

Devils in the details

-Diagnosis within the official Catholic Exorcism

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>This thesis examines how the Catholic Church officially diagnoses exorcisms. It covers the years from 1986 to 2022.</p> <p>This study involves analyzing literature and documents written by Rome's chief exorcist, Gabriele Amorth, and by researchers Nicole Bauer, Francis Young, Serge-Thomas Bonino, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.</p> <p>This research reveals that when an exorcist-priest presents a theological framework where demonical influence is considered a reasonable option, it is possible to provide a valid diagnosis and assess if an exorcism ritual is required. The main aspect of diagnosis is to lead the patient in the process of obtaining God's grace. During this process, certain symptoms should appear for a positive diagnosis to occur, which then leads to the major exorcism.</p> <p>This research also indicates that the majority of the official exorcisms (99.7%) conducted by Rome's chief exorcist, Gabriele Amorth, were more like ordinary pastoral care than what you might see in Hollywood films.</p> <p>The overall number of exorcisms carried out by Gabriele Amorth (over 30,000) is much larger than the count of major exorcisms (93) performed by Gabriele Amorth. Amorth points out that often a brief blessing and a moment of prayer are enough to count as an exorcism. A patient could also receive more than one exorcism, so Amorth is counting the total exorcisms rather than the number of treated patients. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this is not a fair comparison. The 30,000 appears to represent the number of exorcisms, which might include only a brief moment of prayer, whereas 93 is the count of treated cases of demonic possession, which could involve several exorcisms. However, this number still tells us that cases of demonic possession are rare.</p> <p>It seems that beyond regions influenced by the Catholic Church, very few people have knowledge about official Catholic exorcisms. Additionally, it is evident that when the ritual is recognized by the Church, the Church's influence is sufficient to regulate how the ritual is practiced.</p> <p>After this study, it is possible to examine exorcism research from a wider religious perspective. Furthermore, this research can lay the groundwork for future religious studies.</p>	
Key words: Exorcism, Dogmatics, Gabrielle Amorth, Systematic theology, Catholic Church, Exorcism diagnosis	
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1. Introduction

These studies began from my personal interest in horror films, comic books and the Catholic angelology. I have no personal experiences of the official exorcism of the Catholic Church. I have evaluated some public data of exorcisms before initiating this research. I want to draw attention to the fact that even the public online materials from the Catholic Church show that the lack of knowledge of official Catholic exorcisms in the most non-Catholic media is astonishing. The common knowledge of the official Catholic exorcisms is non-existent. Countries influenced by the Lutheran Reformation are not an exception to this. The Lutheran framework is natural for me and I try to remain as objective as possible and describe the diagnosis, leading to the exorcism, as clearly as possible.

One major reason for writing this thesis is to increase the knowledge of the official Catholic exorcisms. As a Finnish Lutheran, I feel that it is an honour to study an old Christian ritual, with a solid historical background. The timeline of these studies is from 1986 to 2022. This is due to the fact that the main source of these studies, Gabriele Amorth, became an exorcist in 1986 and this thesis commenced in 2022. Although the Finnish Lutheran exorcism tradition is minimal, the current development of the Church is encouraging. Finnish Lutheran priest Lea Kujanpää has published a book titled "*Ettei tarvitse pelätä*" (Karas-Sana 2023), which describes the methods of the Lutheran exorcism ritual. These methods are not studied in this research, so only an acknowledgement is enough. Kujanpää's book also does not fit within the timeline of this research.

The diagnosis is the most central aspect of the exorcism rite. Without a solid diagnosis, the whole concept of the ritual is inconsistent. Therefore, the question of the consistent diagnosis is the most central aspect of this thesis. A consistent official diagnosis creates a solid background for the ritual. Research regarding diagnosis of the Catholic exorcism is not typical for studies in Finland. Therefore, one of my main interests for this research is that it could function as a background study for even further research, which could include examples of practical exorcisms.

Furthermore, exorcism (at least major exorcism) is not included in mainstream theology. In the Roman Catholic tradition, the demonical possession, leading to the major exorcism, is being caused by unwanted behaviour. Demonical possession is a state of the person, which can cause serious consequences. Such unwanted behaviour is not regarded as a state or

stance which people should generally pursue.

It is difficult to compare Christian rituals, and the rite of exorcism is no exception. Still, the similar deliverance of evil can be reflected in the different prayers, blessings and especially in the Christian healing tradition.

1.1 Background and previous research

Exorcism is a practice found across the globe and it is a crucial element in many religions ¹. The Catholic Church conducts ceremonies with precise and well-documented practices using consistent terms that are easy to understand. The first mention of the "exorcist" as an official position in the Catholic Church can be traced back to as early as 253². However, during the spring of 2022, the Finnish Lutheran Church did not have an official exorcism ceremony. In this research, any discussions about the Lutheran Church are specifically related to the Finnish Lutheran Church, unless otherwise mentioned. The Finnish Lutheran Church does have rituals that involve the "deliverance of evil," such as liberation prayers, and some of these rituals could even be seen as minor exorcisms. The difference of minor and major exorcisms is presented later in this thesis. The most notable examples of Finnish Lutheran rituals that share a common purpose with exorcisms, focusing on the "deliverance of evil," are Lutheran baptism and house blessings. These ceremonies aim to rid evil influences, and both can be easily found in the official Finnish Lutheran liturgical materials³. The Lutheran blessing of houses closely resembles the act of exorcising houses performed by Gabriele Amorth ⁴. As Amorth states, "*The Bible does not cite any exorcism of houses*" (p.123), but still this form of ritual remains to be quite similar in the Catholic and in the Lutheran Church. This is a good example of how exorcism has changed over time. The housing and living conditions described in the *Bible* are different from modern times, and as housing standards have improved, the methods of exorcism have also evolved. As Catholic

¹ Bauer, Nicole Maria. 2022. *The Devil and the Doctor: The (De)Medicalization of Exorcism in the Roman Catholic Church*.

² *National Catholic Reporter*; Sep 1, 2000; 36, 38

³ Lutherska kyrkans dopformularet, *Lutherska kyrkans välsignelse av hem, dopformular*

⁴ Amorth Gabriele, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1999, P.123

exorcism has evolved in line with the progress of Western society, a question arises: Has demonical influence also evolved, and what does this demonical influence actually represent? Although distinguishing between Lutheran pastoral care and minor exorcisms can be a complex task, it is evident that the Finnish Lutheran Church lacks an officially prescribed major exorcism rite.

It is important to note that while some Finnish exorcists, who do not belong to either the Catholic or Lutheran traditions, are well-versed in the Christian exorcism tradition, there are cautionary stories where individuals claiming to be exorcists have attempted to bring the dead back to life⁵. These occurrences are unrelated to the sanctioned rituals of either the Catholic or Lutheran Churches. This illustrates that even if a ritual is not part of the official doctrine, people may still perform it, and different ministers might begin to improvise.

One of the primary reasons for selecting Gabriele Amorth as my source for this research was that the Catholic Church did not have an official exorcist in Finland in spring of 2022.

Additionally, the realm of official exorcisms in the USA and Great Britain is too large for this thesis. Italy could have served as a source for official exorcisms, but due to my limited proficiency in the Italian language and the aforementioned factors, I narrowed down my sources. I have examined an article by Nicole Bauer, practical techniques described by Gabriele Amorth, and the officially translated method by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops. Through comparative analysis of these sources, I am able to present the key features and attributes of contemporary Catholic diagnosis.

Focusing the comparison on the Catholic tradition is viable because the act of expelling demons has occurred in various continents, cultures, and religions, ranging from shamans to priests. While the primary objective of each exorcism ritual remains consistent, which is to remove the demon that is interfering with the possessed person's free will, the specific procedures and characteristics of the process vary considerably across diverse religious traditions. The shared exorcism research is closer to religious studies than to formal theology. The topic (exorcism) has been widely researched in the religious studies (for example Ilkka Mäyrä⁶, Kimmo Ketola⁷ and Emma Cohen⁸ have done tremendous work), but

⁵ Puranen, Kaisu. 31.8.2011. *Iltalehti*. Available at: [Kohusaarnaaja yritti herättää kuolleen henkiin \(iltalehti.fi\)](https://www.iltalehti.fi/kohusaarnaaja-yritti-herattaa-kuolleen-henkiin-20110831)

⁶ Mäyrä Ilkka, *Demonic Texts and Textual Demons. The Demonic Tradition, the Self, and Popular Fiction*. 1999 Tampere: Tampere University Press.

⁷ Ketola, Kimmo. *Rituaalit. Uskonto ja ihmismieli. Johdatus Kognitiiviseen uskontotieteeseen*. 2008 Helsinki: Gaudeamus Helsinki University Press.

a purely theological point of view is rarely taken. My primary objective is to establish a purely theological perspective. Research that exclusively focuses on diagnosis is relatively rare, but, for instance, as mentioned earlier, Bauer has made intriguing observations related to this subject⁹.

My interest in studying exorcism initially arose from horror films but quickly evolved into an academic pursuit when I began comparing regular (Lutheran) pastoral work to (Catholic) minor exorcisms. Distinguishing between Catholic minor exorcisms and Lutheran pastoral care can at times be challenging. Catholic exorcism appears to revolve around the deliverance of evil and the creation of a positive Christian environment.

The primary distinction between my thesis and the field of sociology of religion lies in the sociology's focus on studying social facts and explaining social phenomena through social factors. In this context, natural scientific and theological explanations are typically not considered¹⁰. My studies are theological, but I take into consideration also interesting observations from other sciences. These studies highlight the phenomena with the ability to approach the subject with theological questions. The psychological questions remain valid, even though they are rather only being observed than raised. A theological approach presents the theoretical framework with a solid background, which helps the reader of this thesis to understand the phenomena and the ritual of exorcism.

The word 'exorcism' is understood differently, even in different European countries. It seems that the majority of Catholic exorcisms resemble ordinary pastoral care, involving blessings and prayers¹¹, while the Lutheran Church does not have an official stance on exorcisms. The Catholic exorcism ritual contains numerous traditions (e.g. "*prayers of liberations*") which the Lutheran Church also has, but the Lutheran Church does not call these rituals exorcisms.

This thesis is written in Systematic theology and precisely dogmatics, so any questions regarding the psychology of religions are rather being observed, than raised. There are several similar approaches to secular therapy and spiritual treatments, and the diagnosis

⁸ Cohen, Emma. *The Mind Possessed. The Cognition of Spirit Possession in an Afro-Brazilian Religious Tradition*. 2007 New York: Oxford University press

⁹ Bauer, Nicole Maria. 2022. *The Devil and the Doctor: The (De)Medicalization of Exorcism in the Roman Catholic Church*.

¹⁰ Morrison, Ken: Marx, Durkheim, Weber: *Formations of Modern Social Thought*, SAGE 2006

¹¹ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story* P.77, 1999

conducted by professionals (including the exorcist-priest and the medical doctor) bears a resemblance to a mental examination.

