may be difficult to admit to the existence of invisible, insubstantial angels, and well-nigh impossible to accept they are more powerful than we are.

⁴ *The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version*, Hebrews 1:14.

⁵ Job 1:6; Daniel 7:9-10.

⁶ 2 Samuel 24:15-17.

⁷ Matthew 6:26.

⁸ Psalm 90:11; Matthew 18:10.

⁹ Luke 1:11-15; Luke 1:26-35.

¹⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 50, Art. 1.

¹¹ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 51, Art. 2; Tobias 5:5-6.

¹² Tobit 12:19. The Archangel Raphael, in the guise of a young man, explains to Tobias how it was that he appeared to eat and drink with him at Raguel’s feast: “I seemed indeed to eat and to drink with you: but I use an invisible meat and drink, which cannot be seen by men.” See also: ST I-I, q. 51, art. 3. Aquinas demonstrates that the angelic organism does not require sustenance because the material body it assumes is not alive in the proper sense; rather, it is self-sustaining.

¹³ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 50, Art. 1.

¹⁴ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 51, Art. 1.

The notion may also arise of angels as bland, robotic entities lacking any mark of personal individuality. This may seem all the more true given Scriptural evidence for the enormous quantity of angels in existence.¹⁵ Aquinas himself admits that angels exist in exceedingly great numbers.¹⁶ And yet he counters that, as a class, angels are super-unique in that it is impossible for two angels to be of the same species.¹⁷

Consider how the entire human race belongs to a species. Two unrelated human beings living continents—or even centuries—apart will still share ninety-nine percent of their genetic makeup. What sets them apart is that one percent that determines their individuality. With angels, each individual is as different from the other as a bird is to a fish is to a beetle. Each and every singular angel is the sole member of his own species.

Building on this point: angels are unique individuals not merely as they relate to each other. Each has his own personality apart from every other being exhibiting the signs of personhood, and that would include all of humanity. So not to merely presuppose that angels are persons, observe: the study of philosophy has distilled metaphysical personhood into six factors. Scriptural evidence demonstrates angels possess all the attributes necessary for them to be considered persons, in spite of the fact that angels are not human.

One of the above-referenced factors is the use of language. While angels do not utilize language in the formal sense, they are capable of accomplishing that which human beings must rely upon language to achieve. This is to say: angels are capable of expressing discrete, nuanced, and high-level concepts to each other and to mankind.¹⁸ Moreover, Scripture solidly establishes that angels exhibit volition, with the fall of the angels¹⁹ being the prime example of angelic free will.²⁰ That a third of the angels fell to perdition²¹ while the others remained loyal to God reflects angelic capacities of self-awareness, introspection, rationality, and moral agency.

This aside, judging by the many Scriptural encounters between angels and mankind, it is safe to presume that God is a being who delegates. Since angels are the functionaries through whom God implements His will, it should suffice to say that angels are demonstrably volitional beings, capable of utilizing their judgment in matters entrusted to them.

Nor can angels be thought of as a diffuse cloud of amalgamated creatures with no way to tell where one ends and the other begins. Aquinas teaches that angels are super-unique. Thus, there must be a way to tell one from another, notwithstanding that they lack physical bodies. In this vein, consider: everything that exists is built up of something else. As among a stone, a plant, an animal, and a human being, while it is true that atoms form the most basic building block for each of them, the natures of these four could not be any more different. A stone is not alive; a plant is alive but immobile; an animal is alive and mobile, but cannot reason; a human being is alive, mobile, and can reason. Among them, the human being can be set further apart from these others as a creature exhibiting qualities of personhood, traits shared only with the angels, and with God.

¹⁵ Daniel 7:10.

¹⁶ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 50, Art. 3.

¹⁷ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 50, Art. 4.

¹⁸ Tobit 6:16-22; Judges 13:13-20; Luke 24:1-10; Mark 16:1-8.

¹⁹ Revelation 12:7-9.

²⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 59, Art. 3.

²¹ Revelation 12:4.

These qualities – existence, life, personhood, the ability to reason – cannot exist in a vacuum. They require a being to possess them. The being serves as the point of reference. In a manner of speaking, these qualities must have an “envelope” to contain them. To put it concretely, a heart and a set of lungs alone do not make a human being, despite that all human beings require a heart and lungs to remain alive. These organs must be contained within an envelope if they are to contribute to the proper function of the organism. This envelope, for want of a better term, is a body. If angels did not have bodies as such, they could hardly be spoken of as individual persons. Each angel must therefore have his own body, so to speak, if he is to be recognizable from another angelic individual, notwithstanding that their bodies lack material substance.

On the surface, this would appear to contradict Aquinas’s observations on whether angels possess bodies,²² but note the distinction. Here Aquinas posits that an angel is not a composite creature like a human being, which consists of body and soul. He also notes that angels must have an incorruptible, self-subsisting form.²³

That an angel is self-subsisting means he needs nothing by way of sustenance. That he is incorruptible means he does not degrade as material things are wont to do over time or with use. Put another way, nothing that is essential to the nature of an angel’s spiritual body can be separated from it. His body is perfectly self-contained, and thereby, can neither be corrupted nor alienated from its constituent parts. Lastly, and most pertinent to the discussion, Aquinas relates these attributes to the angelic **form**. This is crucial. A form is a configuration. To draw a comparison, the bodies of all living creatures can be said to be patterned configurations of organs. If angels could be said to have organs, they would have only two: an intellect,²⁴ and a will.²⁵ Hence, the particular configuration that denotes an angel generally, along with the demonstrable individuality of one angelic entity from another, necessitates that an angel must be possessed of some body that distinguishes it from other angels.

The foregoing discussion on angels has served to develop the following point, which is this: all demons are angels. All that differentiates one from the other is its individual motivation.

The holy angels venerate God through service to Him. In contrast, demons seek only revenge against God for their current state of self-inflicted eternal punishment. Despite their ambitions, demons are aware that vengeance is a futile exercise. They cannot harm God directly. However, they also know God laments in the loss of His beloved children to perdition. This is why demons resort to the cowardly tactic of attacking those whom they can hurt – mankind, beloved among God’s creatures.

Like the faithful angels, demons evince the qualities of personhood. They have names, exhibit emotions, can speak, express desires, and demonstrate intelligence. Some theologians may at times refer to a demon with the impersonal pronoun “it” to depersonalize the being, or as a reminder to avoid engaging it as one would other people. Whatever the case may be, this usage of the language is technically incorrect. Demons are not animals or objects but people – albeit terribly evil ones. To forget this is to downplay how dangerous they are.

²² *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 50, Art. 1.

²³ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 50, Art. 5.

²⁴ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 59, Art. 2.

²⁵ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 59, Art. 3.

THE CAPABILITIES OF INCUBI AND SUCCUBI BY VIRTUE OF THEIR SPIRITUAL NATURES

Incubi and succubi are angels in terms of function, spirits by nature, and demons by choice. These states are permanent and irrevocable. Because demons retained their angelic natures after their fall, much of what can be said of the holy angels applies to demons. Likewise, because incubi and succubi are demons, what can be said of demons applies to them as well.

Like their sanctified counterparts, demons are vastly intelligent, purely spiritual intelligences capable of feats that exceed human capabilities. If they can be characterized in one word, they are hateful. This shared hatred of God is why demons despise humankind, each other, and even themselves.

