

Gabriele Amorth: An Exorcist tells his story

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Notes from the Italian edition by Alison Morgan, May 1999

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Preface - P. Candido Amintini

Diagnosis has to be done on basis of symptoms. Illness of demonic origin resists medical treatment but responds to prayer. Victims of demonic influence regard selves as persecuted by bad luck; their lives are succession of disasters.

Introduction

Amorth has been exorcist for 9 years; ha exorcised 30,000+ people, of whom 93 were possessed. Trained by his predecessor, P. Candido, who was full time exorcist for 36 years. Become exorcist only at expense of those you pray for; mistakes inevitable. Aim of book to equip exorcists and clergy; latter need to know when to involve an exorcist. Few books available; p 11 refs. Practical; assumes the theory has been covered.

Centrality of Christ

Demons hierarchical; conserve the ranks they had as angels [hence the confusion about which it is, MA vs now]. Towards end of exorcisms, in strongest cases (possession), he recites the christological hymn from Phil.2. When reaches the knee bowing bit, they all kneel, including the client.

The power of Satan

NB despite assertions of spiritualists and others, there are no good spirits except angels, and no evil ones except demons.

Demons can tempt, can possess body (but not soul, unless individual gives it to them freely)

Angels and demons are pure spirit; for them the word 'place' has different meaning from that it has for us - as with time.

Ordinary action of devil

to tempt people to evil, inc Jesus himself

Extraordinary action of devil - takes 6 forms

- physical suffering. Various saints suffered flagellation, physical marks. External not internal affliction
- possession: demon takes possession of body (not soul) and controls it; victim unable to resist and is not responsible; may or may not be external evidence
- vexation: disturbances and illnesses which do not lead to loss of consciousness or to doing or saying things involuntarily. Job. Hunchback woman. Paul (thorn in flesh). Common to find people affected by devil in their health, possessions, work, relationships
- obsession: obsessive thoughts which lead to desperation, temptation to suicide; inc in dreams. Commonly diagnosed as psychiatric disorder.
- Infestation: houses, objects, animals
- subjection to devil - voluntary pact made.

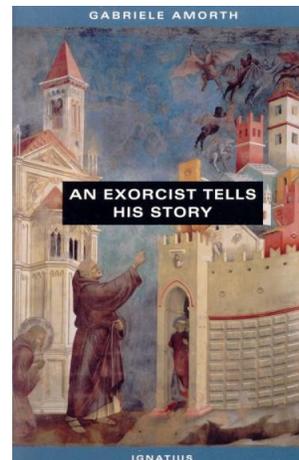
Strictly speaking, exorcism needed only for possession. Other cases can be dealt with by usual means: prayer, sacraments, forgiveness, life of Christian discipleship.

Angels: our allies in this battle; we each have own custodian angels.

Room in Christian life for pain, but not for sadness/depression [tristizia].

Appendices

Pope Leo XIII had vision during mass which led him to write prayer against Satan and circulate it to every priest for frequent use.



Gifts of Satan.

Ability to foretell future events; to transcribe messages; to leave body, to project self as double; to hear voices. And others.

Exorcisms

Mk 16.17 those who believe in me will chase out demons: these are prayers of liberation, not exorcisms. Church has instituted sacramental of exorcism to protect people from impostors; to be exercised only by priests appointed by bishops. This is what exorcism is; the use of this specific sacramental. Any other prayer is a prayer for liberation.

Exorcism can last a few minutes or several hours. It has 2 aims: to free the person, but before that to form a diagnosis; it is often only during exorcism that it becomes clear whether or not there is a demonic intervention. Exorcist is thus looking for certain signs.

Need to beware of assuming demonic involvement too readily; but also need to bear in mind that devil prefers to hide self. Also the case that an unnecessary exorcism can do no harm. Signs usually arise during the exorcism; if none show, but the client says he is better afterwards, then repeat the exorcism and sooner or later signs will come. Sometimes signs diminish in successive exorcisms; at other times increase and only then decrease. So don't wait for certain signs of possession before carrying out an exorcism. NB sometimes years of exorcisms are necessary to reveal and deal with the full extent of the damage.

3 signs of possession which will come only during an exorcism:

- to speak in unknown languages
- to possess a superhuman strength
- to know hidden things

Sometimes the client will have both demonic and psychiatric problems; share care with psychiatrist.