1.2 Research aims.

The purpose of this research is to determine if official exorcisms in the Roman Catholic Church are based on a thorough diagnosis. The approach for this investigation involves analyzing Nicole Bauer's studies, the practical exorcisms discussed in the works of Amorth, and comparing them with the documents provided by the official administrative authority, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB). If there is a reliable and uniform diagnosis, the diagnostic methods should be similar for all individuals. The presence of a reliable diagnosis is vital for these studies, and the initial research question of this thesis is: *"Is there an official diagnosis of exorcism proceeded by the Catholic Church?"*. In the event that the answer is affirmative, this research will provide the official diagnosis of the Catholic Church. However, if the answer is negative, the significance of the ritual becomes a subject of debate. All the findings are derived from written materials, as I did not personally witness practical exorcisms during the course of this research.

Another objective of these studies is to demonstrate how the official Catholic exorcists categorize individuals into two distinct groups, namely those who require exorcism and those who do not, and to ascertain whether a consistent diagnosis is the basis for initiating exorcism.

The primary questions in this research revolve around the diagnostic techniques for major exorcisms. This study distinguishes between two official exorcism categories: major exorcism and minor exorcism. I chose Gabriele Amorth as the main source for the practical exorcisms because every Catholic priest to whom I talked recommended Amorth for this topic. Amorth was the Chief Exorcist of Rome and one of the most prominent exorcists in the world until his death. Amorth also worked on the translations of the modern exorcism rites. Furthermore, Gabriele Amorth has detailed his practices in several sources. Although his work is mostly written in Italian, his work has also been extensively translated into English. In the Catholic Church the official exorcists have an official exorcism ritual, a rite

which is observed by the Church. The first published official exorcism ritual was included in the liturgical books of the Catholic Church called *Rituale Romanum* (1614). The ritual has been updated afterward on several occasions and the latest version of *Rituale Romanum* is from 1998. Gabriele Amorth refers to the *Rituale Romanum* on several occasions, and it is clear that *Rituale Romanum* presents the guidelines to exorcisms performed by Gabriele Amorth¹².

I am using the *Rituale Romanum* in order to understand Amorth's exorcisms. Since these studies focus on the diagnosis, *Rituale Romanum* is only briefly introduced. I am also examining the new translation of the rite, a document entitled '*Exorcisms and Certain Supplication*'. This is an official document of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB, translated in 2013). USCCB's modern version is crucial in order to understand how the modern exorcists work. The resemblance between the two rituals (the original *Rituale Romanum* and the "*Exorcisms and Certain Supplication*") is enormous and the main difference is the language. Official *Rituale Romanum* is written in Latin and the modern translation uses English. It needs to be pointed out that the original *Rituale Romanum* has been updated on several occasions, and the USCCB only provides translations of these updates. The USCCB solely translates the formula and is otherwise not actively involved in the ritual.

In this thesis I will study if Gabriele Amorth, Nicole Bauer or USCCB are able to recognize the difference between serious medical condition and the spiritual phenomena called the "demonical possession". It could also be that these two are not mutually exclusive.

I am also studying the potential differences between the official way of diagnosing demonically possessed individuals and the methods practiced by Gabriele Amorth. The second research question is "*How many percentage of Gabriele Amorths patients were considered demonically possessed?*". This is a relevant question for two reasons. The first reason is that Amorth distinguishes between demonical influence and demonical possession. According to Amorth, demonical influence appears to be a minor interference of human will by demons, whereas demonical possession involves a significant demonic interference that requires serious attention. Therefore, there should be a clear distinction between the extent of demonical influence and demonical possession.

¹² Bauer, Nicole Maria. 2022. *The Devil and the Doctor: The (De)Medicalization of Exorcism in the Roman Catholic Church*. Page 3/13

The second reason is Gabriele Amorth's position. Amorth was considered the Chief Exorcist of Rome. It is conceivable that the individuals who sought his help had previously attempted other methods of healing without success. Therefore, the number of genuine demonical possessions treated by Amorth remains significant. These studies will allow for a comparison of the number of demonical possessions treated by Amorth with those treated by other exorcists. The third research question is: *"How are the official Catholic exorcists recommended to diagnose the spiritually possessed?"*. In this thesis the previous question is reflected through Amorth's work, recommendations by USCCB, and in the end through the studies of Bauer. By answering these questions I will also be answering the fourth research question of *"What type of diagnosis leads to the major exorcism?"*.

The evaluation of data will be based on the written materials and documents. Because I am not a medical professional or a trained exorcist I cannot take a stand if the condition is medical or spiritual. Therefore this thesis is based on published literature.

This research primarily falls under the category of dogmatics, as my aim is to identify the theological arguments underpinning exorcist practices. It also has slight connections to the philosophy of religion and, more specifically, studies in ecclesiastical history. This is because ecclesiastical history encompasses the study of Christianity from various perspectives.

The research is strictly theoretical in nature due to my personal preferences; I do not delve into practical theology, and my personal interest lies in analyzing this type of theoretical framework. Additionally, I plan to continue with this type of research after completing my master's thesis, as it provides essential background information regardless of future research directions. Subsequent research could include comparisons between Lutheran pastoral care and minor exorcisms. This is because, in countries influenced by the Lutheran church, moments of prayer and blessings by a priest are often viewed as dimensions of pastoral care rather than exorcism.

The terminology of Catholic exorcisms can be challenging for a Lutheran. The term minor exorcism does not have a clear translation into Swedish or Finnish. In Swedish and Finnish, the word 'minor' typically denotes a smaller version of something, as in 'minor hockey league' referring to the AHL, which is smaller in scale than the NHL. However, this kind of vocabulary usage is atypical in Swedish and Finnish. Consequently, 'minor exorcism' does not translate well, making it challenging to discuss the topic even in Scandinavia.

The fifth research question of this thesis is *"Is it possible that the majority of exorcisms are*

closer to therapy sessions, than they are to the dramatic depictions of exorcisms in Hollywood films?” For example, the act of healing a person (or a patient) from possession is referred to as 'therapeuo' in ancient Greek¹³. The word itself reminds a lot of the word *therapy*.

The topic is also interesting from a psychological angle. Therefore I offer the reflections of Nicole Bauer to this thesis. Similar topics and the moral issues that follow have been handled in diverse fields ranging from science to fictive literature, from Sigmund Freud¹⁴ to the novel *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*¹⁵. After these studies it could be possible to continue with a psychological approach. The development has been encouraging and it seems that the modern exorcism and the modern psychology could develop together. Nicole Bauer states that: *“Recent developments in Roman Catholic exorcism reveal a tendency for medical terminology and an attempt to incorporate psychological approaches.”*¹⁶. Bauer argues that: *“religion is adapting to science in order to meet the demands of modern societies. Religious healing practices in particular are therefore challenged to unite medical and religious worldviews”*. Bauer’s observations seem to support my literature analysis.

These types of researches can be seen as a part of the type of inter-scientific observations which Amorth also sees important to modern Catholic exorcism. Bauer’s studies could show that Amorth had a consistent view on how to develop the exorcism as a ritual. Amorth in fact had medical staff attending to his exorcisms. To Amorth exorcism was also about science –at least on the level of diagnostics when he had not confirmed the possession. It could be that the psychological problems do not rule out the spiritual problems, and therefore an inter-scientific group is always needed for official exorcisms according to Amorth.

Different forms of exorcisms are being reflected later in this thesis. The question of diagnosis is important, because if there is a solid diagnosis it is possible to continue studies of diagnostics. If there is not a solid diagnosis the meaning of the ritual cannot be compared to certain secular functions.

¹³ Dickason, Fred C, *Demon possession & the Christian. A new perspective*, Crossway books Wheaton, 1993

¹⁴ Evan Jay, Martin. *The encyclopaedia Britannica*, September 19. 2023. Available at; [Sigmund Freud | Britannica Biography, Theories, Psychology, Books, Works, & Facts | Britannica](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sigmund-Freud)
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sigmund-Freud>

¹⁵ Stevenson Robert Louis, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, London 1886

¹⁶ Bauer, Nicole Maria. 2022. *The Devil and the Doctor: The (De)Medicalization of Exorcism in the Roman Catholic Church*.

This thesis studies the timeline from 1986 to 2022. This is because Amorth was appointed as an exorcist in 1986 and I began my research during the spring of 2022.

To summarize: the question of existing solid diagnosis is crucial for these studies and the main question of this thesis is *“Is there an official diagnosis of exorcism proceeded by the Catholic Church?”* If the answer is yes, then this research presents the official diagnosis of the Catholic Church. If answer is no, then the meaning of the ritual is debatable.

The following questions are secondary, subdued to the first question, and to the existence of diagnosis. If an official diagnosis exists, this thesis answers also to the following questions:

“Is there an official diagnosis of exorcism proceeded by the Catholic Church?”

“How many percentage of Gabriele Amorths patients were considered demonically possessed?”,

“How are the official Catholic exorcists recommended to diagnose the spiritually possessed?”

“What type of diagnosis leads to the major exorcism?”

“Is it possible that the majority of exorcisms are closer to therapy sessions than they are to the dramatic depictions of exorcisms in Hollywood films?”

1.3 Methods and material

This thesis employs qualitative, inductive, and interpretive methods. I have collected and analyzed the necessary data from books and articles (qualitative method), examined the reasoning and opinions, and scrutinized various narratives from different sources (interpretive method). The inductive method is used to address the central question of this thesis: *'Is there an official diagnosis of exorcism proceeded by the Catholic Church?'* If a solid diagnosis exists, then this research will outline the methods for it. This research also offers insights from the historical development of the rite, and as such, it incorporates all of these qualitative, inductive, and interpretive methods¹⁷.

The most significant literature for this research are the three books of Gabriele Amorth: *"The Devil is afraid of me*, Sophia Institute press, Manchester, 2019," *"An Exorcist Tells His Story*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1999," and *"Gabriele Amorth, An Exorcist Explains the Demonic*, Sophia Institute press, Manchester, 2016", an article of Nicole Bauer: *"The Devil and the Doctor: The (De)Medicalization of Exorcism in the Roman Catholic Church. 2022"* and *"Exorcisms and Certain Supplications"* (Typical Edition, USCCB 2013) approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

¹⁷ Grenholm Carl Henric: *Att förstå religion. Metoder för teologisk tolkning*. Lund 2006

2. Biography of Gabriele Amorth

Gabriele Amorth was born in 1925 in Modena, Italy. He studied law before he became a priest. He came from a family of lawyers and his brother was a judge¹⁸. Amorth also graduated in law¹⁹.

Amorth was part of the resistance during World War II and received a medal for his wartime actions. After the war, he joined the Christian Democrat movement and served as a deputy leading the party's youth wing. Father Gabriele Amorth was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1954²⁰, and he worked as the assistant of Father Candido. He was ordained as a member of the order of the Pauline Fathers and also worked several years as an editor of the Catholic magazine "*Madre di Deo*" (*Mother of God*)²¹.

He was appointed as an exorcist by Cardinal Poletti, who served as the vicar of the diocese of Rome, on June 6, 1986. After this appointment, Amorth stated that he committed his life to exorcism. He acknowledged the considerable influence of Candido Amaniti on his path. Gabriele Amorth noted that Amaniti had served as an exorcist for more than 35 years, and considered him to be "*one of the greatest exorcists who ever lived.*"²². Amorth gained experience in exorcisms under the direction of Father Candido²³, who was Amorth's mentor and introduced him to practical exorcism. Father Candido helped him to understand both the practical and theoretical aspects of exorcism.

