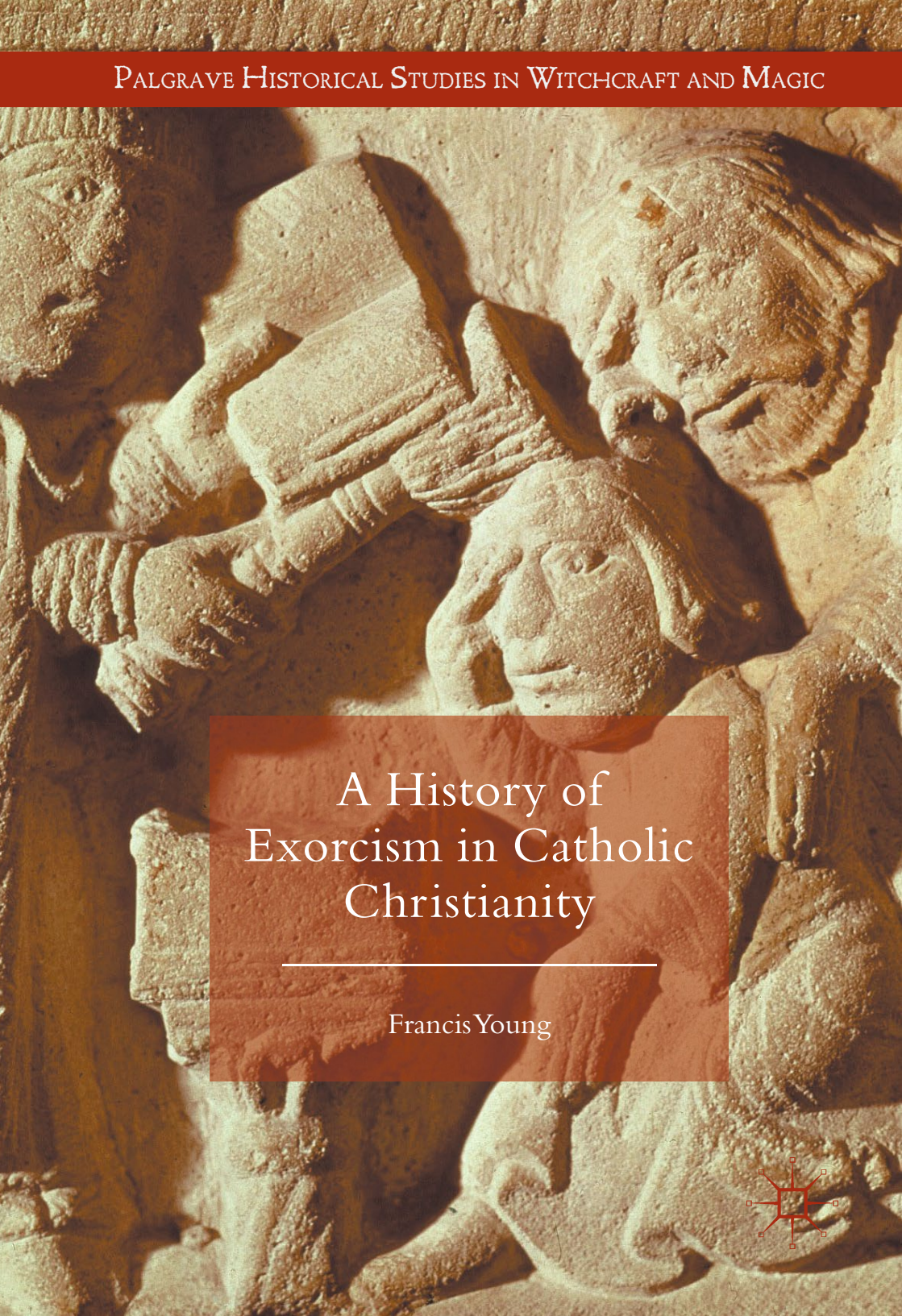


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A History of
Exorcism in Catholic
Christianity

Francis Young



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A History of Exorcism in Catholic Christianity

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For Abigail

PREFACE

The last three decades have seen an explosion of interest amongst historians in the phenomenon of demonic possession. A large number of studies have dealt with individual cases or collections of cases, most of them from the Reformation era. Most of these studies have focused on the behaviour of the people supposed to have been possessed; some of them have focused on the behaviour of the exorcists. Virtually none of them have dealt with exorcism from a ‘procedural’ point of view, examining the texts and rituals of exorcism itself. This book aims to supply that deficit, offering an account of the evolution of rites of exorcism. It appears as part of a series dedicated to magic and witchcraft for two reasons. In the first place, exorcism was one possible response to witchcraft. Secondly, exorcism has a complicated relationship with ritual magic, furnishing magicians with many of their texts from the late Middle Ages onwards. The history of magic cannot be properly understood without an appreciation of the history of exorcism.

I first began to work on exorcism in 2009 in the context of English Catholic history, and dealt with the subject in the final chapter of my *English Catholics and the Supernatural, 1553–1829* (2013). However, during the course of research I became acutely aware of the need for a book that defines the boundaries of what can be considered exorcism, and which sets the much-studied early modern exorcisms in their broader historical context. In particular, a book was needed that addressed the textual, ritual and canonical evolution of exorcism. Furthermore, the resurgence of exorcism within twenty-first-century Catholicism is a phenomenon that demands some kind of historical analysis. Do late twentieth- and

twenty-first-century exorcisms really hark back to the Middle Ages, or are they a distinctly modern phenomenon whose roots lie in recent history? This book aims to provide that analysis and offer answers to this question and others.

