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In 1976 a young German girl named Anneliese Michel underwent a series of exorcisms. The rites were administered by two priests of the Catholic Church to free Anneliese of the six demons they believed possessed her. Seemingly as a result of the exorcisms the girl died. Worldwide publicity followed when the girl's parents and the two exorcists were brought to trial and convicted of negligent homicide. Here a noted anthropologist offers her own interpretation of the exorcisms of Anneliese Michel. Drawing on interviews with the two exorcists, the girl's parents and friends, transcripts of the trial, and tape recordings made during the exorcisms, as well as studies of religious experience in various cultures.

Felicitas Goodman has written a fascinating, compelling book, one that finally tells what happened in this strange case as it delves into the age-old mystery of demonic possession.

The Exorcism of Anneliese Michel Details

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From Reader Review The Exorcism of Anneliese Michel for online ebook

Sabrina Rutter says

After seeing the movie THE EXORCISM OF EMILY ROSE I really couldn't wait to read the book. As often happens the movie was much different than the book.

The thing I really like about this book was how it explained someone could come to the belief that they were possessed by demons. It is believed by the author that Anneliese was having a religiously altered state of consciousness, and had she not been on the medication her doctors gave her the exorcism would have worked. This is explained in the book, and to me makes perfect sense.

As for being creepy...I don't think this book was scary at all. I scare easily on this topic, and I was able to sleep alone after reading this just fine. It was even storming really bad, and I was still not spooked.

This book starts out telling the story, moves on to the trial, and then explores the cause of her death. I wish the author of this book could have been there for Anneliese because I believe she would have been able to keep her alive.

Aldi says

This is a super-interesting case (I was only aware of the basic details before reading this book and was looking for a more in-depth analysis), but wow, the subtitle here is a load of utter crock. This book has nothing at all to do with science. It's a highly distorting, religiously motivated, strongly biased, pseudo-scientific embarrassment. (I also did not realise before opening the book that it was actually published by a Catholic publisher and was littered with tacky ads for similar publications. Stay classy, Christiana-Verlag!).

The author takes Anneliese Michel's alleged demonic possession at face value and from the start her goal is obviously to prove the possession was real and discredit the opinions of the medical professionals involved. She accuses the "other side" of biased investigations more than once when she herself obviously made an assumption *a priori* and then did her best to prove it true, dismissing any evidence to the contrary; the opposite of an objective, scientific approach, in other words.

The result is pretty painful to read. There is interesting information in it, for sure, such as the excerpts from Anneliese's diary and quotes from the exorcism tapes, but it's all cluttered up with praise for the priests, defence of ultra-conservative Catholicism, and condescending rants against possible medical explanations (without ever being able to back up those rants with any substantial evidence - it's all projection and assumption).

I am not what you'd call a skeptic; I have no use for organised religion but I'm entirely open to the possibility of paranormal/supernatural phenomena. This method of investigation, though - presenting the literal demons and devils of the Catholic church at its most conservative as the gospel truth whilst ridiculing and dismissing the opinions of psychiatrists and epilepsy specialists, coddling and defending a bunch of superstitious lunatics who tortured a young girl with hour-long daily exorcisms over a period of TEN MONTHS and stood idly by while she self-injured and starved herself to death, reinforcing her delusions with medieval, magical-mystical-religious hogwash, and then blaming the doctors (that Anneliese hadn't even ever seen during that period leading up to her death) for said death... well, it gave me hives.