Demons were created in a state of virtuousness, but became evil through sin by an act of their free will. As a result of their choices, their punishment is hell. However, it is a misconception to think all demons are trapped in hell, unable to leave. While it is true hell is a place, it also a state of being. Specifically, hell is a state of permanent detachment from God. All demons experience hell in this sense, but not all demons are confined to the place called hell. After the fall, some demons were bound in chains and kept in darkness,²⁶ while the rest were cast down to earth.²⁷

Scripture describes demons as being wicked,²⁸ lying,²⁹ unclean,³⁰ and malicious³¹ spiritual entities. They seek to associate themselves with man.³² They can cause physical and mental conditions in people, including: blindness,³³ muteness,³⁴ seizures,³⁵ fever,³⁶ bodily infirmity (here, in particular, a condition that prevented a woman from standing erect for eighteen years),³⁷ and antisocial behavior.³⁸

²⁶ 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6.

²⁷ Revelation 12:9.

²⁸ Acts 19:15.

²⁹ 1 Kings 22:22.

³⁰ Zechariah 13:2.

³¹ Isaiah 19:14.

³² Leviticus 20:6.

³³ Matthew 12:22.

³⁴ Id.

³⁵ Mark 9:17-21.

³⁶ Luke 4:39.

³⁷ Luke 13:11.

³⁸ Luke 8:26-27.

Demons tempt man into offending God through sin. Scripture attests that demons can incline human beings toward particular ideations and behaviors such as: pride,³⁹ bondage⁴⁰ (slavery), fear⁴¹ (timidity), unfaithfulness⁴² (which contemplates fornication and adultery, but also a turning away from God), Antichrist⁴³ (apostasy, irreligion, heresy), pythonism⁴⁴ (divination), error,⁴⁵ jealousy⁴⁶ (generally, but also as between spouses), deception and departure from morality,⁴⁷ and even murder.⁴⁸

It is through a person's sins that a demon may attempt to make a claim of right over the sinner,⁴⁹ a concept which underpins theories of demonic possession. To put it briefly: all legitimate power and authority ultimately derive from God. Power is the capacity to make things happen. Authority is the context of power. The more one distances oneself from authority, the more attenuated power becomes.⁵⁰ Sin, which is an act in contravention of God's authority, distances one from God. Because authority exists not for the benefit he who holds it but for the protection of others, a sinner cannot hope to benefit from the protection God's authority affords him if he does not act in accordance with that authority.

Demons are universally malevolent. There is no camaraderie among demons, nor can demons extend true friendship to anyone. To do so would require the virtue of charity, which they lack. As such, they are utterly incapable of love. This is particularly important with respect to incubi and succubi. Mankind tends to associate the sexual act with love, or at the very least, companionship. It is not beneath these creatures to foster pleasant emotions in their victims so to better disguise their motives. Any time a demon's behavior might appear to be motivated by charity, it is not actual love that impels it but the selfish belief that the demon might further its agenda from the contact. That agenda is the ruin of human beings. Because the end-point of a demon's lifespan (so to speak) is not capped by death as with human beings, demons can afford to play a "long-con" if it would ultimately result in the loss of a person's soul to hell.

As to their capabilities, the following is a non-exhaustive discussion of what demons can do, so to illustrate some extent of their powers. Demons can infest people, places, animals, and things. While they cannot work miracles because these belong solely to God, demons can produce lying wonders—false miracles.

³⁹ Proverbs 16:18.

⁴⁰ Romans 8:15.

⁴¹ 2 Timothy 1:7.

⁴² Hosea 4:12.

⁴³ 1 John 4:3.

⁴⁴ Acts 16:16.

⁴⁵ 1 John 4:6.

⁴⁶ Numbers 5:14.

⁴⁷ 1 Timothy 4:1-3.

⁴⁸ 1 Samuel 19:9-10.

⁴⁹ John 8:44; 2 Timothy 2:26.

⁵⁰ This is not to say the power of God is diminished by one's own sin; rather, with each sin, a sinner moves himself further under the authority of something that is not God.

With respect to matter: they can transport and manipulate objects; they can make things vanish without affecting them directly by interposing some invisible agent that hides the object from sight; they can manifest light and heat from no apparent natural sources; they can cause objects to spontaneously combust; they can prevent harm to something consumed in flame; they can quench sources of light and heat; they can manipulate the ambient temperature; they can obstruct the normal operation of mechanical and electronic devices.

Demons have access to mankind's lower faculties: the body, senses, memory, imagination, and emotions. They can make a sick person appear cured; they can make a healthy person ill; they can cause people and things to levitate; they can instill any positive or negative emotions such as love, companionship, lust, fear, and anger; they can imitate religious ecstasy and generate false stigmata; they can cause people to speak in tongues—both actual languages and nonsense babble; they can generate illusions perceptible to any of the senses; they can manifest as apparitions purportedly sent by God. In rare cases, they can be the direct cause of a person's death (such as by stopping the heart), or the indirect cause (such as by causing a fatal traffic accident, or inciting one person to murder someone else⁵¹).

They can cause all sorts of physical and mental conditions. They can fool a person into thinking he has special powers like clairvoyance, telepathy, evocation, and the ability to know future events or secret information.⁵² They can produce mental fatigue by bombarding a person with constant and persistent distressing imagery. They can bring about confusion by forcing a person to consider incongruous or incompatible concepts.

Demons are also capable of transporting objects into a person's body without having to cross the intervening space or even break the person's skin. In a 1928 exorcism conducted in Iowa by Father Theophilus Riesinger,⁵³ the possessed individual was observed over a twenty-eight day period. The demon made sure to keep the afflicted person malnourished—the victim could not hold down more than a teaspoon of milk daily. Yet, during the worst of the demonic activity, those present witnessed the possessed individual vomiting gouts of foulness, literally buckets at a time, several times a day. The quantities of what was vomited up exceeded the volume of a normal human's digestive organs. Moreover, the contents did not comport with the food the victim regularly consumed, as she was on a highly restricted diet.

With all the things demons can do, there remain many things they cannot. Demons cannot create a substance. To make something out of nothing requires the application of infinite power. Only God commands infinite power, and so only God can create a substance *ex nihilo*, or transform the essential nature of things.

Demons can, however, manipulate substances to make them appear as though they were created from nothing, but this is just sleight of hand. For instance: they can take an object already in existence and move it invisibly, so that when it appears before the viewer, it will seem as though the object was created then and there.

⁵¹ Niezgoda, Joseph. *The Lennon Prophecy: A New Examination of the Death Clues of the Beatles*. New York: New Chapter Press, 2008.

⁵² Acts 16:16.

⁵³ Vogl, Rev. Carl. *Begone Satan! A Soul-Stirring Account of Diabolical Possession*. Rev. Celestine Kapsner, trans. 1935 Rpt. St. Michael House Press, 2004.

Likewise, and for similar reasons, demons cannot bring a dead person back to life. They can, however, produce the illusion that a person is back from the dead. One way is by mimicking the person's voice, appearance, and mannerisms. Another is by causing an affected person to suffer a mortal illness, only to remove the condition and have the person make a seemingly "miraculous" recovery.

Demons cannot prophesize. They do not know the will of God short of what they can deduce from the circumstances. Since they are creatures within the flow of time, they cannot look ahead to relate future events to those in the present.

