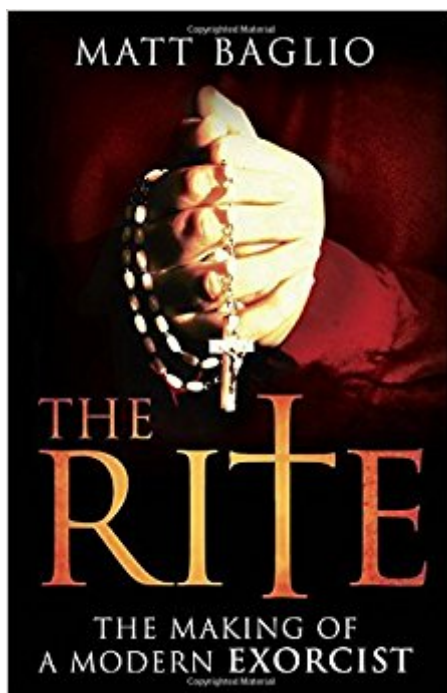


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# The Rite: The Making Of A Modern Exorcist



## Synopsis

The inspiration for the film starring Anthony Hopkins, journalist Matt Baglio uses the astonishing story of one American priest's training as an exorcist to reveal that the phenomena of possession, demons, the Devil, and exorcism are not merely a remnant of the archaic past, but remain a fearsome power in many people's lives even today. Father Gary Thomas was working as a parish priest in California when he was asked by his bishop to travel to Rome for training in the rite of exorcism. Though initially surprised, and slightly reluctant, he accepted this call, and enrolled in a new exorcism course at a Vatican-affiliated university, which taught him, among other things, how to distinguish between a genuine possession and mental illness. Eventually he would go on to participate in more than eighty exorcisms as an apprentice to a veteran Italian exorcist. His experiences profoundly changed the way he viewed the spiritual world, and as he moved from rational skeptic to practicing exorcist he came to understand the battle between good and evil in a whole new light. Journalist Matt Baglio had full access to Father Gary over the course of his training, and much of what he learned defies explanation. The Rite provides fascinating vignettes from the lives of exorcists and people possessed by demons, including firsthand accounts of exorcists at work casting out demons, culminating in Father Gary's own confrontations with the Devil. Baglio also traces the history of exorcism, revealing its rites and rituals, explaining what the Catholic Church really teaches about demonic possession, and delving into such related topics as the hierarchy of angels and demons, satanic cults, black masses, curses, and the various theories used by modern scientists and anthropologists who seek to quantify such phenomena. Written with an investigative eye that will captivate both skeptics and believers alike, The Rite shows that the truth about demonic possession is not only stranger than fiction, but also far more chilling.

