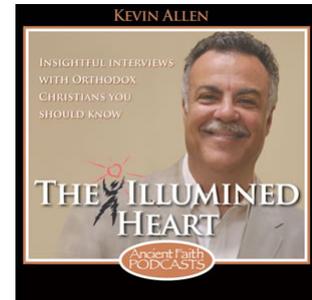


## Transcript

### The Illumined Heart: 159: The Occult: Shining Light on Satan's Shadow - Part 2



Kevin Allen · December 10, 2010

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**Listen to Part 2 of this fascinating concluding conversation between host Kevin Allen and Orthodox priest and occult-specialist, Father George Aquaro.**

**K**evin Allen: Welcome to this part two edition of *The Illumined Heart* on Ancient Faith Radio. My guest is Fr. George Aquaro. We are on the subject of the neo-occult movement. Fr. George is the pastor of St. Matthew Antiochian Orthodox Church in Torrance, California. He is an expert and a specialist on the neo-occult and the occult movement in our culture. I am with him in studio today. Fr. George, welcome back for what will be a very fascinating part two.

**Fr. George Aquaro:** Thank you very much.

**Kevin:** My pleasure. For those of you listening, I highly recommend that you start with part one ([http://ancientfaith.com/podcasts/illuminatedheart/the\\_occult\\_shining\\_light\\_on\\_satans\\_shadow](http://ancientfaith.com/podcasts/illuminatedheart/the_occult_shining_light_on_satans_shadow)), because we have been talking about the increasing attraction of the occult in our culture, and we reference the Twilight series, *Ghost Whisperers* on TV, *Ghost Hunters*, and in literature, the Harry Potter books.

Father, my first question in this part two—and I do not want to lead us down a rabbit-hole here, because we could probably spend a whole interview on Harry Potter—but briefly, where do you come out on the Harry Potter literature? You are a father of younger children. Do you see the use of witchcraft simply as literary metaphor in the so-called Christian traditions of Tolkien and Lewis, or do you see it as an overt attempt to popularize the occult?

**Fr. George:** I think it depends upon what you do with it. People read Greek mythology all the time in school, and we do not see an outbreak of Zeus worship. My daughter is right now

reading the last book in the series, and we've *talked* about it, and I think that's the most important thing as a parent, when your children are reading things, or they're learning things, to discuss with them what they are learning and what are they *getting* out of it.

There is a certain attractiveness to the ideas that are in there, as far as: "Wow, wouldn't it be great if I could just sort of wave a wand and make a bowl of soup when I'm hungry?" The one thing that the Harry Potter series, I guess, has going for it, is that it is, in many ways, so surreal; it's so far from where we're at. I think the more outlandish something is, the less likely it's going to have some kind of a subconscious effect.

**Kevin:** So it's not so easily confused with metaphor when it's so outlandish. It's easier to *not* confuse it with some reality. That's a good answer. I remember when we were raising our kids, we were kind of fundamentalists and would not let our oldest daughter watch *Bewitched* because it was about a witch, and she still talks about how terrible Mom and Dad were that we wouldn't let her watch benign *Bewitched*. (laughter)

**Fr. George:** I want to emphasize that I think that there are certain *lines* that we as parents have to draw with our children. I think that, for example, if you're a parent of a teenager, and you find your kids are— it's one thing if your kids are watching the Twilight series. They twinkle or something, I don't know.

**Kevin:** It's a very attractive imagery.

**Fr. George:** It's one thing if your kids watch that TV show or movie or whatever it is. It's different if you then come home and you find your kids are reading books like *How to Become a Vampire*, or they start *modifying* their behavior, their clothing, they get into being— it's something beyond goth. There are people that are what I refer to as "amateur vampires." They actually will say, "I am a vampire"; they will drink human blood. Or the ones that are a little *queasy* on that, they will drain psychical powers from other people, I've heard of that. Then you've got a problem, because you are now divorced...

**Kevin:** You've crossed the line.

**Fr. George:** Right. Exactly. It is the same thing with people who go to Renaissance fairs. You can go to a Renaissance fair and dress up in a costume and put on a funny accent for a weekend; it's a little different when you start doing that 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and you really *are* Sir James of Compton, you know.

**Kevin:** Except in the case of the occult, you may be entering into waters, if you will, in the unseen, that are different from being a little nutty with the Renaissance fair business.

**Fr. George:** Right.

**Kevin:** I think we have spoken to this, but maybe you could amplify a little bit. Are you encountering people, Fr. George Aquaro, in your pastoral ministry, as an Orthodox priest, who have come to the Church for help with demonic oppression and/or possession, and did they begin by dabbling in the occult?