Like the holy angels, demons are capable of perceiving thoughts directed to them. These thoughts do not need to be spoken out loud; it suffices to form the thought with the intent that it be understood by the demon. Exorcists have observed that, while in session, when they mentally project a question to a demon with the *energumen* (the person afflicted by the demon) in their immediate presence, the demon may provide the precise answer to that inquiry by speaking aloud through the energumen. Usually, the exorcist phrases the question in a language the energumen ought not to know. When the demon replies, its answer is in that language.

Demons are not capable of illumining the minds of human beings. To some degree, the holy angels are capable of inserting concepts and inspirations into human minds that were not already there, but demons cannot do this. When demons attempt to skew a person's judgment, they can only work with what they find in that individual's memories without adding to them. Thus, they cannot make a man born blind imagine colors if he has never seen them. They can, however, alter these memories, which can thereby have the effect of creating a new mental object that was not present before. Memories that have been forgotten are also fair game, as are thoughts not subject to easy recall, such as those in the subconscious. The reverse is also true: demons can make one forget things he should otherwise have been able to remember.

Despite having access to a human's imagination and memories, demons cannot simply kick open the door to one's mind. A person afflicted by a demon remains capable of keeping his innermost private thoughts to himself. Similarly, demons cannot subjugate a person's will. Through possession they can greatly impair the exercise of the will, but this is only because so much of one's power of volition is tied up in his body, over which demons assert rights. The will, and by extension the soul, remains inviolate.

For all the demons' power, God is always in control of every aspect of spiritual warfare. Culture has from time to time likened spiritual interplay to a game of chess between two masters, where each is always one move from total defeat. This is not the case. The reality is that God owns the chessboard, controls all the pieces, and makes all the moves. Nothing in the spiritual realm occurs without the consent of God. This does not mean God expressly wills misfortune on His children; rather, that if God should permit such a thing to occur, it would ultimately result in some greater good.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ See: 1 Corinthians 10:13. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able..."
See also: Romans 5:20. "And where sin abounded, grace did more abound."

In this light, demons are the weakest, most wretched creatures that exist. In spite of their natural abilities that exceed those of mankind, they are worse off than parasites and viruses. They have no freedom to act. They cannot do anything except when God allows, and only in the manner God permits. Barring extremely rare circumstances, they cannot affect a person without his consent. When they do intervene in the lives of humankind, it is only to serve as a means by which they might be further humiliated.

Demons exist in constant, terrible fear of each other and of their ultimate destinies. They cannot escape the dread of knowing it is only a matter of time until they will be judged for all the souls they conducted to perdition. Their accomplishments bring them no comfort, because they will be judged all the more harshly for these perversions. They hate themselves, their fellows, their jobs (so to speak), and everything else, and they can do nothing to change any of this. Demons would evoke sympathy if it were not for their constantly trying to get us to share their eternal misery, to say nothing of how deserving they are of this fate.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN THEOLOGICAL DEMONOLOGY AS PERTAINS TO INCUBI AND SUCCUBI

More so than with the holy angels, the nature of demons, and the manner by which they organize themselves and their affairs, remains a question of theological debate. There have been many attempts to describe the infernal hierarchy, the most notorious example being S.L. MacGregor Mathers's⁵⁵ *The Lesser Key of Solomon*, which is looked to in occult circles as one of the most influential works on the topic of goetia. MacGregor Mathers relied heavily upon Jacques Collin de Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal*. de Plancy, in turn, took his inspiration from Voltaire, who was a satirist and fervent anti-religionist.

Like his literary forefather Voltaire, de Plancy was a skeptic, but in 1830 he converted to Catholicism to the chagrin of his literary admirers. Following his conversion, de Plancy sought to harmonize his *Dictionnaire* with Catholic theology, but to poor results. Despite his efforts, his work cannot be considered a true and faithful exposition of metaphysical reality. Moreover, because so much of MacGregor Mathers's work rests upon de Plancy's *Dictionnaire*, MacGregor Mathers's *Lesser Key of Solomon* must be deemed unreliable as well.

Therefore, resort is made to Catholic theologians. Writing in sixth century, a Syrian monk known as Dionysius the Areopagite was among the first to postulate a comprehensive structure for the angelic host. His work would be elaborated upon by many after him, including Aquinas.

The eleventh century saw the publication of *De Operatione Daemonium* by Michael Psellos, a Byzantine philosopher at Constantinople. His work was attempted to pin down the general characteristics of demons by extrapolating from what was understood about holy angels.

⁵⁵ MacGregor Mathers was an acquaintance of Aleister Crowley when the two were members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

Psellos reasoned that, since the bodies of holy angels were known to be luminous and insubstantial, demonic bodies therefore had to be dark and possessed of some matter, albeit matter with mysterious properties that were not well understood. Psellos, and others following his line of thinking, observed that this substance had to permit the demonic organism to become invisible at will and travel extremely fast. And, despite exhibiting some properties of physical matter, the substance had to allow demons to pass through or enter other physical objects, because it was already known that demons were capable of entering into the bodies of animals and people. This notion that demons are quasi-material spirits would later be derogated in favor of thinking of them as purely spiritual beings, which remains the Catholic view to this day, although works such as the *Daemonologie* of King James and those of both Girolamo Menghi and Ludovico Maria Sinistrari would argue otherwise.

In the twelfth century there arose an account of Pope Sylvester II as popularized by Walter Map, a Welsh clergyman. Map asserts Pope Sylvester maintained a succubus named Meridiana as his lover and confidant.⁵⁶ There are serious doubts as to the veracity of this claim, not least of which is that Map composed his book over a century after the death of the pontiff in question. Moreover, in his time as now, the book was not considered a work of theology. It is an anecdotal account of Map's life and times, with particular emphasis on court intrigue and popular rumors.

In the thirteenth century, Aquinas put forth an organizational scheme for both angels⁵⁷ and demons.⁵⁸ In it, he establishes that there must be order among evil spirits. Prior to their fall, all angels belonged to one of nine choirs. Each angel was assigned a particular destiny and given capabilities suitable to its function. Notwithstanding their fall from grace, all demons retained their natural abilities. Some demons were created stronger than others. Since the angelic substance is not subject to degradation, those powers which are natural to a particular demon will never wane. Hence, some demons will always be more powerful than others in terms of natural capacity. It is through this power that they compel obedience among their ranks.

⁵⁶ Map, Walter. *De Nugis Curialium (Courtiers' Trifles)*. M.R. James, trans. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

⁵⁷ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 108.

⁵⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 109.

By the fifteenth century, the preternatural connection between demons and witchcraft was firmly established in the mind of continental Europe. Incubi and succubi were viewed as playing important roles in the recruiting of witches. Pope Innocent VIII's papal bull of 1484, *Summis desiderantes affectibus*, expresses the Catholic religion's stance on witchcraft at the time:

It has recently come to our ears... [that] many persons of both sexes... give themselves over to devils male and female⁵⁹ by their incantations... cause to perish the offspring of women, the foal of animals, the products of the earth... as well as men and women[;]... and that, at the instigation of the enemy of mankind, they do not fear to commit and perpetrate many other abominable offences... to the insult of the divine majesty and to the pernicious example and scandal of multitudes.

The Church here acknowledges several facts: the existence of witches; witchcraft's preternatural implications; and that witchcraft in itself is wrongful, but all the more so from the harm caused through it. Interestingly, the bull recognizes male and female witches, with appropriately-gendered demons to which they might "give themselves over." The greater meaning of this expression comes to light in *Malleus Maleficarum*, published two years afterward, and attributed to Dominican friars Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger.