Amorth claimed to have been selected for this position by chance and mentioned that his previous interest in exorcisms had been primarily theoretical. Throughout his tenure as an exorcist, he conducted more than 30,000 exorcisms²⁴.

Gabriele Amorth co-founded the International Association of Exorcists in 1994, and he served as the president of the organization²⁵, which is officially called "*Associazione*

¹⁸ Brandreth, Gyles . *Edmonton Journal* ; Edmonton, Alta. [Edmonton, Alta]. 12 Nov 2000: E7

¹⁹ Allegri, Renzo. *Messenger of Sainth Anthony*, May 10th 2003. Available at: [The Exorcist | Messenger of Saint Anthony \(messengersaintanthony.com\)](http://The Exorcist | Messenger of Saint Anthony (messengersaintanthony.com))

²⁰ STT, *Ilta-Sanomat*, 18.9. 2016. Available at: [Vatikaanin entinen päämanaaja ja Harry Pottereiden vastustaja on kuollut - Ulkomaat - Ilta-Sanomat \(is.fi\)](http://Vatikaanin entinen päämanaaja ja Harry Pottereiden vastustaja on kuollut - Ulkomaat - Ilta-Sanomat (is.fi))

²¹ Brandreth, Gyles. *The Sunday Telegraph*, 29.10. 2000. Available at: [An Interview With Father Gabriele Amorth: The Church's Leading Exorcist \(boston-catholic-journal.com\)](http://An Interview With Father Gabriele Amorth: The Church's Leading Exorcist (boston-catholic-journal.com))

²² Brandreth, Gyles . *Edmonton Journal* ; Edmonton, Alta. [Edmonton, Alta]. 12 Nov 2000: E7

²³ Amorth Gabriele, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1999, P.68

²⁴ Amorth Gabriele, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1999, P.169

²⁵ *National Catholic Reporter*; Sep 1, 2000; 36, 38; ProQuest Central pg. 5

*Internazionale Esorcisti*²⁶. This translates into English as “*The International association of exorcists*”, officially abbreviated as AIE. The association received canon-law recognition in 2014²⁷. According to Bauer, “*The organization is concerned with questions of “demonic possession”—the appropriation of a person by the devil or by demons—and with specific religious healing practices such as prayers of liberation and exorcism.*”²⁸

By May 2003, Amorth led a group of six exorcists, and he is referred to as the chief exorcist of the Diocese of Rome. He was also involved in updating exorcism rites and received recognition from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). This illustrates the high level of respect he commanded among other exorcists. Amorth passed away in 2016 in Rome.²⁹

In addition to his work on exorcism, Amorth was also recognized as an expert in Mariology and was a member of the Pontifical International Marian Academy.

Beyond his professional responsibilities, Gabriele Amorth was known for his joyful and cheerful personality. In his later years, he would playfully joke that the devil was afraid of him simply because, in his words, Amorth is uglier than the devil. Amorth has also told that his favourite film is “*The Exorcist*” (Friedkin, 1973).

Amorth stated that by performing exorcisms he is preventing suicides and other types of deaths. He was considered as ecclesiastical specialist for illnesses caused by the evil. In a deeper ecclesiastical sense, he was an expert on demonic activity.

According to Amorth, even the official exorcists do not only exorcise. The official exorcists are primarily priests and exorcism is an area of specialization for Catholic priests who fulfil the requirements. Amorth saw treating the demonic possessions and serious medical conditions as two different conditions complementary to each other and often argues that the exorcist should have access to the medical data of the patient. According to him, a considerable part of his work involved social interaction and the establishment of a positive Christian environment. In addition to diagnosis, Amorth also conducted pre-diagnostic

²⁶ Homepage - International Association of Exorcists - A.I.E. International Association of Exorcists. Available at: <https://www.aieinternational.org>. Accessed October 28, 2023.

²⁷ Bauer, Nicole Maria. 2022. *The Devil and the Doctor: The (De)Medicalization of Exorcism in the Roman Catholic Church*. P.1.

²⁸ Bauer, Nicole Maria. 2022. *The Devil and the Doctor: The (De)Medicalization of Exorcism in the Roman Catholic Church*. P.1.

²⁹ Connor, Laura. *The Mirror*, “*The Pope's chief exorcist 'who banished 70,000 demons' and said Vatican was possessed by devil dies aged 91*”, 19th of September 2016, available at: [The Pope's chief exorcist 'who banished 70,000 demons' and said Vatican was possessed by devil dies aged 91 - World News - Mirror Online](#)

assessments, which included using questionnaires.

Amorth claimed that exorcism cannot harm anyone when it is conducted with care and by a team of professionals.

He is frequently mentioned in popular culture as the chief exorcist of the Vatican. This reference is inaccurate, as Amorth was, in fact, the chief exorcist of the Diocese of Rome.

3. Theological background of exorcism

This chapter presents the theoretical background of exorcism. Besides exorcism research, the theoretical background also includes studies of angelology, since the fundamentals of angelology are important for understanding the logic of exorcism.

Regardless of the approach (biblical, psychological, allegorical or literary), it seems that demons can cause different types of disturbances. These phenomena also affect people who do not believe in demons. As Tony Stark said in the film *Iron Man 3*: “We create our own demons”.

The research in the field of diagnostics within Catholic exorcism is not very wide. Since this research is theological, the studies by Bauer and Young are the most essential references. According to the *Bible*, exorcising evil spirits and demons was central to the actions of Jesus Christ (for example Matthew 4:23-24, Matthew 8:16 and Luke 13:32). It is also clear that Jesus gave a direct order to his disciples to exorcise evil spirits and demons (e.g. Matthew 10:1, Matthew 10:7-8 and Mark 16:17). Also, according to Gabriele Amorth, there are evil entities that bother people with different types of devious approaches, and the process that aims to end this disturbance is called “the exorcism”³⁰.

According to Gabriele Amorth, the number of exorcists in Italy has grown from 20 in 1986 to 300 by the beginning of this millennium. The number of exorcists has increased considerably in slightly over a decade³¹. It is typical for the number of exorcists and exorcisms to change over time. Francis Young highlights that “waxing and waning of the popularity of liturgical exorcism during a history punctuated by periods of crisis, the first being between the years 900 and 1500” and that: “between 1100 and 1300 liturgical exorcism almost disappeared”³².

There could be several reasons for these variations, but since the number of the official exorcists is not central to my research questions, only the observation of the range of variation is enough.

Gabriele Amorth’s view on exorcism is that it is not only a battle between man and Satan. He saw the exorcisms as battles in a celestial war between God and Satan, and according to him, “Jesus gave the power to expel demons to all those who believe in him and act in his

³⁰ Amorth Gabriele, *The Devil is afraid of me*, Sophia Institute press, Manchester, 2019, P.35

³¹ *National Catholic Reporter*; Sep 1, 2000; 36, 38; ProQuest Central pg. 5

³² Young Francis, *History of exorcism in Catholic Christianity. (Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic.)*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016

*name*³³. Amorth also states that demonical possessions happen only because God allows them to happen.

According to Gabriele Amorth, every Catholic priest can be trained as an exorcist and, according to Amorth, an official exorcist is always a Catholic priest³⁴. This is exactly in line with the USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) and researchers such as Young and Bauer. Even while Amorth has quite strong opinions about how the exorcists should work, it is notable that the Vatican observes and provides the official guidelines to the official exorcists, including exorcists with similar positions as Amorth. It seems that every Catholic exorcist has a similar training, and Amorth seems to have a significant position among them. It could be that Amorth was actually one of the key persons to observe the updated materials.

The official Catholic guidelines are in line with Amorth's work. In this thesis, the resemblance of these (official guidelines and Amorth's work) are not being studied, but only a brief observation is made. These studies also acknowledge that Gabriele Amorth has probably affected the official guidelines and, therefore, the official guidelines of exorcisms and the practical exorcisms performed by Gabriele Amorth should be in line.

In order to become an official Catholic exorcist, a priest needs to fulfil the requirements of the official exorcists required by the Vatican. Also, all the cases of demonical possessions (which lead to official exorcism) undergo a process handled by the Catholic Church, which means that the exorcists do not confront all those who feel they are being demonically possessed. This could also explain why Amorth's method of diagnosis seems reasonably straightforward. It could be that the patients brought to Amorth (at least after the early millennium) had already undergone a process of elimination. It is unclear how this process of elimination (of patients) could have worked, but it is safe to assume that the chief exorcist of Rome would have too much work to do, if he confronted everyone who thinks they are being possessed. Based on his recognition in the Vatican, and in the whole Catholic Church, it is obvious that Gabriele Amorth's work included also other tasks and responsibilities than major exorcisms.

According to Amorth, *Rituale Romanum* provided a solid guideline for Catholic exorcisms.

³³ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story* P.153, 1999

³⁴ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story* P.153 "All priests who are not exorcists, have a particular power that derives from their ministerial position."

The *Rituale Romanum* “gives a series of practical rules both to help recognize the presence of true possession and to guide the demeanor of the exorcist”³⁵. Amorth also states that people cannot improvise an exorcism. This also shows why Amorth saw the position of observing authority as important –if people cannot improvise an exorcism, there needs to be an official rite (and support for the ritual). The Vatican has several recommendations for the exorcists and it seems that through their work, the exorcists can even establish an international network. In this thesis, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has its own chapter (3.1), which explains the most significant functions of the organization. Gabriele Amorth was also very interested in developing the ritual even further and he was not afraid to say if something was not correctly adjusted to the new translations.

³⁵ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story* P.68, 1999

3.1 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) was established in 1966 as a result of the amalgamation of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic Conference. The USCCB comprises members who hold prominent positions within the Catholic Church's hierarchical structure, including bishops, diocesans, and coadjutors.³⁶

This thesis focuses on the USCCB's role as an administrative body responsible for translating the official exorcism rite into English. The rites translated by the USCCB are considered to adhere to contemporary standards. It is important to note that this research does not engage in a comparative analysis between the original rite (*Rituale Romanum* 1614) and the USCCB's most recent update (*Exorcisms and Certain Supplications, Typical Edition*, USCCB 2013). Instead, it aims to generate insights by examining both. The practical disparities between these two versions warrant a separate and more in-depth investigation. The *Rituale Romanum* (1614) serves as a representation of the traditional adaptation of the rite, while the USCCB's *Exorcisms and Certain Supplications* (2013) signifies the contemporary adaptation.

The USCCB has an official document titled *Exorcisms and Certain Supplications* (USCCB 2013), which is a translation of the latest *Rituale Romanum* (1998). Notably, the original *Rituale Romanum* (1614) has undergone multiple updates and translations over time. The 2013 translation is considered the modern, official version of the exorcism rite, to be used in place of the norms and formulas.

Gabriele Amorth played a pivotal role in the development of the new exorcism rites. His occasional criticisms of the new rites should be understood within the context of his position. Amorth aimed to preserve as much of the ritual's traditional content as possible while making it more accessible. This approach led to some controversies and public discussions. In my view, Amorth's comments can be interpreted as providing guidance for the new rites rather than mere criticism.

³⁶ *Homepage of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, available at: [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops \(usccb.org\)](https://www.usccb.org), Accessed October 28, 2023.