**Fr. George:** Yes, and yes. Not all the cases that I've dealt with have come through

necessarily overt occult activity, but it is there and it is a problem. A lot of our people—and by “our people,” I mean “Orthodox”—are very afraid to talk to their priest about this topic. For example, in our Archdiocese, roughly 70% of the clergy are converts from religious backgrounds that don’t have a spiritual element. Even if you do go to seminary, they don’t cover a lot of this, really, in seminary, at all, so it’s very easy to have the attitude that I had going into this, the first time as a priest I was asked—and this was after a number of years, it wasn’t right off the bat—when I was asked to deal with a situation that appeared to be a haunting.

**Kevin:** In someone’s home?

**Fr. George:** It was in a building, it wasn’t actually the home, but the first question I had was, “Do we believe in ghosts?” I starting rooting through the typical Orthodox literature and I couldn’t find anything on it, so then I called my bishop, and I called a number of other people, and asked, “What do I do?” And they said, “Well, we are not exactly sure.”

It took a while for me to gather the information together. And part of it is because these things are, number one, is they’re rare, and, number two, in most cases they’re not really connected to our own personal repentance and our salvation. That’s one of the reasons why the Church doesn’t really get into demonology and angelology the same way that you find in, let’s say, pagan spirituality. It’s *really* not there because our primary focus as Orthodox Christians is repentance and conversion, and these things only come up in relation to our repentance and conversion.

In the case of this manifestation, I went in and said, “Well, this must be a demonic apparition; I need to go do the exorcism prayers,” and I did the exorcism prayers, and I was throwing holy water at it, and *nothing’s* happening. This thing was still manifesting. It happened in front of me, and we had a number of witnesses who heard it.

**Kevin:** *Really?*

**Fr. George:** It was not like it was actually *heard*, it wasn’t a visual apparition, but it was the sound of someone walking around. What eventually happened was that I talked to an abbess and she said, “Oh, we had this problem years ago, and the bishop told the priest to serve a moleben for the dead, and just pray for their salvation and everything will be okay.”

So I said, “Okay, I can do that.” I discovered that we do have services for the dead who are not at rest, and I did the service, and it was really remarkable, because as I’m praying, the person who was there, who was manifesting themselves, was *knocking* in agreement to the prayers, indicating...

**Kevin:** “This is what I need.”

**Fr. George:** “This is what I need, thank you.” After that it stopped.

**Kevin:** *Really?* Never another manifestation?

**Fr. George:** Well, what happened was that I regularly, routinely did the prayers there, and it all stopped. Then what happened was that I got caught up in other things and I got lazy. Then

*different* apparitions started happening in other areas in the building, different from the one that originally happened, and I said, “Okay, what do I do now, because now it’s like it’s magnified?”

In talking to people who are the ones that I turn to for advice—clergy, and also some lay people that have knowledge in this area—they said, “Well, when you start praying for the dead, particularly when you do not have names and you are offering general prayers, others will come.” This gets into the idea of “Where are the dead?” It’s not like they are wandering around, but they’re allowed to manifest. So what it was was a manifestation: “No, Father, you need to keep doing this because there are others who need prayer, as well.”

Now we have a routine to do that in that place, to continue to pray for the dead, because for whatever reason, that’s what God wants going on there, and so we do it. There was one time when a person who didn’t know about what was going on went into the building, they didn’t know what was happening, and they got spooked because an apparition manifested, and I had to come in there and say, “Okay, listen, this is *our* building, this is not *your* building, so we make the rules here, and the rule is: you can’t manifest. We promise, we’re going to pray for you, but you have to stop doing this because you’re scaring people.” And it stopped, and that was it.

**Kevin:** Wow. My word.

**Fr. George:** So it continues to this day, but it’s a benefit, a blessing for me and those who come and pray, because we are doing something good for someone else who cannot help themselves.

**Kevin:** The Roman Catholics have a long tradition of the office of exorcist, and training, and so on. I know we have prayers for exorcism, as you have pointed out. Briefly, what about the Eastern Orthodox tradition in this area? Can priests be trained to do this work?

**Fr. George:** I’ve been blessed to know several Catholic exorcists, and they’re very, very knowledgeable in this, and they’re dealing with this topic on a routine basis. In fact, they’re *working* to build cooperation with the Orthodox Church, primarily the Russian Orthodox Church, and there’s been a lot of, let’s say, cross-pollination between the two churches.