According to Kramer, no one was a witch in the proper sense unless he first entered into a pact with a demon. A human being was thought incapable of performing ostensible miracles through his efforts alone; nor could mankind command supernatural power unless it was the will of God that he should. Barring the agency of God or an angel acting on God's behalf, the only alternative left to account for occurrences beyond the ambit of the natural sciences was preternatural intervention.

To generate preternatural feats, preternatural power was required, and the source of this power was demons. Since demons are naturally more powerful than man, man could not hope to cow demons into submission. The only way to get demons to do what a human wanted was through an alliance, forged with the hopes that the demon would live up to its side of the bargain. It happened to be the case that for some, the pact spoken of necessitated sexual congress with a demon, a concept echoed in later centuries.

Despite the connection between witches and demonic sexual coupling, it should not be presumed that witches were the only persons engaged in physical congress with demons. An account from sixteenth century Spain relates the story of a Franciscan nun named Magdalena. When she was five years old, she beheld a man clothed in a brilliant mantle, whom she believed was Christ. Her fame as a mystic only increased during her adulthood. On the Feast of the Annunciation in 1518, Magdalena discretely revealed to her abbess that she was pregnant. She believed that, like the Blessed Virgin, she had conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Upon the orders of the Archbishop of Seville, she underwent a medical examination. Three experienced midwives concluded that Magdalena was pregnant, yet her virginity was intact.

⁵⁹ By this it may be understood that the pontiff makes reference to a demon's apparent, not actual, gender. Gender is a property of a physical creature capable of sexual reproduction. Demons are spirits. Spirits are incorporeal and do not reproduce. As a result, spirits are genderless. By virtue of their angelic natures, spirits are more properly referred to as masculine. However, this does not preclude them from taking on appearances contrary to their natures.

Christmas Eve saw Magdalena secluded in a separate dwelling prepared for her. There she remained for three days. Afterwards, she reported having given birth to a beautiful male child at midnight on Christmas. The child radiated light like the noonday sun.

The morning after Christmas, the child mysteriously vanished. The midwives examined Magdalena again, observing that her breasts bore signs of having nursed an infant. Her body no longer exhibited signs of pregnancy and her virginity remained intact. As a sign of the “miraculous” events, her black hair had turned blonde, but when her hair was cut, the trimmings reverted to black.

These and other prodigies drew the attention of Europe’s royalty. Queen Isabella of Castile was convinced of Magdalena’s holiness. Charles V, then ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, requested a piece of her nun’s habit be brought to him, with which to swaddle his newborn son, Phillip II. Magdalena was thought of as a saint walking the earth, although some of her contemporaries – St. Ignatius and St. John of the Cross – remained skeptical.

In 1543, Magdalena became gravely ill. A priest was sent to hear her deathbed confession. When he entered her cell and put on his stole, Magdalena went into a convulsive fit.

A doctor was summoned. He examined her while she was undergoing what resembled a bout of religious ecstasy. She did not respond when pricked with a needle; however, when the doctor jabbed her with a needle dipped in holy water, this elicited a groan. All the while, Magdalena appeared to be unaware of her surroundings. She would have had no way of knowing the second needle had been immersed in holy water.

An exorcism ensued, conducted by the Reverend Don Juan of Cordova. His investigation concluded that Magdalena was demonically possessed. The details of her exorcism are nothing short of horrifying.

Magdalena cried out in a loud voice that she had made a forty-year pact with the devil, and that she was dying because that time period had nearly run its course. She also admitted that the apparition of the dark-haired man she had witnessed when she was five years old was not a vision of Christ but of a demon.

Throughout the exorcism, Magdalena was witnessed convulsing violently on the floor. While she did not seem in control of herself, certain of her actions demonstrated volition. She would attempt to bite anyone within reach. Other times, she would laugh uncontrollably at inappropriate times, or scream in pain, or wickedly berate the priests. The postures her body assumed were obscene, often imitating the act of copulation. On several occasions she appeared to have been held aloft by unseen hands, then thrown to the ground.

Eventually she revealed that she had been fornicating with a demon she identified by name, one of the two who had been influencing her for decades. Under compulsion, the demons divulged they took great pride in the iniquities they had wrought through her. One of them admitted that, after it had let down its disguise and revealed itself to be hideous, it demanded that Magdalena become its wife. In return, the demon had promised her otherworldly pleasures as well as the appearance of sanctity. Magdalena had accepted its offer before her entry into the religious life. The demon then resumed its disguise as the dark-haired youth by whom she would eventually become pregnant.

It was here that Magdalena recanted the prior account of her mysterious pregnancy. She claimed she did indeed give birth, but what escaped her body was not a human child but a massive caterpillar.

In light of the foregoing, it may seem that Magdalena, a nun, does not fit the mold for the common perception of a witch. However, upon closer inspection, the hallmarks become apparent: Magdalena transacted with preternatural forces to obtain material advantages during her lifetime. In exchange, she offered her body to demonstrate the earnestness of her bargain.

The sixteenth century also saw the emergence of Nicholas Remy, a French jurist, demonologist, and witch hunter. As a young man, he witnessed a fair number of witch trials. During his career as a judge, he presided over witch trials for more than a decade. His zealotry earned him the title of the “scourge of witches.”

Remy wrote *Demonolatry*, a witch-hunter’s handbook. It was an overnight success, eclipsing the earlier *Malleus Maleficarum* as the de facto operations manual in some parts of Europe. Citing St. Justin Martyr and other early Catholic theologians, Remy disseminated the idea that demons could take on the appearance of people both living and dead. More to the point, he posited that encounters with the ghosts of the dead were really apparitions of demons masquerading as the deceased. This becomes important in the context of incubi and succubi, as eyewitness accounts occasionally relate the victim encountered a demon in the guise of a deceased loved one who appeared to be very much alive.

Also writing in the sixteenth century, Girolamo Menghi authored several books in the years leading up to the Catholic Church’s promulgation of the Roman Rite of exorcism in 1614. A Franciscan friar, he was an exorcist and scholar in the realm of demonology. His best known works were *Flagellum Daemonum* and *Compendio dell’arte Essorcistica*, both from the year 1576. Menghi devoted much scholarship to the phenomenon of the demonic pact, whereby a human witch pledged himself to one or more demons. To prove his fidelity to the demonic forces, a prospective witch engaged in sexual intercourse with a demon. The witch was then assigned a demonic familiar spirit through whom false miracles might be worked.

Similarly to Dionysius’s scheme for the holy angels, Menghi’s *Flagellum Daemonum* divides the infernal hierarchy into orders. Each order is loosely classified by habitat (so to speak), sphere of influence, and behaviors. The discussion begins with demons which he categorizes as *l’infimo choro*. In Menghi’s view, these spirits are of the lowest designation because they act with the least malice. This is not to say they are friendly to mankind. These demons are undoubtedly dangerous and evil. It is in this context that Menghi discusses incubi and succubi, which, by their particular characteristics, are most suited toward inciting sins against chastity. These, he asserts, are not purely spiritual entities but must be composed of some matter if they are to interact sexually with mankind.

