

The Devil's Habits and Exorcism in the Catholic Church: Father Amorth's Account

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Abstract

The Italian priest Fr. Gabriele Amorth (1925-2016) gave a singular contribution to the life of the Catholic Church: the rediscovery of exorcism's importance after many years of oblivion. Through his many publications, he divulged his lifelong experience of being an exorcist. Although the devil's existence and his evil activity are a matter of Christian faith, they were often theoretically or practically denied even inside the Church. The devil and other demons can operate in multiform ways: ordinary activity, like temptation, and extraordinary activity, like possession, vexation, obsession and infestation. These phenomena have to be distinguished from mental illnesses that can present similar symptoms, but whose causes are different: natural for the former, supernatural—diabolic—for the latter. Consequently, these problems must be addressed with different solutions: medical care for common illnesses, and exorcisms and other spiritual aid for diabolic pathologies. The devil often works with the cooperation of people, who, more or less consciously, approach the world of occultism: magic, spiritism, Satanism. Exorcism and prayers of deliverance can help a person to liberate oneself from a possession or other demonic disturbances. However, a sincere conversion to God and a strengthening of the faith are required to obtain a complete and durable liberation. Exorcism is not magic, but a faithful prayer to the Christian God.

Keywords: Catholic Church, demonic possession, occultism, magic, spiritism, Satanism, exorcism.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Italian priest Fr. Gabriele Amorth (1925-2016) gave a singular contribution to the life of the Catholic Church: the rediscovery of exorcism's importance after many years of oblivion².

In 1986, by pure chance and without any specific preparation, he was appointed exorcist of the Diocese of Rome in order to help an old exorcist, Fr. Candido Amantini (1914-1992), who became his beloved master (Amorth-Fezzi, 2018: 14-17; Amorth-Rodari, 2012: 11-14). After six years of apprenticeship, Fr. Amorth became the world's most famous and active exorcist until 2016, the year of his death.

In 1990, he wrote his first book about his experience as an exorcist, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, which became a real best-seller, continually reprinted and translated into almost 30 languages (Amorth-Fezzi, 2018: 26)³. After his success in the first publication, he regularly wrote books with a bibliography of more than 30 titles by the time of his death. He was also hosted on many TV programs and radio broadcasts, conferences, etc. and was regularly interviewed by the press. In 1990, he founded the International Association of Exorcists (Amorth-Fezzi, 2018: 26-28), now led by Fr. Francesco Bamonte.

During his long life, Fr. Amorth not only went to great lengths to divulge his experience, but also fought hard battles against the incredulity of the existence of the devil in the Catholic Church and the Vatican, and the necessity to appoint more exorcists (Amorth, 1999: 165-174; Amorth-Fezzi, 2018: 32-33; Amorth-Rodari,

² For Fr. Amorth's biographical accounts and witnesses on his life and work, see Amorth-Fezzi, 2018. See also Chiara Bresciani's interviews mentioned in the References at the end of the present essay.

³ The Chinese language edition was published in Taiwan in 2017 for Apocalypse Press. Fr. Amorth's second book on the same theme (*An Exorcist: More Stories*), that came out in Italy for the first time in 1992 (*Nuovi racconti di un esorcista*), was published in Taiwan for Apocalypse Press in 2018. For further details, see the Bibliography in Chinese at the end of the present essay.

2012: 189-193; Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 18-26 and 124-125)⁴. In his books, he recounted of myriads of cases handled by him or witnessed by other exorcists. His language was very direct and provocative, strongly denouncing the lacks of the Church, as well as the vices of contemporary society⁵.

In the present contribution, I will try to summarize Fr. Amorth's experience concerning the devil's habits and exorcism in general.

II. THE DEVIL AND EXORCISM IN SCRIPTURE AND IN THE TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH

The belief in the existence of the devil is, for a Christian, a matter of faith. The whole Bible, from the book of *Genesis* to the book of *Revelation*, speaks often about the devil and his actions. Following the orthodox teaching of the Church, Fr. Amorth stresses that the devil and demons are not merely symbolizations of evil and sin⁶, but have a real and personal identity⁷. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is very clear: "Evil is not an abstraction, but refers to a person, Satan, the Evil One, the angel who opposes God" (Catholic Church, 2012: 2851).

⁴ One needs to also recognize that Fr. Amorth was particularly grateful to some recent popes, in particular Leo XIII, Pius XI, Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, who, in their speeches and deeds, strongly opposed the actions of the devil. See, for instance: Amorth, 1999: 37-39; Amorth-Rodari, 2012: 215-231. Paul VI's speech on devil of 1972, June 29 is reported in full in the chapter *Paul VI speaks about Satan* in Amorth, 2002 and in Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 263-270.

⁵ Another of Fr. Amorth's battles inside the Church regarded the Italian translation—from the Latin—of the *Rite of Exorcism* in the *Roman Ritual*. See: Amorth-Fezzi, 2018: 32; Amorth-Rodari, 2012: 211-215.

⁶ Swiss theologian Herbert Haag (1915-2001) was an exponent of the current thought, who affirmed that the devil was only a personification of evil or sin. ~~was the~~ In 1969, he published a book titled *Abschied vom Teufel (Farewell to the Devil)*, which was criticized for instance, by Joseph Ratzinger in the article *Abschied vom Teufel? (Farewell to the Devil?)*, published in *Dogma und Verkündigung (Dogma and Preaching)* in 1973.

⁷ See: Amorth, 1999: 27.

