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Longtime Exorcist: Satanism Is Growing in Western Societies

Father François-Marie Dermine, promoter of an annual international course on exorcism in Rome, discusses his recent popular work about the devil, offering keys to discernment on this controversial and sensitive topic.

Solène Tadié - Interviews - December 4, 2020

The “death” of the devil in people’s minds is accelerating the “death” of God in de-Christianized Western societies. For this reason, Dominican **Father François-Marie Dermine** decided 20 years ago to recatechize Catholic people through different initiatives.

A Canadian by birth, Father Dermine has been an exorcist for several Italian dioceses since 1994. In 2003, he contributed to the creation of the “Course on Exorcism and Prayer of Liberation,” a weeklong interdisciplinary workshop on exorcism. This annual event, held in Rome, gathers priests, women religious and lay experts from around the world to focus

on Satanic activity and the formal ministry that the Church established to respond to such activity.

Father Dermine is president of the Italian Catholic association [GRIS](#) (Social-Religious Information Research Group) and professor of moral theology at the [Theological Faculty of Emilia-Romagna](#); he is also the author of several books about the ministry of exorcism and the dangers surrounding the obscure and dangerous beliefs and practices of the occult.

His latest work, *[Ragioniamo sul demonio. Tra superstizioni, mito e realtà](#)* (“Let’s Reason About the Devil: Between Superstitions, Myths and Reality”), was written in a question-and-answer format and seeks to inform the public — believers and nonbelievers — about the nature and scope of Satanic activity at a time when the devil’s very existence is being increasingly questioned, even by [Catholic leaders](#).

While discussing the content of his book with the Register, Father Dermine warned the Catholic faithful not to neglect religious education, which is the first bulwark against the advance of the devil and Satanism in society.

Why did you write this book, which addresses a wide audience?

First of all, I wrote it because there are a lot of prejudices, ignorance and confusions to be addressed. Indeed, I am an exorcist, and it really hurts me to hear people in general and priests in particular deny the concrete action of the devil in our lives. I couldn’t stand this situation anymore. It is the fundamental reason why I wrote this book. Faith deprived of the belief in the existence of the devil is not genuine because the existence of angels is a truth of faith, and the devil is a fallen angel. I am very clear from this point of view. Whoever denies the existence of the devil is a heretic. Obviously, the devil is not at the center of the faith, but his figure is indispensable to understand the mystery of faith.

I sometimes wonder how a priest can remain faithful to his vocation without believing in the devil. It makes him a kind of social worker, but nothing more.

Why do you think the questions surrounding the devil are so “snubbed” by theological circles nowadays?

We live in a period of great rationalism nowadays. We try to find an explanation, a demonstration to everything, but as I recall in my book, the existence of the devil is not to be demonstrated — it is to be believed. Even if there are good reasons to believe it on a rational level, it is not enough. After Vatican II, the desire to rationalize the faith, especially in regions where Catholicism was very traditional, was sometimes too radical, and we threw the baby out with the bathwater. Many members of the clergy seem to want to emancipate themselves from concepts that seem too medieval, backward or even superstitious to them, while the belief in the devil is still quite widespread in the rest of society, especially among the youth. When I go to give lectures in schools, the children listen to me in a religious silence. It is our duty to explain what the devil is in a way that is neither superstitious nor extravagant.

A controversy erupted within the Church after a Jesuit priest suggested that the devil was nothing more than a symbol of evil. In your book, you also mention the exegete [Alberto Maggi](#), who denied the existence of demonic possession on the basis of the teachings of the Old Testament. Why are these statements false?

Because they are simply not faithful to the Holy Scriptures. It is true that there are fewer references to the devil in the Old Testament, even if he is mentioned from the first pages of the Bible, in the Book of Genesis. But while approaching the fullness of time, and thus the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Bible mentions it a lot more. Jesus himself insists on the figure of the devil. He could have sided with the [Sadducees](#), who did not believe in the existence of angels as purely spiritual beings; but, not only did he not do that, he also wanted to reaffirm this reality against which he himself had to fight. We have no reason to think that the devil is a symbol of evil that exists in the world. The symbol has the function of manifesting a reality that is not yet visible, concrete or present. And evil is so omnipresent, unfortunately, that we certainly do not need a symbol to represent it.