After Menghi comes Ludovico Maria Sinistrari and his work, *Demoniality: Or, Incubi and Succubi*. Sinistrari of Ameno, as he is otherwise known, was a seventeenth-century Franciscan friar. He was an exorcist and professor of theology in Pavia. Like Menghi, he was an expert on demonology. His written works influenced the carrying out of the inquisition across Europe. *Demoniality* was of particular interest to those tasked with investigating charges of witchcraft.

Educated man that he was, he undoubtedly had a firm grasp on Aquinas’s metaphysics. Sinistrari was aware of the apparent impossibility of sexual contact between humans and perfectly incorporeal spirits. And yet he points to significant anecdotal and Scriptural proof of this contact to support his observations.

Ultimately, Sinistrari concludes that these spirits must be an intermediate class of creatures if they are capable of successful copulation with mankind: they are below the angels yet above man. In his estimation, the bodies of incubi and succubi must share qualities with both the angels and humans. Like the angels, these creatures' bodies are *subtile*—they move as the angels do and can vanish from sight at will—and yet their bodies must be made up of some kind of matter, albeit a mysterious, more perfect form of it.

The works of Menghi and Sinistrari, while informative, should be approached with trepidation. They should not be taken as the definitive expressions on incubi and succubi, or demons in general. Without the benefit of genuine divine revelation, even the best of hypotheses cannot escape the realm of theological speculation to become the final say on the matter. Both authors make heroic efforts to reconcile the incongruities they perceive. While their positions are well reasoned and as state of the art as sixteenth century medicine would permit, their views represent a minority opinion. Still, the fact that they and their theological forebears should devote such scholarship to the exploration of incubi and succubi demonstrates that Catholicism takes these entities seriously.

INCUBI AND SUCCUBI EXAMINED THROUGH THE LENS OF CATHOLIC SCRIPTURE AND HOLY TRADITION

The concept of incubi and succubi is not peculiar to Catholicism. Arabic cultures consider the succubus a type of *jinn*. In German folklore, it is known as *drude* or *alp*. In Slavic folklore, it is the *mare*. The Baule people of Africa acknowledge the existence of gendered spirit spouses, which, despite being lovely to behold, always regard a person's flesh and blood spouse as a rival. Regardless of the culture naming them, the traditions in which these beings appear almost categorically relate that intercourse with them is hazardous to one's physical or spiritual well-being.

In beliefs of the ancient near-east, the succubus was associated with Lilith. A medieval text known as the *Alphabet of Ben Sirach* tells the story of the first such creature. Although the work is apocryphal, it reveals what was thought of this conceptual proto-succubus. It relates that Lilith was the first wife of Adam, whom she deserted to copulate with Samael, a fallen archangel. The very picture of a home wrecker, she thenceforth became associated with defiling men and inflicting mortal illness upon children.

A reference to Lilith is found in Isaiah 34:14. Depending on the translation, the Bible refers to her by name,⁶⁰ or depicts her as a lamia⁶¹ (a child-eating monster from Greek tradition), a screech-owl,⁶² or some other night creature. None of these place her in a favorable light, as all equate her with odious wasteland beasts. Such passages likely served as the inspiration for European art of the late Renaissance to the early Industrial Revolution, which render these creatures as women with animalistic deformities. At times, they are shown as having birdlike claws, or tails like a snake's.

⁶⁰ *The Holy Bible: New American Bible, Revised Edition*. Bible Gateway, www.biblegateway.com. Accessed 14 Dec. 2020.

⁶¹ *The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version*. Bible Gateway, www.biblegateway.com. Accessed 14 Dec. 2020.

⁶² *The Holy Bible: King James Version*. Bible Gateway, www.biblegateway.com. Accessed 14 Dec. 2020.

Scripture, in the Book of Tobit, makes particular reference to the demon Asmodeus, who afflicted Sarah. Sarah had been married seven times before she met Tobias, her destined husband. Each time, Asmodeus had killed Sarah's former husbands on their wedding nights.⁶³ This grieved Sarah because no man would marry her out of fear that he might be killed next.

Asmodeus is clearly a demon. Archangel Raphael relates to Tobias that Asmodeus's murders are founded upon rights the demon has usurped. In a manner of speaking, the demon seized rights over Sarah such that he was permitted to kill any who attempted sexual conduct with her. But it can also be said that Asmodeus held rights over Sarah such that he could determine with whom she had sexual relations. The difference between the two is the point of reference. It remains unclear whether the demon asserted rights over the lives of those whom it killed, or over Sarah and her choice of whom she could marry. Notwithstanding, the fact Asmodeus unjustly asserted these rights to the detriment of one party or the other is in keeping with demonic behavior.

Raphael tells Tobias that the rights Asmodeus usurped properly belong to Tobias—to wit, Tobias is the only man who may legally marry Sarah—and that he is entitled to claim these rights.⁶⁴ This evidence inclines one to consider Sarah's prior marriages as somehow illicit. The wrongfulness is ascribed not to her but to her potential suitors, especially considering that only her marriage to Tobias may be deemed valid. From this, an inference can be drawn that Asmodeus is associated with improper sexual activity.

In still other traditions, these entities are referred to as “spirit wives” or “spirit husbands” as well as “marine spirits.” The name, marine spirit, merits brief reflection. It immediately calls to mind the fourth order *Acquatile* spirits in Menghi's *Flagellum Daemonum*. It also appears to bear a connection with Ezekiel 26:16, but the link is debatable. In pertinent part, the verse reads:

Then all the princes of the sea
shall come down from their thrones:
and take off their robes,
and cast away their broidered garments...⁶⁵

An argument can be made that “princes of the sea” means spirits of the water, in much the same vein as some demons are called spirits of the air⁶⁶ and others are princes over regions of the earth, as in the case of the Prince of the Kingdom of Persia.⁶⁷ Similar reference is made to these entities in Catholic binding prayers used in the modern day:

Lord Jesus Christ, in Thy Name, I ask thee to bind and silence all powers and forces that do not accept Thee as Lord and King, in the air, **in the water**, in the ground, the netherworld and nature and the spiritual world.⁶⁸

⁶³ Tobit 6:14.

⁶⁴ Tobit 6:11-13.

⁶⁵ Ezekiel 26:16.

⁶⁶ Ephesians 2:2.

⁶⁷ Daniel 10:13.

⁶⁸ Ripperger, Chad A. *Deliverance Prayers for Use by the Laity*. Denver: Sensus Traditionis Press, 2018. (Emphasis mine).

Given the larger context, the stripping of garments has been taken to mean that these spirits will entice mankind into immoral sexual behavior; though the Scriptural connection seems tenuous. However, the term “marine spirit” becomes clearer in the context of African religions.

