

## UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | DEMONIC POSSESSION

### S1E18 Transcript

DR. GALLAGHER: It's not a good idea to ignore the reality of the devil. It's not particularly healthy to either ignore or exaggerate the significance of demons. There's darkness and evil in life, and suffering in life, too. And one can't ignore the less palatable realities, like what I believe is the existence of a darker realm.

NARRATION: A WOMAN EXPERIENCES A VIOLENT ATTACK. TERRIBLE BRUISES ARE EVIDENT ON HER BODY, BUT SHE'S UNABLE TO DESCRIBE HOW THEY GOT THERE. IN ANOTHER CASE, A MEMBER OF A SATANIC CULT CLAIMS HER PSYCHIC POWERS ARE A GIFT FROM THE DEVIL. ARE THESE ACCOUNTS THE MANIFESTATIONS OF TROUBLED PSYCHES, OR UNDENIABLE PROOF OF EVIL SPIRITS, HERE TO TORMENT THE LIVING?

I'M STEVE FRENCH, AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "DEMONIC POSSESSION."

DR. GALLAGHER: I was brought up in an Irish Catholic family and we certainly went to church and I heard stories of possession. So, I didn't discount the idea that they were possible. I certainly never thought I would run into one.

NARRATION: DR. RICHARD GALLAGHER IS A BOARD-CERTIFIED PSYCHIATRIST AND A PROFESSOR OF CLINICAL PSYCHIATRY AT NEW YORK MEDICAL COLLEGE, AS WELL AS A FACULTY MEMBER OF THE PSYCHOANALYTIC INSTITUTE OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY. HE IS ALSO THE LONGEST STANDING AMERICAN MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EXORCISTS.

DR. GALLAGHER: I'm not an exorcist myself. I'm a physician, and the reason I got involved in this field was simply because people asked for my assistance. You know, I'm used to helping people who are suffering. In my case as a psychiatrist, mostly people suffering from emotional and mental disorders, but I wasn't going to turn people away just because they had a controversial diagnosis.

NARRATION: DR. GALLAGHER STUDIED THE CLASSICS AT PRINCETON, THEN WENT ON TO YALE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, WHERE HE TRAINED AS A RESIDENT IN PSYCHIATRY.

DR. GALLAGHER: And so, I was on a career to be a mainstream academic psychiatrist. And then a local priest, who turned out to be a very prominent exorcist, asked me if I'd help about a case of a woman who claimed that she was being beaten up, literally beaten up, by invisible spirits. And so, he wanted to make sure she wasn't psychotic or, you know, was getting beaten up by somebody and lying about it. When I said I was a little skeptical about demonic attacks on people, he said, "Well, that's exactly the type of person we want. We want somebody, as a physician, who would evaluate people, who's skeptical."

NARRATION: DR. GALLAGHER KNOWS THAT CATHOLIC PRIESTS ARE REQUIRED TO SEEK MEDICAL EVALUATIONS BEFORE BEGINNING OFFICIAL SPIRITUAL INTERVENTIONS AND HE'S INTRIGUED BY THE OPPORTUNITY. DURING HIS REVIEW OF THE CASE, HE FINDS NOTHING UNUSUAL IN THE WOMAN'S FAMILY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HISTORY, AND LAB TESTS SHOW NO EVIDENCE OF BLOOD DISORDERS, OR ANY OTHER MEDICAL CONDITION TO EXPLAIN THE HEAVY BRUISING ALL OVER HER BODY. COULD THE WOMAN BE TELLING THE TRUTH ABOUT THESE MYSTERIOUS ASSAULTS?

DR. GALLAGHER: I had to tell the priests that this, in fact, did not seem to me to have any natural, medical, or psychiatric explanation, which is really what he wanted to hear from me. And he said to me at that point, "Yes, that's what I thought." He said, "This is what we call a demonic oppression, not a possession."

NARRATION: UNLIKE A DEMONIC POSSESSION, WHERE AN EVIL SPIRIT TAKES PHYSICAL CONTROL OF ITS VICTIM, A DEMONIC OPPRESSION IS OFTEN CHARACTERIZED BY VIOLENT EXTERNAL ATTACKS AGAINST AN INDIVIDUAL.