Many people have contributed to this book in more or less significant ways over the last few years. My wife, Rachel Hilditch, has patiently tolerated my preoccupation with all things exorcism-related, and deserves my first and lasting thanks. I am grateful to Dr Bridget Nichols and Dr James Noyes for reading and commenting on portions of my draft manuscript, as well as the anonymous readers appointed by Palgrave Macmillan who contributed such helpful and constructive suggestions. I thank Tim Roe and Annaïck Kisby for their help whenever I have got stuck on translations from Latin and French, and Emily Russell and the staff at Palgrave Macmillan for shepherding this book toward publication. The staff of the Rare Books and Manuscript Rooms at the British Library and Cambridge University Library have been unfailingly helpful, as have the staff of the Kent History and Library Centre. I am grateful to Abbot Geoffrey Scott for allowing me the use of the monastic library at Douai Abbey, which gave me access to some otherwise obscure and inaccessible texts.

Finally, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Fr Jeremy Davies, a founder member of the International Association of Exorcists and exorcist of the Archdiocese of Westminster, for being prepared to read and comment on this book's final chapter from the perspective of a practising exorcist.

All translations from works in languages other than English are my own, unless otherwise stated. Naturally, I take responsibility for any and all errors that may remain in the text.

Francis Young
Ely, Cambridgeshire, UK
November 2015

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ABBREVIATIONS

- BL British Library, London
- CCCM *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1966–2014), 316 vols
- CCSL *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–2014), 201 vols
- CSEL *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Salzburg: University of Salzburg, 1866–2011), 99 vols
- CUL Cambridge University Library, Cambridge
- DESQ *De Exorcismis et Supplicationibus Quibusdam*, 2nd edn (Vatican City: Typis Vaticanis, 2004)
- KHLC Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone
- OR *Les Ordines Romani du Haut Moyen Âge*, ed. M. Andrieu (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1931–61), 5 vols
- PG *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1857–66), 161 vols
- PL *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1844–64), 221 vols
- RR *Rituale Romanum editio princeps (1614)*, ed. M. Sodi and J. J. Flores Arcas (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004)
- SG *Liber sacramentorum Gellonensis, textus*, ed. A. Dumas, CCSL 159, 159A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), 2 vols
- ST Aquinas, Thomas (ed. P. Caramello), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Summa theologiae* (Turin, 1963), 3 vols

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Introduction

It is likely that there are now more books in print on the subject of Catholic exorcism than at any time in history. They range from journalistic investigations, both sympathetic and hostile, to warnings about the power of the devil and instructions on how the laity can participate in casting out Satan and his demonic servants. Exorcism is widely and freely discussed by twenty-first-century Catholics, and the secular media's appetite for exorcists and stories of exorcism is seemingly insatiable. If the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were 'the golden age of the demoniac',¹ the twenty-first century is a second golden age of the exorcist. After three centuries of sustained scrutiny and suspicion from within and without the church, exorcism has proved to be a dark yet enduring feature of Catholic culture. Exorcism is in demand as never before, from Catholics and non-Catholics alike, and thanks to the global impact of cinema, the figure of the priest-exorcist has come to be recognized throughout the world.

The contemporary popularity of exorcism raises a historical question. How did exorcism, marginalized for so long, manage a rebirth at the end of the twentieth century? Media events of the last forty years, such as William Friedkin's 1973 film *The Exorcist* and the Satanic abuse panic of the 1980s, do not adequately explain the thorough resurgence of an ancient and controversial practice. The historical roots of exorcism are as

¹Monter, E. W., *Witchcraft in France and Switzerland: The Borderlands during the Reformation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 60.

deep as those of any Christian rite, yet the renewal of interest in exorcism does not so much represent the antiquarian resurrection of a long-dead custom as the re-emergence of an organic, adaptive tradition. The origins of contemporary exorcism lie as much in the apocalyptic spirituality of Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903) and the charismatic exorcisms of Johann-Joseph Gassner in eighteenth-century Germany as they do in twentieth-century events.

To answer thoroughly the question of why exorcism has made a successful come-back, the entire history of exorcism within Catholic Christianity needs to be examined. Many historians are still apologetic when they approach ‘an aspect of Catholic religious culture that has long been considered hopelessly superstitious’,² but while it is certainly not for the historian to determine what is and what is not superstitious, ‘superstition’ is undoubtedly a subject of historical interest. This book approaches exorcism from the perspective of church history as an aspect of Catholic religious behaviour, concentrating on the development of the theological, liturgical and legal foundations of exorcism rather than the physical phenomena of possession. Sarah Ferber saw religious war, fear of witches and a concern to regulate new spirituality as the ‘predisposing conditions’ of an explosion in exorcism in sixteenth-century France.³ This book endorses that thesis, and applies it in more general terms to the entire history of exorcism. In fact, Ferber’s conditions can be broken down to just two ingredients essential for a flourishing of exorcism: division within the church and fear of an external spiritual enemy. These factors are almost invariably accompanied by an apocalyptic sensibility, as threats to the church are often construed within a Christian religious outlook as signs of the imminent end of the world. Where one or more of these factors have been absent, the practice of exorcism has undergone a crisis, leading eventually to a transformation to suit better the needs of the time.