The devil, in Christian belief, is not equal to God, he “is one of God’s creatures” (Amorth, 1999: 19), an angel who, with other angels⁸, rejected their Creator and began to dwell in hell in order to distance themselves from God as much as possible (Amorth, 2016: 17-18). In fact, during an exorcism, the devil revealed to Fr. Amantini that hell was not created by God, but rather by the fallen angels (Amorth, 1999: 22; Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 97-103).

Scripture and the Church’s Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called “Satan” or the “devil”. The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God [...] Scripture speaks of a sin of these angels. This “fall” consists in the free choice of these created spirits, who radically and irrevocably rejected God and his reign (Catholic Church, 2012: 391-392).

How many are the demons? Fr. Amorth thinks that they are about one third of created angels. However, they are a lot, and if they were to be visible, they would “obscure the sun” (Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 120).

God never destroys nor rejects his creatures, which he provided with free will and intelligence. “Therefore”, says Amorth, “even though they broke with God, Satan and his angels maintain their power and rank [...] even if they use them for evil purposes” (Amorth, 1999: 26; see also: Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 184-187).

After the creation of human kind, demons resumed the battle against God by haunting people with the purpose of damning them to hell. God replied to the devil’s rebellion with the incarnation of Jesus Christ⁹ that has come “to destroy the works of evil” (I John 3:8). “Jesus defeated Satan through his sacrifice” (Amorth, 1999: 27), his passion and death on the cross, which merited his resurrection. God’s sacrifice is the answer to Satan’s hate, and this kind of love is the key for salvation.

Demons wage a lost, irrational war. Although they know that God is more powerful, they still go on in opposing him. Since they can’t directly fight God, their action is oriented towards men. Their victory, which cannot give them true happiness

⁸ About this theme see also: Bamonte, 2008.

⁹ About Christ and Satan, see the chapter *Christ against Satan* in Amorth, 2002. See also: Amorth, 2016: 7-16 and Amorth-Rodari, 2013: 49-56.

nor relieve their sufferings, is the damnation of people. Therefore, men are unceasingly under the devil's attack.

It is important to bear in mind that whereas demons work to hurt us, good angels unceasingly operate in order to protect us from evil attacks (Amorth, 2016: 18-20 and 127-128). Furthermore, Mary, the Mother of God, along with all the saints and the blessed souls intercede for us with God (Amorth, 1999: 35-36; Amorth, 2016: 125-127)¹⁰. Amorth says often that a Christian has not to fear the devil since God is more powerful, but should rather fear to commit sin, the ordinary way to refuse God's love and protection.

III. ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY ACTION OF SATAN

According to Fr. Amorth, demonical action can be divided in two kinds: *ordinary* and *extraordinary*¹¹. The former is called *temptation* as Fr. Amorth explains: "The devil's mission in the world is to seduce souls, to lead each man and woman on the wayward paths of sin; and the principal path of this tragic mission is the path of temptation" (Amorth, 2016: 63). Every person is tempted by the devil during his whole life. Therefore, according to the Christian vision, human life is a battle against evil and will cease only with death. In the Gospel, it is recorded that even Jesus was tempted by Satan, without giving in. Falling into temptation is called sin.

According to Fr. Amorth, the extraordinary action of the devil can be classified in four kinds: *possession*, *vexation* or *oppression*, *obsession* and *infestation*.

Diabolical *possession* "is the most striking and serious form of the extraordinary action of the devil" (Amorth, 2016: 66): one or more demons take possession of the body—never the soul of a person. In a diabolical possession, the person "goes into a trance and loses consciousness, leaving space for the evil spirit

¹⁰ Regarding the role of Holy Mary in the battle against Satan, see: Amorth-Sznurkowski, 2018. See also: Amorth, 2016: 122-124; Amorth-Rodari, 2012: 27-28; Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 223-233. Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 228-251. For an exhaustive and clear treatment see also: Bamonte, 2011.

¹¹ See: Amorth, 2016: 63-91 and Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 36-45.

to speak; to agitate the person; to curse; to vomit nails, glass, or other objects; and to demonstrate herculean strength—in brief, to take over” (Ibid.). However, when a person is possessed by the devil, these kinds of manifestations are not continuous. There are moments that the subject appears normal and can lead a semi-normal life. Often “the crises are provoked by external motives”, like religious activities or objects, but at other times, they occur “without apparent cause” (Amorth, 2016: 67). The demon is relatively free to act by his own will. Therefore, the possessed is not morally responsible for any words or actions that the devil operates through him beyond his consciousness (Amorth, 1999: 33). Amorth adds another interesting observation: “*Diabolical possession is not a contagious disease, neither for the relatives nor for those who witness it, nor for the places in which exorcisms are held*” (Amorth, 1999: 84, emphasis in original).

Whereas possession is not so common, *vexation*¹² or *oppression* is the most numerous diabolical extraordinary activity. Amorth explains that

here the devil acts without any dominant and prevailing influence over the body and the mind of the victim, as happens in the case of possession. Vexations are true and actual aggressions, physical or psychological attacks that the demon works against a person (Amorth, 2016: 70-71).

The devil can cause illnesses, nightmares, interpersonal conflicts, financial losses, etc. without any apparent cause. Fr. Amorth maintains that people are vexed especially in three fundamental domains: health, affections and work or business, which consequently lead to a loss of enjoyment of life and the desire of death (Amorth, 1999: 80-84). In the history of the Church, many saints were fiercely vexed by the devil.