There's nothing in Anneliese's symptoms of possession that could not (and has not been) linked to her diagnosed epilepsy, depression, and a psychosis populated with hellfire and brimstone imagery from a super-restrictive Catholic upbringing. There wasn't a single utterance that her "demons" made that cannot be explained as an externalised manifestation of suppressed rebellion by a sick, frustrated and mentally troubled girl who could not cope with the rigorous expectations and pressure placed on her by her extremely religious family and value system. There were no opinions expressed by the demons that weren't either spoonfed to them by the exorcising priests or that couldn't have been warped expressions of Anneliese herself (I mean, these "demons" delivered messages from the Virgin Mary, spoke in Anneliese's own accent, never used a stronger swearword than "asshole" - despite being demons!! - and spewed the exorcising priest's own dogma on how the church needed to return to its more conservative roots, ffs!) There were no signs of weird forces at work, like in other possession cases where a person speaks in languages they don't know or performs impossible physical feats. Her "voices" and vocalisations, while creepy and unsettling (I've listened to a few of the tapes on YouTube) were nothing that she herself wasn't capable of producing.

One thing that the book (unintentionally) does very well is establish just how strong the power of delusion can be, and that there can be no logic when you're up against toxic beliefs that run this deep. Like, how can you even argue with a group of people who is just utterly convinced that they have no personal responsibility and that everything in their lives is determined by demons and saints? There is no logical argument when the answer is always going to be "but god"/"but devils." I feel horrible for this young woman who badly needed help and, instead of getting more/better medical attention, got her illness repackaged as something that was more familiar and convenient for her and her priests and family to believe in, even at the cost of her life.

The behaviour of Anneliese's priests and parents may not have been driven by bad intentions, but they were absolutely guilty of letting her die when she could have been saved, and were rightly convicted in court. For this author to challenge that and claim "demons did it" as an actually scientifically defensible position is ludicrous and despicable.

Meredith says

An incredibly spooky read- one of the only books to ever truly terrify me...

PJ Who Once Was Peejay says

This book uses court transcripts and interviews to paint a portrait of a real-life exorcism from the 1970s that went horribly wrong. This section was both fascinating and dull at times (she does a *very* thorough job). "The Exorcism of Emily Rose" was based on this case.

Goodman is an academic, but not dismissive or patronizing on the subject of exorcism. She believes possession is real—although perhaps not a case of demons inhabiting the body of an unwitting soul—and not a purely Christians vs. The Devil thing. It's known in many cultures. Her final analysis of what the phenomena of exorcism might really be, in a biological and psychological sense, was for me the most compelling aspect of the book. It changed my mind on the subject, which I can't say is true of many books.

Earl says

This, I believe, is an excellent and honest treatment of the famous case that inspired "Emily Rose." Quite balanced view, which challenges us to look beyond psychology and investigate the case of possessions--and how we can deal with them as Catholics.

Caleb says

This is a novel-like narrative account of a famous German case of possession, devoting the bulk of its length to describing the peculiarities and drama of the case, and speeding a little too quickly through the trial (in which four people, two priests and the victim's parents, were found guilty of killing Michel through negligence) and ending with a pretty fascinating coda, which offers a psychological/medical/scientific explanation for what Goodman argues is a cross-cultural phenomenon.

The case itself is pretty terrifying, even if one doesn't believe in demons and the devil and the like—the fact that the human brain can conceive of such things, and control the body that houses it—is itself pretty damn scary.

Steve Wiggins says

Any book by an academic that takes seriously issues concerning possession is worth five stars. Felicitas Goodman went on to write other books that dealt with issues of spirit possession and altered states of consciousness. The case of Anneliese Michel was one that clearly meant something to Goodman.

For those who saw the movie *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* the story of Anneliese will be familiar. The location and age given in the movie cater to an American viewership, but many of the episodes Emily undergoes are described according to witnesses of what actually happened to Anneliese. This is a sad, tragic story. After months of undergoing an exorcism, Anneliese died of starvation. Goodman asks, what if it was the doctors who were wrong? If they took her spiritual outlook seriously medical science may have been able to save her.

The book is a detailed description by a trained anthropologist. Goodman relies on court records, diaries and interviews. She reconstructs the last year or so of Anneleise's life and the torments she underwent. Goodman doesn't claim there were demons, but then, she doesn't claim there weren't.