Second aim of exorcism is to liberate. This may take a long time, and the client will need a lot of help - just to get there, to pray, to go to church. Length of time required corresponds to initial strength of the possession and how long it has been in place. Sometimes it takes years... God in charge. Supporting factors: faith of exorcist and client, prayers of client and of others on his behalf; use of holy water, oil, salt; frequency of church attendance and living in way consistent with gospel; word of God and praise also important. Both exorcist and client prey to discouragement.

Exorcism is part of service of baptism.

How common is the problem

Increasing all the time with decrease in Christian living and increase in occult. Particularly amongst the young. A person may be afflicted by devil with or without fault. We are all subject to the temptations of the devil. 4 main reasons lie behind demonic interference:

- by permission of God - just as he permits us to be tempted, so he may permit more direct attack.
- As result of a curse; spell the commonest method
- as result of serious and persistent sin
- as result of contact with evil people or places (spiritualism, magic, fortune telling, witchcraft etc)

Generally easier for an exorcist to distinguish between demonic problems than for a psychiatrist.

Fear of the devil? St Theresa of Avila

Extract from her *Life*.

Where to start

Confession (wresting souls from the devil) annoys him more than exorcism (wresting bodies). Preaching word of God annoys him even more, because faith comes from what is heard. So if you are not afraid to confess and to preach, you need not be afraid to exorcise.

You start by questioning the client to see whether there are grounds for proceeding to an exorcism. You ask about:

- physical problems: head and stomach are the parts of the body most commonly involved. Aversion to sacraments is typical, odd or violent behaviour, asocial behaviour.
- Have the obvious medical avenues been explored (one criterion for possession is that drugs don't help).
- Is there abnormal physical strength. Does he hear strange noises. When did the symptoms start, and can they be related to any particular event

The first 'blessings'

He always calls exorcisms 'blessings', and demonic presence 'negativity'. Avoids alarming client. The official prayer is in Latin! First exorcism should be brief; anointing with oil is helpful, with the words 'may your servant be protected with this sign of your name'. Devil is sensitive to the senses, esp sight.

NB devil = Satan = Beelzebub; other evil spirits are demons.

Demons are reluctant to speak, and only do so in case of actual possession. Don't ask curious questions: only name, how and when entered.

If they go into a trance and remember nothing afterwards, that is a sign of possession, ie that they have a demon inside; and that when they spoke and moved during the prayer that was the demon inside.

If they have some reaction which reveals demonic attack, but don't lose consciousness and remember (even vaguely) what they heard and did, then that is a sign of vexation.

Obsession produces obsessive thoughts, particularly at night. Same solution: prayer, sacraments, fasting, Christian life, love, exorcisms.

Demons tend to attack person at 5 points:

- health - can cause physical and psychological illness. Some are transitory, esp in head and stomach; can include lumps, cuts, bruises; make sign of cross and sprinkle with holy waters. Cysts and tumours can also go with exorcism.
- Relationships - arguments, broken relationships between people who love each other, inability to form lasting relationships with members of opposite sex
- work - inability to find or keep a job; business failure for no apparent reason
- joie de vivre - depression
- desire to die - desperation, suicide; can always be overcome if person places self under protection of church; one prayer sufficient.

Possession is not contagious, either for the family, nor for those present at the exorcism, nor for the place in which it carried out. Hardened sin or swearing much more dangerous.

Sometimes one blessing a week is necessary for several months or longer. Confession of sin is more powerful than exorcism. Danger they get discouraged and give up.

How the demon behaves

It will try everything to avoid discovery and then to discourage client and exorcist. Contrast with mental illness, when the patient generally seeks attention; the demon does the opposite.

1. Before being discovered. It hides behind illness.

2. During prayer. Sometimes it avoids discovery even in initial exorcisms; repeated ones will reveal it. Ask it its name - to reveal it is a defeat. Ask how many demons are there; the first named is the chief. Ones with biblical names are worse. It may also react to sacred names; it won't name God, Jesus, but will use circumlocution. Ask how long it has been there and for what reason. But it isn't all that important to question it. It may not tell the truth anyway. They sometimes, in severe cases, speak spontaneously to discourage or frighten the exorcist.

3. Just before it comes out. In normal illness, the patient gets gradually better till cured; here the person gets worse until finally the healing comes. The client may feel he can take no more; but often that is what the demon feels, put onto the client. Client may fail to turn up as a result. Demon may also cause physical and psychological illness which needs medical treatment afterwards.

4. After the liberation. Period of reinforcement follows liberation; danger of relapse into life without prayer or worse into sin.