We do not have an office of exorcist, in the same sense. In the Orthodox Church, every priest has the duty to conduct exorcism prayers, as necessary. In major cases, you always would want to communicate with your bishop as far as what’s going on. However, it isn’t like in the Catholic Church, for example, every diocese has to have a designated exorcist, and he has to have a letter from the bishop that says that he’s allowed to do them. We do not have that kind of formal system in that sense. However, our exorcism *prayers* are from St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom. They’re very ancient, and in fact the Catholic exorcists can, with the right permissions, actually use those prayers, because they go back so far.

**Kevin:** First millennium, before the Schism.

**Fr. George:** Right.

**Kevin:** Moving to a slightly different subject, but one I did want to follow up on, Fr. George Aquaro. I interviewed, on this program, a couple of years ago, a former Wicca practitioner, actually a priestess. She is now Eastern Orthodox, in Canada, outside of Toronto. She made the distinction between white and black magic. What do you make of that distinction?

**Fr. George:** Well, I think they are deceptions. I mean, there is an intention that people get into witchcraft, and say, “Well, I am just trying to do this for good, and not for bad. I am not trying to cause problems.”

**Kevin:** Not conjure the demons, and so on.

**Fr. George:** Right. But it is really a type of deception to say, “Well, my magic is white and not black,” because it’s all still based on this self-will, and trying to do what you want to do. When we look at magic, itself, there’s a number of different types of magic.

In the paper, you mention I talk about the different “stages” of magic, and it starts with the most benign, which is healing. Healing can sound like it is a positive thing, but the question is, what’s the source of the healing, and why aren’t you going to the Church, and why aren’t you putting your faith in God, rather than putting your faith in the practitioner?

This is part of the problem with witchcraft, and this can be true of clergy and people in the Church, where people start putting more of their faith in a *person* than they do in *God*. We never want to, as clergy, seem to have so much of a blessing that we’re any more than any other priest. We all share the same priesthood, the same ministry.

Getting back to the degrees of magic, it can start off looking very white, benevolent, because, “Oh well, I am healing.” Or the next stage is the alleviation of curses, removing curses or hexes from people. That’s like the evil-eye kind of stuff. Then the next step is, “I make *amulets* that give you good luck or keep away bad luck. That sounds nice, doesn’t it? That sounds very nice, I am doing something nice for you. Look, I am just giving you this little trinket and this is going to keep away *bad* things.” Well, again, *where* is *God* in that?

**Kevin:** Again, this gets back to the channeling or harnessing of depersonalized forces, of which there are really none.

**Fr. George:** Exactly, and this is why the making of talismans and amulets is condemned in the canons of the Church. It’s condemned in the Old Testament, and then it’s condemned yet again in the canons of the Church, even if they are supposedly for beneficial use.

St. John Chrysostom actually wrote that Christians should only bear two things on their body—one is the cross, and the other are the Scriptures. People would carry small pieces of the Scriptures on them, and that actually comes down from Judaism—the phylacteries which they wore on the forehead and the hand.

**Kevin:** A mezuzah—when you come into the home, there’s a little piece of the Torah in there and you kiss the thing that it’s in.

**Fr. George:** Right. A more modern, recent practice has been the carrying of blessed incense. People go to Greece, and they will take little pieces of the galloon fabric from the

priest's vestment and they'll put a little bit of the incense in there. If you read in the *Book of Needs* there's actually a blessing for that—we're supposed to bless our incense. I have to admit that I've only been doing it recently, since I got the new *Book of Needs*; it has all those prayers in there. The blessing of incense actually *mentions* that people can carry it with them and it is bringing that blessing with it. We have holy water.

**Kevin:** Holy oil.

**Fr. George:** The holy oil. Usually the holy oil we don't necessarily carry with us, usually only priests will carry that. But holy water, people are given it. Recently I had a liturgical question, somebody had noticed that on the calendar it said, "Blessing of waters," and it wasn't during Theophany. Normally in our churches we bless the water at Theophany and everybody gets those little teeny squeeze bottles, and it seems to sit in your icon corner and you never use it. I said, "Why do you have this blessing of water in the middle of the year?" The priest told me, "Well, it's because you've run out." And I am trying to think, I have been around a while, I've *never* heard of a church running out...

**Kevin:** I have six years' worth of bottles on my altar.

**Fr. George:** Right. "People never run out, we end up pouring it in a designated spot to get rid of it at our church. What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, in a lot of villages the people will actually use enough holy water that the priest is blessing it almost *monthly*." I said, "What? You are blessing water that much?" "Yes, people use it. There are some lay people that will routinely, on a weekly basis, bless their homes with their own holy water." Again, this was part of my learning curve.

**Kevin:** It makes sense when you think that it is a blessed item, and we are a sacramental church, and there are forces around us, and why not purify your physical environment the way you try to purify yourself through prayer and fasting?