The identification of spirit spouses as water spirits is a concept present among the Yoruba and Igbo peoples of Nigeria. This particular reference to water likely arises from Nigeria’s location on the Atlantic Ocean.⁶⁹

Among the Yoruba in particular, women who have spirit husbands are thought to be spirits themselves. The belief is that the spirit spouse and the human victim were previously bound in wedlock while in the spirit world. The human spouse, prior to arriving in material reality, petitioned her spirit husband to travel to the human world. Having received permission from her spirit husband, the female spirit is born into the material world as a human woman. However, this assent came with caveats: she was forbidden from having a human husband; her spirit husband could visit and engage in sexual intercourse with her whenever he pleased; and, if she became pregnant by her spirit husband, she would bear their spirit children.⁷⁰

Because a spirit spouse’s human partner is considered a spirit as well, any children of their union would be spirits also. But, due to the incompatibility of the parents’ natures, the chances of the woman becoming physically pregnant from this union and showing the usual signs of pregnancy are low.⁷¹

Having said as much, it is abundantly clear that the Yoruba accept the reality of sexual contact between spirits and humankind. Such encounters sometimes occur while the human partner is asleep. For this reason, these spirits are referred to as *oko-oru* – “midnight husbands.” Notwithstanding that the spirit spouse manifests to her in a dream, when she awakens, the woman will often discover evidence of having had physical sexual contact. These changes in her bodily anatomy are taken as confirmation of the reality of her dream experience.⁷²

What is more, these spirits are not limited to solely this mode of interaction with the material world. Women with spirit husbands report that they obtain all manner of advantages from their spirit spouses – physical protection, provision of necessities, emotional support, and so forth – such that they see no need in seeking a human husband.⁷³

However, this comes at a cost. More so, perhaps, than their flesh and blood counterparts, a spirit husband must be appeased or else it can wreak havoc on its partner’s life. The spirit will demand total commitment. Such fidelity precludes any chance of the woman having a human husband and children.

⁶⁹ Jimoh, Shaykh Luqman. “The Yoruba concept of spirit husband and the Islamic belief in intermarriage between jinn and man: A comparative discourse.” *International Conference on Humanities, Literature and Management (ICHLM’15)* Jan. 9-10, 2015 Dubai (UAE).

⁷⁰ Id.

⁷¹ Id.

⁷² Id.

⁷³ Id.

Should the woman breach this vow, she can expect her spirit spouse to frustrate her efforts. This can manifest in several ways. Women considered attractive and who would otherwise have no problem pursuing men find themselves consistently rebuffed. If and when they enter into committed relationships with men, some misfortune occurs to cut the relationship short. Barring that, should the couple attempt sexual intercourse, healthy and otherwise fertile women discover that they are unable to conceive children.⁷⁴

Skeptical readers may be quick to point out that such misfortunes as befall women with spirit husbands may be attributed to other, non-preternatural causes. It is well to think so. Caution demands tempered mistrust of the preternatural. However, the fact remains that the Yoruba, subjectively at least, ascribe such events to the actions of jealous spirit spouses. Even without accepting the entire body of Yoruba tradition as true, these accounts lend enough evidence to show that spirit spouses are incubi and succubi.

Turning back to Catholicism, the Church does not officially recognize demons of particular types. By this is meant that there are no recognized demons of sexual deviancy, of anger, of drug abuse, or of alcoholism, per se. These are human failings. While demonic temptation may cause one to fall prey to these behaviors, the behaviors are not the demons' natures as such. Thus, it is wrong to think of incubi and succubi as "sex demons" because sexual conduct is not proper to their nature.

Notwithstanding, Catholic tradition maintains that each spirit was created for a particular purpose, and each was given specific abilities to carry out its destiny. These abilities arise from attributes which are proper to their natures. When they fell, the demons retained these gifts, but started to use them in ways contrary to their initial destinies. Thus, it is understood that certain demons exhibit specialties in particular kinds of vices or in driving specific behaviors.

To illustrate: Aquinas is an exemplar of bodily purity. To keep him from joining the Dominicans, his parents and siblings confined him in the tower of his family's castle. They then sent a prostitute to his room, thinking she could dissuade him from a life of priestly celibacy. Aquinas chased her out with flaming torch and locked himself inside. Thereafter, he received a vision of two angels who tied a white cord around his waist. For the remainder of his life, never again was he tempted to sexual iniquity. Holy tradition maintains that the angels who visited Aquinas were sent to guard his chastity—that was their purpose, and they had received qualities from God to allow them to carry out that mission.

With respect to demons, those spirits retained their angelic natures, powers, and specific capacities afforded them to carry out the duties for which they were created. Fallen spirits will use their gifts to spite God, either by aping that which is virtuous, or by perverting it. Since we know from Aquinas's experience that there exist angels who guard chastity, it stands to reason that there are also demons who foster sexual licentiousness. This line of thinking lays the theoretical framework for the existence of incubi and succubi.

⁷⁴ Id.

Incubi and succubi, as individual demons, drive particular behaviors and temptations in human beings. The incubus is thought to exhibit male characteristics, while the succubus is perceived as exhibiting female characteristics. While, generally, female succubi attack men and male incubi attack women, the relations between the apparent genders of these demons and their victims are not strictly always heterosexual. The evidence reflects that certain demons specialize in homosexual male temptation, others in homosexual female temptation, and still others in heterosexual temptation of either gender. There may potentially be others specializing in temptation toward other forms of illicit sexual conduct.

The thought of a female demon might strike the reader as odd, especially when calling to mind that spiritual beings are genderless. While it remains true of demons that they possess qualities akin to those of males by virtue of their angelic natures, demons are predisposed to behaving in a manner that cuts against the natural order. Thus, the succubus is not true to its own nature, having taken on feminine qualities that are unbecoming of it, but which nonetheless promote its aims.

These demons tempt people with illicit sexual conduct. While there is nothing wrong with sexual activity when it occurs under the proper circumstances, what is sinful is sex outside of when and how it is proper. These demons' specialty is to promote affronts to chastity. Note the words of Christ:

You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.⁷⁵

These demons are well-versed in this type of sin. When they manifest visually, they have been known to take the form of someone whom the victim trusts, is in love with, is infatuated with, fantasizes about, or would be powerfully tempted to engage sexually. They may take on the appearance of someone with whom the victim is, or was, in a committed relationship, even a former spouse. They have also been witnessed as looking like attractive strangers, people whom the victims have never met. No matter what form they take, they will assume the appearance of someone with whom it would not be licit to have sexual relations.

⁷⁵ Matthew 5:27-28.

Their goal is the same as that of any demon—to lead people to perdition. A demon can neither give nor receive pleasure, objectively speaking, as it is incapable of this. In fact, it cannot actually derive any pleasure from the sexual act because it lacks a physical body, physical senses, and a proper gender. Given the nature of demons in general, it would probably be fair to say it loathes its purpose for being, and what it must do to fulfill this purpose. Kramer and Sprenger would agree:

Also it must be carefully noted that, though the Scripture speaks of Incubi and Succubi lusting after women, yet nowhere do we read that Incubi and Succubi fell into vices against nature. We do not speak only of sodomy, but of any other sin whereby the act is wrongfully performed outside the rightful channel. And the very great enormity of such a sin in this way is shown by the fact that all devils equally, of whatsoever order, abominate and think shame to commit such actions.⁷⁶

If the demon gets any satisfaction at all from its work, it is in knowing that its actions will lead to the ruin of souls, for whatever that might be worth. All demons hate the work they are compelled to do, even if their tasks are aligned with their greater goal of revenge against God.

Sinistrari, in *Demoniality*,⁷⁷ relates a number of incubi and succubi encounters with which he was personally familiar or which he investigated. The earliest occurred while he was a lecturer at Pavia. The victim, a married woman named Hieronyma, was known in her community as having a good moral character. Sinistrari could discern no motivation for her to fabricate the encounter. Indeed, it appears he believed her, even while remaining skeptical during the inquiry so not to bias his view of the facts.

Hieronyma related the following. Having spent a day kneading bread, she took the dough to her local baker, who instructed her to come back after the bread had been baked. Upon her return, she took her loaves. Among them was an expensive cake, which she knew was not hers, though the baker insisted it was. She took it home that evening and shared it with her family.