Periods in which exorcism has flourished include late antiquity, the early medieval era, the late Middle Ages, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the present day (1980s onwards). Whilst no period of church history has ever been without division, the instigation of reform has produced particularly acute questions of identity for Catholics. This occurred in the

² Midelfort, H. C. E., *Exorcism and Enlightenment: Johann Joseph Gassner and the Demons of Eighteenth-Century Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 7.

³ Ferber, S., *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 4.

sixteenth century, before and after the Council of Trent (1545–63), and again in the twentieth century, when Catholics were divided by interpretation of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). The threat of paganism in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages eventually passed, producing a crisis for exorcism between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. A revival of demonology in the thirteenth century, in response to the theological threat to traditional doctrines of evil by the Cathars, formed the background to the late medieval revival of exorcism, aided by an increased awareness of a new threat in the form of witchcraft. The Reformation and a continuing obsession with witchcraft produced perfect conditions for the growth of exorcism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, embarrassed by exorcism in an age when the church's relations with secular governments were seen as paramount in importance, church authorities discouraged exorcism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In other words, exorcism declined as the spiritual threats of heresy and witchcraft were perceived as less important, at least by elites. The roots of the contemporary revival of exorcism lie in Pope Leo XIII's conviction that a new spiritual threat, a Satanist global conspiracy directed by Freemasons, menaced the church in the late nineteenth century.

The story of exorcism can be told in many ways other than as church history. Histories of exorcism could also be written from the perspectives of medical history, the history of mental illness, gender studies, religious anthropology and the sociology of religion, to name just a few.⁴

⁴For an approach to exorcism as an aspect of medical history see Clarke, B., *Mental Disorder in Earlier Britain: Exploratory Studies* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975); on exorcism and gender studies, see Blackwell, J., 'German Narratives of Women's Divine and Demonic Possession and Supernatural Visions 1555–1800: A Bibliography', *Women in German Yearbook* 16 (2000), pp. 241–57; Caciola, N., *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); for anthropological studies of exorcism see Goodman (1988); Kapferer, B., *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka* (Providence, RI: Berg, 1991); Stirrat, R. L., 'Demonic Possession in Roman Catholic Sri Lanka', *Journal of Anthropological Research* 33 (1977), pp. 133–57; Stirrat, R. L., *Power and Religiosity in a Post-Colonial Setting: Sinhala Catholics in Contemporary Sri Lanka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Solomon, R. M., *Living in Two Worlds: Pastoral Responses to Possession in Singapore* (Frankfurt-am-Main: P. Lang, 1994); Carrin-Bouez, M. (ed.), *Managing Distress: Possession and Therapeutic Cults in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999); Chohan, S. S., 'The Exorcist: Personification of Human Wickedness or Upholder of Religious Duties?' in Hamilton, R. P. and Breen, M. S. (eds), *This Thing of Darkness: Perspectives on Evil and Human Wickedness* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 103–14.

These histories are undoubtedly needed, but this volume confines itself to the consideration of exorcism as part of the history of the Catholic church. Exorcism in the New Testament and the very earliest centuries of Christianity lies beyond its scope, since its purpose is not to address the ultimate biblical or theological origins of exorcism, but to trace the evolution of exorcism as a practice of the Catholic church. Any attempt to deal with Christian exorcisms before around 150 CE runs into the debate about when Christianity became differentiated from Judaism as a distinct religion. Before the fourth century, when the concept of ‘orthodoxy’ was established, it is all too easy for the historian to impose ‘anachronistic conceptual limitations’ on the material.⁵ Likewise this study makes no attempt to survey the traditions that emerged from the Protestant Reformation, which have been ably treated elsewhere.⁶

It is by no means uncontroversial to speak of the Catholic church as a single organization with a continuous history from the fourth century.⁷ A history of ‘the Catholic church’ is really a history of ‘the Catholic tradition’, and in Chap. 2, I use the term ‘Latin West’, conscious of the ambiguous meaning of the word ‘Catholic’ in the early centuries of Christianity. This book traces the history of a ritual tradition within Latin Christianity, and is thus more than a history of the institutions and regulations of a

⁵ Nicolotti, A., *Esorcismo Cristiano e Possessione Diabolica tra II e III Secolo* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 17–8.

⁶ On the Reformers’ rejection of exorcism see Cameron, E., *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 205–8. On the Protestant reform of baptismal exorcism see Kelly, H. A., *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology and Drama* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 254–71; Nischan, B., ‘The Exorcism Controversy and Baptism in the Late Reformation’, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987), pp. 31–52. On Protestant exorcists see Freeman, T. S., ‘Demons, Deviance and Defiance: John Darrell and the Politics of Exorcism in Late Elizabethan England’ in Lake, P. and Questier, M. (eds), *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c. 1560–1660* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), pp. 34–63; Almond, P. C., *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England: Contemporary Texts and their Cultural Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Gibson, M., *Possession, Puritanism and Print: Darrell, Harsnett, Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Exorcism Controversy* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006). On contemporary Protestant exorcism and deliverance see Collins, J. M., *Exorcism and Deliverance Ministry in the Twentieth Century: An Analysis of the Practice and Theology of Exorcism in Modern Western Christianity* (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2009).

⁷ On this issue see Macy, G., ‘Was there a “The Church” in the Middle Ages?’ in Swanson, R. (ed.), *Unity and Diversity in the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 107–16.

reified church. The practice of exorcism is as old as the church, and older than most of the institutions within the church that have tried to regulate it throughout the centuries. Failure to appreciate the antiquity and enduring nature of exorcism is a feature of much contemporary scholarship on exorcism in specific historical eras, and a shortcoming this book is intended to address.