**Fr. George:** People ask, "Why don't we see *more* manifestations? If we're supposedly surrounded by all of these demons and angels and things like that, why don't we notice them more often?" The way I was taught, and it makes an awful lot of sense to me, is part of their interest is to not be seen. Angels don't have ego problems that they have to be noticed. They just *do* their business and that's it. The forces of evil don't want to walk around saying, "Hi, I am evil, and I'm here to do bad." The most evil people that we run into, Ted Bundy for example, they aren't advertising it; they look perfectly normal.

**Kevin:** Their purpose is to *do* the evil.

**Fr. George:** Right, and to look as absolutely harmless as possible. That's why if you take a look at guys like Himmler or Heydrich, for example—you look at these guys and there was nothing particularly impressive about them: they wore snazzy uniforms, but they didn't look like they were really snarling monsters, but they killed *millions* of people. They were horrible, horrible human beings.

**Kevin:** Yes. We read so much in New Age literature today, and we see this in the New

Age and self-help movements about self-realization, self-actualization, and so on. I came across the book, *Ritual Magic* by Ian Butler, and I found something interesting in it and I would like you to comment on this. He writes, “The fundamental aim of all magic is to impose the human will on nature, man, and the supersensual world in order to master them.” So it’s really about self-deification, isn’t it?

**Fr. George:** Sure, it’s being god without God.

**Kevin:** Yes, there you go.

**Fr. George:** It goes back to what we were talking about in the first episode. We are trying to dodge being *who* we are.

**Kevin:** To promote ourselves.

**Fr. George:** To promote ourselves, yes. It’s trying to be more than who we really are. “I am not this person who is living a lowly life with only moderate amounts of success. I want to be famous; I want to be powerful.”

You see a great deal of that drive, and that’s one of the reasons why in classical culture, for example, who was accused of being a witch? It was the old, childless widow who lived on the edge of town, the most powerless person, the person who appeared to have the greatest amount of *need*, so that *that* is going to be the person that is going to be *tempted* to engage in *powerful* activities.

It is a very common accusation, but it’s not necessarily totally unfounded, because if you look in traditional cultures—my father’s family are Italians, there’s an awful lot of good Catholics, and there’s an awful lot of witchcraft going on, and a lot of times it actually lived up to the stereotype.

**Kevin:** That happens in Orthodox cultures, as you’ve mentioned, as well, in Russia and Slavic countries, as well as in Greece. I interviewed Kyriacos Markides, who wrote a couple of books on Daskalos, who was a man that was ultimately excommunicated by the Greek hierarchs for basically practicing magic and witchcraft, but *he* would argue that it was Orthodox Christianity, it was just that these narrow-minded priests and hierarchs didn’t get it.

**Fr. George:** Oh yeah, and there are even cases where some clergy got involved. For example, I guess in the Carpathian Church, you see the presence of what they called “black prayers.” The priests had books of curses that they could utter against people. For example, you’d go to your priest and say, “Yovanka down the street, she has two cows and I only have one; strike it dead,” and they would do it.

**Kevin:** *Really.*

**Fr. George:** Yes.

**Kevin:** That’s the tricky part of when shamanism starts to intersect with, if you will, Christianity. And I want to ask that question, but I want to build up to it a little bit, because it is kind of the tricky one we will end on.

On another subject, Fr. George Aquaro, I know that there are some Catholic theologians I have read recently that claim to recognize, at least the possibility of extraterrestrials and extraterrestrial life, non-human life on other planets, and so on, in the cosmos. On the other hand you have people like Fr. Seraphim Rose, in his book, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, that very clearly condemn all of this as being demonic, that these are demonic entities, there's no such things as extraterrestrials. Does the Eastern Orthodox Church come out clearly on either side of this equation?

**Fr. George:** No, not that I am aware of. It certainly hasn't been discussed in any of our councils. I am personally skeptical, as far as any of the things that I've heard or seen. I think that there are human forces at work. Some of these issues can *look* awful demonic; I don't disagree with that conclusion, but on the whole with the UFO phenomenon and everything else I am personally skeptical, and I don't see anyone in the Church in an official capacity saying, "This is absolutely the case."

If you take a look at UFO phenomena, it seems to be following the same track as our technological developments, so I think a lot of it is misinterpreted other phenomena and people playing around. You have to remember that some of these governments have been playing around with some odd stuff for years. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow, at one point—I don't know if it's still to this day—but they actually had to cover the outside of the building with some sort of steel plates, or whatnot, because the Soviets were experimenting with beaming magnetic waves into the building to affect the personnel who were inside.