3.2 Angels and demons

According to Catholic doctrine, it is affirmed that every demon is, in fact, a fallen angel. Angels, conversely, serve as celestial intermediaries between God and humanity. While the *Bible* references the existence of demons and the devil, it refrains from employing the specific term 'fallen angel'. The phrase 'fallen angels' characterizes a group of celestial beings, or angels, who embarked on a rebellion against God, leading to their subsequent expulsion from heaven. These disobedient angels are documented, for instance, in the *Book of Revelation 12:7*. Conversely, the term 'fallen angel' has been adapted to modern parlance. Though it explicates the hierarchy of demons, signifying that demons are angels who succumbed to sin, this thesis employs the term 'demon' to define 'fallen angels' due to its more widespread usage.

If a demon occupied a high-ranking position within the angelic hierarchy, it is important to note that it retains a comparable status within the hierarchy of demons. Demons of superior rank wield authority over the lesser demons. In cases where an individual is afflicted by multiple demons, the exorcist should prioritize the expulsion of the most highly ranked demon. Thus, knowledge of the names of the demons afflicting the afflicted person assumes paramount importance. Additionally, it is crucial to remember that each demon must be expelled, but it is advisable to commence with the highest-ranking one. It appears that when the authority of Jesus Christ compels the demon to divulge its name, the demon's power diminishes. Therefore, it is important to know the names of the demons possessing the patient³⁷.

According to Gabriele Amorth, there existed rebellious angels in heaven, led by an angel known as Satan.³⁸ Amorth also states that *"God never rejects his creatures. Therefore even though they broke with God, Satan and his angels maintain their power and rank"*³⁹. Despite Amorth's assertion that Satan has retained his powers, Amorth contends that Satan lacks the capability to terminate human life. Instead, Satan endeavours to *"make us his followers in opposition to God, just as he is in opposition to God"*. According to him, this serves as the primary impetus for demonic possession in humans. Evidently, Amorth believed that every

³⁷ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story*, P.79, 1999

³⁸ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story*, P.25-26, 1999

³⁹ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story*, P.26, 1999

soul that surrenders itself to Satan augments his powers. Consequently, exorcism is perceived as a celestial battle for souls. Nevertheless, a clear distinction must be drawn between individuals who willingly submit their souls to Satan, and cases of demonic possession that transpire irrespective of an individual's volition. Demonic possessions occur when a demon seizes control of a person's body and mind, though it is important to note that demons cannot usurp control over an individual's soul.

Gabriele Amorth states that Jesus Christ “*defeated Satan through his sacrifice*” and that “*Jesus first gave the power to cast out demons to his apostles; then he extended the power to the seventy-two disciples, and in the end he granted it to all those who would believe in him*”⁴⁰. Consequently, according to Amorth, the positions held by demons are overshadowed by the supremacy of Jesus Christ, regardless of their standing within the demon hierarchy.

In the context of the *New Testament*, Satan emerges as the arch-nemesis of Christ and God, representing a direct adversary. Satan is recognized as the leader of evil spirits, standing in direct opposition to God. In Islam, Satan is identified as an evil spirit known as Iblis^{41 42}. Comparative analysis across diverse religious traditions suggests that cases of demonic possession, regardless of the underlying reasons, are indicative of a global spiritual phenomenon, transcending denominational boundaries and extending beyond the confines of the Catholic Church.

Gabriele Amorth undertakes a differentiation between distinct categories of fallen angels, or demons, acknowledging the uniqueness of each fallen angel. Amorth contends that the primary impetus for the fall of the angels was rooted in: “*pride and disobedience*”⁴³. The angels had a free will, but they served under the command of God. Fallen angels were celestial beings, who had an ultimate task -to follow Gods’ command. Obedience was their reason for existence. When angels refused this task, they were no longer angels but became corrupted, fallen angels. This paradox (angels with free will were supposed to serve God, but refused to) caused the angels to fall. Comparison between the angels and demons is similar to rebelling soldiers in the army. It is also important to understand the paradox of

⁴⁰ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story* P.27, 1999

⁴¹ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Iblis*, available at: [Iblis | Meaning, Name, & Significance | Britannica](#). Accessed October 28, 2023.

⁴² The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Satan*, available at: [Satan | Definition, Meaning, Scriptures, Role, & Facts | Britannica](#). Accessed October 28, 2023.

⁴³ Amorth, G, *An exorcist explains the demonic*, 2016, P.17

fallen angels in order to understand why it was so important to Amorth's exorcism to use clear commands. Angels are celestial beings who obey; fallen angels are celestial beings who disobey if given a chance. Therefore it is important to know the name of the possessing demon –demon needs to be commanded in a way which it cannot disobey. In the end a demon cannot disobey the power of Christ and the power of Christ compels them.

Therefore any official exorcist can overrule the power of fallen angels by praying in the name of Jesus Christ and proceeding with the exorcism.

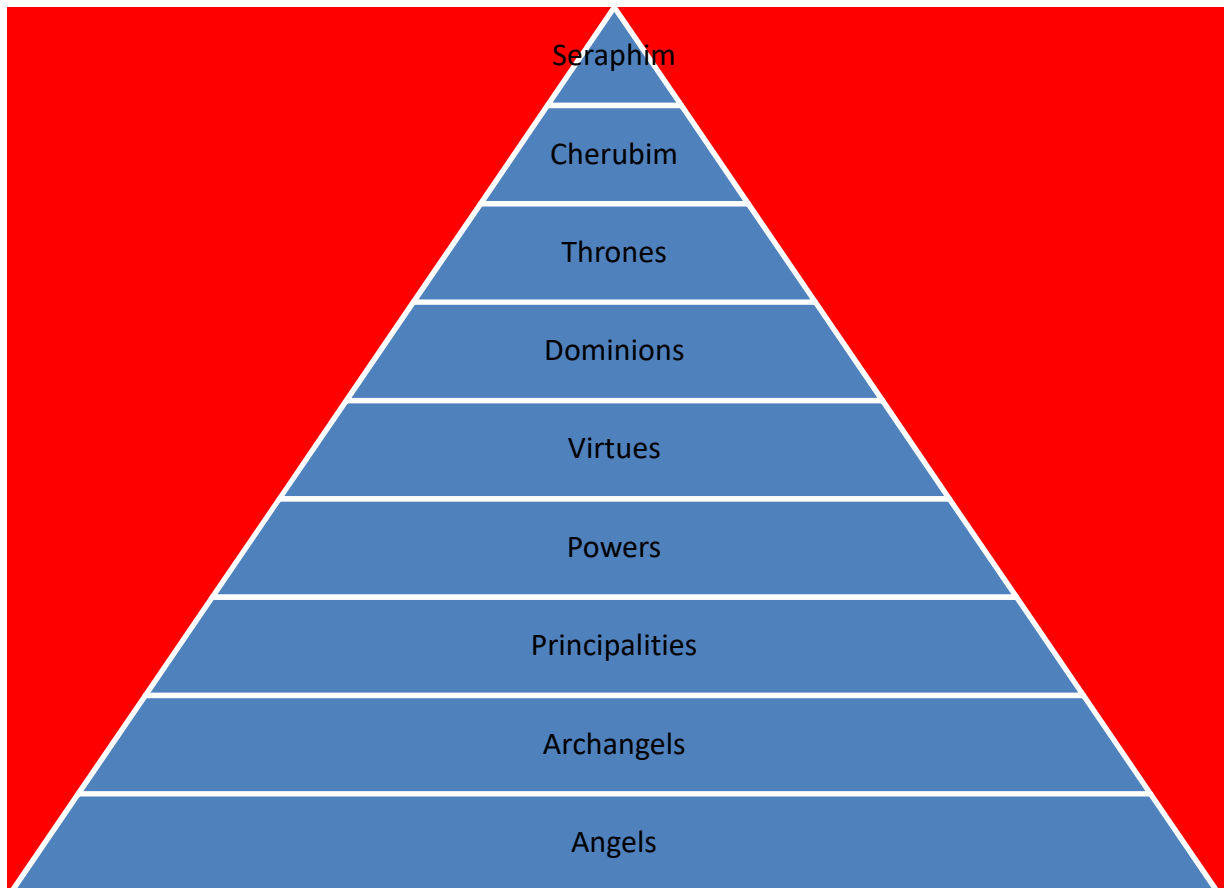
3.3 Theoretical framework of Catholic exorcists.

Understanding the hierarchy of angels is vital for comprehending the array of symptoms that various demons can induce. This comprehension serves as a foundation in the diagnosis of exorcism. If the possessing demon occupies a significant position within the hierarchy, it may command other demons to possess the afflicted as well.

Amorth suggests that when the angels fell, they retained their positions in the angelic hierarchy. Amorth's perspective on angelology aligns harmoniously with the official Catholic angelology. According to Catholic angelology, the demon hierarchy mirrors the angelic hierarchy. Demons are disobedient angels, occupying equivalent positions in their demon collective as angels do in their own hierarchy.

The angelic hierarchy is categorized into nine distinct groups, known as the angelic choirs. Serge-Thomas Bonino's research corroborates Amorth's findings. According to Bonino, *“the angelic world is organized into nine choirs divided into three triads or hierarchies. The first triad— seraphim, cherubim, thrones—is in direct contact with God. The second is composed of dominions, virtues, and powers, and the third consists of principalities, archangels, and angels, who come into contact with the ecclesiastical hierarchy”*. Bonino elucidates the angelic hierarchy through the diagram provided below⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ Bonino Serge-Thomas, *Angels and Demons -A Catholic Introduction*, The Catholic University of America Press, 2016, P.58



(Serge-Thomas Bonino describes the angel hierarchy with the structure drawn above.)

The celestial hierarchy delineates a multitude of tasks and roles for angelic entities. As postulated by Bonino, angels serve a myriad of functions, ranging from the conveyance of divine messages to taking care of different nations. This suggests that demons, as fallen angels, may possess an array of capabilities and functions, thereby yielding a diverse spectrum of observable manifestations in the individuals they afflict.

Similar to how a soldier must have a military rank to be considered a soldier, it is always possible to assign an angel a place within the angel hierarchy. To truly be an angel, one should hold a position in this hierarchy. Since all angels, whether fallen or not, have positions within the angel hierarchy, angels and demons may engage in struggles over possessed individuals.

Theoretical debates about battles between angels and demons are also possible.

Bonino also agrees that certain levels of hierarchy are difficult to interpret, as he states the following: "*The precise status of these realities is difficult to pin down.*"(p.41-42). For this thesis, the exact positions of different angels are not crucial. It is sufficient to note that every angel holds a position.

Amorth describes that the demons possessing their victims often attempt to draw the attention of Satan. One of the most common signs of this behaviour is when the possessing demon falsely claims to be Satan. This illustrates the challenge of determining the name of the possessing demon, as demons are known to lie whenever possible. From the demon's perspective, Satan holds the highest authority in their hierarchy, and the demon seeks to gain power by provoking Satan's attention. Therefore, it appears that exorcism and demon possession operate under a similar logic, with the exorcist invoking the authority of Jesus Christ while the possessing demon attempts to provoke Satan's attention.