DR. GALLAGHER: She experienced these attacks just as if someone was physically beating her constantly, while onlookers would be either mystified or horrified that they would see bruises appear on her with no obvious material cause. Evil spirits seem to have the ability, even though they're spirits, they seem to have the ability to act, to an extent. Now, just as characteristically as blows upon the body, very sane people, for one reason or another, will report a spirit attack where they're scratched, or they're choked, or they're pushed, or they may experience just enormous amount of pains at different times. Sometimes, for instance, they may experience pain entering a church, or pain attempting to receive communion.

NARRATION: AN EXORCISM CAN ONLY BE PERFORMED ON SOMEONE WHO IS BELIEVED TO BE POSSESSED. IN THE CASE OF THE WOMAN WITH THE UNEXPLAINED BRUISES, ALL THE CLERGY COULD DO WAS PRAY FOR HER SPIRITUAL DELIVERANCE. EVENTUALLY THE ATTACKS STOPPED, AND SHE WAS ABLE TO RESUME HER NORMAL LIFE. WHEN THE PRIEST RETURNED WITH A NEW CASE, DR. GALLAGHER VENTURED EVEN DEEPER INTO THE DARK WORLD OF HOSTILE SPIRITS.

DR. GALLAGHER: He wanted an evaluation of a woman who claimed to be a satanic high priestess of a rare, organized satanic cult. And he claimed that she was completely possessed.

NARRATION: THE DAY BEFORE HIS FIRST MEETING WITH JULIA, THE HIGH PRIESTESS, DR. GALLAGHER SETTLES IN FOR A QUIET EVENING AT HOME. ALL AT ONCE, SOMETHING SHATTERS THE PEACEFUL CALM.

DR. GALLAGHER: We had two cats. They used to sleep at the end of the bed. They were normally well-behaved, and they started furiously going at each other. We had to separate

them. They just went berserk. The very next morning, this woman and the priest come to my house, and the first words out of this woman's mouth were, "Oh, nice to meet you, Dr. Gallagher. By the way, how did you like those cats last night?" You can imagine I was a little taken aback.

NARRATION: IF JULIA IS POSSESSED, DR. GALLAGHER BELIEVES HE WILL RECOGNIZE CERTAIN UNMISTAKABLE SIGNS.

DR. GALLAGHER: The basic criteria of a possession involve the clear evidence of a foreign entity, an evil spirit, invading and controlling the body. They can't just take over the will or the soul, but they can take over the consciousness, put people in a type of submerged trance. They will speak through the victim and they don't sound disembodied. They're using the body, including the vocal cords of the individual, but they speak in a arrogant, prideful way with tremendous expression of hatred towards anything sacred or religious.

NARRATION: IT ISN'T LONG BEFORE DR. GALLAGHER WITNESSES SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY IN THE PRESENCE OF JULIA, THE CULT HIGH PRIESTESS.

DR. GALLAGHER: One of the more spooky experiences I had was, I was in the car with the exorcist who introduced me to her. Julia was in the back seat, and all of a sudden, she seems to go into a trance, and this nasty voice comes out of her. It was something like, "Oh, leave her alone. You f-ing monkey priest." Uh, and this sort of conversation went on for about five minutes. And then she came out of the trance and I said to her, "Julia, do you remember what was going on?" She goes, "What do you mean? No." Because she did not know anything about the last five minutes, when this demon had taken over.

DR. GALLAGHER: The priests were already aware that she was possessed and, very quickly, I was in full agreement with that. And I did in fact have a lot of meetings with her because she was very conflicted about getting help. The priest wanted me to help sort out her psychological state of mind and the reason for her ambivalence. She told me about her life in the cult, and it was such a dramatic case, a once in a century possession — an extremely, extremely dramatic possession, precisely because, we presume, she was this Satanist, devil worshiper, priestess in this cult. She even called herself the queen of the cult. And since she knew herself that she was possessed — she was an intelligent enough woman — she wanted to get rid of the possession, so that's why she had turned to the exorcist. On the other hand, she didn't want to leave the cult. In some respects, this was her home. She had sort of fallen in love with the leader of the cult. She also was afraid that the cult would retaliate if they knew she had turned to the church.

NARRATION: DESPITE HER RESERVATIONS ABOUT TURNING TO THE CHURCH FOR HELP, JULIA CONSENTS TO A FORMAL EXORCISM.

DR. GALLAGHER: As no two possessions are exactly alike, you could say no two exorcisms are precisely alike.