A third kind of diabolical action is the *obsession* that provokes in the victim “disturbances or extremely strong hallucinations that the demon imposes, often invincibly, on the mind of the victim. In these cases, the person is no longer master of his own thoughts” (Amorth, 2016: 72; see also Amorth, 1999: 34). The psyche

¹² For an account of demonic vexation, see for instance: Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 51-52.

can be deeply disturbed with visions, voices, rustlings, etc. and causes the victim to desire to commit suicide or to do evil to others (Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 119-123). As in possessions, during diabolic obsessions disruptions are not always present, but heavily condition people in their relationships with the world, often causing sadness and desperation.

The last category¹³, *infestation*, does not directly harm people, but indeed affects them¹⁴. Diabolical infestations are, following Amorth's definition, "disturbances that act on houses, objects and animals" (Amorth, 2016: 73). These include a great range of possible effects: damages to electrical appliances, automobiles, home-heating systems; doors and windows that open and slam shut day and night; lamps, televisions, or computers that turn on and shut off; sounds of footsteps, violent vibrations, mysterious voices or cries, powerful blows to the walls, stones tossed against windows without breaking the glass; intense unpleasant odors, invasion of aggressive insects, etc. In all of these cases, the police are not able to find a culprit. As one can imagine, haunted houses can provoke great sufferings, along with grave economic losses¹⁵.

As to the relationship between the ordinary and extraordinary activities of the devil, Fr. Amorth remarks:

I also add that the demon does not particularly like exercising his extraordinary action; he prefers by far to act through temptation. In the first case, the external manifestation clearly unmasks his existence. In the second, hiding himself behind ignorance and slight faith, he can act more easily because he is undisturbed. The devil is content when no one believes in his

¹³ In reality, in *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, Amorth speaks about a sixth kind of demonic activity called *diabolical subjugation* or *dependence*. It involves a voluntary submission to Satan through specific rites: "The two most common forms of dependence are the blood pact with the devil and the consecration to Satan" (Amorth, 1999: 35). This issue is addressed in detail in later sections of this essay.

¹⁴ Regarding demonic infestations, see also the chapter *Infestations* in Amorth, 2002 and Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 53-58.

¹⁵ Amorth dedicates a whole chapter to the exorcising of houses in Amorth 1999: 123-127.

existence or when people consider him solely a medieval relic: then he is truly able to act tranquilly! (Amorth, 2016: 68).

IV. EXORCISTS AND PSYCHIATRISTS

In his many books, Fr. Amorth speaks mostly about demonic possession. Before dealing with the question about how and whom can be possessed, Fr. Amorth raises an issue of primary importance to discuss: are these phenomena due to diabolical actions or can they be simply explained by mental illness? In other words: are these people really possessed by the devil or they are just mad?¹⁶

It is useful to refer the praxis followed by Fr. Amorth when a person seeks him out because he or she claims to be possessed. Firstly, he demands the patient's medical records. The same type of symptoms can have either a natural or a supernatural cause and the first important step is to seek scrupulously a natural cause. Therefore, one cannot be received if one has not yet gone to the doctor and has undergone all possible exams. Fr. Amorth stresses that the normal praxis is to seek a doctor—the exorcist must be an exception. He retains that an exorcist cannot make a medical diagnosis nor can he prescribe medicine—this is a doctors' competence.

Fr. Amorth cooperated a lot with doctors and particularly psychiatrists. He also points out that a good psychiatrist must know the limits of his own discipline. If a doctor cannot find the cause of a disease, or if the medicines do not have any positive effects—in some cases, medicines aggravate the patient's symptoms—he must recognize that he is neither able to diagnose nor to treat the patient. In sum, both exorcists and doctors have to recognize the inner limits of their own profession. Exorcisms and medical care are not two interchangeable solutions to a common problem. If there is a natural cause, the exorcist is useless; if the cause is supernatural, doctors and medicines can do nothing.

¹⁶ Amorth devotes a whole book to this theme: *Esorcisti e Psichiatri (Exorcists and Psychiatrists)*, edited for the first time in Italian in 1996. In this book, among other things, he makes a synthesis of two conferences on the subject followed by a discussion with Italian psychiatrists. See also: Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 19-24 and Bamonte, 2015b.

Nevertheless, the lack of a natural cause to a disturbance does not necessarily mean that there is a possession. Alongside the *negative* symptoms of a patient, he must also show *positive* signs of possession.

These include *physical symptoms*: “the two areas most commonly affected by evil influences are the head and the stomach” and, especially among young people, “a sudden inability to learn” (Amorth, 1999: 69). Often, if “pain travels, now to the entire stomach, then to the kidneys, later to the ovaries, etc., defying the understanding and remedies of medicine, it is a common indication of evil influence” (Amorth, 1999: 70).

Other positive indications of possession include cases of diseases where exorcisms have an immediate positive effect, whereas many years of medical care have not led to an improvement, or cases where superhuman strength is manifested during an exorcism (Ibid.).

The most revealing indication of possession is defined by Amorth as an *aversion to the sacred*: “it happens then that prayerful people suddenly stop praying. Others stop going to church and become full of rage; some suddenly blaspheme often and act violently against sacred images” (Amorth, 1999: 69). Such individuals also react violently to any contact with holy water, even if unaware. For instance, if they might refuse to eat food prepared—unbeknown to them—with holy water. Generally, they manifest strong repugnance for blessed or sacred objects, such as images, rosaries, relics, etc. or places, like sanctuaries and churches (Amorth, 2016: 21-23; Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 190-192). A direct attempt to bless these persons, or simply to pray for them—even mentally—, can provoke violent reactions of rage and fury in subjects that normally are quiet and polite.