Amorth states that the position of Satan cannot be compared to Jesus Christ in any way. According to Amorth, the exorcist should not fear the demon's rank in the hierarchy but should continue their work regardless of the demon's identity. Amorth focuses on expelling demons rather than gathering information. He believes that demons always lie, and exorcists should not expect demons to willingly reveal their true identity or any other accurate information. However, when the demon is brought under the influence of God's grace, it becomes possible to compel the demon to disclose its name and to command it in the name of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary do not have designated positions in the angel hierarchy, but their roles are significant. In contrast, Catholic saints do not seem to hold a similar level of authority over demons, at least based on Amorth's reported experiences. When Amorth conducts an exorcism in the name of Jesus Christ, it appears to have a more significant impact.

When exorcising in the name of Jesus Christ, Amorth always conducts the ritual in the most effective manner. Even from an academic perspective, the role of Jesus Christ is exceptional in Western religions and incomparable. In most Christian denominations, Jesus Christ holds the highest authority in Christianity, and the position of the Virgin Mary is also remarkable, given her role as the mother of God.

Jesus and Mary do not have counterparts among the demons. While the *Bible* mentions the antichrist, it is not described as an actual person or an evil counterpart of Jesus Christ. The demons appeal to Satan, who holds the rank of a cherub, but his position cannot be compared to that of Christ.

Even if Satan would have an uncertain position in the hierarchy, the exorcist has power over demons by appealing to the name of Jesus Christ. The power of Christ compels the demon, not the power of the exorcist.

3.4 Rituale Romanum

Rituale Romanum (1614⁴⁵) presents official guidelines for exorcism, it is an official liturgical book of the Catholic Church, and it was made uniform after the council of Trent. *Rituale Romanum* is also the main source of Gabriele Amorth and it has served as the traditional guide for the exorcists. *Rituale Romanum* played a significant role in Amorth's diagnostic practices. The central method of diagnosis involved subjecting the patient to the grace of God, and Amorth followed the instructions outlined in *Rituale Romanum*. While the original *Rituale Romanum* (1614) served as the official liturgical book of the Catholic Church, it has undergone several updates over the years, with the latest version dating back to 1998. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has been responsible for observing and translating these updated rites. Modern official exorcists now use these newly updated versions. It is possible that traditional exorcists continue to rely on *Rituale Romanum* itself rather than the translated versions.

Why was the *Rituale Romanum* the primary source for Gabriele Amorth? I have categorized these reasons into three different categories. The first category is related to the time when Amorth received his exorcist training. The second category is based on linguistic considerations. The third category pertains to the position of Gabriele Amorth.

The main reason is that Amorth became an exorcist in 1986, a time when the way things were done changed a lot worldwide. Back then, Latin was the primary and first official language used in Catholic exorcisms. This goes back to when the practice first became an official part of the Catholic Church. Amorth conducted most of his exorcisms in Latin.

In the years that followed, the importance of Latin in the Catholic Church shifted. However, Amorth believed in keeping the ritual connected to its traditional roots and continued to use Latin because it was the historical language of the Church.

When we compare Amorth's methods to those of other exorcists, we see that he stayed true to using *Rituale Romanum*, a significant part of his diagnosis and practical exorcisms. Amorth not only relied on *Rituale Romanum* but also helped modern exorcists adapt to the updated rituals of our time.

The second reason relates to the linguistic aspects of Amorth's approach. To understand

⁴⁵ Bauer, Nicole Maria. 2022. *The Devil and the Doctor: The (De)Medicalization of Exorcism in the Roman Catholic Church*. P.3/13

why Amorth strongly favored *Rituale Romanum*, we need to briefly explore the linguistic considerations. A significant linguistic aspect involves the use of invocative or imperative prayers. Amorth believed that demons should be ordered rather than asked, making the use of imperative language in Latin a necessity. While the ritual has been translated into English on multiple occasions, Amorth expressed his preference for working with the original Latin text. Amorth was also involved in some of these later translations, but he pointed out that English employs the imperative voice differently than Italian, leading to differences in clarity. For example, English uses "go," while Italian uses "va" or "vai." According to Amorth, the English translation lacks the clarity present in the Latin original.⁴⁶ This is the kind of uncertainty that exorcists should strive to avoid because demons need to be commanded explicitly for successful exorcism. If Amorth had been using Italian/Latin as his working language for decades, adjusting to a new language could be challenging. However, it is important to note that Amorth also contributed to the new translations, thus having a lasting impact on the modern version of the rite. The new English translation by the USCCB is, in itself, merely a translation and is identical to the latest *Rituale Romanum*.

The third reason is Amorth's position. Amorth was an authority among exorcists and was considered a top professional in his field. It is possible that Amorth was able to recognize when a specific set of exorcism rites should be used. For instance, Amorth identified different types of demonic activities, and the duration of his exorcisms varied. It could be possible that Amorth recognized when he could use the modern translation of the rite and when *Rituale Romanum* was needed.

I want to highlight also the fact that there are several unlicensed translations of exorcism on the Internet and this might be exactly the reason why Gabriele Amorth was critical about new translations. Some unofficial translations not only lack the clarity, but they have also lost a lot in translation. It could be that Amorth saw the risks of new, unofficial translations even before the Internet became mainstream.

⁴⁶ LaRoche Lucas, "*The Efficaciousness of Rites of Exorcism*", unpublished term paper, 2015, available at https://www.academia.edu/17674544/The_Efficaciousness_of_Rites_of_Exorcism

4. Analysis

This research studies three different approaches to the diagnostics of exorcism. The first one is the practical approach by Gabriele Amorth. The second one is the scientific approach studied by Nicole Bauer. The third one is the official approach documented by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops.

The number of exorcisms performed by Amorth is inaccurate and depends on the source. The article "*Messenger of Saint Anthony*" (October 23, 2022) quotes Amorth the following way: "*I must have carried out over 70 000 exorcisms.*" While the higher number of exorcisms is possible, the number of 30 000 seems more accurate (Amorth also refers to this number in his written work)⁴⁷. It seems that Amorth counts every exorcism as a new ritual, and the patients who require multiple exorcisms are presented in the literature as new cases.

Almost every exorcism case needs more than one exorcism. It seems important to Amorth that the people receiving exorcisms remain anonymous. It seems that Amorth documented the cases only by their number. When every exorcism is a new case, it is impossible to count how many people received exorcisms individually⁴⁸. A suspected case of possession does not necessarily include demonical possession but can still proceed to exorcism (in its shortest to a moment of prayer).

While other sources even claim that Amorth performed 160 000 exorcisms⁴⁹, this seems like exaggeration. In any case, to count the exact number of exorcisms is impossible. When, in some cases, a brief prayer and a blessing is enough (for exorcism), sometimes the exorcism requires more time. This also shows how the terminology of exorcism differs from one country to another. While e.g. praying and blessing is not regarded as exorcism in Finland, it could be regarded as exorcism in a country influenced by the Catholic Church. The deliverance of evil might take several exorcisms and the amount of time used to exorcise one person differs from one case to another. Also, according to Amorth, a patient could need several exorcisms. Thus, 30 000 exorcisms does not mean 30 000 treated patients. It seems impossible to make a solid difference between Amorth's blessings and minor exorcisms. Amorth understands the minor exorcisms in a different context than what could

⁴⁷ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story* P.169, 1999

⁴⁸ Amorth, G, *The Devil is afraid of me*, Sophia Institute press, Manchester, 2019

⁴⁹ The Guardian, Obituary: *Father Gabriele Amorth, Rome's exorcist for 39 year*, available at: [Father Gabriele Amorth obituary | Catholicism | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/26/father-gabriele-amorth-obituary), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/26/father-gabriele-amorth-obituary>, Accessed November 8. 2023

be considered as the general concept of exorcism. Blessing is a part of an exorcism, but a blessing does not always lead to a major exorcism. This might sound like an obvious fact for a Catholic person, but for a Lutheran it does not seem to be in context with the common understanding of the general concept of exorcism. This shows that when there is not an official exorcism ritual, the terminology is inconsistent.

Amorth states that he has treated fewer than 100 (the actual number Amorth refers to is 93⁵⁰, but I am using 100, as this number might have grown over the years) actual demonic possessions. This means that the symptoms that Amorth diagnoses occur only among 0.3% of the people Amorth diagnosed. However, it needs to be stressed that this is a bad comparison. The number of 30 000 seems to be the number of exorcisms (which could only include a short moment of prayer), and 93 is the number of treated demonical possessions. Still, this number shows that demonical possessions are rare.

⁵⁰ Amorth, Gabriele. *An Exorcist tells his story*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1999, page 169

4.1 Stages of Diagnostic process by Gabriele Amorth

Gabriele Amorth outlines the diagnostic process, which initiates with an examination of physical symptoms. He emphasizes that the stomach and head are frequently the most affected areas. Additionally, during the diagnostic phase, Amorth pays particular attention to the patients' eyes. Amorth states that: *“Almost always in cases of evil presence, the eyes look completely white; we can barely discern, even with the help of both hands, whether the pupils are toward the top or the bottom of the eye. The position of the pupils indicates the type of demons and troubles that are present”*⁵¹.

Amorth acknowledges that physical symptoms may also warrant a medical diagnosis. However, he contends that a spiritual problem, specifically demonic influence, can be distinguished from a medical illness. He suggests that a spiritual ailment accompanied by physical discomfort can be diagnosed and identified through a blessing. For instance, if stomach pain occurs exclusively during a blessing, it may indicate demonic influence. Conversely, if the physical ailment persists regardless of blessings or procedures aimed at obtaining grace, it might not be the result of demonic influence. Given the theological focus of my study, my primary interest lies in understanding the symptoms that, according to Amorth, have the potential to disrupt spiritual well-being. Consequently, I do not assess symptoms such as vomiting or changes in a person's voice, but rather observe these types of manifestations.

Before initiating the diagnosis process, Amorth employed a questionnaire and a pre-diagnosis procedure. The diagnostic procedure commences with a Prayer of Liberation, which bears a resemblance to a minor exorcism but is not typically classified as such. The primary objective of this diagnosis is to assess whether the patient may be experiencing a spiritual issue. To attribute the problem to demonic interference, it must exhibit identifiable characteristics falling into one or more of the six categories of extraordinary satanic activity⁵²:

1. External physical pain caused by Satan.
2. Demonic possession.
3. Diabolical oppression.

⁵¹ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story*, P.78, 1999

⁵² Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story*, P.33, 1999

4. Diabolical obsession.
5. Diabolical infestation.
6. Diabolical subjugation.

While these symptoms can be confused with serious medical conditions and neurological diseases, it is important to note that regardless of the perspective taken in demon research (whether allegorical, literal, biblical, psychological, etc.), the phenomena (demons) affect the people around them. These effects can be observed regardless of the research perspective. Individuals in different reference groups can generate various emotional variations and responses in their proximity, suggesting that demons (regardless of the definition) may also have a similar influence. People invariably influence others in their vicinity.

The first (1.) category, 'External physical pain caused by Satan,' resembles a psychosomatic condition where the patient experiences physical symptoms (e.g., vomiting or stomach pain) that are related to the person's state. Bauer has also observed this type of confrontations and describes symptoms as being *“devilish torments that manifest on an emotional, social, and physical level”*⁵³.

