

ITALIAN EXORCIST TRIGGERS HYPE

Father Gabriele Amorth, a noted exorcist in the Diocese of Rome, was recently interviewed on Vatican Radio, and immediately triggered a wave of hypercriticism.

Various forums on the Internet were alive with chatter over Father Amorth's comment, "I am convinced that the Nazis were all possessed by the devil." Furthermore, the Pauline priest asserted that the "horrors" committed by Stalin and Hitler also demonstrate that "they were possessed by the devil." Unfortunately, some read those remarks as Father Amorth's way of saying Stalin and Hitler were nuts who cannot be held responsible for their actions.

Catholic teaching on exorcism, we pointed out to the media, does not equate demonic possession with mental illness. On the contrary, the *Catholic Catechism* says, "Exorcism is directed at the expulsion of demons or the liberation from demonic possession through the spiritual authority which Jesus entrusted to his Church. Illness, especially psychological illness, is a very different matter; treating this is the concern of medical science."

Moreover, in no way does exorcism imply that those possessed by the devil are not responsible for their actions. Satan, the Church teaches, "was at first a good angel, made by God." Indeed, at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the Church made plain that "The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing." So much for giving totalitarians a pass: over 20 million lost their lives to the Nazis and over 150 million were killed by communists in the 20th century.

Father Amorth is alleged to have said something about how

Harry Potter hides the work of the devil. We're not sure. What we do know is that in 2003, Father Don Peter Fleetwood, who helped write a Vatican document on New Age phenomenon, told a Vatican press conference that "I don't see any, any problems in the Harry Potter series." Indeed, he praised the good intentions of the British writer J.K. Rowling, who authored the series.