NARRATION: THE ORTHODOX AND CATHOLIC CHURCHES HAVE THE MOST ELABORATE, RITUALIZED PROCEDURES, WITH PRAYERS THAT GO BACK CENTURIES TO A MANUAL CALLED THE ROMAN RITUAL. THE DOCUMENT IS STILL USED TODAY IN A REVISED FORM.

DR. GALLAGHER: Often the individual will be brought to a safe setting. There will be a number of people, as many as needed, to hold the person down, because the person may willingly request the exorcism, but then when the demon surfaces, the demon tries to either escape, or even attack people. And then the priest says prayers, for anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour or two, from the manual and then sometimes will attempt to engage in some kind of dialogue with the demon, keeping it very minimal, asking the demon what caused the possession, when the demon is going to leave, what, what the demon's name is, keeping it quite minimal while, at the same time, saying prayers, including commands for the demon to leave.

DR. GALLAGHER: It is a process that can take a quite long amount of time. I have seen exorcisms which, one exorcism has delivered the individual, but I've also seen exorcisms that are done serially and last weeks or even months, and sometimes even years. They're very sobering, sad spectacles, in many ways, because you can see the evil spirit attempting to resist the commands of the priest to leave. And you can see, in the process, that the individual victim, while most of the time during the exorcism their consciousness may well be submerged, nevertheless, you can tell before and after they have the ceremony, that they feel quite tortured.

NARRATION: JULIA, THE HIGH PRIESTESS, SUBMITS TO MULTIPLE EXORCISMS, BUT EACH TIME, THE EVIL SPIRIT HOLDS FAST TO ITS HUMAN HOST. ARE ITS POWERS SIMPLY TOO STRONG FOR THE EXPERIENCED EXORCIST? OR IS IT JULIA HERSELF WHO DOESN'T WANT TO LET THE SPIRIT GO?

DR. GALLAGHER: She was highly conflicted person. And since she really would never give up her cultic practices and leaving the cult, it's not surprisingly that, despite the fact that she had agreed to about eight or nine exorcisms, she was never delivered because people often don't understand that you can't have it both ways. You have to work at it. You have to renounce your evil ways, or your nefarious life, before you can be liberated. [SEP] And sometimes the person is never delivered. The whole process is important, but this is a kind of spiritual journey for the individual victim, him or herself, who have to cooperate with the prayers, who have to renounce any evil or sinful behavior, who have to turn to God. And that's an equally important part of the whole process. What made her case particularly striking is, not only did she exhibit enormous amount of paranormal activity when she was in a trance state, for instance, during the exorcisms, but even outside of her trances, she had these amazing psychic abilities, which she felt, quite frankly, as a devil worshiper, Satan had granted her these privileges.

NARRATION: DR. GALLAGHER BELIEVES THAT ONE OF JULIA'S POWERS IS WHAT PARAPSYCHOLOGISTS CALL "REMOTE VIEWING" — THE ABILITY TO SEE PEOPLE ACROSS A GREAT DISTANCE, IN REAL TIME.

DR. GALLAGHER: And I challenged her once and I said, "Tell me where the chief exorcist is now." And she said, "Well, I can see him. He's on a beach. He's walking along saying his prayers." And I said, "What is he dressed in?" She said, "He has khaki pants and a blue windbreaker." So, I said, "I'm going to call him." So, I called this exorcist. I said, "Father Ray, what are you doing?" And he said, "Well, I'm usually at the rectory at this point, but I decided I'd take a walk on the beach and I'd say my breviary," which are the daily prayers of a priest. And I said, "What are you wearing?" And he said, uh, "Who wants to know?" So, I said, "Well, just humor me." So, he said, "Well, I have khaki pants on. I have a windbreaker." I said, "What color is it?" He said, "Blue." And, he said, "Oh, now I know what's going on. You're talking to Julia." And, uh, I said, "Yes." He said, "She is something else. Isn't she?"

NARRATION: IN HIS MORE THAN 25 YEARS OF EVALUATING POSSIBLE DEMONIC ATTACKS AND POSSESSIONS, DR. GALLAGHER HAS CREATED A BODY OF WORK THAT TACKLES THE MOST ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE REALM OF THE SPIRITS. WHO ARE THEY? WHERE DO THEY COME FROM? AND WHAT DO THEY WANT?