The following night, she was awakened by a hissing voice. It asked whether she had enjoyed the cake, insinuating that it had been a gift from he who addressed her. The voice flattered her, remarking upon her beauty, expressing it desired her embrace and the lengths to which it would go in order to have her. Hieronyma then felt as though some invisible person were kissing her cheeks. She made the sign of the cross and repeatedly invoked the names of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin. After half an hour, the entity left her alone, but not for long.

Hieronyma was thereafter approached by a handsome young man whom she had never met. She described him as having green eyes, blonde hair and a beard, and fine clothing. This young man approached her in public to state his amorous intents. He kissed her hands and spoke with her while she was in the company of others, which would have been embarrassing to her as a married woman. And yet, it seemed to Hieronyma that no one else in attendance was able to see the young man.

⁷⁶ Kramer, Heinrich and Jacob Sprenger. *Malleus Maleficarum*. Montague Summers, trans. Honolulu: World Public Library Association, 2010.

⁷⁷ Sinistrari, Fr. Ludovico Maria. *Demoniality: Incubi and Succubi: A Book of Demonology*. 1872. Isidore Liseux, trans. Rpt. London: Forgotten Books, 2016.

After months of having had its advances rebuffed, the incubus became violent. It stole a silver cross which Hieronyma always wore. Jewelry went missing from locked containers. The demon smashed all of her cookware and just as quickly reassembled the broken pots, putting everything back in order as though nothing had happened. It beat Hieronyma, forming bruises all over her face and body. It rearranged the furniture in her house. It stole the family's infant daughter and kept her away from Hieronyma for a time before returning her. It transported a large number of flagstones to Hieronyma's bedroom overnight and arranged them into a wall so high that she and her husband could not leave their bed except with a ladder. Having resolved to wear a Franciscan monk's frock as a penance, she was at church when the demon produced a mysterious gust of wind that blew off all her clothing, leaving her naked in public and thoroughly embarrassed.

This incubus harassed Hieronyma for years. Despite its ill-treatment of her, she never gave herself over to its desires, and persisted in her Catholic faith life. Eventually, the incubus departed, never to haunt her again.

Another incident which Sinistrari personally investigated involved a Carthusian deacon named Augustine. Across several encounters, the demon appeared to Augustine in the forms of a skeleton, a pig, an angel, and even disguised as people with whom the monk had regular contact. As to the latter, the deception was so perfect that Augustine did not suspect anything was amiss until the demon let down its disguise. In one such instance, the demon resembled the prior of Augustine's monastery. Augustine was so completely fooled that he asked the false prior to hear his confession and bless his room in the hopes that these actions would exorcise the demon. In keeping with its ruse, the false prior did everything Augustine requested. Its trickery did not become apparent until it, still disguised as the prior, vanished suddenly before Augustine's stunned eyes. The actual prior had no recollection of having heard Augustine's confession or blessing his room, as he was elsewhere when his apparent body-double performed these actions.

It should be noted that Sinistrari's *Demoniality* takes a sympathetic view toward these creatures, likening them to mischievous spirits who are frustrated or lonely. He is not alone in this view. Francesco Maria Guazzo, a contemporary demonologist, held a congruent opinion. In essence, Sinistrari and others argue that intercourse with these entities is doubtless an improper use of the sex act and thereby a sin; however, that such an act contemplates no affront to religion. Thus, they conclude these creatures are not demons in the proper sense, and intercourse with them is less culpable than when sexual coupling occurs for the purpose of impugning God, as in the case of the initiation of a new witch.

These views are suspect. Sinistrari himself echoes his German forebears in *Malleus Maleficarum* in that these creatures are instrumental to forging infernal pacts, despite his claims that they might not always be employed to this end. Moreover, he admits these creatures assail the virtue of chastity. Thus, on the one hand he asserts that these creatures cannot be as bad as his contemporaries say they are, because the sin they prompt is not as serious as was first thought; while on the other he argues that these creatures nonetheless provoke mankind to sin. When these arguments are reduced to their base elements, it is clear Sinistrari cannot escape asserting that these creatures entice mankind to sexual sin. If this is the case, their behavior is far too similar to demonic activity to be deemed innocent. Hence, Sinistrari tacitly acknowledges incubi and succubi must be demons, despite arguing to the contrary.

With that said, while Sinistrari's observations on the nature and motivation of incubi and succubi may be off the mark, there is consensus on certain facts he relates pertaining to their behavior.

During the early stages of an attack by an incubus or succubus, a victim may experience sleep paralysis, a state in which a person is conscious and aware of his surroundings but unable to speak or move. The victim may feel pressure against his body, as though someone were sitting or lying on top of him, or pinning him down.⁷⁸

At this phase, in rare cases have there been visual manifestations where the demon appears to let down its disguise. Some have reported seeing vaguely human-shaped shadow figures; others have witnessed a figure resembling a hideous old woman known in common parlance as "the hag" who has been associated with succubi in particular. With respect to incubi, there are accounts of an unnaturally tall, svelte humanoid with prodigious male genitalia and somewhat masculine characteristics. These masculine qualities except the genitals are greatly effeminized, such that the creature can be said to have an androgynous appearance. It has been observed as having neither a scrotum nor testes.

When bodily contact occurs, the entity is described as feeling unnaturally cold to the touch as if dead, sometimes even icy. In other instances, contact feels strange in ways that escape precise description. Victims report that the sexual coupling is similar to what might be expected with a flesh and blood partner, except that the experience is "off" somehow—unnatural, shameful, or it makes them feel dirty afterward. Victims claim to have felt a "pins and needles" or "electric shock" sensation during sexual contact. Still others report extreme discomfort, violence, and pain.

Even if one assumes the foregoing eyewitness accounts are perfectly accurate, these depictions cannot be relied upon as faithful representations what these creatures must look like. Recall that a demon is an angel. Angels by nature are incorporeal, and so they are imperceptible to the physical senses. Therefore, a demon is by default invisible.

Because mankind's senses cannot capture a demon's accidental qualities, how a human perceives these creatures must depend upon the human's intellectual comprehension of the demon. On this point, Aquinas instructs that: "whatever is received into something is received according to the condition of the recipient."⁷⁹ Put another way: things are received in the mode of the recipient; the disposition of the receiver determines the message received. Thus, water when poured into a vessel will take the form of its vessel, not because this shape is natural to the water, but because the water is received in the vessel according to the state of the vessel.

As a result, these eyewitness accounts do not provide true *physical* descriptions of the demons as such, but *metaphysical* descriptions. How demons appear to mankind is not intended to represent what they look like, but to reveal what they are. Thus, same demon may manifest different physical accidents to one human witness as opposed to another.

The foregoing is important to grasp if one is to understand why the incubus and succubus might appear as gendered creatures. As purely spiritual beings, their apparent genders are nonessential to their natures. Thus, at least in theory, a demon should be able to change its apparent gender to suit its victim without doing violence to the essence of what that demon is.

⁷⁸ Henri Fuseli's 1781 painting, *The Nightmare*, depicts this phenomenon.

⁷⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q. 75, Art. 5.