The second (2.) category (*the demonic possession*) can easily be confused with *“a symptom of various mental illnesses such as multiple personality disorder (MPD) or repressed memory syndrome (RMS)”* according to Bauer. These are different types of conditions, when the MPD and RMS are medical and the *demonic possession* is a spiritual condition. If a person is diagnosed with a medical condition, the person should receive help from the medical professionals, not from the exorcist. This (referring to *demonic possession*) is the most serious form of demonic influence and can lead to, or encompass, any of the other five (5) categories. Bauer shows that it is difficult to distinguish this category from a serious medical condition. Typical symptoms of this category include changes in personality and radical alterations in the tone of the patients' voice.

The third (3rd) category (Diabolical oppression) resembles depression. It is important to point out that oppression on its own is not necessarily a symptom of demonic influence. Bauer states that *“Psychological complaints such as depression, mental confusion, phobias, or hallucinations can also be traced back to diabolical causes”*. According to Bauer,

⁵³ Bauer, Nicole Maria. *The Devil and the Doctor: The (De)Medicalization of Exorcism in the Roman Catholic Church*. 2022. P.5/13

psychological complaints are sometimes traceable to diabolical causes, but she also acknowledges that there could be room for speculation. Diagnosis can be controversial when not performed by professionals. Bauer's examples illustrate the challenges in making accurate diagnoses and emphasize that other factors, apart from spiritual problems, should be taken into consideration.

The fourth (4.) category is *diabolical obsession*. This category can be compared to Bauer's category "*devilish obsessions that can even lead to suicide*". This category is as difficult to interpret as the third category. According to Amorth, if an obsession occurs during a moment of prayer and blessing, especially during the Prayer of Liberation, the origin of the obsession could be demonic. It should be highlighted that the diagnosis is accurate only when it is performed completely, not if there is a positive indication of just one category. The fourth category seems to indicate *demonical influence*, but as said before, the symptoms are difficult to interpret.

The fifth (5.) category is diabolical infestation. Amorth categorizes certain possessed objects (e.g. houses or books) as targets of this type of interference. Since this study focuses on people, the category of diabolical infestation is not explored but rather observed during this thesis.

The sixth (6.) category is diabolical subjugation, which can be defined as a category of people who willingly submit to Satan. While this may seem obvious, there are certain factors that are difficult to interpret. Amorth describes diabolical subjugation as a state of dependence in which a person willingly submits to harmful influences. Addictions share similar characteristics, but according to Amorth, the fundamental disparity is that a person with diabolical subjugation willingly submits, whereas, for example, a heroin addict may submit against their free will. It is possible that active addictions (such as heroin addiction or alcoholism) can develop from diabolical subjugation to diabolical obsession in some cases. As a result, when the diabolical state develops, a person begins to submit even against their free will.

Amorth states that the diagnosis is a phase where the exorcists proceed with a caution.

Amorth states that "*There are people who have fixation of being possessed*" and to these people "*an exorcism may become proof positive of possession and nobody will ever be able*

*to convince him differently*⁵⁴. Therefore it is important to distinguish Prayer of Liberation and minor exorcism from each other. The main practical difference is that a minor exorcism requires a priest, while a prayer of deliverance can also be performed by a layperson. Amorth claims that people who feel that they are being possessed by demons rarely are – the problem is always difficult and is open for interpretation. Amorth also highlights the different phases of the diagnosis and the importance of the diagnosis on several occasions⁵⁵. According to Amorth false diagnosis creates more problems and therefore the exorcist needs to be sure of the symptoms. Still Amorth highlights that *“It is only through an actual exorcism that we can be certain whether we are dealing with satanic influence”*⁵⁶. In this context, Amorth might also refer to the prayer of deliverance since it appears to be the initial part of the exorcism ritual. However, the prayer of deliverance can be performed independently of exorcism, making it easy to confuse with a minor exorcism. By simply comparing the numbers of Amorth's exorcisms (a total of 30,000 exorcisms) and the fact that Amorth recognized fewer than 100 actual cases of demonic possession, it becomes evident that Amorth could identify specific recurring symptoms and differentiate between two distinct groups of individuals. This process bears similarities to a medical diagnosis or a psychological evaluation in which a doctor categorizes people into two groups: one comprising healthy individuals and the other consisting of those exhibiting symptoms. In the second group, there are individuals diagnosed by Gabriele Amorth who did not require a major exorcism. In the other group, there were individuals diagnosed by Amorth who were afflicted by a severe spiritual ailment (comprising 93 people). Amorth has officially stated that he has healed at least 93⁵⁷ demonical possessions, but this number might have increased in the following years.

In his books, Amorth describes the symptoms of demonic possession, but the symptoms are sometimes really difficult to diagnose. Some symptoms of demonic possession cannot be traced to humans (common features are reports of objects flying around, books falling off the shelves, strange lights, cold zones, bad smells that are difficult to confirm) or their origin

⁵⁴ Amorth G, *Exorcist tells his story*, 1999 (P.77)

⁵⁵ Amorth G, *An Exorcist tells his story*, 1999 (P.44)

⁵⁶ Amorth G, *An Exorcist tells his story*, 1999 (P.44)

⁵⁷ Amorth G, *An Exorcist tells his story*, 1999, (P.169)

is challenging to track (e.g., some symptoms personally sound like a severe migraine). In this thesis, however, I am focusing only on diagnosing symptoms related to people. This method excludes many of the reported cases.

4.2 Diagnosis of Bauer and Amorth

While Bauer often analyzes symptoms from a psychological perspective, this research predominantly interprets them from a theological rather than psychological standpoint. In this thesis, the ritual is examined with a theological approach, and psychological terminology serves as a tool for elucidating this perspective.

Bauer concurs with Amorth, emphasizing the challenging nature of the diagnosis. According to Bauer, the diagnosis of demonical symptoms can be categorized into three (3) distinct groups: (1) *supernatural symptoms*, (2) *physical or psychological reactions to Christian objects* and (3) *physical or psychological symptoms in general*⁵⁸. While Amorth appears to maintain consistency in diagnosing the first two categories—(1) supernatural symptoms and (2) physical or psychological reactions to Christian objects—both Bauer and Amorth concur on the challenging nature of the third category, (3) general physical or psychological symptoms.

Bauer suggests that the first two categories, supernatural symptoms and physical or psychological reactions to Christian objects, are easier to diagnose compared to the third category, which includes general physical or psychological symptoms. From Bauer's perspective, these first two categories align with Gabriele Amorth's six categories of extraordinary satanic activity and would also be diagnosed as demonical influence.

The first category, which includes supernatural symptoms such as levitation and other non-human features, is quite unusual. It is evident that individuals experiencing these symptoms would require immediate medical or spiritual attention. The highly supernatural nature of these symptoms makes mere observation sufficient for this thesis. If someone involuntarily starts levitating during a moment of prayer (or while subjected to other means of obtaining the grace of God), it could indicate demonical influence. It is important to note that levitation alone is not necessarily a sign of demonical possession. The source of the levitation should be identified (as it could also be the grace of God). The source of levitation can also be from God, in which case levitation itself is not a sign of the demonic.

The second category is *physical or psychological reactions to Christian objects*. USCCB and Gabriele Amorth emphasize these symptoms as Amorth states “*anyone who notices the*

⁵⁸ Bauer, Nicole Maria. 2022. *The Devil and the Doctor: The (De)Medicalization of Exorcism in the Roman Catholic Church*. 5.1, Page 7/13

*presence of tormenting phenomena tied to an inexplicable aversion to the sacred, to God, or to prayer should seek spiritual discernment.*⁵⁹ Symptoms that fall under this category are the ones which typically appear during a blessing or a prayer. Amorth suggests that this category could also encompass external physical pain caused by Satan. For example, the sudden appearance of scars during a blessing or a moment of prayer could indicate demonic influence.

The third category highlights the challenges of achieving a definitive diagnosis, as every psychological or physical symptom can fall under the broad category of general physical or psychological symptoms. While the official approach (USCCB), the theoretical approach (Bauer, Young), and the practical approach (Amorth) all describe similar methods, Gabriele Amorth also possesses methods for distinguishing general physical or psychological symptoms from physiological or mental illnesses. Amorth accomplishes this by guiding the patient towards the grace of God, typically through a blessing or the Prayer of Liberation. It is difficult to find a similar level of diagnostic clarity in Bauer's studies. In the end, it appears that by implementing Amorth's methods, one can differentiate general physical or psychological symptoms by observing the patient's responses to grace-obtaining methods. This process allows Amorth to reclassify the general symptoms from Bauer's third category (general physical or psychological symptoms) into either the first or second of Bauer's categories (supernatural symptoms, or physical or psychological reactions to Christian objects), thus ruling out the possibility of a serious medical condition. If the symptoms only occur when Amorth has blessed the patient, it is reasonable to assume that the issue has a spiritual nature.

Nicole Bauer interprets modern exorcism similarly to the USCCB and Amorth. Bauer's research reveals her attempt to maintain objectivity in her study of the subject.

According to Bauer, "The exorcist can step in and provide healing only once psychological and medical attempts have failed and thus the only diagnosis is demonic possession."

(p.7/13). The conclusion is that Bauer's viewpoint aligns with that of the USCCB. Additionally, Bauer concurs that, during an exorcism, medical personnel should always be in attendance. Amorth holds a notably similar perspective. However, for this research, Gabriele Amorth's views on exorcism provide examples of practical exorcism and theology, whereas Bauer,

⁵⁹ Amorth, G, *An exorcist explains the demonic* P.57, 2016

Young, and the USCCB focus more on presenting the theoretical background.

According to the translation of the USCCB, Bauer's and Amorth's diagnoses depend on the collaboration of the interdisciplinary group. This group could consist of the following individuals:

1. Priest-exorcist
2. Medical doctor or medico
3. Nurse/attending medical staff
4. Member of a congregation
5. Scribe

The translation of the USCCB clearly suggests that *“the Exorcist will make a prudent judgment after diligent inquiry, always preserving the seal of confession, having consulted, to the extent possible, experts in spiritual matters and, if necessary, in the science of medicine and psychiatry, who have a sense of spiritual realities”* (Para 17, page 9). This illustrates that official exorcists collaborate with medical professionals. While this is purely speculative, it is possible that some of the patients treated by Amorth ultimately received medical care. The decision to perform an exorcism is always made in consultation with medical professionals.

The prior research demonstrates that all three of Bauer's categories can be related to Amorth's six different phases of extraordinary satanic activity. These categories can also be compared to phenomena outside the realm of theology and even different medical conditions. However, my study primarily concentrates on theology, specifically dogmatics, so I will not delve deeply into these phenomena and medical conditions. The objective of mentioning these severe medical conditions is to emphasize the significance of having interdisciplinary exorcism groups to accurately identify the underlying issues.

Nicole Bauer suggests that sometimes it is hard to recognize the demonical possessions from *“multiple personality disorder” (MPD), or “repressed memory syndrome” (RMS)*⁶⁰. This shows how difficult the diagnosis is. Both of these diseases include a variety of symptoms which explain what kind of behaviour the exorcist could encounter.