In sum, can certitude be reached concerning cases of supposed diabolic possession? Fr. Amorth gives an affirmative answer ~~although~~ although not for every case (Amorth, 1999: 50). He adds that exorcisms are prayers that cannot do any harm to anyone whereas wrong diagnosis or medical care can, in certain cases, provoke irreparable damage (Amorth, 1999: 45)—the only danger that exists for exorcisms is that they be readily performed on mental patients who are not possessed thus increasing a false certitude concerning their possession.

V. CAUSES OF DIABOLIC POSSESSION

We now come to the question raised above: how can a person come to be possessed by Satan and who can become victim of a possession? Fr. Amorth explains that there are two ways: *with sin* and *without sin* (Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 46-53).

The first way is culpable: it results from *a person's fault or sin*. It happens when people do spiritually dangerous acts that can throw open the doors to the devil in their life. For example,

when a person tries to resolve a personal problem, often work related or emotional, and turns to a wizard or [...] to form[s] of occultism in all multiple styles; or when, often at a young age, and only as a joke, he may have played around spiritism (Amorth, 2016: 78).

For instance, during Halloween parties (Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 81-92). Another culpable means of possession is *perseverance in sin and vice*, “that is, living a life—stubbornly and with conviction—that is contrary to love” (Amorth, 2016: 78). Fr. Amorth stresses the importance of moral conduct: following the laws of God ~~that~~ leads people to ~~lead~~ a life full of love, truth and justice. He denounces strongly the vices of the present age, like the use of drugs, the widespread practice of abortion (Amorth-Rodari, 2013: 183-188; Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 158-164) and the dissolution of the family (Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 126-130). He says that “the most diffuse are the spiritual ills that are tied to an unrestrained use of sex” (Amorth, 2016: 79; Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 176-181). Furthermore, the horror, evil and inhuman cruelty promoted by television, cinema (Amorth, 2016: 56-57), and such music as satanic rock (Amorth, 2016: 54-55), can favor the spread of many vices. Fr. Amorth underlines that human liberty is a gift, but also a risk (Amorth-Rodari, 2013: 161-167).

Based on his long experience, Fr. Amorth maintains that blameless causes of possession decidedly represent “the majority of cases”: at least 90 percent (Amorth, 2016: 79). Apart from the possibility that *God allow extraordinary demonic activity* in order to strengthen a person's faith through such a spiritual trial (Amorth, 1999: 56-57; Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 109-110), many people are inculpably possessed by

means of *an evil spell*¹⁷: “an evil spell is causing the sufferings of others through the intervention of the devil” (Amorth, 1999: 57; see also Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 101-103). In this case, the victim commits no sin, while the wizard and the one who requests the wizard's services are guilty. There are many people who seek the help of a wizard or a witch in order to set spells against others for various motives, such as resentment, hatred, or vengeance.

Therefore, in principle all people can be victims of diabolic possession. In his books, Fr. Amorth recounts of children possessed while they were still in their mother's womb through an evil spell, often procured by relative (Amorth-Rodari, 2012: 97-117; Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 70-74 and 195-202). He tells stories of priests, nuns, and consecrated people that became possessed by Satan (Amorth-Rodari, 2012: 119-134; Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 64-67). The majority of the possessed are young people—often because of their disorderly behavior—and especially girls, who in his opinion, are more curious and courageous than boys to approach the occult. However, Amorth says that the majority of people who seek the help of an exorcist are female, which means that they are also more willing to be helped by a priest than males (Amorth, 1999: 114).

Fr. Amorth underlines the fundamental importance of living a life in the grace of God (Amorth, 1999: 58-59 and 115). If a Christian faithfully observes God's commandments, prays often and regularly participates in the Church's life, especially the sacraments of communion and reconciliation, he has nothing to fear from the demon's attacks because he is particularly protected from above. Amorth adds that “the number of those who are affected by the evil one has greatly increased” (Amorth, 1999: 53) due to various social factors: consumerism, materialism and hedonism, anti-religious philosophies and political systems that put religion out of people's life creating superstition— “it is a well-known fact that where religion

¹⁷ On the theme of curses, evil spells, and witchcraft see the dedicated chapter in Amorth, 1999: 129-142, in which the Italian exorcist speaks in detail about four main frequent forms of curses: black magic, curses, evil eye, and spell. An accurate classification of curses and evil spells is reported in Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 99-100. See also: Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 159-163; Amorth, 2016: 38-48, and Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 54-60.

regresses, superstition progresses. We can see the proliferation, especially among the young, of spiritism, witchcraft, and the occult” (Amorth, 1999: 53-54) often promoted by the media.

VI. OCCULTISM AND ITS FORMS

Fr. Amorth refers to *occultism*¹⁸ as the main gate to welcome the devil into one’s life. Occultism is, adopting Amorth’s imagine,

the great umbrella under which all the practices and forms of satanic adoration are gathered in order to be drawn upon by those who wish to profit from its gains. The most significant forms of occultism are magic, astrology, fortune-telling, or spiritism (Amorth, 2016: 29).

All these occult practices hold a common belief: it is possible to control spiritual forces after undergoing an esoteric initiation. In reality, these forces, powers, or entities, are, according to Amorth’s experience, solely “the unclean spirits commonly called devils” (Amorth, 2016: 30) that ultimately owe obedience to a unique lord, Satan.