Testimony

Demon will do everything to convince you you are ill for some other reason. Need to persevere, if necessary for years. Blessings have the effect God wants, and that depends more on the will of the patient than on the exorcisms themselves. Confession and communion are stronger than exorcism. Demon wants you to believe God not capable of freeing you, is not with you.

Effects of the exorcism

If demonic activity is present they will always notice an improvement. If there is no activity during the prayer time and no noticeable benefit afterwards then the demonic is probably not involved. Demonic may emerge only gradually, and improvement will not come till the full effects have been manifested.

Collaboration of patient is fundamental to success; attributes 90% to patient, only 10% to exorcist. Need for patient to pursue Christian life, especially prayer.

Obstacles to healing: irregular matrimonial situation, failure to forgive, failure to be reconciled.

NT clearly distinguishes between the ill and the demonised.

Worst cases are those who have had a spell placed on them.

Most often affected are young people; it often turns out when older people are involved that the demonic interference goes back to childhood or even before birth.

Thinks one of the reasons God permits demonic interference is because it acts as a stimulus to Christian life.

During exorcism, do whatever produces the biggest reaction from the demon - sprinkle with holy water, blow at it (in use since patristic times), use music or incense.

Where to send them - to the foot of the cross, to receive their destination from Christ.

Water, oil, salt

Any priest can bless them (prayer in the *Ritual*). Usage more important. All work in conjunction with faith.

Water

3 benefits: forgiveness of sin, defence against devil, gift of divine protection. Prayer over the water adds other effects - power to chase demons away

Oil

Disempowers demons; renders their attacks useless.

Salt

Protects places from demonic presence or influence. Scatter it on threshold and 4 corners of room.

For houses can also burn incense which has been blessed; has always been regarded effective against evil spirits as well as an element of praise and adoration to God.

For clothes can sprinkle with blessed water; demonised person will rip them off.

Exorcism of houses

No examples in scripture. But experience suggests helpful. Symptoms: noises, screechings, thuds; feeling of a presence, or of being touched or attacked or immobilised. May be result of suggestion alone. Domestic animals seem to be sensitive to demonic presences in house. Most often the phenomena are associated with a person rather than with a house.

What to do.

Ritual contains prayers for protection of places. Say some.

Then read first part of first exorcism for people, adapting it for houses.

Then bless every room. Bless incense and go round with that.

More prayer.

Communion.

One visit is enough in light cases. May need to repeat it in cases of curses or where house has been used over long period for occult activity. Occasionally it can't be cleared. Use of oil, water, salt also helpful.
Need to be aware of paranormal phenomena for discernment.

Witchcraft

Is an attempt to harm another person through the intermediacy of the devil. Spells and black magic are ways of doing it.

Black magic, witchcraft, satanic rites

Curses; commonest are curses placed by parents/grandparents on children

Evil eye

Spells - common. Direct (they eat or drink something prepared with a curse) or indirect (curses placed on possessions, photos, images). Produces vexation or possession.

[Think the level of prechristian pagan superstitions and practices probably higher in Italy than here].

More on magic

2 types: imitative and contagious. First uses eg dolls to represent the person; second based on physical contact, and uses something belonging to the person. Strongest witchcraft in his experience is from Brasil and Africa, and based on magic and contact with spirits.

Who can dismiss demons?

Jesus gave power to dismiss demons to all those who believe in him and act in the power of his name. These are prayers of liberation, or private prayers. Exorcists are appointed to use specific sacramentals and to act as representatives of the Church.

Good idea to have backup prayer group during exorcism.

Hard sometimes to distinguish between liberation and healing, except that drugs have no effect on spiritual ills.

Demonic interference can however cause psychiatric illness which needs conventional treatment. Need for exorcist to know something about psychiatric illness.

Warning against alternative practitioners - healers, gypsies, mediums.

Closing chapters on the Church

Adam defeated by devil, Christ victorious over devil. Alternative theories of cross.

In early centuries every Christian was an exorcist. But risk of charlatans who make things worse.

No clear dividing lines between possession and vexation, vexation and physical/moral evils.

Current Catholic regulations confine exorcism, that is, deliverance from possession, to exorcists; all other cases may be resolved by prayer, sacramentals, etc. This is most cases.

Exorcist needs to be part of group containing doctor and psychiatrist.

Spiritual benefits for the exorcist: faith, humility, encouragement to prayer, power of God. A priest who is afraid of the devil is like a shepherd who is afraid of the wolf.

Prayers of liberation

Prayers for inner healing the most useful.

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