

1. **Why exorcism?** Is it ridiculous in today's world? Do we still believe in it? [The answers to the latter two being, respectively, “no” and “yes” for those playing the home game]
2. **The existence of angels and demons**
 1. *How do we know they exist?*
 1. Primarily, revelation
 2. Secondarily, philosophical speculation makes probable arguments for their existence
 3. Thirdly, converging arguments about explaining events in human history
3. **The nature of angels and demons**
 1. *The terms are Greek in origin*
 1. “Angel” from “messenger.” Angels can signify, broadly, all good spirits; strictly, however, it's a rank of only some
 2. “Demon” from “spirit.” We use it for evil spirits
 2. *Knowledge of their nature comes from faith, informed by hypothetical necessities (if X, then Y must be true too)*
 1. Spirits are purely immaterial “minds” without bodies, beings of pure intellectual activity
 2. Many of our material categories cease to be applicable – hence, knowledge of them is only in reference to the kinds of activities that they perform and in analogy to our own powers
 3. *Organization*
 1. God's grace and their natural powers organize them into a “hierarchy” - traditionally termed the “choirs”
 2. These are different ranks divided according to the jurisdiction of each angel's activity
 1. Seraphim – love of God in Himself – Isaiah 6:2
 2. Cherubim – contemplation of God – Ezekiel 1
 3. Thrones – contemplating the types of things (God's ideas) - Colossians 1:16
 4. Dominations – ruling other angel choirs
 5. Virtues – giving power to carry out orders
 6. Powers – planning how to carry out an order
 7. Principalities – nations and rulers – all the above mentioned in Ephesians 1:21
 8. Archangels – great messages or important events – Jude 1:9
 9. Angels – individuals or events – many places in Scripture
 3. The hierarchy is roughly correct, but is not an article of faith – the point is threefold:
 1. Human beings will come into the heavenly choirs as saints
 2. God's Providential care uses free cooperation in its execution
 3. The ultimate end of rational beings is contemplative, societal, and involves grace in execution (art/prudence)
 4. Demons do not fall under the hierarchy – they have no society, but dominion of stronger over weaker. The “highest” demon, however, is the least happy and most malicious.
 4. *What power do they have?*
 1. Pure intellect and will
 2. CAN: influence other intellects through illumination or “angelic speech” (persuasion), modify imaginations and senses and material objects (limited for the evil spirits), do preternatural things, know a great deal
 3. CANNOT: create/destroy, operate apart from God's Providence, work miracles, know the future, modify another rational creature's intellect or will
 5. *Specific activities*
 1. Good angels
 1. Ordinary: illumination (strengthening our minds' ability to know truth) and persuasion toward good ideas

2. Extraordinary: visions and spiritual phenomena, external events, bodily appearances (Raphael and Tobias)
2. Evil spirits
 1. Ordinary: temptation and intellectual blindness (they can only darken the intellect externally, not by “reverse illumination”)
 2. Extraordinary: visions and spiritual phenomena, external events, obsession (directed attacks from without), possession (interruption of ordinary control over the body)

4. Exorcisms

1. What is it?

1. Exorcism is when “the Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One and removed from his dominion” (CCC 1673); comes from “to abjure” in Greek
2. A sacramental blessing, working *ex opere operantis* (its power is in the faith of the prayer, not in a divine promise like the sacraments)

2. Minor exorcisms are a normal part of baptism

3. Major exorcisms seek to free the possessed

1. We believe in this power because the Apostles inherited it from Jesus
2. Physical harm is stupid – spirits are immaterial
3. The only competent authority for an exorcism is the bishop or a priest deputed by him – successors to the apostles
4. Medical advice is necessary, as possession has superficial similarity to mental illness and because demons try to disguise their presence. A true mental illness is not a possession and the Church has been careful to distinguish them. Doctors are present at an exorcism, and no exorcism is undertaken without both a psychological evaluation that concludes that there is no medical explanation for their condition AND probable evidence pointing to possession
5. Signs: knowledge beyond the person in questions, languages they never studied or encountered, preternatural strength, marked aversion to holy things [these are not exhaustive and none of these criteria is used exclusively]
6. Sacraments are infinitely more effective than major exorcisms, and exorcism should tend toward adopting a regular, ordinary life of grace (Matt. 12:45)
7. Exorcisms are not magic; they are public prayers and blessings of the Church

4. Why does God allow this?

1. To bring about a greater good
2. A child in a state of grace is infinitely more powerful than all Hell (St. Therese)
3. Possession is counterproductive to Satan – it actually tends to bring people either back to the faith they lapsed in or into the Church for the first time
4. Temptation in general, by resisting it, brings us a greater reward in heaven

5. The Occult, or How the Devil Wants You to Be Stupid

1. Superstition as a Mortal Sin

1. Idolatry, Divination, “Observances”
2. The latter category is seeking aid in “magical” practices (crystals, incantations)
3. Parodying the sacraments, and it's just ultimately stupid – the Devil keeps in blindness

6. Concluding Points

1. The Devil is not the only source of temptation, nor does he take away freedom
2. The Devil is not all-powerful – fearing him irrationally is as superstitious as the occult
3. Ordinary holiness, ordinary means of grace, and seeking the lowest place
 1. “Do not glory that the spirits are subjected to you, but that your names are written in heaven” (Lk 10:20)