**Kevin:** Interesting.

**Fr. George:** In fact, something similar to that is now done with people who do these paranormal investigations, and I just want to say to people, if you're thinking about ghost-hunting: "*Don't do it.*" Maybe we can get into that later. Very small magnetic fields can have an affect on the human consciousness, and they were experimenting with that kind of stuff back in the '60s, so you can imagine where they are at now.

**Kevin:** Let me follow up on that. What about these ghost huntings and ghost sightings and reality shows which are particularly popular pursuits today on reality TV? We've talked a little bit about ghosts, but why would you be so discouraging of that, if, in fact, you acknowledge that apparitions that are non-demonic—departed souls, etc.—do, and can, manifest?

**Fr. George:** Well, this is where we get into that issue regarding obedience, and getting sucked into an obedient relationship with a demonic. What do demons want to do? They want to lead us towards them and away from Christ, and if they have to do that, impersonating a person, they are going to put on a good appearance.

**Kevin:** Their best face.

**Fr. George:** Yes, put your best foot forward. They are going to dress up like somebody else. Let's say, for example, you get a Ouija board out, and: "I'm going to talk to the dead. I'm going to communicate with the dead in my living room." And you open it up with an invitation,

“Is there anybody here?” Well, now you’re opening the door to the spiritual realm in your living room, the comfort of your own home, right there. Then, you are inviting this spirit to touch objects that are in your house that you have your hands on.

Well, when they have done actual scientific experiments with Ouija boards and they’ve actually blindfolded the people, basically the puck just does a big figure-of-eight on the table; nothing happens. When they take the people who are blindfolded and they change the letters around on the board, it doesn’t come up with anything. In fact, there was a movement in the 19th century called the Spiritualist Movement, and people were involved in automatic writing. They collected thousands and thousands of *reams* of automatic writing, and you know what? It didn’t add anything to human knowledge; it didn’t improve the world; it didn’t save a life—it was just jibberish. But what we are doing when we ask something to take over our hand and *write*, or move the puck around on the board, or knock on the wall, is we are inviting spirits that we can’t see to interact with us.

**Kevin:** Can they only interact with us, Fr. George Aquaro, by our invitation? Or, as I think you mentioned in your article, can they can impose themselves, too?

**Fr. George:** There are limited cases where then can impose themselves, but usually what they do is, they wait for an invitation. I will give you a typical situation, where let’s say somebody plays with a Ouija board. A couple of days later they start hearing something in their closet—a classic example—there’s something in the attic, there’s something in the closet, there is something that is occupying the outer reaches of the home.

**Kevin:** Their physical environment.

**Fr. George:** And what do we do when we hear something that is in the closet? We withdraw. We curl up in bed. Instead of going over there, opening the closet door, throwing around a lot of holy water, taking your cross and saying, “*Get out of my house. You do not belong here,*” we draw back. We fall back in fear. So then it says, “Well, you know, since they’re not telling me I can’t be in the closet, I guess I can *stay* here. And now I’m going to step out of the closet and step into the middle of the room.” And you withdraw, you pull back, and then pretty soon you’re sleeping on the couch in the living room. This *happens* with people, I’m not making this up.

Pretty soon, they have lost complete control of their house, because all this thing does is take one step forward, and you don’t challenge it, and it takes another step forward. It’s *your home*, you have the spiritual authority. We have spiritual authority over our homes, our place, because this belongs to *us*, and we belong to God, and that is the chain of ownership. These things don’t have an ownership in this world. This is *not* their world, but they encroach, and if we don’t react, like, for example, the little old ladies in the village with their holy water they’re sprinkling around, they’re not going to put up with anything! If something’s going to come in their house, they are going to make it *pay*. And they do that. They sprinkle their holy water, and they bless their homes, and they make their homes *safe*.

But when you start inviting these things to talk—for example, one of the ghost-hunting activities involves doing an *EVP session*. They get a recorder out and put it in the middle of the room and ask questions. Well, if you put a recorder out, and you start asking questions, you're inviting things to talk. I tell people, if you want to start having a haunted house, start putting tape recorders out and *look* for interaction. *Things* will come and interact.

What do these things want? They want your attention. *That's* what they are looking for—your attention.

**Kevin:** And ultimately, as you say, your obedience.

**Fr. George:** Your obedience, exactly. They will get your attention with objects that are beautiful. You will see something—“Ah, this is really going to get their attention.” But eventually, they want to develop an interpersonal relationship, and then eventually get you to obey, and they're drawing you away from God, you see. Every time you start studying angels, you're *not* reading the Scriptures, you're *not* praying to God.