Since I post about demons on my blog (Sects and Violence in the Ancient World) I addressed this book there as well. The phenomenon of possession exists, whether it's attributed to medical or spiritual causes. It seems that listening to the patient is not a bad course of action. This tale, scarier than the movie, will not soon be forgotten.

Elaine says

An amazing account of a true story, with a clear view of both sides, spiritual and clinical. Finally I understand possession and exorcism - religious altered state of consciousness. Anneliese was poorly served by both her spiritual advisors and her physicians, a very sad story. They should have worked in tandem to help this poor young woman.

Christian Engler says

After reading Matt Baglio's book-The Rite-the possession case of Anneliese Michel immediately sprang to mind, primarily because of the fictionalized films that were based loosely on her life and case: The Exorcism of Emily Rose as well as Requiem. Without any fanfare or hyperbole, Dr. Felicitas Goodman, a religious anthropologist, quietly gets straight to-the-point in detailing the life of a young and devout Catholic college woman from Bavaria who began to experience claimed supernatural anomalies that were plaguing her. Before her tragic death in the summer of 1976 in a failed exorcism, she claimed that she was not in full control of her will and that she could see frightening specters. Additionally, she had an aversion to religious items, possessed hidden knowledge and would occasionally emit a foul odor that smelled like burning dung. Atop of that, she suffered from a laundry list of other odd and unexplainable extremes. Witnesses were plentiful in attesting to the claims. Jumping from hospitals like the Institute for Psychotherapy and Medical Psychology to clinics and vice versa to get any kind of handle on what was happening to her, the doctors, scientists, psychiatrists and clinicians whom she encountered were of no real help. One or two indicated that she suffered from epilepsy and a psychosis, an illness that was made worse by their prescribed drugs of Tegretol, Dilantin and periciazine. Though meant to keep the seizures and other problems at bay, they in fact repressed her suffering consciousness as well as the shock element that the exorcism was intended to provide. The assorted drugs, were, in a way, having a warring battle against each other and not addressing the core problem of what was wrong with Anneliese Michel, and that, according to Dr. Goodman, was that she was possessed. The drugs diffused the penetrating arrows of the exorcism, shielding the soul/consciousness (whatever you want to call it) from being thrust away from the clutches of the entities whom Anneliese-in her altered state-claimed to be possessed by. Those entities were said to be Cain, Hitler, Nero, Judas Iscariot, Lucifer and Fleischmann, a fallen, corrupt and licentious priest from centuries past. Because of her deep religious convictions and her peasantry upbringing, Anneliese Michel felt unable to be honest with her doctors, who, in her assessment, would have frowned upon her backward diagnosis and simply written her off as a Catholic zealot. Her symptoms would not have been analyzed from a religious context, and thus, thinking outside of the box would not have been possible for any of the medical staff, for the symptoms did not fit any medical and scientific framework. The problem was that there were two stark and contrasting belief systems that were in play while addressing the same issue, namely a sick patient. Not finding the help that she needed, she turned to her priests, who, after meeting with her, also claimed to suffer from some supernatural residue. In assessing her, they noted that she did show the hallmark signs of a true possession case, a genuine demoniac, as laid down by the Roman Ritual, around since 1614. With the approval of the possessed, her family and the clerical higher-up, the priests were given the green light to perform the ritual. Not adding personal speculation to the case material, Dr. Goodman lets the eyewitness accounts and documentation speak for itself. And it does make for shocking reading. I found Dr. Goodman's assessment of the case to be the most cogent and plausible, mostly that demon possession is real but that it can be healed by way of exorcism. It may be an uncommon and fringe experience, but it is still a scientifically verifiable human experience, nonetheless. Perhaps if a cross-cultural psychiatrist had been in charge of the medical case from the very get-go, a better outcome would have ensued. This was an

informative read. And I enjoyed the scientific, academic and anthropological analysis of it.

Steve Parcell says

Quite simply this is one of the most depressing and harrowing books I have ever read and yet the fact I read it in just over 2 days bears testimony to its raw power.