*Magic*¹⁹, *sorcery* and all forms of *divination*, like horoscopes, palm reading, interpretation of omen and lots, etc. are strongly condemned by the Catholic Church²⁰:

All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to “unveil” the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of

¹⁸ See, for instance, the chapter *L’occultismo* in Amorth, 2000: 41-60 and Amorth, 2016: 29-30; Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 104-110. See also: Bamonte, 2015a.

¹⁹ For a detailed description of magic, see the relevant chapter in Amorth, 1999: 143-151. See also the chapter *La magia* in Amorth, 2000: 61-74; Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 111-113; Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 61-72, and Bamonte, 2000.

²⁰ Catholic Church, 2012: 2115-2217.

omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers (Catholic Church, 2012: 2116).

There is a classic distinction between *white magic* and *black magic*. While the former is used to protect one's own life from evil forces in order to attain a positive outcome—like finding a job—, the latter has the purpose to harm someone: “in current terminology, white magic means to take away a spell; black magic means to cast a spell” (Amorth, 1999: 60). According to Fr. Amorth, both kinds of magic are ultimately “black”, because “every form of magic is practiced with recourse to Satan” (Ibid.). It is evident that to intentionally harm other people is absolutely reprehensible, but to seek demonical entities—whether consciously or not—represents always a great risk. Among the cases, according to Fr. Amorth's accounts, the most common examples of magic are evil spells. Moreover, for a Christian, to try to modify or foretell the course of human events with preternatural demonic help indicates a lack of faith in God's love and providence, and is thus a grave form of *superstition*²¹.

The “instruments” to do magic are several: “evil spells, the evil eye, charms, magic filters, rituals, invocations, cursed foods and drinks ingested by the victims, crystal balls, et cetera” (Amorth, 2016: 38). Fr. Amorth is aware that the majority of the so-called sorcerers, fortune-tellers, etc. are only frauds²². They possess no power and take advantage of people's credulity and sorrows to make easy money. However, there are also true wizards, who, often through a consecration to Satan (Amorth, 2016: 32-34), get real and terrible powers, like clairvoyance, bilocation, automatic writing, etc. (Amorth, 1999: 39-41; Amorth, 2016: 34-36). Whatever may be the case, the devil grants such powers in order to bond these individuals to himself, leading

²¹ According to Catholic Church, 2012, “superstition is the deviation of religious feeling and of the practices this feeling imposes. It can even affect the worship we offer the true God, e.g., when one attributes an importance in some way magical to certain practices otherwise lawful or necessary” (2111).

²² About cartomancy see: Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 116-118.

them to believe that they are in control, while in reality enslaving them evermore and rendering them dependent to his will. Therefore, the belief that one can actually control supernatural entities is a mere illusion.

A particular form of occultism is *spiritism*²³ or *necromancy*, that is, “the evocation of the dead through a medium” (Amorth, 2016: 48) who works like a “channel”. Also called *channeling*, it is a very ancient and widespread practice and is present in almost all cultures. The techniques used by mediums are several: the medium’s fall into a trance, pendulum, automatic writing, Ouija board, etc. As in the case of magicians, there are true mediums and impostors. In light of his long experience, Fr. Amorth believes “that the evoked, presumed souls of the deceased [...] are in reality unclean, awakened spirits, attracted, indeed “forced”, by the evocation to manifest themselves” (Amorth, 2016: 52).

What does Amorth think about the so-called *wandering souls*, spirits, phantoms, or ghosts whose presence is often perceived? In this regard, there are two certitudes of Christian faith: “the first is that we have only one life, and we play it out here” (Amorth, 2016: 27). At the end of life, all will be judged by God and will be given a permanent destination: heaven—immediately or after a purgatory—or hell (Amorth, 2016: 133-145): “therefore, there is not any possibility that these “wandering souls” are waiting to be incarnated” (Amorth, 2016: 27)—Christians in fact do not believe in reincarnation. The second certitude of the faith “is that a form of communication exists between the dead and us” (Ibid.): blessed souls in heaven can intercede for us while those still in purgatory can benefit from our prayers. In contrast, “excluded are the souls of the damned; being in hell they do not enjoy (and do not desire) our prayers” (Ibid.). According to this distinction, there is no ground for believing in the existence of wandering souls. In this regard, there is an evolution in Amorth’s thought throughout his works. In his early books, the Italian priest strongly denies the existence of wandering souls (Amorth, 1999: 30). However, in his later books, in dialogue with other exorcists, he becomes more open²⁴: he

²³ About spiritism see the relative chapter (*Lo spiritismo*) in Amorth, 2000: 75-89 and Amorth, 2016: 48-54.

²⁴ See, for instance, the chapter *Le sorprese degli esorcisti. Le anime dei defunti* in Amorth,

recognizes the possibility that after death, souls, for some mysterious cause—as it would always be an exception—, do not go immediately to their ultimate destination, but rather wander in a liminal state, waiting not for a new incarnation, but for some form of human help that may quicken their journey towards destiny.

Another and more terrible form of occultism is *Satanism*²⁵, that is, “the practice of the cult, or worship, of Satan” (Amorth, 2016: 30). Satanists are persons that explicitly decide to consecrate themselves—through a ritual—to Satan and to join a *sect*. “These cases are fairly rare: we are speaking of thousands, not millions of persons” (Ibid.), but they are the most dangerous. There are two kinds of Satanism: *personal* and *impersonal* or *rationalist* Satanism.