EXORCISM AND ITS HISTORIES

An exorcist speaks with the authority of God to cast out demons. Whether or not this invisible drama really takes place behind the outward words and actions of exorcist and demoniac, the Catholic exorcist's pretensions to authority are grounded not in personal self-assurance but in legal fact. In contemporary Catholicism, exorcists claim to confront the devil not only with the authority of God, but also with that of the church, which they themselves have received by an explicit licence from a diocesan bishop within the strictures of Canon Law. Catholic theology presents exorcism as a political act in the invisible polity, in which the kingdom of Jesus Christ confronts and overthrows the devil's kingdom of darkness. However, exorcism is also a political act on the human level of church history. The entire canonical process of exorcism, beginning with the authorization of the exorcist and ending in the spoken rite, dramatically brings into focus questions of authority and legitimacy, to a greater extent than any other rite of the church. Furthermore, the exorcist is not the only participant in the drama of exorcism: by means of exorcism the demons speak and are bound to tell the truth, so that their words become 'suitable and versatile weapons in inner-church conflicts, theological controversies, and church politics'.⁸ Exorcism defines the 'other', that which is opposed to God's church, and it has been exploited both by the defenders of Catholic 'orthodoxy' and dissidents seeking to establish their own claims to authority and authenticity. Individual cases of exorcism, and indeed the question of whether exorcisms should be performed at all, have polarized Catholics for centuries.

For many contemporary Europeans and Americans, including Catholics, the practice of exorcism seems an unaccountable 'medieval' survival whose intrusion into the modern world is discomfiting and bizarre. However,

⁸ Goodman, F. D., *How about Demons? Possession and Exorcism in the Modern World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 97.

the origins of exorcism as practised in the Catholic church today, with its diagnostic criteria and attempted safeguards, lie in the early modern period. Indeed, the Middle Ages were a period of crisis and transition for exorcism, in which it was transformed from the charismatic, saint-focused practice of late antiquity into a liturgical rite invoking priestly authority. For many centuries, a strong tension existed between the idea that exorcism was the preserve of especially holy men and women (or their relics after death) and the notion that any priest could command a demon. By the late Middle Ages exorcism was identified as a sacramental rather than a sacrament: unlike the regenerative grace of baptism or the transubstantiation of bread and wine in the mass, the success of a priestly exorcism was not guaranteed, and depended at least partly on the piety and holiness of the exorcist.

Exorcism as officially practised in the contemporary Catholic church is an adaptation of a seventeenth-century rite liturgically rooted in the early church but applied according to early modern criteria of diagnosis and canonical legitimacy. The intense, confrontational and dramatic exorcisms that captured popular imagination in films such as *The Exorcist*, placing great emphasis on the power of words uttered by a priest, are a distinctly modern phenomenon. The intensity of Counter-Reformation theology imbued the liberation of demoniacs with a new significance in a perceived apocalyptic conflict between the church of God and the synagogue of Satan, in the form of the Protestant Reformation. From the sixteenth century onwards debates about exorcism and possession provided the occasion for discussions of the relationship between mind and body that paved the way for modern psychology. Exorcism, like every other aspect of Catholic liturgy and practice, has evolved and changed over the centuries, but in its present form it is best described as a legacy of the early modern rather than the medieval world.

The purpose of the earliest historical accounts of exorcism by Catholics was to argue for the rite's continuing importance as part of the practice of the church.⁹ The German priest Anton Joseph Binterim (1779–1855) began the systematic study of the ancient sources for the rite of exorcism in 1831,¹⁰ and later in the nineteenth century, Ferdinand Probst and

⁹Nicolotti (2011), p. 23. See pp. 24–9 for Nicolotti's helpful overview of the literature on exorcism.

¹⁰Binterim, A. J., *Über die Besessenen (Energumenen) und ihre Behandlung in der alten Kirche* (Munich: Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Religions, 1979), originally published 1831.

Franz Wieland examined the history of exorcism in the context of a discussion of the status of sacramentals and the development of the office of exorcist as a minor order of the clergy.¹¹ Another German priest, Franz Joseph Dölger, produced the first dedicated modern study of the Patristic and textual sources of baptismal exorcism in 1909.¹² This has only recently been surpassed as an authoritative treatment by the work of Henry Ansgar Kelly and Andrea Nicolotti.¹³

In spite of the extensive historical literature on exorcism, no scholarly work dedicated to the entire history of exorcism exists in English.¹⁴ The contribution that a systematic history of developing attitudes to exorcism could make to Catholic church history has largely been overlooked. Fears of possession, and consequently the practice of exorcism, have tended to surface at times of crisis in the history of the church. At such times exorcism (or the control of exorcism) has served as an important means of establishing authority and identity. The Reformation was not the only period of crisis in the history of the Catholic church when this was true. The recent concentration of historical work on Counter-Reformation exorcisms carries with it a danger that the type of exorcisms practised at that time are projected back onto the medieval past and forward onto the present, when in fact exorcism is a complex and evolving Christian tradition.

¹¹ Probst, F., *Sakramente und Sakramentalien in den drei ersten christlichen Jahrhunderten* (Tübingen: H. Laupp'schen, 1872); Wieland, F., *Die genetische Entwicklung der sog Ordines Minores in den drei erstern Jahrhunderten* (Rome: Herder, 1897).

