

MAG – 019 – Confession

Content Warnings

- Graphic injury
- Religious abuse

Discussions of: Religion, supernatural compulsions, blood

- **Mentions of:** Theological dread, violence, knives, hospital, ritual, death, alcohol, cannibalism
- **SFX:** High pitched tone

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill Presents The Magnus Archives Episode Nineteen Confession

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro - Continues]

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement of Father Edwin Burroughs, regarding his claimed demonic possession. Original statement given May 30th 2011. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

JONATHAN SIMS

(Read a loud from the archived witness statement of Father Edwin Burroughs)

Thank you for coming. I know that this can't have been easy to arrange and I appreciate the opportunity to make my statement. The Prison Service probably didn't make it easy for you. They're understandably hesitant to give anyone extended access to me in case I get violent, but I'm very glad they made an

exception for you. At least, assuming that you're real. I hope you're real but maybe it's that hope that's being used against me in a cruel joke. Or maybe the joke would be that I would let that doubt cost me my only chance to tell my story. Either way, I choose to make my statement and if you're not real then hopefully no harm done.

We'll get to the cannibalism, of course, but first I just want to provide some context. I don't know how much you work with the Church in your Institute. You may be surprised that a man of the cloth such as myself, however far from grace I may have fallen, would enlist the aid of an organisation dedicated to studying the paranormal. Well, to be honest, it's generally kept quiet, but the Catholic Church is not against belief in the supernatural outside of the official doctrine. Demons, ghosts, black magic... It's generally up to the individual how much they believe in these things, and I believe that very much of what you research is real. Dangerous, but real. I've always seen the Devil's work as a very tangible thing, and those priests who might speak of them as metaphor or symbol are, I fear, often placing themselves and their parishioners in a position of peril. Sorry, this is becoming a homily. It's just been some time since I've had a chance to express myself like this; I almost don't care if it is on one of its phantasms.

So it was only natural, I suppose, that it was relatively early in my vocation as a priest that I trained as an exorcist. It's not something all that special really, every diocese should have a trained exorcist available, or failing that a bishop can do it, but nine times out of ten the duties of an exorcist are to recommend a good psychiatrist, doctor or substance abuse program, and bishops don't usually have time for that. I was an exorcist for the Diocese of Oxford when this all happened. I trained as a Jesuit, so I was used to moving about a lot, but

I was at Oxford from about 2005 right through to my arrest in 2009. There were two exorcists in the diocese, myself and an old Augustinian by the name of Father Harrogate. I would ask as a favour that you not follow up with him; he plays no part in what happened to me and would, I think, be upset by any reminder of my actions.

In my time I have performed just over one hundred exorcisms, with varying degrees of success. It was relatively rare that it felt like much more than a blessing or a prayer. It still helped in most cases, but as one of the most common types of possession is not The Exorcist-style of speaking in a demonic tongue and floating off the bed, but rather that of an unnatural depression, it was often hard to be sure. It is difficult to say how many were devout believers who came to us with a very natural depression, and simply preferred to look to the Church than to counselling or medicine. Even those were helped to some degree, I believe, even if only as a placebo. On a few occasions, though I did encounter things that served to firm up my belief in the Devil and my faith in my Lo– my L– I’m sorry, It won’t let me say the words. It won’t let me pray either, but I hope I will not be judged too harshly for it on the final day.

As I was saying, there were times when I felt things pushing back. I was once cursed at in Sumerian by a young man who was utterly illiterate, and had the names of my childhood pets thrown at me by an old Jamaican man. I will admit that there were times that I have been very afraid of what I was trying to remove, but I always had faith in Je– I always had faith. None of it prepared me for what happened on Bullingdon Road, though. That was something else entirely.

I was doing some work at the Catholic chaplaincy in St Aldate’s, generally trying to help the spiritual well-being of the students who came to us, when

Father Singh, one of the other priests working there, came to me. He said he had a student from St Hughes asking after an exorcism, and wanted to refer her to me. I told him of course and he set up a meeting between us. The student's name was Bethany O'Connor, and much of what she told me was under the seal of confession, something I will not break even now, so suffice it to say she believed that she was no longer in control of her own mind.

Even as we talked, she spent much of her time looking around or staring into my eyes with what I can only describe as pointed suspicion. Bethany told me that her will was still her own but she could no longer trust her senses, and had found herself doing much that she did not understand.

