

Summary of text 33: Do people still believe in the existence of the devil?

This text addresses the question of whether belief in the devil, demons, and exorcism is still meaningful today. The document consists of several parts: a German newspaper article by theologian Herbert Haag, commentary by the compiler, reflections on historical figures such as Mobutu and Nicolae Ceaușescu, and an extensive handwritten treatise on exorcism by Father T'Jampens.

1. Herbert Haag's Position

The starting point is an article by the Swiss theologian Herbert Haag about Catholic exorcism. He discusses the death of Anneliese Michel in 1976, who died after prolonged exorcisms. This case caused a great stir within the Church and ultimately led to a revision of the exorcism ritual by Pope John Paul II in 1998.

According to Haag, the new ritual brought about few fundamental changes. While it acknowledges that doctors and psychiatrists must be consulted, it holds fast to the existence of demonic possession. Haag sees a contradiction in this: if Christ definitively conquered Satan, why would the devil still have power over people?

He further states that modern biblical scholarship shows that many notions of devils and demons stem from ancient Jewish ideas. According to him, a distinction must be made between the 'demons' of the Gospels and the later Christian conception of the devil. According to Haag, Jesus did not cast out devils, but healed sick people who were considered possessed by spirits at the time. What was previously explained as demonic activity is today often understood medically or psychologically.

2. A Reaction

We note that Father T'Jampens crossed out a number of passages by Haag, which can be interpreted as a sign of disagreement. Apparently, Haag represents a modern, rational view, while exorcists assume the real existence of devils and other malevolent spiritual beings.

From a Christian standpoint, reality as a whole can be understood as a tripartition into 'natural', 'extra-natural', and 'super-natureal' - three distinct levels of reality.

'Nature', or the natural level of reality, includes everything observable in the world around us and experienced by humans. This is the domain of empirical science.

'Extra nature', or the extra natural level of reality, includes according to this view everything outside the natural world. This includes subtle beings, thoughtforms, the subtle bodies of deceased people, and the gods of non-biblical religions.

Finally, 'supernature', or the supernatural level of reality, relates to everything transcending nature and extra nature. This concerns the biblical God, high angels, saints, and everything associated with them.

If Herbert Haag accepts that what was previously explained as demonic activity is today often understood medically or psychologically, he apparently tends to reduce the whole of reality, including the extra natural and the supernatural, to the natural level. Then we no longer speak of religion in its full meaning, with its characteristic mystical dimension, but religion risks being reduced mainly to folklore, sociology, ethnology, psychology, and depth psychology.

Returning to the topic of 'possession': not every alleged possession is necessarily demonic in nature. Sometimes deceased persons, spirits, or other subtle entities could exert an influence on living people. Karmic causes, magical attacks, and paranormal influences are also cited as possible explanations for human suffering.

3. Mobutu as an Example of Evil

To illustrate the existence of evil, the text uses examples from a documentary on Mobutu Sese Seko, former President of Zaire. Witnesses describe him as cunning, manipulative, and violent. Reports are cited of political murders, the disappearance of opponents, and a system characterized by fear and oppression.

In addition, extensive reference is made to allegations of involvement in black magic, the use of talismans, rituals, and contacts with magicians. Some witnesses believe that Mobutu maintained his power partly by practicing occult arts and that heavy personal sacrifices were made in return. The author sees this as an illustration of the idea that evil can have not only a moral or political, but also a spiritual dimension.

4. Nicolae Ceaușescu

Nicolae Ceaușescu is also cited as an example. Referencing publications on Romanian history and Roma culture, the text describes stories asserting that Ceaușescu and his wife made use of magical aid to retain their power. According to this view, their eventual fall could be partly explained by the loss of that protection.

The author acknowledges that such claims are difficult to prove rationally, but uses them to illustrate the conviction that political power is sometimes associated with belief in supernatural forces.

5. Father T'Jampens's Theory of Exorcism

The largest part of the text consists of an extensive study on exorcism by Father T'Jampens, who is himself an exorcist. He describes exorcism as a response to evil. In doing so, he distinguishes between various forms of evil and different ways people are believed to be influenced by it.

Five forms of evil

According to T'Jampens, five main types of people consult an exorcist:

1. People who are allegedly possessed.
2. People experiencing paranormal phenomena.
3. People constantly experiencing unexplained setbacks.
4. People suffering from unwanted sexual influences.
5. People with conditions for which they believe there is no ordinary medical explanation.

Possible causes

He distinguishes several possible explanations:

- Demonic spirits.
- Deceased persons who have not found peace.
- Magically or occultly invoked forces.
- Negative thoughtforms.
- Influences from past lives or a prior existence.

According to Father T'Jampens, no single explanation completely excludes the others. He rejects a one-sided approach where all phenomena are immediately considered demonic.

6. Exorcism as a Counterreaction

Exorcism is described as a process by which evil is neutralized. According to him, this happens on three levels:

- Mental: purification of thoughts and feelings.

- Spiritual: prayer, faith, and love.
- Astral or subtle sphere: influencing non-visible energies.

In addition, he emphasizes the importance of self-defense through moral purification, inner peace, and a positive attitude toward life. According to his view, negative thoughts make a person more vulnerable to harmful influences.

7. The Relationship with Medicine and Psychiatry

A striking part of the text is the attempt to relate exorcism to medicine and psychiatry. T'Jampens discusses neuroses, psychoses, hysteria, and other mental disorders. He acknowledges that some phenomena have a medical or psychological origin. At the same time, he believes that certain cases cannot be fully explained within the existing scientific framework.

His position is that doctors, psychiatrists, and exorcists should ideally work together. According to him, some problems can have both a psychological and a spiritual dimension.

8. Spiritist and Occult Interpretations

A large part of the manuscript discusses spiritist literature, paranormal experiences, and stories of contact with the deceased. Examples are given of mediums, ghosts, telepathy, clairvoyance, out-of-body experiences, and healings.

The common thread is that T'Jampens places various explanatory models side by side:

- Demonistic: the cause lies with devils.
- Spiritist: the cause lies with deceased persons.
- Magical or dynamistic: the cause lies with forces or thoughtforms.
- Psychological: the cause lies within the person oneself.
- Pre-existential: the cause lies in a past existence.

According to him, every model contains a part of the truth.

9. Criticism of Materialism

A recurring theme is criticism of a purely materialist worldview. Modern science is undeniably valuable, but according to the author, it does not necessarily encompass all aspects of reality. Science focuses primarily on phenomena that are sensorially observable and preferably reproducible. Paranormal and religious phenomena do not always fall within that framework according to this view.

Father T'Jampens advocates openness to experiences as described by clairvoyants and mystics, as well as within various religious traditions.

10. Final Conclusion

The document concludes that evil really exists, but cannot always be explained in the same way. A purely demonic explanation is too limited, but a fully rationalistic explanation is also considered inadequate. Therefore, a broader view is advocated in which scientific, psychological, spiritist, occult, and religious factors are brought into connection with each other as much as possible.

In the epilogue, it is stated that modern people are often skeptical of devils, spirits, and paranormal phenomena, sometimes from a biased stance. At the same time, such convictions occur in virtually all cultures.

It should be clear that the author regards the work of Jesus, exorcism, prayer, and spiritual forces as indications for the existence of more than just tangible reality.

Ultimately, every person is free to decide for themselves which conviction seems most plausible to them.