The first recognizes the personal nature of Satan, and the followers entreat, adore and honor him as god. The second [...] does not believe in Satan's personal nature [...] rather, they see him as a cosmic energy that is present in each man and in the world and that, when called upon, will emerge in all his power to carry out the most absurd and atrocious perversions, always connecting them to esoteric rites” (Ibid.).

The ultimate objective of Satanists is to lead people to believe that they can do all they wish because they are their own gods. No external authority, such as parents, state, Church, etc., has the right to interfere in the free determination of one's self. This philosophy is very attractive and seductive, especially for the young (Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 169-175).

The worship of Satan is often a macabre and desecrating parody of God's cult. Rites of consecration, black masses (Amorth, 2016: 36-37 and Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 114-115), often caricaturize the Christian liturgy: Satan's priests wear liturgical

2000: 161-185); See also, Amorth, 2016: 26-28; Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 27-39 and 143-152.

²⁵ On Satanism in general and the story of Sai Baba, defined by Amorth as “Satan's beloved son”, see Amorth-Rodari, 2012: 167-188 and Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 188-194. See also, Amorth, 2016: 30-32. For more accounts, see Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 68-91 and Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 111-118.

vestments—often stolen in churches—and blaspheme prayers modelled on Christian ones such as the Lord’s prayer; a naked woman—preferably a virgin—is laid on an altar and, at the end of the celebration, is repeatedly raped, first by the Satan’s priest, and then by others. Every Satanist meeting ends with a great orgy in which large amounts of drugs and alcohol are consumed.

Needless to say, adherents to Satanic sects—which are relatively easy to access but almost impossible to leave—are often pushed to do evil things, even murders, some of which have been reported by news agencies.

VII. EXORCISM AND LIBERATION

After the exposition of the possible causes of a diabolical possession and how to distinguish it from a natural pathology, this section explores the means to obtain liberation in case of diabolical possession. As stated above, help of an exorcist is needed to reach certitude about demonic possession. If there is a grounded probability of possession, Fr. Amorth first carries out a normally short exorcism, in order to ascertain a diagnosis: “only through the exorcism itself can we determine with certainty whether there is a satanic influence” (Amorth, 1999: 44). The exorcist wants to see a patient’s reaction to an exorcism. If a person is really possessed by the devil, he or she often has particular reactions well known to the exorcists and cited in the *Ritual*: “Talking in unknown languages, exhibiting superhuman strength, and knowing what is hidden” (Amorth, 1999: 46). If there are one or more of these signs, possession is almost certain. Often, however, the devil wants to hide himself in order to dwell undisturbed in a person, and there are not evident reactions during the first exorcism. As a result, when in doubt, Amorth performs regular weekly exorcisms on the same person, and observes if there are particular signs. In one case, the patient’s condition can show improvement: after the exorcisms, his or her sufferings and disruptions stop for a while or are reduced, whereas after medical care the patient had shown no improvement. During subsequent exorcisms, reactions get stronger until a sudden revelation of the demon occurs and he is brought to the open by the exorcisms’ power. In sum, it is “very important to recognize the signs that

occur *before* an exorcism, *during* an exorcism, and *after* an exorcism and the development of signs *during the course of* the exorcism” (Amorth, 1999: 45).

Before describing in detail the process of an exorcism²⁶, we have yet to tackle two important questions: what do exorcisms actually consist in and who can perform them? The *Catechism* offers the following definition of exorcism:

When the Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One and withdrawn from his dominion, it is called exorcism. Jesus performed exorcisms and from him the Church has received the power and office of exorcizing. In a simple form, exorcism is performed at the celebration of Baptism. The solemn exorcism, called “a major exorcism,” can be performed only by a priest and with the permission of the bishop. The priest must proceed with prudence, strictly observing the rules established by the Church. Exorcism is directed at the expulsion of demons or to the liberation from demonic possession through the spiritual authority which Jesus entrusted to his Church. Illness, especially psychological illness, is a very different matter; treating this is the concern of medical science. Therefore, before an exorcism is performed, it is important to ascertain that one is dealing with the presence of the Evil One, and not an illness. (Catholic Church, 2012: 1673).

²⁶ On exorcisms in general see the chapter dedicated to them in Amorth, 1999: 43-52. In the book's chapter *The Demon's Behavior* (Amorth, 1999: 91-99), Fr. Amorth makes an interesting distinction concerning the four most frequent behaviors: 1. *Prior to discovery*, when the “demonic possession causes physical and mental disturbances” (91); 2. *During exorcisms*, when the devil tries to hide himself, but has to react to the power of the rite. When felt discovered, he can counterattack in order to scare the exorcist or the people present. 3. *Nearing the exit of the demon*, during which the evil spirit has lost strength, but can “launch the last attacks” (96). He does not to leave the person and does everything in his power to remain in the victim's body. 4. *After liberation*. Since a demon tries to repossess his former victim's body, the person has to prevent relapses by leading a life of prayer in the grace of God. It resembles a period of convalescence after a drug addiction. See also: Amorth, 2016: 93-117 and Amorth-Rodari, 2012: 22-27; 43-53.

Using the traditional language of the Church, exorcisms are *sacramentals*, which are specific spiritual aids²⁷: benedictions or blessings, prayers, blessed water, salt and oil²⁸, the Sign of the Cross, sacred images and other blessed objects (Catholic Church, 2012: 1671-1672). They are similar but not as strong as the seven sacraments²⁹. Exorcism, a special prayer of deliverance, has been existing during the whole history of the Church³⁰. As recounted in the Gospels, Jesus performed several exorcisms and gave his disciples the authority to cast out demons (Amorth-Zanini, 2010: 200-227).