The death of the devil precedes the death of God, as you write in your book: Can the death of the devil in people’s minds strengthen the demonic presence and field of action?

Certainly. I once heard some people say: “I have come to the awareness of the existence of God through the awareness of the existence of the devil, because I have seen it.” This statement has a relative value, but it is true that, if the figure of the devil is missing, one also loses sight of the figure of God itself. In this sense, the death of the devil can accompany or precede or favor that of God because it makes the concept of God very abstract. It makes faith arid and intellectualistic and makes us forget that we really need to be saved, helped and protected by the Lord. We must bear in mind that our faith consists in the effective presence of a loving God, and reasoning is not always the best way to reach God. In our course on exorcism and theology, we teach the so-called [theodicy](#), which focuses on a rational study of the relationship between God’s justice and the presence of evil in the world. This rational theology is valid, but it is a very different reality from the faith in a concrete and present God who acts in my life each day.

In an interview last year, you were [alarmed](#) by the resurgence of “aggressive Satanism.” What makes you think that, and how do you explain it?

Yes, I have seen it from my own experience, but I can see it even just by having a look on the internet. It makes me understand how Satanism is now a reality for many young people, who already know so much about it thanks to the resources they find online. On these websites, the figure of the devil is openly praised, and it attracts many people — this figure of the devil who emancipates himself from God to lead his life as he pleases. There is also a growth of real Satanic groups, whereas in the past they were a very exceptional reality. They are multiplying in a very worrying way. And I also see this through the victims of Satanism, of dangerous rites, who come to see me and who have lived unprecedented, unimaginable sufferings to their own skin. Personally, I can say that more people are coming to see me than before, and, unfortunately, I cannot follow all of them. Satanism has come out in the open, and we must be very careful about it.

Isn't there a risk, on the other hand, of talking too much about the devil, of seeing its signature everywhere and attributing to it all the evils of humankind?

When people come to see me for an exorcism, I spend a lot of time talking to them, because they often forget that most of our evils are not caused by manifestations of the devil but by ourselves, as we are the cause of 90% of our evils. That the devil then comes to exasperate them is a fact.

He can undoubtedly lead us to despair, but he cannot be considered the primary cause of most parts of our evils. Adam and Eve committed the original sin, not the snake. Obviously, they were induced by the devil, but surely sin is caused by our choices. It would be too easy to dump our sins on the devil. It is not easy to reach a balance, in this sense. People who rush to the exorcist on any occasion also risk not seeing the natural causes of their problems.

Should we believe in the power of such occult practices as the evil eye? Can those who have a rooted life of prayer be the victims of third parties who resort to occult practices?

Yes, unfortunately. This fact has been confirmed by my own experience. Everyone can be a victim of evil. But it is obvious that it is more difficult that a person who tries to live an honest life in the grace of God become prey to the devil. However, I have followed devout Christians who were under its grip. But if this happens, if God allows it, it is to enable these people to come to a greater good. I personally witnessed that these people can make an important qualitative leap in their human life and in their life of faith. We also have various examples of [possessed saints](#) in history, and this means a lot. However, these people have been able to win the battle with God's help, and it strengthened their holiness and humanity, as well.

When I talk to people, I always tell them there are not absolute antidotes to the action of the devil. We are called to be vigilant while our enemy goes around like a roaring lion trying to make us fall. We have to be vigilant, without ever putting the devil, or the fear of it,

at the center of our attention. Jesus Christ is always at the center, as well as the infinite love of God towards us.

Do you think that Satanism is also widespread in the spheres of earthly power, or is that a myth?

In order to become powerful, some people can be tempted to rely on the devil, and the purpose of Satanism is just that. “I give something to you, devil; I offer you sacrifices, as long as you give me something in return.” Those who are in search of power are sometimes tempted to rely on the devil. This danger is real. It is absolutely not excluded that high-ranking people explicitly worship the devil — not to mention Freemasonry, some of whose members can get along very well with Satanism.

Many Catholics resort to divination nowadays, convinced that it does not go against their faith. This was the case for Blessed [Bartolo Longo](#), who continued this practice for some time after his conversion, and also for priests, according to some private testimonies I’ve encountered in the past few years. Is divination inherently diabolical?