I found myself feeling almost intrusive reading what this poor girl went through. It wasn't epilepsy and they could not find anything wrong with her medically so what is the alternative?

There has to be some credibility to the fact that she was possessed. Speaking in various languages and different tones and characters? Her whole facial expression changing in a flash to something completely different to a very pretty girl. Strength beyond that of a malnourished petite woman and unearthly screams and grunts.

Read the book and listen to the recordings on YouTube. It is unpleasant and soul destroying but very compelling.

Then she dies and you think that it is all over and yet the priests who worked tirelessly to help her and her poor parents were prosecuted? Unfortunately indicative of the modern world having to apportion blame as they could not find a conventional reason why she died. They held the 4 of them responsible for the malnourishment and yet reams of documents detailing her condition were available and ignored.

Very very compelling both as a book and as evidence of possession as a real event.

Cody Christodoulou says

The Exorcism of Anneliese Michel, by Felicitas D. Goodman, is an amazing TRUE story about a girl possessed by evil spirits. It took place in the small town of Klingberg, Germany in the 1960's. The main character is Anneliese Michel. She was a very religious and holy child. When she was a teenager, she would occasionally wake up feeling paralyzed and scared. She would proceed to urinate in her bed and began to see demonic figures. She thought she was going crazy. Her family called in both a doctor and priests to try to figure out what was wrong with her. The doctors believed she was hallucinating and prescribed drugs. The priests came to the conclusion that she was possessed and took measures to rid her of evil spirits.

Unfortunately Anneliese died in the process.

Felicitas D. Goodman is a religious anthropologist with a strong background in religious rituals. She thinks that Anneliese was actually possessed and that the drugs were not helping. She thinks the drugs actually interfered with the exorcisms. As a Catholic person, I believe that people can be possessed by demons and unholy spirits. I believe that an evil spirit took total control of Anneliese, and her spirit was too weak to defeat the demon inside her. I recommend this book to anyone interested in possessions and exorcisms. The story gave me evidence to support what I've simply been told to believe all of my life. I also watched "Anneliese: The Exorcist Tapes", which are recordings of her actual exorcisms. The exorcisms detailed in the book were very descriptive and matched the recordings. The evidence creeps me out because it gives me proof that there actually is a devil that can work through people.

Zoë says

The story of Anneliese is very tragic. A young girl suffered from severe medical problems and in the end lost her life. I wanted to find an unbiased book of this exorcism but I did not. The author, Felicitas Goodman didn't delve deep enough into more logical explanations of what was happening to Anneliese.

Anyone in the book who had doubts of Anneliese being actually possessed by demons is usually brushed off. Goodman is so obviously biased by the way she never questions if the priests could ever be in the wrong. In the trial, Professor Sattes brings up his research to the court, Goodman always comments on his work as having "weighty errors", "written carelessly" and "hastily" without explaining why it's so!

When two psychiatrists, Köhler and Lungershausen bring up their research, she goes on to call their documents "tedious", "complex" and "unedited". She goes on about how the paper's format is not written properly to her liking, but that doesn't necessarily mean the scientific evidence is not true. Maybe research more into what they're actually saying instead of dismissing their facts altogether?

I noticed that Goodman always puts quotes around scientific explanations for Anneliese's conditions, and never quoting the word, possession. For example, when Goodman quotes Dr. Schleip, on page 206, Schleip makes her assessments of Anneliese's "epileptic-like" epilepsy, by observing her symptoms being symptoms of epilepsy, Goodman simply ends with, "but they didn't find lesions in the frontal lobe during the autopsy, nothing at all that would have lent support to dr. Schleip's diagnosis", and left it at that. Therefore it had to be SOMETHING ELSE LIKE DEMONS, PERHAPS! Goodman, keeps pushing that idea as the only idea upon the reader.