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Journalist Baglio follows a Catholic priest through the latter's training to become an exorcist in this incisive look at the church's rite of exorcism and its use in contemporary life. Baglio began delving into the topic after hearing about a course at a Vatican-affiliated university, where he met and befriended the Rev. Gary Thomas, a priest in the diocese of San Jose, Calif. Thomas took the exorcism course at the request of his bishop and subsequently apprenticed himself to a seasoned exorcist. Keenly aware of the misunderstanding that abounds about exorcism through film images, Baglio sets about dispelling misconceptions and does so skillfully, separating the real from the imaginary in the mysterious and unsettling sphere of the demonic. Both Thomas and Baglio were changed by their exposure to the rite. Thomas grew spiritually during the process, which bolstered his desire to help his parishioners, and Baglio, previously a nominal Catholic, reconnected with his faith. For anyone seeking a serious and very human examination of this fascinating subject, one that surpasses the sensational, this is absorbing and enlightening reading. (Mar. 10) Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Chanting prayers and slinging holy water, the cinematic exorcist faces the forces of evil with strength and faith. But what of his real-life counterpart? In his first book, journalist Baglio follows Brother Gary, an American Roman Catholic priest, as he learns about exorcism firsthand during a sabbatical in Rome, first through a university class and later through an apprenticeship with an Italian exorcist. Spectacular exorcisms do occur, but most of the book focuses on other topics, from Father Gary's early life to the scientific controversies surrounding exorcism. The Rite provides more questions than answers: Why do some exorcists use methods not approved by the Church? Has the popularity of alternative religions led to a rise in possessions and exorcisms, as Baglio's interviewees maintain? If exorcism is a Christian ritual, why does it benefit Hindus and Muslims? More guidance as to how readers might explore these questions would be welcome, but this book is recommended for all public libraries as a place to begin the dialog.Ã¢â –â •Dan Harms, SUNY at Cortland Memorial Lib. Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Demonic possession is the most stigmatized and stereotyped of all border phenomena. And I say border as I refer to the line between what we consider normal and experiences we can't explain. Perhaps the movies are to blame for our idea of what an exorcism consists of, a little girl screams when splashed with holy water, or a deep evil voice manifests. Neuroscience and psychology associate demonic possession with a call for attention or a misinterpretation of a modern disease like schizophrenia. The fact that the whole experience is so deeply coded with religious ritual and theology may discourage even the most open-minded paranormal researcher. A balanced look at the experience of an exorcist must weigh all of these barriers towards providing a fair and believable look at the truth behind these tormenting experiences. Freelance writer and journalist Matt Baglio succeeds at demonstrating why modern demon possession lore is just the tip of the iceberg through his recently released, *The Rite: Making of a Modern Exorcist*. I didn't expect an account of exorcism to be so believable, or so chilling. Partly because Baglio was just as skeptical when he started writing the book, and partly because following San Franciscan Catholic priest Father Gary through his training revealed that he started just as clueless. When the Catholic Church wrote a letter to every US diocese in 2005, Father Gary was surprised to learn that he had been chosen for the post. Leaving for a sabbatical year, Father Gary spent twelve months at the Continuing Theological Education at the North American College in Rome where he was ordered by his bishop to take a course on how to become an exorcist. That first class was where Baglio and Gary met, Matt seeing an opportunity to follow someone through the process of what he thought might be a sensational ploy at the headlines by the Catholic Church. Most American priests fall on one end of a large spectrum, they are either quite skeptical of exorcism or "see demons everywhere". But in Italy, demonic possession is just a fact of life. Oddly enough, the most exorcisms occur in Italy, a country that is over 80% Catholic. Is this because demonic possession primarily affects Catholics or is it because Italians are more likely to seek out an exorcism? These are just some of the interesting mysteries raised by this book. As Father Gary progresses through the training, he apprentices with Father Carmine, an expert in performing the exorcism ritual. Initially Father Gary only witnessed what he described as people coming in and belching very loudly. Leaving him with many more questions than answers... until he witnessed the case of Sister Janica. Janica was a nun that suffered from a "very powerful demon." When Father Carmine began the ritual she shook in her chair and began to beat her head against stone wall until it shook. As the prayers continued she growled and then shouted an ear piercing scream just before, "the voice" manifested. It was an otherworldly guttural rasping sound that shouted obscenities at Father Carmine. Her face contorted

into rage. Her eyeballs rolled into her head and she screamed, flailing on the floor. And this had been happening regularly for nine years. Movies and lore depicts the exorcism as a one shot deal but this is rarely the case. The possessed are freed from their demons only after a long process of returning to religious ritual in their lives, for Catholics this means confessions, prayer and mass. The exorcism only makes up about 10-20% of the healing process. But in rare cases, priests have performed exorcisms on Muslims and Hindus, after which they returned to their respective rituals. This is one of the theological reasons that God allows possession, to lead people back to a life of devout faith. After witnessing something as horrible as an evil force acting through a human being, I'm sure I would strike up some sort of repeated action to avoid it. The scientific explanation against possession lacks the ability to account for quite a few unbelievable experiences. For example, one priest went home after an exorcism and his cats began tearing each other to pieces. The next day when talking to his "patient", the demonic voice manifested and said to the priest that it enjoyed playing with his cats. Another case involved a possessed individual taunting a priest with a demonic voice about its ability to erase all his phone's text messages, because he did. Multiple personality disorder and depression can't explain why the possessed have been known to vomit buckets of sperm, live scorpions and black nails. Clairvoyant abilities are provided by the demons through the possessed as they sometimes describe intimate details of priest's lives or objects in hidden areas. In very rare cases, a demon will describe its past possessions the priest was involved in. The descriptions that Matt Baglio received of these horrible exorcisms through first hand interviews are very disturbing. As I read them, chills went down my spine because they are so vivid and honest. Discernment, the ability to determine if someone is truly possessed, is an interesting dilemma. Many exorcists like to work with a team of psychologists, psychiatrists and other advisers. The key to determining if someone is truly possessed can be rather obscured but typically if someone's condition does not respond to medicine, only to blessings and prayer it is an indication that demonic possession is likely present. Almost always, someone truly possessed won't attribute their problems to a demon. They only seek out the priesthood after being forced by a family member or friend. If one comes to a priest saying that they have a demon in them, that's a clue in the direction of a purely psychological problem. This gripping account of an often ignored portion of the human experience, *The Rite* exceeded my expectations and led me to question my hodge-podge worldview. Why is it that demonic possessions occur so often in Catholics and in women? This leads me to speculate that like the campfire creating the shadows, the Catholic Church somehow creates this polar opposite manifest in the phenomena of demonic possession. There is truth in the accounts within this book, as depicted by the shock of seasoned priests to the experience of their