**Kevin:** And you are separating angelic beings from their natural order, the context of their natural order?

**Fr. George:** Right, exactly, and the natural order *always* leads back to God—so anything that is *not* leading us to repentance for our sins... This is another issue, you said, what if someone appears? You have to look at what is the fruit of that apparition? If the fruit of that apparition is that you are drawn closer to God, you repent of your sins, you do some sort of charitable act, then it's a good thing, and we could say, apparently, that's inspired by God.

There was a story about one of the Desert Fathers—the name escapes me—but he was in his cave praying and this angel appears and says, “Prepare yourself, because in three days there are people coming and they're going to take you, and they're going to make you a bishop.” He says, “Get out of my cell, in the name of Christ, get out of my cell, this is a lie. I'm just a monk; I'm just a poor sinner.”

So the next day, “Hurry up, the emissaries are two days away, you need to get ready; they're going to make you a bishop.” “Get out of my cell, you are trying to tempt me to ego.”

Then the third time he comes: “They're coming, they are coming to get you, they are going to make you a bishop.” He says, “I don't believe this; I am a sinful monk.” The angel responds, “Yes, and they are sinful people, and so God is going to punish them by making you their bishop because you are such a sinful man.” So he says, “Okay, *now* I believe you,” and he packed his things, because it brought that message of repentance. That is where he kind of gets it.

So, when you say, “*Why* should I go ghost-hunting? *Why*? Because I'm *curious*?” Well, if somebody is manifesting in a home, they're not at rest. Are you going there to *help* those people? If not, this is like going to the hospital and having a gloat over the patients who are in there. “Hey, doctor, can you show us somebody who is really *sick*? I want to go watch somebody who is *ill*. Is there somebody who's got, like, a triple-amputation, and I can go in

there and make fun of them?” Because that’s what you’re doing when you’re going into a haunted house, and there’s crying and voices. Why would you want to go to a house and listen to someone in pain?

Why not go there and say, “I’ve been asked to go check these things out,” but I don’t go with the idea, “Oh yeah, there definitely is a ghost here,” and then just go home. If somebody is manifesting there and they need help, I want to help them. So in the situation I mentioned in the previous episode where there was this manifestation, I wanted to *change* that person’s situation so that they would not manifest anymore, so they could *go be at peace*, be at rest. That is what all of the prayers of the Church are about, when we talk about dealing with human apparitions, is the idea that we are to give these people the prayer that they need to be reconciled with their consciences, so they can go be at rest with Christ.

**Kevin:** And again, as you’ve stated well, it comes down to obedience. Scripture and our canons say don’t do this, and if you decide to do it, you are obviously giving your obedience to something other than God, through the Scriptures and through the Holy Church.

**Fr. George:** Absolutely.

**Kevin:** We are starting to descend now on the second part of our interview, Fr. George Aquaro. This is going to take a bit of time, I don’t want to rush through this. There’s also a growth of pagan religions in our culture, as you know, and you have spoken about, many of which have *clearly*, although not always recognized by Western seekers, incorporated the occult into their rites, their metaphysics, and their world views.

We see this in forms of yogic, especially tantric, Hinduism, especially *chakra* enlightening—I don’t know what the word is—yoga, and so on, and especially in Tibetan Buddhism, but you mention, even in Islam. You wrote, “Both Buddhism and Islam have tracks that accept an interplay with the demonic.” Could you talk a bit about how the occult *is* an integral part of these religious traditions, specifically, and especially in Islam, where you don’t hear much about that?

**Fr. George:** Yes, if you ever want to make somebody *really* uncomfortable who is trying to teach you about Islam, have them discuss djinn.

**Kevin:** Spelled j-i-n-n?

**Fr. George:** Sometimes it is d-j-i-n-n, sometimes it’s just a /j/. Djinn are beings that are not angels. According to the *Koran*—if I’m not mistaken; it’s been a while since I have read up on all of this—they are made of fire. I think they said angels are made of air, and they are made of fire, or vice-versa, but, basically, they are a very powerful spiritual being that can *be* Muslim or not.

**Kevin:** Wow.

**Fr. George:** One of the beliefs in Islam, for example, is that the jinn eat the bones and leftovers of your food after you throw it away, so that is why they say the Muslim djinn will only eat your food if...

**Kevin:** If it's not pork.

**Fr. George:** Yes, and if it's been prayed over in the name of Allah, so they always say, make sure that you say your prayers over your food so that the djinn don't starve.

**Kevin:** My word.

**Fr. George:** I'm not making this up, it's kind of very odd. But what happens in certain tracks of Islam, a sheik will get a book with a series of invocations. Remember I mentioned in the first episode, we talked about grimoires, these magical books of medieval Europe? The Muslims have the same idea, and they will open the book and invoke a certain type of djinn, and then what you are supposed to do is read your *Koran* and the djinn kind of tries to distract you and pull you away, and then, after a certain point, the djinn gives up and you form an association with that djinn and it serves you.

