

INDE AB ALIQUOT ANNIS
On The Current Norms Governing Exorcisms
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

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Issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on September 29, 1984.

Excellentissime Domine,

For several years, in certain areas of the Church, assemblies formed to pray for liberation from the influence of demons (though they do not perform exorcisms as such) have been increasing in number. These assemblies are often led by members of the laity, even when there is a priest present.

Since the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has been asked what is the proper attitude towards these activities, this Dicastery deems it necessary to make known to all Ordinaries the response which follows:

1. Canon 1172 of the Code of Canon Law declares that no one may licitly perform exorcisms on those who are possessed [obsessos], unless he has obtained particular and express permission from the local ordinary (section 1), and it decrees that this permission is to be granted by the Ordinary only to priests who are outstanding in piety, knowledge, prudence, and integrity of life (section 2). Bishops are therefore strongly urged to enforce the observance of these prescriptions.
2. It follows also from these same prescriptions that Christ's faithful may not employ the formula of exorcism against Satan and the fallen angels which is excerpted from that formula made official by order of the Supreme Pontiff Leo XIII, and certainly may not use the entire text of that exorcism. Let all bishops take care to admonish the faithful about this matter whenever such instruction is required.
3. Finally, for the same reasons, Bishops are asked to guard lest those who lack the required power attempt to lead assemblies in which prayers are employed to obtain liberation from demons, and in the course of which the

demons are directly disturbed and an attempt is made to determine their identity. This applies even to cases which, although they do not involve true diabolical possession, nevertheless are seen in some way to manifest diabolical influence.

[EWTN theological note: Paragraph 3 applies this prohibition to obsession (of persons) and infestation (of places). CBD]

Of course, the enunciation of these norms should not stop the faithful of Christ from praying, as Jesus taught us, that they may be freed from evil (cf. Mt 6:13). Moreover, Pastors should take this opportunity to remember what the tradition of the Church teaches about the function properly assigned to the intercession of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, the Apostles and the Saints, even in the spiritual battle of Christians against the evil spirits.

May I take this occasion to convey my great feelings of esteem for you, remaining your servant in the Lord,

Joseph Card. Ratzinger, Prefect

INDE AB ALIQUOT

ACTA CONGREGATIONUM CONGREGATIO PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI

Epistula Ordinariis locorum missa: in mentem normae vigentes de exorcismis revocantur [Die 29 m. Septembris a. 1985 (AAS p. 1169-70)]Excellentissime domine, inde ab aliquot annis, apud quosdam coetus ecclesiales, conventus ad preces faciendas multiplicantur hoc quidem proposito, ut liberatio obtineatur ab influxu daemonum, etiamsi non de exorcismis proprie dictis agatur; qui conventus peraguntur sub ductu laicorum, etiam praesente sacerdote.

Cum a Congregatione pro doctrina fidei quaesitum sit quid sentiendum de hisce factis, hoc dicasterium necessarium putat omnes ordinarios certiores facere de responsione quae sequitur:

1. Canon 1172 Codicis Iuris Canonici declarat neminem exorcismos in obsessos proferre legitime posse, nisi ab ordinario loci peculiarem et expressam licentiam obtinuerit (1), ac determinat hanc licentiam ab ordinario loci concedendam esse tantummodo presbytero pietate, scientia,

prudencia ac vitae integritate praedito (2). Episcopi igitur enixe invitantur, ut observantiam urgeant horum praescriptorum.

2. Ex hisce praescriptionibus sequitur ut christifidelibus etiam non liceat adhibere formulam exorcismi contra satanam et angelos apostaticos, excerptam ex illa quae publici iuris facta est iussu summi pontificis Leonis XIII, ac multo minus adhibere textum integrum huius exorcismi. Episcopi hac de re fideles admonere curent in casu necessitatis.

3. Denique, ob easdem rationes, episcopi rogantur ut vigilant ne -- etiam in casibus qui, licet veram possessionem diabolicam excludant, diabolicum tamen influxum aliquantulum revelare videntur -- ii qui debita potestate carent conventus moderentur, in quibus ad liberationem obtinendam preces adhibentur, quarum decursu daemones directe interpellantur et eorum identitas cognoscere studetur.

Harum normarum tamen enuntiatio minime christifideles abducere debet a precando ut, quemadmodum Iesus nos docuit, liberentur a malo (cf. Mt 6,13). Insuper pastores has oblata opportunitate uti poterunt, ut in mentem revocent quid Ecclesiae traditio doceat circa munus quod proprie ad sacramenta et ad Beatissimae Virginis Mariae, Angelorum Sanctorumque intercessionem spectat in christianorum etiam contra spiritus malignos spirituali certamine.

Hanc occasionem nactus impensos aestimationis meae sunsus tibi obtestor permanens

add.mus in Domino

Iosephus Card. Ratzinger, Praefectus

Albertus Bovone, a Secretis

L. S. In Congr. pro Doctrina Fidei tab., n. 291/70