Nowadays in the Catholic Church, exorcisms are the competence of bishops, who in turn can delegate priests to perform them according to the *Ritual*³¹. Therefore, lay people cannot perform exorcisms, and neither can the priests who are not rightfully appointed as exorcists. Thus, they do not have the authority to perform exorcisms, and nor do the rituals have the efficacy. Fr. Amorth was a fervent proponent of extending the authorization to perform exorcisms to all priests since he believed that they already caused the devil even greater rage by preaching and confessing. He believed that there was great need of exorcists and affirmed that “a priest who has the courage to preach and to hear confessions should be not afraid to exorcize” (Amorth, 1999: 67). Amorth repeatedly said that he did not fear the devil:

²⁷ According to Catholic Church, 2012, “sacramentals are sacred signs instituted by the Church. They prepare men to receive the fruit of the sacraments and sanctify different circumstances of life” (1677). See also 1667-1673.

²⁸ Amorth dedicates a chapter to blessed water, oil, and salt in Amorth, 1999: 117-121. See also: Amorth, 2016: 128-132.

²⁹ According to Catholic Church, 2012, “the sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions” (1131).

³⁰ In Amorth, 2000: 9-32, the author sketches out a history of exorcism in the Catholic Church. See also Amorth-Rodari, 2012: 193-209. A shorter account is reported in Amorth, 2016: 95-100.

³¹ The *Ritual* with 21 rules are reported in Italian—the original language is Latin—by Fr. Amorth in the Appendix of Amorth, 2000.

I have never been afraid. Not even at the beginning. Never! I always said many times on television, “When the Devil sees me, he poops in his pants! [...] I always feel secure! I have so much help from above (Amorth-Fezzi, 2018: 39)³².

However, non-exorcists—lay people and common priests—can do prayers of deliverance or healing that, in many cases, are very effective and are sometimes more successful than exorcisms³³.

How long does an exorcism last? Fr. Amorth stated that some exorcisms are very short, lasting a few minutes, while others can go on for hours—it often depends on the demon's reactions. Amorth normally prefers short but regularly repeated exorcisms (Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 107-108).

The most adequate place to perform the rite of exorcism is a small chapel with few persons in attendance. It is important that the setting be adorned with sacred images, like a crucifix or an image of the Holy Mary. Amorth confides bitterly that he often had to change locations because “the exorcist is considered troublesome or an inconvenience” (Amorth, 2016: 105).

Can people be forced to receive an exorcism? Amorth affirmed that an exorcism could only take place with a patient's consensus. However, as the time of the ritual approaches, difficulties can arise:

when the person enters the room where the exorcist works, it sometimes happens that he will begin to feel the influence of the [evil] spell more intensely and will manifest a nervousness and discomfort, or, in more serious

³² Therefore, Fr. Amorth says that priests do not have to fear the devil's vengeance against exorcists: “the devil is already causing each one of us as much harm as he is allowed to do. It is false to believe that if I leave him alone, he will leave me alone. It is not only false; it is also a betrayal of our priestly ministry [...] A priest who is afraid of the devil's reprisal can be compared to a shepherd who is afraid of the wolf. It is a groundless fear” (Amorth, 1999: 194). However, if special harm occurs, “the welfare of souls is worthy of every sacrifice” (Amorth, 1999: 195). See also: Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 94-95.

³³ Amorth goes into detail about these prayers. See: Amorth, 2000: 139-159; Amorth, 2016: 119-122. See also the chapter *Exorcisms and Prayers of Liberation* in Amorth, 2002.

cases, the person will enter into a trance and must be dragged like a dead weight (Amorth, 2016: 102).

In such cases, the help of a friend or a relative is needed. Amorth points out that, “at the end of the rite, when I reawaken the person, he will often appear defogged, completely in control again, and will be able to say a prayer peacefully and to exchange a few words with me” (Ibid.).

During the rite, an important and often crucial moment is when the dialogue between the priest and the demon, who speaks through the possessed, takes place. The exorcist has to “never ask useless questions or out of curiosity” (Amorth, 1999: 79). The priest asks “the unclean spirit his name; each one has a name. When the demon has a biblical name or one given in tradition [...] we are dealing with ‘heavyweights’, who are much tougher to defeat” (Amorth, 2016: 102). If the demon is forced by the exorcist to reveal his name, it means that he starts to get weak: it “is an anticipatory sign of the liberation” (Ibid.). Another good sign is when the demon is obliged to confess “when and how he entered that particular body and when he will leave” (Amorth, 2016: 102-103). Nevertheless, prudence is of utmost importance because the demon is used to lying. In the Christian tradition, he is also called the Prince of Lies. Therefore, if he speaks truly, it is a sign that God Himself imposes it on him.

What kind of phenomena can happen during an exorcism? According to Amorth, the extremely violent situations and the most spectacular phenomena include: speaking in foreign or esoteric languages; overturning of the eyes; levitation (Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 203-205); spitting nails, glass, hair, etc. (Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 164-166). Amorth says that “these objects do not come from the esophagus, in which case they would seriously wound the internal organs; rather, they materialize in the vomit coming out of the mouth” (Amorth, 2016: 104). During the exorcism, the demon can also reveal where “one can discover the amulet or charm that the wizard [used] [...] in order to complete the rite” (Ibid.). Such items include twisted pieces of iron, woven thread, knotted twine, etc., that have to be burned—accompanied with fervent prayers—in order to break the bond. Amorth relates that

each exorcism is unique, and even though there are commonalities, “one can never tell ahead of time what will happen” (Amorth, 2016: 105).