⁶⁰ Bauer, Nicole Maria. 2022. *The Devil and the Doctor: The (De)Medicalization of Exorcism in the Roman Catholic Church*. P.11

4.3 Diagnosis of USCCB

In this thesis, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is regarded as the administrative organization. The USCCB has translated the official *Rituale Romanum* (1998) in English. The latest version of *Rituale Romanum* (1998) provides the exorcists with the guidelines and instructions, and therefore the documents should not be evaluated in a similar way as Amorth's and Bauer's work. The USCCB's translation has only a small amount of interpretations regarding their official diagnostical procedures. USCCB's document *Exorcisms and certain supplications, typical edition* is translated from Vatican's latest official version of *Rituale Romanum* (1998). The USCCB has only translated and published the English version of the ritual. Still at this thesis the role of USCCB is considered as administrative, as their translation of the ritual is being used.

According to USCCB's translation (*Exorcisms and Certain supplications, typical edition*) signs which can indicate the demonical possession are the following: "*Speaking a number of words in an unknown language or understanding someone speaking; making known distant and hidden events; showing strength beyond the nature of the individual's age or condition*" (Para 16, page 9). USCCB's translation also highlights that it is important to "*pay attention to other things, especially those of the moral and spiritual order, which in another way manifest diabolical intervention, as for example, vehement aversion from God, the Most Holy Name of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints, the Church, the Word of God, sacred things and rites, especially sacramental ones and from sacred images*". While USCCB's official line of diagnosis is consistent and parallel with the theoretical studies by scientists like Bauer and Young, the official line of USCCB highlights the two first categories of Bauer's article (*supernatural symptoms, physical or psychological reactions to Christian objects*). This is also in consistence with the methods practiced by Gabriele Amorth. While the third category mentioned by Bauer (*physical or psychological symptoms in general*) is the most difficult to distinguish from a serious medical condition on its own, it is also the single category that needs a catalyst (obtaining grace) for the diagnosis. It is possible that Bauer's third category (physical or psychological symptoms in general) could indicate a demonical influence. However, by bringing patients from the third category to the grace of

God through 'sacramentals,' this category may also exhibit symptoms from the two previous categories⁶¹. When a possessed patient is subdued to obtaining grace, the patient would commence to show symptoms from a slight change of the tone of voice, to vomiting, or to radical levitation. Identifying the source of supernatural activity is important, as at times, for example, levitation may be due to the grace of God and not involve anything demonic. Measures that lead to obtaining grace appear to function as a diagnostic method, and there are reports of possessed individuals sensing hidden exorcism relics or other sacred artefacts during an exorcism.

I want to emphasize that the USCCB does not have an official role on exorcisms. USCCB has only translated the *Rituale Romanum*, and therefore the translation provides guidelines for exorcists.

⁶¹ United States Catholic Conference of bishops, available at: <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals> [Sacraments | USCCB](#)

5. Conclusions

As stated previously, the Catholic Church has a solid diagnosis of official exorcism. Amorth, Bauer and USCCB agree on this, although they all have different positions, and they describe the diagnosis in different ways. This answers the first research question *“Is there an official diagnosis of exorcism proceeded by the Catholic Church?”*.

The answers to the second and the fifth research questions are slightly parallel. Examining the practical aspects, a significant majority (99.7%) of Amorth's exorcisms align more with ordinary pastoral care than sensationalized Hollywood films. In the Hollywood films, the special effects play a significant role (e.g. the *The Pope's Exorcist* combines facts with fiction and is exaggerating with special effects), whereas the majority of Amorth's exorcisms rather included prayers and blessing than huge explosions. It also seems that the number of Amorth's major exorcisms was only 0.3%. This is regarded as the total number of demonical possessions (93) handled by Gabriele Amorth, divided by the number of the total exorcisms (30 000) performed by him⁶². It also needs to be emphasized that this type of calculation is not very reliable, as it compares the number of people receiving major exorcisms to the total number of exorcisms performed by Gabriele Amorth.

The second question (*“How many percentages of Gabriele Amorth's patients were considered as demonically possessed?”*) is impossible to answer, as the patients might have received several exorcisms. The 0.3% figure presents the number of major exorcisms but, as said, these people might have received several exorcisms, so the number is unreliable.

The answer to the fifth question (*“Is it possible that the majority of exorcisms are closer to therapy sessions than they are to Hollywood films?”*) is yes.

Considering the general concept of exorcism, I needed to limit my research to studying Gabriele Amorth's diagnosis, which leads to the major exorcism. Diagnostics of minor exorcism (which sometimes includes only a brief prayer and a blessing) differs considerably from major exorcism. My main focus is the diagnosis leading to major exorcism. Minor exorcism also has a diagnosis of its own and the patient receiving major exorcism has already been diagnosed at least twice (before the minor exorcism and before the major

⁶² Amorth G, *An Exorcist tells his story*, 1999, (P.169)

exorcism).

5.1 Tools and Methods of Diagnosis

Gabriele Amorth began his exorcisms by telling the patient that he was giving a blessing and praying⁶³ (Prayer of Liberation). He did this because, if a human is possessed by a demon, the demon does not want to be recognized⁶⁴. According to Amorth, if a demon is aware of the exorcism, it can hide. This method (Prayer of Liberation) should be considered as a tool of diagnosis, as Amorth in his written work states that during the Prayer of Liberation he observes the same type of symptoms that the USCCB and Bauer write about. This method should be seen as a method of *obtaining grace*. This answers the third question (*"How are the official Catholic exorcists recommended to diagnose the spiritually possessed?"*), as the measurements of obtaining the grace of God should be seen as tools for diagnosis.

Symptoms which occur can include convulsions, physical pain, rigidity of limbs, muscular flexibility and contortions, supernatural strength, levitation, swelling, vomiting, loss of bodily functions, speaking previously unknown language, noticeable change in the voice, trance experiences, visions, clairvoyance, blasphemy, immortal gestures and actions.

According to Gabriele Amorth, one of the typical symptoms of demonical influence is aversion to the sacred. The name of Jesus Christ has a significant effect on the people being possessed. The exorcist could also encounter violent behaviour, such as anger towards loved ones. Amorth seems to state that procedures leading the patient to obtaining the grace of God (such as Prayer of Liberation or minor exorcism) would cause symptoms. These diagnostic procedures could include sacramentals. Sacramentals contain e.g. rosaries, priestly prayers, blessings, holy water and scapulars. The symptoms are difficult to interpret only by evaluating the individual symptoms and without the spiritual connection (entrust the patient to the grace of God). Amorth was sometimes unsure whether there is demonical influence or not. Amorth states that only through exorcism (here he could mean the Prayer

⁶³ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story* P.77, 1999

⁶⁴ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story* P.91, 1999

of Liberation⁶⁵) can he determine with certainty whether there is satanic influence⁶⁶. It also seems that he proceeded with his minor exorcisms in order to subdue the patient to the procedure of obtaining grace. It seems that the procedure of obtaining the grace of God is the main tool for diagnosis. The USCCB and Bauer seem to agree on this when the USCCBs translation states that the exorcist has to: *“pay attention to other things, especially those of the moral and spiritual order, which in another way manifest diabolical intervention, as, for example, vehement aversion from God, the Most Holy Name of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin”* (Para 16, page 9) and Bauer states that *“Physical or psycho-social Reaction to Christian Objects”* (p.7) could indicate the need of major exorcism. The minor exorcism Amorth refers to is an actual (minor) exorcism, but it can also be argued that his minor exorcism is not in accordance with the general concept of Christian exorcism. Instead of evaluating the diagnosis of minor exorcism, this research focuses on how Gabriele Amorth was able to make the difference between the 30 000⁶⁷ exorcisms and the 93 major exorcisms. It is clear that he is diagnosing something, because he is always focusing on the similar symptoms in his diagnosis. The minor exorcism seems to have an especially high position in his diagnosis. Minor exorcism might be enacted in a fairly short period of time (it could contain only a prayer and a blessing), whereas a major exorcism can take up to weeks. When Amorth spoke about how he performed his exorcisms, he made no clear difference between the minor and the major exorcisms (these are the two official exorcism methods distinguished from each other by USCCB and researchers such as Bauer and Young). This might lead people reading Amorth’s books to think that he is hastening to major exorcism, while the data and the literature clearly show that in its shortest a minor exorcism is similar to a moment of prayer with Amorth. Notable is that Amorth has diagnosed a variety of different symptoms before this. Even though the process is not always the same, he diagnoses the symptoms and, after the diagnosis, he proceeds to minor exorcism. Amorth distinguishes prayers of liberation from the exorcisms, although sometimes it is difficult to recognize when he is mentioning Prayer of Liberation and when he is describing a minor exorcism. Similar terminological difficulties appear, when it seems that in his published work he does not always make a solid difference between the minor exorcisms and the major exorcisms.

⁶⁵ Amorth, G, *The Devil is afraid of Me*. P.16, 2016

⁶⁶ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story* P.44, 1999

⁶⁷ Amorth G, *An Exorcist tells his story*, 1999, (P.169)

To Amorth, minor exorcism is also generally exorcism. Also for a Lutheran, it is sometimes difficult to recognize the differences between these three categories, because the boundaries of adjacent categories are not entirely clear.

5.2 Practical Realities of Exorcism

The categories of exorcism performed by Gabriele Amorth are:

1. Prayer of Liberation (diagnosis)
2. Minor exorcism (minor ritual)
3. Major exorcism (major ritual)

It is important to observe that the first category (Prayer of Liberation) is not considered an official exorcism, but from a Lutheran point of view this category needs to be detected. Similar types of prayers of liberation exist, even though all the countries affected by the Lutheran Reformation did not have an official major exorcism in spring 2022. It seems that traditional churches affected by the Lutheran Reformation still have remains of exorcisms in their official rites.

Amorth also states clearly that sometimes these procedures lack clear boundaries to adjacent categories. This means, for example, that it is difficult to make a solid theoretical difference between the Prayer of Liberation and the minor exorcism (according to Amorth, *“a priest prays a public prayer of liberation, which I call an exorcism”*⁶⁸). The diagnosis of minor exorcism performed by Gabriele Amorth should be a study on its own. This type of research could be useful, because only a priest-exorcist can perform an exorcism ritual, whereas also a parishioner could pray the Prayer of Liberation. If there were a way to distinguish these two from each other, it could prevent regular parishioners from improvising.

Amorth states that the people who end up on exorcists' doorsteps *“have already tried every*

⁶⁸ Amorth, G, *The Devil is afraid of Me*. P.16, 2016

possible medical test and remedy."⁶⁹ This shows that it was likely that his patients had some type of a diagnosis before. According to Amorth, a doctor should be present during an exorcism and the patient receiving the treatment should present medical information before the modern exorcism can begin. This also shows how atypical and strong Amorth's position was. As stated, some of his patients had probably been given some type of diagnosis, whereas a younger, less experienced exorcist without such a position would need to evaluate patients without existing data. However, this is just a speculation based on Gabriele Amorth's position.

Amorth states that only by performing (minor) exorcism (which could be only a Prayer of Liberation), the exorcist can determine whether the illness is caused by demonical influence or a serious medical condition. He also asserts that official exorcism is not dangerous. In fact, it can guide the patient to the correct authority (e.g. medical care). Amorth's minor exorcisms include sacramentals and it seems that he is trying to create a position where the patient with symptoms is obtaining the grace, which rather is a tool of diagnosis than actual exorcism⁷⁰. This answers the fourth research question: "*What type of diagnosis leads to the major exorcism?*" -If the patient has symptoms while obtaining the grace of God, the exorcist can proceed with the major exorcism.