From this, one can think of incubi and succubi as being one and the same, especially considering how their apparent sexual dimorphism serves no purpose given their inability to sexually reproduce.⁸⁰ However, it should not be assumed that an incubus is a succubus under a different appearance. The distinction between both creatures is very fine and remains a topic of theological debate. The better view is to think of them as separate types of beings.

The more a person hands himself over to the demon's suggestions of sexual sins, the more intense and dangerous contact with the demon becomes. The sexual contact need not be with the demon itself. Over time, the victim will no longer derive the same level of satisfaction from sexual gratification. The effect is similar to drug addiction. Just as an addict requires progressively larger quantities and more exotic drugs to achieve the desired effect, the demon will suggest increasingly more extreme and illicit sexual behavior to stoke the victim's passions. The further along this path the victim is led, the less he perceives the wrongness of his actions.

By virtue of their being demons, incubi and succubi can cause the gamut of demonic activity – temptation, obsession, oppression, and possession. During obsession, the subject of the victim's invasive and persistent thoughts is often sexual in nature. Some of these mental images might be enticing to the victim, while others might be shockingly perverted and disturbing to his conscience. As the attacks progress, the incubus may inspire vivid, detailed, and lengthy dreams in the victim. These dreams may culminate in abnormally strong orgasms. Victims have reported sexual feelings so powerful that they awoke from sleep, trembling, in the middle of the dream.

These demons can also produce immediate and unwanted sexual arousal during wakefulness at times when such would cause the victim embarrassment. They can prevent sexual arousal, orgasm, conception, and the normal operation of the reproductive system in either sex, tactics utilized when their victims rebuff their desires.

It is not beneath these demons to play on their victim's emotions. In addition to any other false promises demons have been known to make, these demons will resort to offering companionship and sexual gratification. People with licentious inclinations are particularly at risk, as are those who are heartbroken, frustrated, lonesome, indulgent, or anxious.

Once the relationship turns abusive, the demon will inspire feelings of guilt if ever its victim considers taking action against it. A common tactic is accusing the victim of infidelity to the spirit as though it and the victim were spouses. They have been known to threaten their victims in the nature of a battering spouse, resorting to such ultimatums as: "If you leave me, I will hurt you and those you love" and "You will never find anyone else who will love you like I do."

These utterances are lies intended to keep the victim from seeking help, but the threats are often real. In advanced cases, these demons have caused physical harm to those they torment, both during and outside of sexual encounters. These have come in the form of bite marks, cuts in the skin, bruises, beatings, illness and trauma to the victim's sexual organs or other parts of the body, and even death.

⁸⁰ According to the prevailing view, these creatures cannot produce offspring. A minority opinion, held by Sinistrari and others before him, asserts that these creatures are indeed capable of sexual reproduction.

SEEKING DELIVERANCE FROM INCUBI AND SUCCUBI

As relates to deliverance, the Catholic religion relies upon two thousand years of experience built upon Jewish foundations reaching into distant antiquity. It benefits from the contributions of scores of mystics, saints, and theologians throughout the centuries. It is not unfounded, therefore, that in the public consciousness Catholic priests are considered the ministers to turn to when all other methods of deliverance fail. Because Christ is God and He instituted the Catholic faith, Catholicism is the only religion that possesses the entirety of divine revelation, power, and authority. Christ Himself said as much: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."⁸¹

When diagnosing cases of demonic activity, the first step is to rule out other causes for the circumstances complained of. Not all activity that might be ascribed to demons is preternatural. It may be the case that suspected demonic activity finds its origin in natural causes. Therefore, it is advisable to approach the subject with practiced mistrust. This is to say, not to assume out of hand that any event is demonic in nature, but not to foreclose the possibility either.

In general, there are five types of demonic activity. The first is temptation, which is referred to as ordinary demonic activity. The next four are considered extraordinary activity: infestation, oppression, obsession, and possession. It is sometimes the case that a person does not suspect demonic intervention until one or more of the latter manifest. In cases of confirmed demonic possession, the Church resorts to the formal rite of exorcism. Instances of actual demonic activity short of possession of the body can be undone without a formal exorcism, either by the afflicted person acting alone or, as more commonly is the case, with the aid of a Catholic priest.

The Church and her saints have observed that sacramentals are powerful tools for fending off demons. In particular, St. Teresa of Avila notes that holy water and devoutly making the sign of the cross are highly efficacious. A crucifix is an object of terror for demons. Through the merits of Christ, the instrument of His torture becomes the symbol of universal salvation. A proper crucifix will exhibit a corpus—a three-dimensional depiction of the crucified Savior—or else the object in question is more correctly referred to as a cross. St. Joseph and St. Benedict medals, when blessed in the proper manner, are also useful in spiritual warfare owing to the intercession of those saints whose likenesses they depict.

With these sacramentals as with any other, the person using them must not repose his faith in the objects because there is no power in the objects themselves. Rather, a person's faith must instead rest in He to whom these blessed items point—Jesus Christ. There is no "magic bullet" for deliverance; nor can a miracle cure be found in any mere object, blessed or otherwise. It is for this reason that, if one is to achieve complete deliverance, a lifestyle change is required. Deliverance can be likened to a patient at his doctor's office being told that his health will continue to decline unless he develops better exercise and eating habits. If the patient does not take his doctor's advice, he cannot hope to improve.

⁸¹ John 14:6.

Thus, the first step toward deliverance is for the person to renounce everything that gave rise to the demonic activity. Depending on the circumstances, this may entail permanently separating oneself from particular acquaintances, giving up bad habits, and other such measures. Renunciation is crucial, because it begins the process of stripping demons of whatever rights they may hold over the individual. In this regard, the sacrament of Reconciliation is of vital importance. Confessing one's sins helps in identifying one's primary vices; while begging God's forgiveness for these sins bestows the grace necessary to resist them in the future.

The person seeking deliverance must also sincerely participate in the Catholic sacramental life. This entails regular attendance at mass, proper reception of the sacraments, prayer and fasting, meditation, and doing whatever else may be necessary to foster one's spiritual growth. Otherwise, theologians speculate that the expulsion of evil spirits leaves a vacuum, so to speak, in the affected person. If one does not fill this gap with virtue through the practice of his faith, relapse may occur, resulting in the person becoming worse off than before deliverance efforts commenced.⁸²

CONCLUSION

Evil spirits are an ancient enemy of mankind. Their existence has been attested by various faith traditions across history, most of which have their particular method of ritual exorcism or, at the very least, appeasement.⁸³ Regardless of the name different faiths ascribe to them, these wicked spiritual creatures are demons.⁸⁴ As such, they are categorically evil. The fact that so many disparate traditions acknowledge the reality of demons, and furthermore, take steps to combat these creatures, should serve as ample proof of their existence.

Incubi and succubi, by virtue of their being demons, lack the virtue of charity. They are incapable of friendship or love because they cannot will what is genuinely good for anyone, not even for themselves. Should their actions appear to be motivated by charity, this can only be a ruse in furtherance of their aim of damning souls. They are detestable in every conceivable way – more so, perhaps, than the rank-and-file demon, for their alacrity in perverting one of the most profound expressions of human love.

END OF REPORT

⁸² Matthew 12:43-45.

⁸³ Driscoll, Fr. Mike. *Demons, Deliverance, and Discernment: Separating Fact from Fiction about the Spiritual World*. El Cajon: Catholic Answers, Inc., 2015.

⁸⁴ See: Psalm 95:5. "For all the gods of the Gentiles are devils..."