The higher up that you go in this system, you read further in these invocations. A classmate of mine in seminary one time said that in the Middle East one time, a Muslim boy decided to buy one of these books in the market and he went home and he turned all the way to the back page, and read the last prayer that was in the book and instantly became possessed by this demon. It was so bad that eventually they could only find one sheik who had a djinn that was more powerful than this one and he was in North Africa, and they had to pay the guy a lot of money to go drive that one off of this kid. So there's an exchange of money, which is always a bad sign, but also, what is it done for? It's done to enhance: this spiritual being is supposed to *serve* the sheik who forms the association with the spirit.

**Kevin:** Almost like a genie.

**Fr. George:** Exactly, it's a genie. "Okay, you let me out of the bottle, and you get three wishes." That's where the story comes from is that concept; it is found in Islam. They say that these djinn are *not* demons, but you have to look at the things that they *do*. Very often these are used to *harm* people, and the question is, why would a being that's *that* powerful really want anything from a human being?

**Kevin:** Anything that's of God, especially.

**Fr. George:** Yes.

**Kevin:** Even in forms of Judaism, in Kabbalah, they have integrated in forms of the occult. Isn't that correct?

**Fr. George:** Yes.

**Kevin:** I always struggled with one of the canons where it said that Orthodox Christians should not go to Jewish doctors, and I thought, "Well, is this just anti-Semitism?" Then somebody explained to me that in the ancient days, medieval days, and so on, oftentimes physicians that were Jewish physicians incorporated some of these occult methodologies in their dispensing of alchemical drugs and different things like this. That was the reason. It's not that they were anti-Semitic—maybe some of them were, but that's not the reason why it wound up in our canons. They wanted to keep us *from* any occult interaction.

**Fr. George:** Yes, there are some fascinating books on Jewish magic. There was Christian magic, as well. They were all out of the same boat, but it was much more accepted in Judaism. Avoiding Jewish doctors had to do with two issues: abortion, because Jews were allowed to abort Gentile babies, but not Jewish babies.

**Kevin:** Oh!

**Fr. George:** That was one of them. The other had to do with the practice of Jewish magic, where there was a lot of formulas and incantations, and, in fact, there was a special writing system that they developed because you couldn't use the Hebrew letters in magic. They understood that they were tampering with something, so they created a separate writing system to write the spells that were very often used by doctors. There's nothing wrong with using, let's say, herbs, or things like that. It's where there is a *non*-physical element that is added to these things that we have to be very careful of.

If you take a look in the New Testament, for example, the Book of Acts where St. Paul, for example, says you can eat meat that's been sacrificed in a pagan temple, but there's an issue regarding [not eating] things that have been *defiled*. What does it mean to defile? It was a little bit more than simply offering up food in a pagan temple; there was something more powerful that was going on. We, as Christians, have a very old tradition of blessing our food, because you don't know if you are going to be eating something that is defiled, which is something that an unclean presence has been attached to. That's why we always bless our food, because you never know what's going on in the background.

**Kevin:** Interesting.

**Fr. George:** This has been a problem with, for example, some young people and the use of narcotics. Remember, a lot of the narcotics groups now, particularly the Mexican drug cartels, are involved in the occult, be it the route through the Caribbean and people involved in voodoo, or now, for example, "Santa Muerta," in the Mexican drug cartels, is kind of their patron saint. It's "Holy Death." If you go to a shop, for example, and you see what looks to be like a skeleton dressed in a kind of a blue cowl, carrying a sickle, the blue cowl is like the Virgin Mary's robe, but it is not the Virgin Mary, it's a skeleton—it's kind of creepy. That's "Santa Muerta," and that's a type of occult activity, and they do some of their rituals with the drugs being present, so things might be *attaching* to this kind of stuff.

**Kevin:** For demonic protection against the law, and other gangs, and who knows what.

**Fr. George:** Right.

**Kevin:** I just want to mention, you mentioned no problem with herbs and things, but I am assuming you'd say that if somebody wants to throw a crystal at you, then you know we're crossing a line there. Some physical things are okay, but some other physical things may have a little resonance with the demonic...

**Fr. George:** Sure. You have to be very careful with these things. I tell people, "When you bring objects home, *bless* them. You have holy water—bless the object before you bring it into

your house.” That is often enough. That is why we *bless* our food, anything that has been attached to it, because people can be, literally, spiritually poisoned.

People who’ve gone through severe demonic attack will often, when we are doing the prayers, they will kind of vomit, but nothing actually comes out, and it is actually the spirit—the person isn’t possessed, but the thing is attached and it came through something that they ate or ingested. It’s in their stomach and it has to come out.