Sometimes a demonical influence can cause a serious medical illness, so a medical diagnosis does not preclude or confirm the spiritual problem. It is important to repeat that even when Amorth's minor exorcism is indeed a minor exorcism, one could argue that the resemblance to the major exorcism is so small that his minor exorcism cannot be considered being in accordance with the general concept of exorcism.

According to Amorth, some demons can be exposed by holy water and other types of demons cannot stand crucifixes or the sign of the cross. The demons react in different ways to different procedures. This could be because different demons have different tasks and positions in their own hierarchy. According to Amorth, demons still have similar positions in the hierarchy as the angels have.

An interesting detail in Amorth's exorcisms is the position of Virgin Mary. He states that "*I*

⁶⁹ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story* P.69, 1999

⁷⁰ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story* P.35, 1999

*put myself under the protection of both Jesus and Mary*⁷¹. This shows that the positions of Jesus and Mary are significant to his exorcisms and personal theology. There has also been some academic discussion regarding the question whether Gabriele Amorth has affected the new formulas of exorcisms and whether the position of Virgin Mary is more emphasized during a modern exorcism. In this thesis, it seems obvious that Amorth has affected the new formulas, as he stated that he and Father Candido had made omissions to the formula⁷². Considering Amorth's background, this would only be logical –he also has a very high and respected position and he is considered a professional of Mariology. Combining Amorth's expertise in Mariology with his experience in exorcisms, it becomes evident that the role of the Virgin Mary holds significant importance.

5.3 Realm of Demonical Entities and Exorcism traditions

Amorth discusses the moments when an exorcist confronts a demon. He emphasizes that the exorcist should refrain from posing unnecessary questions, as these could lead to confusion due to potentially false answers from the demon. According to him, both biblical texts and his own encounters support the suggestion that demons often deceive and provide untrustworthy information. Therefore, the primary duty of the exorcist is to expel the demon, rather than seek information from it.

Amorth believes that demonical influence serves as trials to test one's spiritual strength. This suggests that even demonical possessions are allowed by God. However, he also mentions that some of the demonical influence is due to black magic. In Amorth's view, there is no distinction between white and black magic. He considers all forms of magic to be black.

Amorth believes that all the beings that possess people are demons. He does this to make a clear point. He does not write about evil spirits, djinns, or other evil forces. For Gabriele

⁷¹ Allegri, Renzo. *The Exorcist, Messenger of Saint Antony*, May 10th 2003, available at: [The Exorcist | Messenger of Saint Anthony \(messengersaintanthony.com\)](http://TheExorcist.MessengerofSaintAnthony.com)

⁷² Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story* P.77, 1999

Amorth, whenever a person is controlled by an evil entity, it is always a demon, and demons should be exorcised. If Amorth used various words to describe different evil entities, it would make his writings confusing. Thus, he uses the word demon to describe the evil entity inside a person. He states that *“There are no good spirits other than angels; there are no evil spirits other than demons”*⁷³. Amorth mentions that demonical influence is caused by a demon, but he also acknowledges that not every person suffering from demonical influence is necessarily possessed. In other words, demons can cause feelings like depression or anxiety in people who are not possessed, and this is what he calls demonical influence. Amorth also believes that even if someone has a medical illness, it does not mean that demonical activities can be excluded.

I have listed the demonical activities from minor to major below:

1. Infestation
2. Oppression
3. Possession

The presence of religious icons might provoke a response from the demons. While the diagnostic method seems consistent, it is worth mentioning that Amorth modified his approaches during the period when Catholic exorcism was evolving. Although he has had a significant impact on the development of inter-scientific exorcism groups, some of his methods appear quite traditional, as opposed to modern. In this study, I have accentuated three distinct reasons for this observation.

The first reason is **routine**. Amorth had built strong connections with the Church and fellow priests. He dedicated his life to this field and gained immense respect, showing his commitment to a high level of professional routine. Amorth does not explain why he acts in different ways but rather explains what he is doing.

The second reason is the **time of training**. Amorth received exorcist training in the 1980s. His methods have shown their effectiveness in real-life situations. However, not all of his techniques are commonly used in today's Catholic Church. It appears that younger exorcists have embraced recent exorcism rites and methods. When these new rites were being developed, Gabriele Amorth held a respected position among official exorcists.

The third reason is **Amorth's position**. Amorth describes the exorcist as the last resort for

⁷³ Amorth, G, *An exorcist tells his story* P.30, 1999

those who are possessed. This might be because before coming to Amorth, the patients might have already been evaluated by other exorcists or priests. Amorth was the head of the exorcists, so it is obvious that even being granted an appointment with Amorth requires effort. William Friedkin (the director of Amorth's favourite film "*The Exorcist*") described that he was able to meet Amorth after some discussions, but I think this shows that Amorth had a unique position among the exorcists. If Steven Spielberg were to call a Finnish congregation and express a desire to meet some priests, I think he would be granted an appointment immediately. In Amorth's view, it seemed that every appointment was equally valued, and even a famous film director needed to wait.

From my perspective, Amorth was a traditional exorcist, and not all of his methods can be recommended in modern times.

In the end, it seems that exorcism in the Catholic Church is considered as the shield and protection of the human soul. Regardless whether people believe it or not.

6. Swedish summary.

Den här pro gradu-avhandlingen initierades av mitt personliga intresse för skräckfilmer, serieböcker och katolsk änglalära. Jag saknar personlig erfarenhet av officiell exorcism inom den katolska kyrkan. Innan jag påbörjade min studie utvärderade jag offentlig information om utövning av exorcism. Jag vill belysa det faktum att även offentligt tillgängligt material från den katolska kyrkan visar att bristen på kunskap om utövningen av den officiella katolska exorcismen i de flesta icke-katolska medier är märkbar. Den allmänna kunskapen om utövningen av den officiella katolska exorcismen är obefintlig. Länder som är påverkade av den lutherska reformationen utgör inget undantag från detta. Den lutherska ramen är naturlig för mig, och jag strävar efter att förbli så objektiv som möjligt och beskriva diagnosen som leder till exorcismen så tydligt som möjligt.

En av huvudorsakerna till att jag skrivit denna avhandling är att öka kunskapen om utövningen av den officiella katolska exorcismen. Som finländsk lutheran känner jag att det är en ära att få studera en gammal kristen ritual med en gedigen historisk bakgrund.

Tidsramen för denna studie kan sträcka sig från 1986 till 2022. Detta beror på att huvudkällan, Gabriele Amorth, blev exorcist år 1986, och denna avhandling påbörjades år 2022.

Min studie är en litteraturanlys baserad på litteratur och dokument från chefsexorcisten i Rom Gabriele Amorth, forskarna Nicole Bauer, Francis Young, Serge-Thomas Bonino och den katolska biskopskonferensen i USA (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops).

Min studie visar att när en exorcist-präst utgår från en teologisk föreställning där demoniskt inflytande anses vara ett allvarligt tillstånd, är det möjligt att ge en konsekvent diagnos och se om exorcism behöver utföras enligt gällande ritual. Den mest centrala aspekten av diagnosen är att en församlingsmedlem får ta del av de medel som enligt kyrkans lära förmedlar Guds nåd. När församlingsmedlemmen fått ta del av dessa medel ska vissa symtom uppträda, för att hen ska få en positiv diagnos som visar att exorcism behövs.

Min studie visar också att de flesta utövningar av officiell exorcism (99,7 %) som utfördes av Roms chefsexorcist (Gabriele Amorth) låg närmare den vanliga pastorala omsorgen än Hollywood-filmer. Gabriele Amorth utövade exorcism totalt över 30 000 gånger, men endast 93 av dem var mer omfattande, så kallad major exorcism. Amorth hänvisar till att det ofta

räcker med en kort välsignelse och en stunds bön för exorcism. En församlingsmedlem kan också ta emot exorcism mer än en gång, så Amorth räknar snarare antalet utövningar av exorcism än antalet behandlade församlingsmedlemmar. Jag behöver dock påpeka att detta inte är en bra jämförelse. Antalet 30 000 verkar vara antalet utövningar av exorcism (vilket bara kan inkludera en kort bönestund), och 93 är antalet behandlade demoniska besittningar. Ändå visar detta antal att demoniska besittningar är sällsynta.

Den allmänna kunskapen om utövningen av den officiella katolska exorcismen är närmast obefintlig utanför den katolska kyrkan. Men min studie visar att när exorcism utförs enligt den officiella ritualen kan de upplevas både trovärdiga och effektiva av kyrkans medlemmar. Syftet med denna studie är att ge en systematisk-teologisk analys av hur man förstår och genomför exorcism inom den katolska kyrkan. Vidare kan studien ses som en bakgrundsstudie för vidare teologisk forskning.

I denna avhandling används kvalitativa, induktiva och tolkande metoder. Jag har samlat in och analyserat nödvändiga data från böcker och artiklar (kvalitativ metod), närmast mig resonemang och åsikter samt observerat olika berättelser från olika källor (tolkande metod). Induktiv metod används eftersom den centrala frågan är: "Finns det en officiell diagnos för exorcism som genomförs av den katolska kyrkan?" Om en fastställd diagnos finns, presenteras metoderna för detta i avhandlingen. I avhandlingen görs också några observationer om den historiska utvecklingen av riten; därför används alla dessa (kvalitativa, induktiva och tolkande) metoder.

De mest betydande litteraturkällorna för avhandlingen är tre böcker av Gabriele Amorth: *The Devil is afraid of me* (2019), *An Exorcist Tells His Story* (1999) och *An Exorcist Explains the Demonic* (2016) samt en artikel av Nicole Bauer: *The Devil and the Doctor: The (De)Medicalization of Exorcism in the Roman Catholic Church*. (2022) och *Exorcisms and Certain Supplications* (Typical Edition, USCCB 2013) översatt av United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Befrielsebön bör betraktas som ett diagnosverktyg, eftersom Amorth i sitt skriftliga arbete berättar att han observerar samma typ av symtom under befrielsebönen som USCCB och Bauer beskriver. Denna metod bör ses som en metod för att erhålla nåd.

Symtom som kan förekomma när någon är besatt av demoner inkluderar: kramper, fysisk smärta, stelhet i lemmar, muskulär flexibilitet och kropps-kontorsioner, övernaturlig styrka, levitation, svullnad, kräkningar, förlust av kroppsliga funktioner, tungomålstal, märkbar

förändring i rösten, transupplevelser, visioner, klarsynthet, hädelse, odödliga gester och handlingar. Det är särskilt viktigt att identifiera källan till problemen. Symtomen är svåra att tolka enbart genom att utvärdera de enskilda symtomen. Och utan den andliga kopplingen (att få patienten att nå Guds nåd) kunde Amorth inte alltid vara säker på om det fanns demonisk påverkan eller inte.

Enligt katolsk lära är demoner underordnade Jesus Kristus oavsett deras position i demonhierarkin. Exorcisten har makt över demoner genom att åberopa Jesus Kristus. Sist och slutligen är det Kristi makt som tvingar demonen, inte exorcistens makt.

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