¹² Dölger, F. J., *Der Exorzismus im altchristlichen Taufritual*, Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums 3.1–2 (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1909).

¹³ The two best short accounts of the history of exorcism in English are Kelly, H. A., *Towards the Death of Satan: The Growth and Decline of Christian Demonology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), pp. 77–95; De Waardt, H., 'Demonic Possession: An Introductory Note' in De Waardt, H., Schmidt, J. M., Midelfort, H. C. E. and Bauer, D. R. (eds), *Dämonische Besessenheit: zur Interpretation eines kulturhistorischen Phänomens* (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2005), pp. 20–35.

¹⁴ As observed by Nicolotti (2011), p. 25. Monika Scala's study in German, *Der Exorzismus in der Katholischen Kirche: Ein liturgisches Ritual zwischen Film, Mythos und Realität* (Hamburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2012) is a fairly comprehensive history of exorcism. Scala sets her analysis of the film *The Exorcist* and reactions to it (pp. 25–143) in the context of an examination of the Biblical and Patristic origins of exorcism (pp. 145–222, 223–311), the early evolution of the Gelasian Sacramentary (pp. 312–49), the *Rituale Romanum* of 1614 (pp. 350–86), the Exorcism of Leo XIII (pp. 387–94) and the revised liturgy of 1999 (pp. 395–424). The essay collection in German and English edited by De Waardt, Schmidt, Midelfort, Lorenz and Bauer, *Dämonische Besessenheit* (2005) also deserves a mention.

The literature on Catholic exorcism produced over the last hundred years can be divided into three broad categories. The first consists of theological reflections by theologians or liturgists on the theory and practice of exorcism, often including its relationship with contemporary understandings of mental health and/or parapsychology.¹⁵ In the second category are collections of exorcism accounts and the personal testimonies of exorcists,¹⁶ while the third category consists of critical historical studies of exorcism from the perspective of religious history. These three categories leave aside the vast popular literature on exorcism and demonology, whether Catholic religious works or the products of sensationalist journalism.

Historical interest in exorcism has tended to focus on certain periods of Christian history whilst neglecting others. So, for instance, the first, second and third centuries have received a great deal of attention from biblical and Patristic scholars,¹⁷ but the period between the fourth and tenth centuries remains comparatively neglected, except where exorcism has been treated as one form of miraculous healing among many.¹⁸ Florence Chave-Mahir's study of exorcism in Western Europe between the tenth and fourteenth centuries is by far the most thorough study of medieval exorcism and, indeed, the only one that tackles directly the period of the High Middle Ages.¹⁹ In addition to her detailed analysis of a wide

¹⁵See Balducci, C., 'Parapsychology and Diabolic Possession', *International Journal of Parapsychology* 8 (1966), pp. 193–212; Suenens, L.-J., *Renewal and the Powers of Darkness* (London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 1983); Triacca, A., 'Esorcismo: un sacramentale discusso', *Ecclesia Orans* 4 (1987), pp. 285–300.

¹⁶An early collection of this kind was Traugott K. Österreich's *Possession, Demoniacal and Other, among Primitive Races, in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modern Times* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1930). More recently, works of personal testimony by Vatican exorcists have achieved considerable popularity and have reached an audience well beyond the Vatican and Italy by being translated into English (Balducci, C. (trans. J. Aumann), *The Devil: Alive and Active in our World* (Alba House, 1990); Amorth, G., *An Exorcist Tells his Story* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1999); Amorth, G., *An Exorcist: More Stories* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2002); Baglio, M., *The Rite: The Making of a Modern Exorcist* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2009)).

¹⁷Sorensen, E., *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002); Twelftree, G. H., *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among the Early Christians* (Grand Rapids, MN: Baker Academic, 2007); Nicolotti (2011).

¹⁸See, for instance, Gentilcore, D., *Healers and Healing in Early Modern Italy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Porterfield, A., *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁹Chave-Mahir, F., *L'Exorcisme des Possédés dans l'Église d'Occident (Xe–XIVe siècle)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), p. 22. One of the few articles in English on this period is

variety of hagiographical and liturgical sources, Chave-Mahir identified every surviving liturgical book produced between the ninth and fifteenth centuries containing a rite of exorcism,²⁰ *exempla* of exorcisms most commonly employed in medieval and early modern texts,²¹ and every instance of exorcism mentioned in the *Golden Legend* of Jacques de Voragine.²²

Contemporary historical study of exorcism has its roots in the historiography of witchcraft, and foundational studies such as Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971), D. P. Walker's *Unclean Spirits* (1981) and Stuart Clark's *Thinking with Demons* (1997) emphasized the links between exorcism, eschatology and the drive to extirpate witchcraft.²³ However, as Armando Maggi observed, one shortcoming of these witchcraft-focused studies was that they did not address exorcism as an important theme in its own right, concentrating instead on deviant exorcists who were thought to have misused the church's rites.²⁴ In the early 2000s two complementary approaches to exorcism emerged. Maggi and Hilaire Kallendorff developed the study of exorcism as a literary genre and emphasized the formative role of language in early modern exorcisms,²⁵ with Maggi arguing that the performative voice of the exorcist imposed order on disordered language, while Kallendorff drew attention to the rhetorical nature of exorcism.²⁶ Nancy Caciola, Moshe Sluhovsky and Sarah Ferber advanced the thesis that late medieval and early modern exorcism developed as a response to anxieties about mysticism and the

Goddu, A., 'The Failure of Exorcism in the Middle Ages' in Zimmerman, A. (ed.), *Soziale Ordnungen im Selbstverständnis des Mittelalters*, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 12/2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), pp. 540–57. On medieval exorcism see also Newman, B., 'Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century', *Speculum* 73 (1998), pp. 733–70; Boureau, A. (trans. T. L. Fagan), *Satan the Heretic: The Birth of Demonology in the Medieval West* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

²⁰ Chave-Mahir (2011), pp. 343–59.