I remember one moment very clearly, in our second meeting I believe. We were taking a walk around the botanical gardens, as she said it calmed her when talking of her problem. She reached into her bag, took out what appeared to be a small slab of stone, slate, I think, and started to lift it to her mouth as if to eat it. I asked her what she was doing, and she stopped, looked at the rock she held in her hand, and threw it away before bursting into tears. She told me that it felt like something was in her head, changing what she saw and felt and thought. I asked when this had started, and she told me it was after she had moved out of her college halls and into a house on Bullingdon Road with her friends. I suggested that perhaps it had something to do with the stresses of entering second year, but she insisted it was something to do with the house. Finally, after several discussions, I agreed to look over the house and perform a small blessing in case there was anything wrong with the place, spiritually speaking.

It was a cold morning in December, near the end of Michaelmas term, when I visited 89 Bullingdon Road. It was an old house, though not so old as to be

unusual in that part of Oxford, and had clearly once been a small family house, now partitioned by the lettings agency to house as many students as possible. Bethany told me that there were six of them living there at the time. I went around the house, looking for signs of anything amiss but found nothing that seemed out of the ordinary. Bethany kept asking me if I “felt any evil” in the house, and I tried to explain to her that priests unfortunately don’t have the power to simply sense the presence of evil. I didn’t realise how unfortunate that was, at least not until we got her room. It was on the first floor at the back of the house, and was a long, thin bedroom, easily the biggest. It was adorned in typical student fashion with movie posters and flat-pack bookshelves, but my attention was immediately taken by a large patch of wall where the wallpaper had been crudely hacked away to reveal the bare brickwork underneath. Written there, in faded blue paint, was a single word: *Mentis*.

I’d been out of seminary for some years at this point, and had never been one for the Latin Mass, but I still knew the word for ‘mind’. My immediate assumption was that Bethany had painted it in some sort of mania, but looking closer I saw that the paint was far too old to have been done since she moved in. It looked more as though it had been painted on the wall and then covered up with layers of wallpaper over the years, until finally being unearthed by stripping it away. What was slightly more concerning, was that watching Bethany pace around the room, following my gaze with some confusion, was that she didn’t seem able to see it. When I asked her what the word on the wall meant to her, she looked at me as though I was talking nonsense.

I didn’t seem like there was much more to be gained there at that point, so I performed a short blessing over the place, took some photographs and told Bethany that I would have to come back later once I’d looked into a few things.

She seemed disappointed there wasn't anything more immediate that I was doing, but didn't try to argue. And so I left what would turn out to be my first visit to the house on Bullingdon Road, calling Father Singh to arrange a meeting the next day where we could discuss whether to attempt a full exorcism.

It was at that meeting that I got the call from the hospital. Bethany had been admitted with severe facial lacerations and was asking to see me immediately. I made my way to the John Radcliffe as soon as I was able and was surprised to see two police officers standing near her bed. I was met by Anne Willett, the nurse who Bethany had asked to call me. I knew Annie a bit already, as she'd attended the church where I ministered and I recognised her from the congregation. She explained to me that Bethany had apparently attempted to attack one of her housemates with a kitchen knife, and in the ensuing struggle ended up falling head first into a full-length mirror, cutting herself very badly.

I was, to put it mildly, somewhat taken aback. This was such an escalation from what Bethany had described before, and I was starting to fear that if I didn't manage to do something the poor girl would most likely end up locked away somewhere. Annie was convinced that an exorcism was the only way, and so finally, I agreed to do so. I had already got permission from the Bishop, but that was before Bethany's hospitalisation, and I would have preferred to discuss it with him. Still, it was clear she was getting worse and I decided to take a risk and try it anyway. It was a stupid risk to take. I was cocky and complacent, full of spiritual pride and an eagerness to test my faith against whatever was inside of Bethany's soul, not even considering that I might be risking it. Still, I have paid dearly for my hubris.

We waited until the police had taken their statements and left, and then I set up and began the exorcism. It went... unusually. There was no resistance from Bethany, almost no reaction at all, and in many parts of the ceremony where in my experience there was usually a response either from the demon, or at least the victim, there was instead just... silence, as she stared at me with a look, almost seemed like pity. Annie just stood in the corner, watching and clearly eager to help, despite the fear I saw in her eyes. At last, Bethany locked eyes with me and slowly shook her head. "I'm so sorry," she said, "It wants your faith."

Without warning she began to convulse. Thrashing in obvious pain. I tried to continue the ritual, but the doctors pushed passed me, desperately trying to help Bethany as blood began to pour from her mouth where she had bitten into her tongue. In the end they couldn't save her. Brain haemorrhage, they said, probably from the blow to head when she hit the mirror and they just hadn't spotted it.

