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True or False Possession: How to Distinguish the Demonic from the Demented

Jean Lhermitte

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Unhinged or unholy? Fiend or fraud?

That's what authorities had to decide about the Carmelite nun Marie-Thérèse Noblet (1889-1930). She suffered sudden diseases that were as quickly cured, chokings, night beatings, unclean visions of blasphemous scenes, violent shakes witnessed by onlookers, foul assaults from filthy beasts, including one she recalled as full of terrible beauty with eyes full of hate.

Then there's Sr. Jeanne of the Angels, the 17th-century prioress of her Ursuline convent, plagued by diabolical visits with an explicitly erotic element, which spread, epidemic-like, to the Ursuline sisters under her care, whose convulsive attacks and obscene contortions scandalized all who witnessed them.

Were these sisters demonic? Deranged? Or merely deceitful?

That's the first question exorcists must answer--the question addressed in these pages by the world-famous French neuropsychiatrist Jeanne Lhermitte.

Genuine demonic possessions, admits Lhermitte, evade the explanations and exceed the competence of even the wisest physicians: they must not be handled in the clinic, but by the Church. At the same time, exorcisms do not help those who are mentally ill. So skilled physicians and trained clergy must press past the visions, the gibbering, the howlings and grindings of teeth, and other frightening symptoms to discern whether they're dealing with real possession, or only pathology, mental or physical.

That's the work Dr. Lhermitte undertakes in these these pages.

With sober clarity and reserve, he reviews the detailed clinical records of scores of cases that startled and alarmed our forefathers as well as the cases of many souls he's examined personally: unfortunate souls judged possessed, who manifested symptoms ranging from the picturesque to the loathsome and pitiful. By means of these cases, Lhermitte illuminates the criteria the Church holds to be decisive signs of genuine possession . . . and those that assure us that despite filth and fits, shrieks and slobbering in other cases the influence of the demon is sought in vain.

Good priests and wise Catholic physicians know that, for the sake of souls, disturbed souls must never be hastily examined or casually judged. *True or False Possession?* will teach you, too, not to rush to judgment, and show you when it's time to call the priest.

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