There are no mentions in her bibliography of the works of Dr. Köhler, Lungershausen, Dr. Schleip, or even Satte's Opinion research she talks so terribly of. You won't get one citation of someone with an opposing view. Guess we have to take Goodman's word for it. You seem to have to take her word for everything. Just like how she always claims that Anneliese wasn't epileptic, had healthy organs, or didn't die of starvation because the autopsy didn't show the signs. Where can I get a record of Anneliese's "oh-so-normal" autopsy?

At the end, Goodman claims the drugs brought on the death of Anneliese. I undoubtedly believe Anneliese died because she did not receive proper medical attention in the last months of her life. You can't depend on a single remedy to cure someone, like exorcism, and cut out all other suggested treatments. That is why she died a horrible and painful death of starvation, self infliction, and exhaustion. Her priests and family thought they were well meaning by respecting Anneliese's wishes to not see a doctor, but Anneliese at that time was not in a healthy state of mind to make that decision for herself.

I was on the same drug Anneliese was put on, Dilantin. (Now I am on Lamictal) Anticonvulsants may not work for everyone and they do come with their side effects. But I was in no way convinced by Goodman's research that it was the drugs I know of fondly that killed Anneliese.

I found deep connection with Anneliese because I have suffered a lot of similar health problems she experienced. The difference is I did not grow up religious and received advanced medical attention. We all have an inner critic in our minds ripping ourselves apart; saying mean things. The inner critic is usually trying to help us, but it can make things worse. I believe Anneliese's inner critic was telling her she was damned, but she couldn't discern her own voice from that of a demon's voice. Knowledge of the brain and its mysteries have certainly advanced since the publication of this book, but I feel certain Anneliese suffered from severe mental illness that was not properly treated.

Ufoseeker says

A terrific story, well accounted.

Kelly says

Anneliese Michel was a young Catholic girl in Germany who died in 1976 at the age of 23. She began having seizures and seeing "Fratzen" (demon-like figures) at the age of 16. After seeking medical help and becoming discouraged because nothing was working, she became convinced that she was possessed. She consequently sought the help of priests who would perform exorcisms over her to cast out the demons. The exorcism sessions were recorded on audio tapes, some of which you can find and listen to online. In the end, Anneleise ultimately died of starvation and dehydration, according to the autopsy report, and could have probably been saved with medical intervention and force-feeding. Her parents and the two Catholic priests who performed the exorcisms were sent to trial, where they were all found guilty of negligent homicide.

It's really a very sad, but fascinating, case. The author gives a detailed, in-depth account of Anneliese's experiences, based on interviews, trial transcripts, and the audio recordings of the exorcisms. During the last two chapters, she lays out her own hypothesis of what caused Anneliese's afflictions and what caused her death. Before reading the final pages of the book, I personally believed that Anneliese was simply mentally ill, and that the people around her perpetuated her hallucinations with all of their wacky religious beliefs. The author, however, suggests that Anneliese repeatedly went into something called a Religious Altered State of Consciousness, which made sense, from what I could understand of it. Although I'm not sure if the author made it clear whether she really believes that demons exist or not. Goodman also believes that the Tegretol prescribed to Anneleise as an anti-convulsant during the final years of her life might have caused her death, as it can cause very dangerous side-effects. Goodman maintains that exorcisms can indeed relieve one from their suffering, but that it didn't work with Anneleise because of the Tegretol.

Like I said, fascinating stuff. I'd never heard of this case until I saw the movie "The Exorcism of Emily Rose", which I just LOVED. Such a good movie! Very creepy, very thought-provoking. The character of Emily Rose is based loosely on Anneleise Michel.

Natalie says

The copy of the book I read was just a stack of copy paper; it was just a photocopied version. You may or may not know the movie "the exorcism of emily rose" is loosely based on this book and though the movie is ok it only gives you a glimpse of the actual events that are noted in this book. The things that this young girl went through FOR YEARS are some of the most terrifying things I've ever read and though I started out being somewhat frightened of the book (reading it with the movie in mind) in the end I was so shocked and so sad and so amazed by her. I highly recommend this book (if you can find it and if you can it probably won't be cheap)
