

CONCLUSIONS

Exorcism is no longer considered just a superstitious ritual. It has become a religious commodity that can be used, by a religion that engages in the practice, to strengthen that particular religion's attraction for and its hold on adherents, and to demonstrate its relevance in society in late modernity. In a religious market in which some groups are competing for the religious territory related to the supernatural, these groups are branding themselves to assert their superiority in dealing with the devil. In the past, religious conflicts were more violent. In late modernity, where human rights are (to a certain extent) protected, religious leaders are no longer able to demonstrate the validity of their beliefs through force but must do this through branding. More professionals are required to deal with the demands of both the religious leaders and the religious followers, and with more experts seeking out the devil, a situation of over-policing occurs, in which the devil's presence becomes pervasive.

We cannot speak about the return of exorcism, as the practice has never really been abandoned, but we can make reference to a specific development taking place in late modernity: exorcism has now been decriminalized and is even treated as a religious commodity.

These findings are part of an overall sociological theory that argues that the phenomenon of exorcism is likely to emerge in the public sphere in times of social change, but (contrary to de Certeau's over-generalizing view) that it is even more likely to occur in times in which a belief in magic and a more enchanted environment provide cultural support. In an age

dominated by science and institutionalized religion – one that does not valorize exorcism and other ritual ways of dealing with spirits and demons – the practice of exorcism is less likely to eventuate. The point is not that exorcism disappears or reappears, but that this ritual has existed over the centuries, in many parts of the world, at different intensities. Today, in this period of continuous change and rampant anxiety, exorcism is re-emerging.

Through our case study, we have discovered that the ritual of exorcism is not the course of action most often adopted in answer to a patient's request to be freed from the devil. Instead, the Catholic exorcist at the centre of our study usually recommends some type of ministry of deliverance to help people to solve their problems of affliction. While this exorcist does not practise any Pentecostal rituals, we find some rapprochement between Catholicism and Pentecostalism, as they appear to be in competition for the prerogative to satisfy the demand for expulsion of the devil. However, as we discussed in Chap. 6, one might wonder if this demand has been greatly increased by the augmented services on offer, that see the work of the devil in many contemporary and everyday practices.

NOTE

Some sections of this book rework and update sections of various earlier publications. These are listed below. We would like to thank their publishers.

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