DR. GALLAGHER: Satan is, we believe that he's the chief demon. Technically that's who we call the devil. The other evil spirits are called demons and, in Catholic teaching, which I believe, they're regarded as fallen angels, angels who rebelled against God.

NARRATION: ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE, THESE DARK ANGELS WERE BANISHED TO THEIR OWN KINGDOM, WHERE THEY UNITED AGAINST GOD.

DR. GALLAGHER: And, probably as a sort of consequence, they hate human beings who still have the ability, and sometimes the willingness, to turn to God, and they want to attack all human beings, as a matter of fact. They mostly do that by tempting or confusing, uh, without taking away people's free will. I'm not saying that they have such power that they can do whatever they want. They can't. Their power is limited, but they certainly seem quite hostile to human beings. I'm sure you've heard of Saint Augustan, bishop, philosopher, theologian, and he was a very experienced exorcist. His view, which originally had sounded to me, sort of like an early medieval superstition, he said, "They'd really like to kill us all." Which is pretty dramatic thing to say, but that was his experience.

DR. GALLAGHER: I think that's an accurate statement. That they are so hostile to human beings, they would be happy to kill us all. I think there's truth to that. Although, what they're mostly interested in is having us turn to evil. In a way having, having us turn to their realm, which is a realm of darkness, quite frankly. They think of us as far inferior to them in intelligence. And in

fact, that is standard Catholic teaching, that they are much more intelligent than us. People sometimes say, "Well, how come they speak Latin or whatever?" Which I've witnessed on numerous occasions. I say, "They don't speak just Latin. They can speak any language, because these are highly intelligent creatures that have been observing us from the dawn of history, and they tend to think of us as just slightly evolved monkeys or animals."

NARRATION: DR. GALLAGHER BELIEVES THAT MOST CASES OF POSSESSION OCCUR WHEN PEOPLE TURN PURPOSELY TOWARD EVIL, OR ENGAGE IN OVERT OCCULT PRACTICES, LIKE BLACK MAGIC, SATANISM, OR PSYCHIC EXPLORATION. HOWEVER, POSSESSION CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE.

DR. GALLAGHER: People sometimes say, "Well, how come only fundamentalist Christians are possessed?" I mean, nothing could be further from the truth. I mean, people of all faiths have been possessed, and people of no faith have been possessed. I've had people consult me who have no beliefs and, in a sense, they're in a slightly worse state because they don't know who to turn to. And they may ask me, for instance, to refer them to a Catholic priest, which often I do and often eventually, they come to possibly convert to Christianity and eventually get delivered.

NARRATION: HAVING EVALUATED HUNDREDS OF CASES OF SUSPECTED DEMONIC POSSESSIONS, AND TENS OF THOUSANDS OF CASES OF MENTAL ILLNESS, DR. GALLAGHER IS UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN TWO VERY DIFFERENT DIAGNOSES THAT CAN APPEAR SIMILAR, EVEN TO SOME EXPERTS.

DR. GALLAGHER: There are some superficial similarities with psychiatric and medical disorders. For instance, the trance is suggestive of certain dissociative conditions. People thinking they have a personality within them that is different from their natural one occurs in multiple personality disorder. Psychotic patients often believe that evil spirits are speaking to them through hallucinations. So, there are a number of, what I call counterfeits, but which are superficial similarities that some cases of possession can exhibit that get confused by many, many people, especially the victims themselves, but also at times, clergy, to mental illness.

DR. GALLAGHER: And mental illness and possession are very, very different things and they need to be distinguished. Once you have enough evidence, in my opinion, someone like myself who is very experienced, and most very experienced exorcists, have very little difficulty distinguishing between the two. What makes the case all the more assured of being diagnosed correctly is that they will often exhibit what are called suggestive criteria, where this particular spirit will speak in foreign languages fluently that the individual never knew, that they will somehow demonstrate what's called supernatural strength, or such abnormal movements that it would be impossible for a human being to imitate.

DR. GALLAGHER: Those are the kind of diagnostic signs that you're looking for, and Catholic priests are taught to look for those signs to the extent of what's called moral certainty. In other words, you're not supposed to just, sort of, intuit that the person is possessed. You're supposed to have clear evidence of paranormal phenomena that indicates that something obviously beyond just a mentally ill person with multiple personality or psychosis or something is able to do.