first witnessed possession. When the exorcists themselves can't explain what is happening I know it is a profound mystery. What it all means is beyond anyone's understanding, especially mine.

This is my third non-fiction book on exorcisms I've read this year, and this one is by far the best. I liked how this book followed a priest from San Jose to Italy so that he could receive the training to become an exorcist. He was ignorant and skeptical to begin with, but once he witnessed real life exorcisms, his views changed dramatically. I learned lots of interesting facts and not surprisingly, demon possession is nothing like the Hollywood portrayal of it. Yes, there are some extreme episodes of strength, levitation, and hidden knowledge, but most people who are possessed cough or yawn during prayers rather than attack the priest. Possession by curses I found the most disturbing. The victims of curses take a very long time to liberate. Most of the curses come from family members of the victim. Some are even passed down to affect later generations. Victims of curses often vomit nails, beads, even sperm. And exorcism isn't a one time, fix it and your done like Hollywood portrays it. One woman in the book has been undergoing exorcisms for 40 years. As with other books, emphasis is placed on the fact that demons can only possess your body, not your soul. It is possible to be a believer and be possessed. Two of the possessed in this book are nuns, and one is the victim of a curse! Yikes. Take away message from this book: If your fiance's mother is against your marriage, don't marry him/her because she's liable to place a curse on you. If you do decide to marry him anyway and you have a baby, get the baby baptized ASAP. Baptism is a type of exorcism and its easier to get rid of curses when the child is young than wait until the child is in their twenties to seek out help. (less)

"The Rite" should be required reading for all adult catholics and especially those seeking clarity about the existence or definition of evil in the world. For non-catholics, the journey of Father Gary provides a fascinating view into the workings of the church right in Rome as well as in your hometown. The "under the radar" work of exorcists occurs without the emphatic support of, well, most of the clergy and even the church leadership -- bishops in particular -- who show a range of reactions to exorcism from begrudging acceptance of the mission to outright ridicule. For students of the politics of Catholicism, this is an interesting example of just how de-centralized the operations of the church often operate. While the pope may have decreed that every diocese appoint an exorcist, it's obvious that not every bishop takes this advice very seriously, if at all. It is ironic that a politically "middle of the road" priest from one of the more left-leaning districts in the US is chosen to witness and learn the reality of the evil almost none of us want to acknowledge. The subject, Father Gary

Thomas, is a thoughtful and honest man with no urgency to recommend exorcism without first having patients be subject to an array of clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and physicians who first ensure the patient is not suffering from a "conventional" mental illness. My understanding of evil was greatly expanded by reading "The Rite" and it will color my interactions with "bad people" in new ways --- most of whom are not possessed, mind you, but who are otherwise demonstrating their weakness for temptation. So the journey this book takes the reader on is quite unique and, especially as one gets to "know" Father Gary, immensely believable. Sometimes it takes a non-hellfire-and-brimstone type like him to guide us through an unpleasant topic that, once we've joined him for the journey, can make us all better people.

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