I was asked to leave in no uncertain terms, and the doctors made it very clear that I may not have been the one that hit her in the head, but they held me very much accountable for her death. I was also given a very thorough dressing down by my Bishop, who told me to take a step back and leave the exorcisms to Father Harrogate for some time. Annie almost got suspended over the matter, but in the end was spared further disciplinary action, as she had been simply passing on the wishes of the patient.

And for a couple of years that was it. I felt a great deal of guilt over my involvement with Bethany's death, and I started to drink more than I had before. I was never, I think, in danger of becoming an alcoholic, as most of the priests I worked with had done work with substance abusers – not to mention

the fact that priests are certainly not immune to alcoholism – and would have picked up on the warning signs. But they did express concern over the occasional disappearance of bottles of sacramental wine. At the time I was sure it wasn't me. I preferred scotch and the Muscatel wine they bought had never really been to my taste, but looking back I can't really be sure what I was drinking. I know it's something of a jump from unwittingly stealing holy wine to my later crimes, but I'm trying my best to fit this into a relatively coherent narrative.

Apart from that, the years passed uneventfully, and I was starting to feel like I'd put the whole affair behind me. Until I got a call from Annie. She said that a gentleman had been admitted to the John Radcliffe after having something of a scare in a house up on Hill Top Road. I explained to her that I wasn't performing exorcisms at the moment, and said she should talk to Father Harrogate. She assured me it wouldn't need a full exorcism, and if I did we could bring him in, but she didn't know or trust Father Harrogate, but just wanted my opinion. Finally, after a lot of pestering, I agreed to pay a visit to the house.

It was late when I got there, and starting to get very cold. The whole affair was starting to bring back some less than pleasant memories of my arrival at Bullingdon Road all those years ago. I was also a bit annoyed at Annie for not mentioning that the house was still under construction, not only making it unlikely to be the haunt of demons or spirits, but also meaning that the coat I had brought along would be somewhat inadequate against the chill in a house without windows. I knocked on the door and one of the builders opened it. I forget his name, I'm afraid, something Polish I think, or maybe Czech? He seemed confused at first as to why I was there, but I explained and it turned

out he was the one that had been treated by Annie at the hospital. She had not mentioned the builder's possible schizophrenia to me, but I began to fear that this may be a waste of time. Still, I had a look around and asked the builder questions about the place. He certainly did have an interesting story, but I was unsure of how much of it I believed.

Eventually, I decided that I'd seen enough and that there didn't seem to be any malicious presence here. The builder was looking at me in such a way as to make me hesitant to tell him that, so I decided I would at least give the place a quick prayer or blessing. I asked him to wait outside, though. Something in his manner was a bit off-putting and I felt uncomfortable with him watching me like a hawk, as though I were about to vanish at any moment.

He headed into the back garden, and I was alone in the house. I moved into the hallway and began to pray, praying for protection and sprinkling holy water around from a flask I carry on me in these situations. As I spoke the words I felt something... alarming. I was starting to grow very hot, as though the room was heating up very rapidly. I looked around for the source of the heat, but the radiators hadn't been installed yet and I couldn't see anything else that might be warming the room. It continued, though, and soon I was sweating through my shirt. I began to cough, and I could smell smoke, even though I couldn't see any or any fire, for that matter.

I fell to one knee and choked back a scream as I felt my skin began to crackle and burn. I began to pray again for protection, not for the place this time, but for me. As I did, I felt... something answer me. And yet, I cannot stress this enough: what answered was not G-God. It wasn't Him. Something else answered my call for protection. I felt my lips move. They made no sound that I could hear, but I felt them form every syllable. "I am not for you. I am marked."

The heat slowed in its increase but it did not stop. My mouth continued to speak for me, when I heard the sound of a car engine outside and a great crash. Instantly, the feeling was gone, as though it were never there, and looking out, I saw the builder had managed to uproot a tree from the back garden. I sat there for a while catching my breath, and when he came back inside, I told him I had completed the prayers and excused myself quickly. It was the first time I had experienced...

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement ends.

Unfortunately, this statement as it stands is incomplete and stops at this point. It does not appear to be the actual end of the document, so I have hopes that the rest is simply misfiled somewhere else in the archives. If this is the case, I will record and add that part when it is found, either by myself or, given the scale of the Archive's mismanagement, by my successor when I pass away from old age.

With this in mind, all but the most preliminary of investigations into this statement are being put on hold until the rest is found. Most of the details do appear to be correct and match the statement given by Mr. Ivo Lensik in 2007. We did find Father Burroughs' arrest record, though, and I am very curious to see how the events recounted here could have led to the incident in 2009, wherein he apparently murdered two first year university students following Sunday Mass, and then peeled off and ate most of their skin.

Recording Ends.

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

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