NARRATION: IN THE PAST 25 YEARS, DR. GALLAGHER HAS DOCUMENTED SO MANY CASES OF PHENOMENA THAT SIMPLY CANNOT BE EXPLAINED BY THE REALITIES OF THE MATERIAL WORLD, THAT HE FELT COMPELLED TO WRITE A BOOK ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCES CALLED 'DEMONIC POSSESSIONS'.

DR. GALLAGHER: Well, there was a woman I dealt with for many years who had become involved, as a teenager, with a group of Satanists in her neighborhood.

NARRATION: FEARING SHE WAS POSSESSED, AND HOPING TO CLEANSE HERSELF, THE WOMAN SOUGHT OUT THE HELP OF A LOCAL DEACON.

DR. GALLAGHER: During the first and only exorcist she had with this deacon, who was very inexperienced, made no effort to have her held down, for instance. As soon as he began some prayers of deliverance, she rushed at him, attacked him, and this petite woman threw this 200-pound guy across the church hall, injuring him quite badly. After that, she and her husband turned to the Catholic church. She had all kinds of weird phenomena occurring to her. For instance, as sometimes is the case, her household seems to be infested, exhibiting another type of extraordinary demonic attack called infestation, where religious objects would fall off the wall, would break apart. Sometimes the chest in her bedroom would tip over and fall upon her. And in addition, she exhibited, during her possession, this voice coming out of her, speaking foreign languages.

NARRATION: DR. GALLAGHER HAS NO DOUBT THAT DEMONIC POSSESSIONS ARE REAL, AND HIS VIEW IS SUPPORTED BY DETAILED RECORDS OF POSSESSIONS ACROSS VARIOUS CULTURES THROUGHOUT HISTORY. THE VAST MAJORITY OF PEOPLE BELIEVE IN EVIL SPIRITS. SKEPTICS, HE SAYS, ARE UNWILLING TO ACCEPT THE AVAILABLE EVIDENCE, NO MATTER HOW CONVINCING IT MAY BE.

DR. GALLAGHER: There are plenty of people who have audio-taped, or even videotaped, possessions and exorcisms. A lot of the people who call for that sort of evidence, either they're not convinced by the evidence that's out there, which is sometimes quite equivocal, or they don't understand that evil spirits are not performers. The famous French poet said, "The devil's greatest trick is to pretend he doesn't exist." They're not going to make it easy for some amateur filmmaker to capture them speaking Aramaic, or they're levitating for a video recorder. It's just not going to happen. It's naive to think it's going to happen. The evidence is

historical. It's not anti-scientific, but it's historical. And one has to simply say, "Do I believe the eyewitnesses or not?"

DR. GALLAGHER: Look, I'm a physician. I went into this to help suffering people, and these people exist. People who have extraordinary demonic attacks are nowhere as common as people who have cancer, or people who have schizophrenia, or something like that, but these people do exist. What are we supposed to say to these people? You know, "Tough luck, pal. Uh, I'm not going to comment on this," or "This is too controversial," or "I'm afraid, you know, I'll get in trouble if I deal with you or something." These people are suffering. They need people to help. That's the reason I get involved.

NARRATION: IF YOU'VE HAD A PARANORMAL EXPERIENCE, YOU CAN SHARE YOUR STORY AT [UNSOLVED.COM](http://UNSOLVED.COM).

NEXT, ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES...

DAVID HOLTZCLAW: And he said, "I don't know how to tell you this." And I said, "Tell me what?" And then he proceeded to tell me that there had been a bank robbery at the bank and that my mom was dead. And I can tell you, time stopped.

—

Unsolved Mysteries is a production of Cosgrove Meurer Productions and Cadence 13. It is executive produced by Terry Dunn Meurer and Chris Corcoran. Produced by Lloyd Lochridge, Christine Lenig, Courtney Ennis, Paige Hymson, and Paul Yates. The Story Producer for this episode is Caitlin Cutt, and it was edited by Kyle I. Kelley.

From Cadence 13, editing, mixing and mastering by Chris Basil, Andy Jaskiewicz and Bill Schultz. Production support by Sean Cherry and Ian Mandt. Artwork and design is by Curt Courtenay. Publicity by Josefina Francis and Hillary Schupf.

The original theme music was composed by Gary Malkin and Michael Boyd.

THANKS FOR LISTENING TO EPISODE 18 OF UNSOLVED MYSTERIES.