²¹ *Ibid.* pp. 385–94.

²² *Ibid.* pp. 395–9.

²³ Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 4th edn (London: Penguin, 1991); Walker, D. P., *Unclean Spirits: Possession and Exorcism in France and England in the late Sixteenth and early Seventeenth Centuries* (London: Scholar, 1981); Clark, S., *Thinking with Demons* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

²⁴ Maggi, A., *Satan's Rhetoric: A Study of Renaissance Demonology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 104.

²⁵ Maggi (2001), pp. 96–136; Kallendorff, H., *Exorcism and its Texts: Subjectivity in Early Modern Literature of England and Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Kallendorff, H., 'The Rhetoric of Exorcism', *Rhetorica* 23 (2005), pp. 209–37.

²⁶ Maggi (2001), p. 106.

need to distinguish between good and evil spirits. Caciola's *Discerning Spirits* (2003) included a detailed study of exorcism and exorcism manuals in the fifteenth century,²⁷ and this remains one of the few studies of medieval exorcism in English.²⁸ Sluhovsky's *Believe not Every Spirit* (2007) examined the later development of the 1614 rite of exorcism within a similar historiographical framework,²⁹ while Ferber's *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France* (2004) approaches its theme through case studies.

The historical literature on early modern possession, exorcism and demonology, by English-speaking and European scholars alike, is vast and growing. The classic studies of Michel de Certeau, Jonathan L. Pearl, Giovanni Levi and David Gentilcore have been complemented by Euan Cameron's significant *Enchanted Europe* (2010) and a plethora of books and articles.³⁰ However, the majority of studies of early modern 'exorcism' have, in reality, focused on possession. Sluhovsky, for instance, was primarily concerned with exorcists as interpreters of possessed behaviour, and controversies concerning the process of exorcism itself were of secondary interest to him. Brian Levack's recent *The Devil Within* (2013), although subtitled 'Possession and Exorcism in the Christian West', is in reality a history of possession and demoniacs. Just one chapter, 'Expelling

²⁷ Caciola (2003), pp. 225–73; see also Caciola, N., 'Mystics, Demoniacs and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42 (2000), pp. 268–306.

²⁸ Marek Tamm provided a brief overview of medieval exorcism in 'Saints and Demoniacs: Exorcistic Rites in Medieval Europe (11th–13th Century)', *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 23 (2003), pp. 7–24.

²⁹ Sluhovsky, M., *Believe not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism and Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

³⁰ De Certeau, M., *La Possession de Loudun*, 2nd edn (Paris: Archives Gallimard Julliard, 1980); Pearl, J. L., 'Demons and Politics in France, 1560–1630', *Historical Reflections* 12 (1985), pp. 241–51; Levi, G., *Inheriting Power: The Story of an Exorcist* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Gentilcore, D., *From Bishop to Witch: The System of the Sacred in Early Modern Terra d'Otranto* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Pearl, J. L., *The Crime of Crimes: Demonology and Politics in France, 1560–1620* (Waterloo, Ont: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), pp. 41–58. Other notable studies of early modern exorcism include Weber, H., 'L'Exorcisme à la fin du XVIe siècle: Instrument de la Contre Réforme et Spectacle Baroque', *Nouvelle Revue du Seizième Siècle* 1 (1983), pp. 79–101; Tolosana, C. L., *Demonios y Exorcismos en los Siglos de Oro* (Madrid: Akal, 1990); Romeo, G., *Inquisitori, Esorcisti e Streghe nell'Italia della Controriforma* (Florence: Sansoni, 2003); Ferber (2004); Lederer, D., *Madness, Religion and the State in Early Modern Europe: A Bavarian Beacon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

the Demon', addresses exorcism directly, and even here the focus is on the purposes of exorcism. Levack devotes fewer than ten pages to the techniques of exorcism themselves.³¹

Although no study has ever been devoted to exorcism in the early modern Americas, numerous historians have written on demonology and the relationship between exorcism and the Inquisition in the Spanish and Portuguese Americas.³² The work of Hans de Waardt and Marc Wingens on Catholic exorcisms in the Protestant Dutch Republic is complemented by Alexandra Walsham's investigations into Catholic exorcisms as miraculous healing in England, as well as my own extensive analysis of exorcism as part of the Counter-Reformation Catholic mission in England.³³ Possessions and bewitchment became almost synonymous in many countries in the eighteenth century, and the history of exorcism at this period has tended to be subsumed within studies of European witchcraft and a large body of literature concerning the history of belief in the devil.³⁴

³¹ Levack, B., *The Devil Within: Possession and Exorcism in the Christian West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 100–10.

³² Cervantes, F., *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994); De Mello e Souza, L. (trans. D. Grosklaus Whitty), *The Devil and the Land of the Holy Cross: Witchcraft, Slavery, and Popular Religion in Colonial Brazil* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003); Ebright, M. and Hendricks, R., *The Witches of Abiquiu: the Governor, the Priest, the Genízaro Indians, and the Devil* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); Mills, K., 'Demonios within and without: Hieronymites and the Devil in the early modern Hispanic world' in Cervantes, F. and Redden, A. (eds), *Angels, Demons and the New World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 40–68, at pp. 53–5.