It is true that it is also a widespread phenomenon among Christians. In fact, I have already met priests who have practiced divination, others who have even had seances, but these are quite rare cases, fortunately. I meet more often priests who have the opposite problem, that is, an excess of rationalism, as mentioned before.

But the Scriptures are very clear on this from the beginning, since Deuteronomy, which condemns all forms of superstition and divination; it is all written in black and white. These practices are serious forms of infidelity towards God. Indeed, one no longer knows how to wait for God’s time — but one cannot know everything, the future in advance, the hidden things by resorting to magic; it is not possible. God keeps us in the dark about what will happen in a year, in a month, and, therefore, we must trust him. It is a matter of trust and abandonment. It is what makes our faith interesting. If God exists and loves me, if he wants to lead me to salvation, I must trust him and his word.

How do you explain that some visionaries make accurate predictions? Does the devil know the future?

It depends on whether these clairvoyant people are moved by God or not. If they are moved by God, it is not surprising that they are able to prophesy about certain things; but they are precisely prophets, and they are mentioned as such both in the Old and the New Testament.

On the other hand, some people are able to “guess” some future events, and the devil can intervene in this. He can know certain futures, whose causes are already existing, or already at work. The devil is very intelligent, far more than we are. He is able to see the signs, the causes of certain events that will happen in a week, in a year or 10. But the devil can never see the events that are linked to our free decisions. Only God can know them, because, for him, the past and the future are an eternal present.

In your courses and lectures, you often warn against practices — such as alternative medicines or even yoga — that are now part of the everyday life of Westerners and that can be dangerous even if they seem harmless. How can one discern?

For my part, I do not demonize everything. Some people are mystified that I do not totally condemn homeopathy, for example. I suspend my judgment, even though I know that the creator of homeopathy was an esotericist [one who believes in a select body of secret or obscure teachings]. But I would not demonize this reality as a whole. However, it is true that many other forms of alternative medicine could be seen as superstitions. The adherence to certain products, to some natural elements, waiting for miraculous effects, is a form of superstition.

With regard to yoga, once again, I cannot demonize it, since the Church itself has not done so. If, as the then-Cardinal Ratzinger once said in an [interview](#), yoga is simply practiced as an exercise aimed at psychophysical well-being, there is nothing to object to it. But in this case, it is no longer yoga as it is known in India, the one that Hinduism has created. And it did so with a religious purpose, that of helping the human beings to pull themselves out of a reality considered as an illusion. I practiced yoga myself for many years when I was young, but I abandoned it precisely because I realized that I was turning back on myself. And unbeknownst to me, yoga was doing what it was designed to do, that is, bringing us back into ourselves and reconnecting with the [Brahman](#), into which we are destined to merge.

Another example is that of [Reiki](#), which consists of the laying on of hands. We Catholics use the laying on of hands when the priest consecrates the bread and wine, but it is in order to allow the action of the Holy Spirit. The priest does not do it by virtue of his own “energy.” Reiki masters, on the contrary, claim they have this power and a healing energy within them, at the end of a real initiation that involves the recitation of a sacred Japanese text. And this is obviously completely contrary to the Catholic faith.

In short, one must always discern case by case. One cannot make a definitive judgment for all these medicines and wellness practices. But some of them can definitely be problematic.

What can the Catholic faithful do to deal with the problem of the resurgence of Satanism that you’ve just mentioned?

Prayer is the first weapon, for themselves, but also for the ministers of the Church, all those who have positions of responsibility. Then, in these times of confusion, where the devil has a large avenue in front of him, the faithful have a duty to deepen their faith, to educate themselves. We need to think a lot about matters of faith and the world around us. It is exactly why I called my book *Let’s Reason About the Devil*.

Solène Tadié is the Europe Correspondent for the National Catholic Register. She is French-Swiss and grew up in Paris. After graduating from Roma III University with a degree in journalism, she began reporting on Rome and the Vatican for Aleteia. She joined L’Osservatore Romano in 2015, where she successively worked for the French section and the Cultural pages of the Italian daily newspaper. She has also collaborated with several French-speaking Catholic media organizations. Solène has a bachelor’s degree in philosophy from the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, and recently translated in French (for Editions Salvator) *Defending the Free Market: The Moral Case for a Free Economy* by the Acton Institute’s Fr. Robert Sirico.