We always have to be very careful with our objects. The Jewish custom is, for example, if you buy a really nice Buddha statue—you see a nice statue—the Jewish practice is you have to deface it in order to break its power. I had a friend when I lived in Japan—he and I lived there around the same time—who bought an object, kind of a wooden block that was blessed in a Shinto temple. Being sort of a Jew, as he said, “not of the kosher kind,” but still being a little bit worried about this stuff, he asked a rabbi what he should do with it. The rabbi said, “Take a chip out of it. Deface it, to show that you are not worried about its power, and then you could have it in your house.” And I think you have to be very *cautious* with these things and ask yourself, “Why do you have this in your house?”

**Kevin:** Why would I have a Buddhist statue *in* my home?

**Fr. George:** Right, right.

**Kevin:** As you state, as we are coming to a close here, and I will quote you, “Only Christianity stands up to the demons and their enticements, where other religious traditions, as we have said, sometimes incorporate them.”

I want to ask a final, somewhat tricky question, and maybe you can answer it. I had a listener recently send me a link to a site where the claim is being made that so-called “*kundalini*-awakening yogas,” the yogas that awaken the so-called eight *chakra* energy centers in the body—that these are actually *influencing* even modern Christian movements through various ecstatic holy laughter, prophesying, even healing movements. What do you make of this? Do you think it is possible for Christians, many of whom pray in the name of Jesus, for example, to be somehow bordering on, or crossing the line over to, occult methodologies, maybe without knowing it?

**Fr. George:** I think that it’s very problematic because these beings that we’re talking about here, these demons really do not care, necessarily, about what your overall intention is. They have their own agenda. There’s an old military saying, “The enemy gets a vote?” They get a vote in this, and if you start getting into *their* territory, *you’re* the one who is straying off the reservation. *You’re* the one going into the new territory.

When you’re trying to unleash inner powers or whatnot, the important thing to remember is the operation of the will. The funny thing about Buddhism, the conundrum of Buddhism is that you’re supposed to get to a point where you have no will, you achieve enlightenment, you’re perfectly harmonized with the universe, but you are doing it all through the actualization and refinement and perfection of your own will. That’s a *problem*.

**Kevin:** Overcoming the will through the will, isn't that Pelagianism, or something like that?

**Fr. George:** It's up there, or out there, I should say, but when you talk about these things you say, "*To what end?*" Is releasing the *kundalini* going to make you repent more? Is it going to draw you closer to God? Are you doing it to serve others? *Why?*

**Kevin:** With humility, etc.?

**Fr. George:** Instead, most people say, "Hey, because I want to feel *great!*" Well, at what cost? There is a wonderful book called something like, *The Gurus, Elder Paisios...*

**Kevin:** *The Gurus, the Young Man, and Elder Paisios*, published by St. Herman Press.

**Fr. George:** A *wonderful*, wonderful book. I highly recommend it, because he *explains* these things very clearly. At times you can look at this young man and ask, "What were you thinking? You were in the presence of a *saint* and you kept running off to India and engaging in all this stuff," but we do this all the time because we're not satisfied with the mundanities. I think the reason most people get involved with this type of stuff is that they are *bored*.

**Kevin:** Or not seeing power, maybe, in their brand of Christianity.

**Fr. George:** Sure, but part of that is boredom. If you want something really *dangerous* for your spirituality, get *bored*, and see what you do. It's dangerous for our kids, it's dangerous for us, and when you are not living Christianity in its *fullness* and its *wholeness*, you can get bored and it leads to dissatisfaction and lack of gratitude, and that lack of gratitude leads to *all* kinds of problems.

**Kevin:** So am I getting a "yes," that some of these movements can, perhaps, border on illicit spirituality?

**Fr. George:** Sure. There is nothing wrong with doing what we call yoga—physical postures. I have a bad back and I have to do some of those exercises so that I can stand through the Liturgy. There's nothing *wrong* with that, but if somebody is saying, "Here, chant these energy-harnessing mantras"—*to whom?* People have been *tricked* where they've ended up going to these meditation conferences and somebody says, "Okay, now, here, put this fruit in the bowl here." "Why?" "Well, it's just part of what we do."

**Kevin:** An offering.

**Fr. George:** You are making an offering.

**Kevin:** My guest on the program today has been Fr. George Aquaro. Fr. George, this has been fascinating. I've loved it, and I'm sure our listeners will. Thank you very much for being my guest.

**Fr. George:** It has been an honor to be with you, and thank you for your ministry. This is a wonderful ministry to the Church. God bless you.

**Kevin:** Thanks, Father.

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