

The White House Needs Exorcise



Arthur Hoppe

IT WAS a dark and stormy night. The back door of the darkened White House opened silently to admit a black-robed male figure.

"Thank God, you've come, Father," said a distinguished gentleman in a well-tailored suit, greeting the visitor warmly. "He's upstairs. Step into the Oval Office. All the wires have been cut. We can talk privately there. I only hope it isn't too late."

"It's never too late for the rites of exorcism, General," replied the Priest calmly. "As I recall it was you who initially declared that 'some sinister force' was at work in this place. What was the first thing you noticed, strange rappings, perhaps?"

"No, Father," said the General. "Strange hummings. We have one that lasts for 18½ minutes. It's . . . It's inexplicable!"

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GET A GRIP on yourself, General," said the Priest. "On the telephone you mentioned other odd happenings."

"Oh, yes, yes," said the General, his voice rising. "Safes open and close at strange hours. Things mysteriously disappear — tapes, memos, heaven-knows what. And objects fly through the air everywhere."

"What objects, General?"

"Thousand dollar bills, mostly hundreds of them flew to a Mexican laundry and then back here. Another 100 flew from Las Vegas to a Miami bank where they languished for three years. We've never been able to explain that."

"Teletransportation," said the Priest nodding. "What about the staff?"

"I think they're . . ." The General paused. "For example, one day his secretary found herself in a contorted position,

one foot on a floor pedal, one finger on a button, and one hand on a telephone behind her. She remained there rigidly for five minutes."

"Catatonic," agreed the Priest.

"And his press secretaries, Father. For six months they have been opening and closing their mouths without saying anything intelligible."

"Perhaps a rare form of glossalalia."

"Worse, his trusted number two man, accused of multifarious crimes, became a convicted felon and vanished. What could have possessed him, we asked ourselves." The General shuddered. "Or who?"

The Priest pointed a finger upstairs. "And he, himself?"

The General's shoulders sagged. "I . . . I just don't know. Remember how he suddenly shoved his press secretary in public? And that well-wisher he slapped on the cheek at an airport? And the Saturday Night Massacre? He made me get rid of those three loyal aides. He has a power that . . ."

"How is he now?"

The General sighed. "Ever since the Pro Bowl Game, he just sits staring at his blank television set for hours on end. Can you help us?"

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"**N**O," said the Priest, putting on his coat.

"Why not?" cried the General, aghast.

"For 2000 years, The Church has been helping those who come to us with strange stories of being possessed by sinister forces. But I'm afraid you don't meet the only criteria we apply."

"What's that, Father?"

"The story, my son," said the Priest gently, "must be believable."