³³ Wingens, M., 'Political Change and Demon Possession in the South of the Dutch Republic: The Confrontation of a Protestant Bailiff and a Catholic Priest in 1650' in De Waardt et al. (2005), pp. 249–62; De Waardt, H., 'Jesuits, Propaganda and Faith Healing in the Dutch Republic', *History* 94 (2009), pp. 344–59; Walsham, A., 'Miracles and the Counter-Reformation Mission to England', *The Historical Journal* 46 (2003), pp. 779–815; Young, F., 'Catholic Exorcism in Early Modern England: Polemic, Propaganda and Folklore', *Recusant History* 29 (2009), pp. 487–507; Young, F., *English Catholics and the Supernatural, 1553–1829* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 189–230.

³⁴ For discussions of exorcism as a remedy for witchcraft see Davies, O., *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736–1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 23–6; Seitz, J., *Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 97–103. On the devil see Russell, J. B., *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); Nugent, C., *Masks of Satan: The Demonic in History* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1983); Russell, J. B., *Lucifer, The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Russell, J. B., *Mephistopheles: the Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University

Of course, there are exceptions, notably Erik Midelfort's work on Johann-Joseph Gassner and Elena Brambilla's important study of the relationship between exorcism, medicine and the church in eighteenth-century Italy.³⁵ Historical studies of possession and exorcism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are scarce,³⁶ yet this is a period that deserves attention. In the nineteenth century, for the first time since the Middle Ages, the laity (and sometimes demoniacs themselves) became the driving force behind exorcism, rather than the clergy.

The Catholic church's strict secrecy regarding exorcisms presents an obvious obstacle to the historian seeking to give an account of exorcism in the twentieth century when, in theory, records of exorcisms and their authorization were kept by diocesan chanceries. Fr Jeremy Davies, exorcist of the Archdiocese of Westminster, was kind enough to share with me his views on contemporary exorcism, but it would have been unreasonable of me to expect him to reveal any specific details of his work, given the strictures of Canon Law. However, a couple of high-profile exorcisms have been extensively documented in the public domain, notably those of the Bavarian student Anneliese Michel in 1976 and the American boy known as 'Robbie Mannheim' or 'Roland Doe' in 1949. Michel's death during an ongoing exorcism led to the trial of her parents and two exorcists and, consequently, the public release of all papers relating to the exorcism. Felicitas Goodman's analysis of this case from the perspective of religious anthropology and comparative psychology is a valuable contribution to the

Press, 1986); Forsyth, N., *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); O'Grady, J., *The Prince of Darkness: The Devil in History, Religion and the Human Psyche* (Longmead: Element Books, 1989); Messadié, G. (trans. M. Romano), *The History of the Devil* (London: Newleaf, 1996); Pagels, E., *The Origin of Satan* (London: Allen Lane, 1996); Muchembled, R. (trans. J. Birrell), *A History of the Devil from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003); Johnstone, N., *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Kelly, H. A., *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Oldridge, D., *The Devil in Tudor and Stuart England*, 3rd edn (Stroud: History Press, 2010).

³⁵Midelfort (2005a); Brambilla, E., *Corpi Invasi e Viaggi dell'Anima: santità, possessione, esorcismo dalla teologia barocca alla medicina illuminista* (Rome: Viella, 2010).

³⁶Two important studies are Harris, R., 'Possession on the Borders: The "Mal de Morzine" in Nineteenth-Century France', *Journal of Modern History* 69 (1997), pp. 451–78; Tausiet, M., 'The Possessed of Tosos (1812–1814): Witchcraft and Popular Justice during the Spanish Revolution' in De Waardt et al. (2005), pp. 263–80. Brian Levack devotes a chapter to comparison of twentieth-century and early modern possessions (Levack (2013), pp. 240–53).

history of twentieth-century exorcism, while Thomas B. Allen's detailed study of the exorcism of 'Robbie Mannheim' shows more concern for critical analysis of the historical material than most journalistic accounts of exorcism.³⁷

In spite of the small number of documented twentieth-century exorcisms, the papacies of John Paul II (1978–2005) and Benedict XVI (2005–13) fostered a revival of conservative theological thought on the devil, creating an environment conducive to practising exorcists sharing their own and others' experiences. Gabriele Amorth's two books about his mentor Candido Amantini, and José Antonio Fortea's *Summa Demoniacae* (2008), a latter-day manual for exorcists, offer considerable insight into the beliefs and practices of twenty-first-century Catholic exorcists. However, sceptical voices of dissent from within the Catholic community, such as the Jesuits Henry Ansgar Kelly and Juan B. Cortés, cannot be overlooked.³⁸ The resurgence of exorcism from the 1970s onwards has been the subject of Michael Cuneo's *American Exorcism* (2001) and James Collins's comparative study of 'charismatic' twentieth-century exorcists of all backgrounds, from Pentecostal to Catholic.³⁹ However, both Cuneo and Collins concentrated on America, and there has been little consideration of contemporary European exorcists in their historical context.

DEFINING EXORCISM, POSSESSION AND DEMONS

Exorcism, possession and demonology each have a distinct and separable history, albeit the history of each has mingled and intersected with that of the others.⁴⁰ Demonology in the abstract need not involve any reference to exorcism at all, and likewise possession has not always resulted in exorcism. However, there is no exorcism without possession, and demonological theory, to a greater or lesser extent, underlies every exorcism.