How many exorcisms are necessary to achieve liberation? According to Fr. Amorth, it is very rare that only one exorcism is sufficient:

I recall cases that needed only a few encounters, and others that I followed for many years. We are in the field of the invisible, so we cannot make precise prognoses. We must place ourselves before the point of view of the divine permission: God permits the devil to persevere against someone for a long time. It is an unfathomable mystery (Amorth, 2016: 106).

Amorth is very clear on this point: “the liberation and when it happens is established only by God” (Ibid.). Therefore, exorcism in the Catholic Church is not at all a magical rite, depending on an exorcist's power or ability. Rather, it is a faithful prayer to God in order to liberate a person from the devil's attack. In short, exorcism is not a private prayer but a specific prayer of the Church offered by its minister in the name of Christ.

Therefore, Amorth always stresses that the most important thing in order to achieve a complete liberation is *faith*: firstly, the faith of the victim as well as his relatives' and friends' faith, the exorcist's faith and the faith of the Christian community that support the whole liberation process (Amorth, 1999: 49; Amorth-Tosatti, 2010: 104-106). Amorth notes:

“The cooperation of the patient is fundamental for success. I always say that the exorcism is 10 percent of the cure; the remaining 90 percent is the responsibility of the individual. What does this mean? It means that there is a need for much prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments, living a life according to the Gospel, using sacramentals [like blessed water, salt, and oil] [...], asking others to pray for a cure—the prayer of the entire family, parish or religious communities, prayer groups, etc., is especially fruitful—and requesting many Masses. Pilgrimages and charitable works are also useful. Above all, liberation is obtained through abundant personal prayer and

through it a union with God that becomes a way of life” (Amorth, 1999: 112, emphasis in original; see also: Amorth-Rodari, 2013: 203-210).

Furthermore, Amorth points out that

one of the most effective tools against evil influences is one of the hardest Gospel precepts: forgive your enemies. In this case the enemy is usually the person who cast the spell and who keeps it going. Sincere forgiveness [...] often breaks open a dead-locked situation and helps speed up healing” (Amorth, 1999: 113).

As what is made clear in Fr. Amorth’s words, deliverance from evil is not only a matter of performing a rite, but that of a sincere and strong conversion of one’s whole life to God that has to continue after liberation is obtained.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This essential presentation of Fr. Amorth’s lifelong experience concerning the devil, his action, and the practice of exorcism, confirms the Catholic teaching that the existence of the devil—a fallen angel—and his evil activity is a matter of faith.

The devil can act in an ordinary way—temptation—and in extraordinary ways—possession, vexation, obsession and infestation. The demonic possession can occur with or without the sin of the victim: it depends on whether the person directly opened the door to evil—through perseverance in sin or making use of occult practices—or is just a victim of an evil spell performed by a wizard or a witch commissioned by a person who bears hate or resentment against the victim. There are some cases in which the possession happened due to the mysterious permission of God himself in order to strengthen a person’s faith.

Diabolic action must also be differentiated from natural illnesses, such as mental disorders, since they can present similar phenomena but are of different origin

and need to be treated accordingly: exorcism for the former and medical care for the latter.

Occultism in its different forms is the most dangerous way to communicate with the devil and allow him to act in human lives.

Lastly, as gathered from Fr. Amorth's accounts, exorcism is the most common form of demonic liberation in the Catholic Church. Exorcism is not a passive process to which the victim is subjected, performed by a particularly powerful priest, but is rather a path of sincere conversion to God that requires the active cooperation of the patient as well as his or her relatives, friends and the entire Christian community. God does not magically operate in human lives, forcing our liberty, but His grace, in order to be effective, always requires our free cooperation.

輔仁
宗教研究

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天主教會中的魔鬼習性和驅魔現象： 阿摩特神父的實錄

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提要

義大利籍的阿摩特神父（1925-2016）所做的重大貢獻之一是讓天主教會重新發現驅魔的重要性。阿摩特神父寫了許多書分享他畢生從事驅魔師的經歷。雖然教會的信仰裡提及魔鬼的存在和作為，但不管就理論或實際的層面，教會內部經常否認這個信仰。魔鬼和其他惡魔有許多作為方式：常見伎倆，如誘惑；特殊伎倆，如魔鬼附身（附魔）、魔鬼迫害、魔鬼擾念（著魔）、魔鬼感染。這些現象即使和精神病有些相似的癥狀，但兩者是不同的。其差別在於起因的不同：疾病由自然原因造成，魔鬼干擾則來自超自然的力量。因此也需要使用不同的治療方式：用醫藥來治療一般疾病，以驅魔和其他（屬靈的輔助）則用來對付魔鬼的作為。魔鬼有時候也會和人類合作，這些人，多少都是有意識地，去接觸一些秘術的世界，如：巫術、招魂、撒旦崇拜等。驅魔儀式以及從邪靈中釋放的祈禱能將一個人從魔鬼附身和其他干擾解脫。不過，他/她必需真心悔改並堅強對天主的信德，才能得到一份完整而又長久的釋放。驅魔並不是魔術，而是向天主的虔誠祈禱。

關鍵詞：天主教會、附魔、秘術、巫術、招魂、撒旦崇拜、驅魔