³⁷ Goodman, F. D., *The Exorcism of Anneliese Michel*, 2nd edn (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2005); Allen, T. B., *Possessed: The True Story of an Exorcism*, 2nd edn (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2000).

³⁸ Kelly, H. A., *Towards the Death of Satan: The Growth and Decline of Christian Demonology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968); Cortés, J. B. and Gatti, F., *The Case against Possessions and Exorcisms: A Historical, Biblical and Psychological Analysis of Demons, Devils and Demoniacs* (New York: Vantage, 1975).

³⁹ Cuneo, M. W., *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty*, 2nd edn (London: Bantam, 2002); Collins (2009).

⁴⁰ Chave-Mahir (2011), p. 15.

Historians have adopted a variety of different approaches to the problem of the ‘reality’ of possession. Brian Levack, whilst rejecting all previous interpretations of ‘what is really going on’ in possessions, nevertheless insists that the historian must offer some sort of answer, and chooses to interpret possessions as conscious or unconscious ‘theatrical productions’ following a religious script.⁴¹ Moshe Sluhovsky was critical of ‘psychopathological’, ‘sociological feminist’ and ‘communicative-performative’ explanations of demonic behaviour,⁴² and Sarah Ferber has likewise rejected attempts to ‘pathologise’ the possessed, on the grounds that we might as well do the same to the exorcists.⁴³ Ramsay MacMullen argued that the historian who doubts the reality of what ancient people believed they saw is engaged in theology, not history.⁴⁴

For the greater part of the sixteen centuries covered by this study, possession was a reality for those who believed that they or their loved ones experienced it, and the effects of exorcism were equally real to them. The starting point for a historical study of exorcism must be to treat possession and the effectiveness of exorcism as experiential realities for the individuals and communities who believed they were subject to demonic attack. Attempts at ‘historical diagnosis’, such as Richard Raiswell and Peter Dendle’s suggestion that most of the demoniacs in Anglo-Saxon England were suffering from epilepsy,⁴⁵ create difficulties. If possession was mental or physical illness, why was exorcism thought to work? Speculation concerning the reasons for the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of exorcism may have a place in medical history, but in a history of the practice of exorcism it is an unwelcome distraction. At the same time, however, it must be recognized that neither possession nor exorcism have ever been stable categories unaffected by their historical context. As Raiswell points out,

... just as the devil lacks a fixed and wholly coherent identity, as his nature and significance vary according to the time and place in which he is perceived, so the strategies employed to redress his incursions shift according

⁴¹ Levack (2013), pp. 29–31.

⁴² Sluhovsky (2007), pp. 2–6.

⁴³ Ferber (2004), p. 49.

⁴⁴ MacMullen, R., *Christiannizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100–400)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 24.

⁴⁵ Raiswell, R. and Dendle, P., ‘Demon Possession in Anglo-Saxon and Early Modern England: Continuity and Evolution in Social Context’, *Journal of British Studies* 47 (2008), 738–67, at p. 745.

to the social and cultural context in which he is detected ... the methods people used were as varied as the guises of the devil himself.⁴⁶

Consequently, to assume—or even to entertain—the reality of spiritual phenomena in a historical work makes the business of history all but impossible, because behaviours and practices need to be evaluated within their historical context rather than as expressions of timeless religious truths. The question of the real existence of demonic personalities needs to be set aside in order to permit historical judgements, but so also do alternative explanations that run the risk of imposing contemporary frameworks of thought on pre-modern and early modern people. As Raiswell and Dendle have noted in relation to the devil, ‘imposing a single, universalist definition on an imaginary concept ... that is a reflection of people’s lived experience only as it is refracted through contemporary theological, natural philosophical and legal paradigms’ carries with it numerous difficulties, and the same is equally true of exorcism.⁴⁷

Theologians, anthropologists and historians under anthropological influence have a tendency to define exorcism very differently. J. Forget’s theological definition has proved influential, forming the basis of Edward Gratsch’s definition in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967) as well as the definition adopted by Nicolotti: ‘The means employed to expel a real or alleged demon, by casting it out from one place, body or object, especially a human body, which it occupies, possesses, haunts or invades’.⁴⁸ Gratsch modified this to ‘The act of driving out or warding off demons or evil spirits from persons, places, or things that are, or are believed to be, possessed or infested by them or are liable to become instruments of their malice’.⁴⁹ Gratsch thus took account of the possibility that exorcism may be deployed as an apotropaic or preventative measure as well as a literal driving out of demons. However, apotropaic practices guarding against

⁴⁶ Raiswell, R., ‘Introduction: Conceptualising the Devil in Society’ in Raiswell, R. and Dendle, R. (eds), *The Devil in Society in Pre-Modern Europe* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation Studies, 2012), pp. 23–68, at pp. 58–9.

⁴⁷ Raiswell, R. and Dendle, P., ‘Epilogue: Inscribing the Devil in Cultural Contexts’ in Raiswell, R. and Dendle, P. (eds), *The Devil in Society in Pre-Modern Europe* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012), pp. 537–51, at p. 537.

⁴⁸ Forget, J., ‘Exorcisme’ in Vacant, A. et al. (eds), *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (Paris, 1903–50), vol. 5:2, pp. 1762–80.

⁴⁹ Gratsch, E. J., ‘Exorcism’ in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd edn (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2003), vol. 5, pp. 551–3, at p. 551.