

# Ghost Hunters' Demonic Encounters as Religious Experiences

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**Abstract:** Ghost hunting became widespread in the United States after the October 2004 of the reality television show *Ghost Hunters*. Ghost hunters, or paranormal investigators, use scientific methods to investigate reportedly haunted locations and seek evidence of ghosts and other spirits. Ghost hunters are especially preoccupied with demons. The analytical lens provided by twentieth-century German philosopher of religion Rudolf Otto reveals that demonic experiences serve as powerful religious experiences for ghost hunters and provide comforting evidence of the existence of the spirit world, a cosmos ordered according to good and evil, and even God.

**Keywords:** ghost hunters, paranormal investigation, demons, religious experience

There are bloodstains on the walls. Horrifying groans and screams and animal growls come out of nowhere. People feel nauseous or dizzy in the space, or they get angry or sad. They feel like someone is watching. They feel like a hateful presence is stalking them. People are pushed and scratched; the scratch marks visible on their skin. The unlucky ones see terrifying, twisted, monstrous figures, or shadow figures black as a void. Hauntings like this are commonly reported by paranormal investigators who claim to have come across demonic hauntings. According to these investigators, the demonic is alive and well in the twenty-first-century United States.

Ghost hunting is booming in the twenty-first century, and the demonic is a central obsession of the ghost hunting subculture. Ghost hunting reality television shows are central to the ghost hunting subculture, and every show I have encountered features episodes on demonic encounters. Some, such as *Ghost Adventures*, perhaps the most popular show, feature demonic hauntings every season. The demonic has been discussed at every ghost hunt I have observed. I have heard dozens of ghost hunters, in media or in live interviews, discuss the fact that paranormal investigators in general are perhaps too preoccupied with the demonic. One example can be found in the words of exorcist James Long, who expresses dismay that, given how dangerous the demonic is, there is still widespread demonic interest and writes that he “cannot understand the fascination of wanting to see a demon.”<sup>1</sup>

I have spent nearly a decade ethnographically observing the ghost hunting subculture. I have read their books and websites, I have listened to hours of podcasts and online radio shows and watched hours of ghost hunting television. To top it all off, I have attended a ghost hunting convention, participated in six ghost hunts, and interviewed upwards of thirty ghost hunters from around the country.

Ghost hunters claim that demons, inhuman evil spirits hell-bent on destroying human lives, stalk our communities and our homes. They haunt or infest locations and objects in order to oppress or possess people. According to ghost hunters and demonologists, copious evidence of demonic activity has been collected and can be presented to anyone skeptical or curious about the topic. In fact, what they consider good evidence of demonic activity must be collected before

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<sup>1</sup> James Long, *Through the Eyes of an Exorcist* (Lulu.com, 2013), 100.

a reputable demonologist or exorcist can be convinced to perform an exorcism. House cleansings are provided a bit more readily, as they are generally less dangerous. Beyond the paranormal investigators themselves, there is a wide swath of the public who believe the investigators are experts on demons and eagerly consume demonic tales and information, particular through television media.

I argue that ghost hunters are preoccupied with demons because demonic experiences function as fulfilling and ultimately comforting religious experiences for ghost hunters. Drawing on monster theory and particularly the work of twentieth century German philosopher of religion Rudolf Otto, I show that demonic experiences are not so different from other experiences of what Otto would call the numinous. An encounter with a demon is a *mysterium tremendum* indeed. Ultimately, for ghost hunters, demonic experiences serve as empirical evidence that there is a spirit world, that the cosmos is ordered into good and evil, and even that there is a God.

### Twenty-first Century American Ghost Hunters

It is hard to say how many people in the United States are ghost hunters or take an interest in paranormal investigation. The Baylor Religion Survey of 2005 found that 49% of Americans believe ghosts probably or absolutely exist, 25% have researched ghosts, apparitions, hauntings, or electronic voice phenomena, 20.7% believe communication with the dead is possible, and 22% claim to have experienced a haunting.<sup>2</sup> The paranormal investigator directory website [paranormalsocieties.com](http://paranormalsocieties.com) lists 4,892 currently or formerly active paranormal investigation groups, the vast majority of which are in the United States. This directory is far from exhaustive, as many ghost hunting groups are not listed on the site. Finally, an entire cable television channel, the Travel Channel, is dedicated to paranormal programming with at least eight shows devoted to ghost hunting. This television channel used to be devoted to national and international travel but eventually transformed due to the popularity of its show *Ghost Adventures*.

Ghost hunters seem to be roughly equally divided along gender lines. Although women are the founders or lead investigators of many groups, these roles tend more often to be filled by men.<sup>3</sup> Ghost hunters tend to be racially homogenous. Most ghost hunters I have encountered have been white. This situation is highlighted by the ghost hunting television show *Ghost Brothers*, which tries to stand out in a crowded ghost hunting television market with the hook that all of the team's investigators are Black. This is not an indication that African Americans are uninterested in ghosts, as long-standing African American spirit traditions are well-documented.<sup>4</sup> Ghost hunters tend to span the political spectrum from left to right. Though some ghost hunters identify with a particular religious denomination, most of them tend to be religiously unaffiliated despite having a Christian religious upbringing or background.

Ghost hunting as it now exists in the United States began in October 2004 when the reality television series *Ghost Hunters* premiered on what was then the SciFi Channel. The show featured two Roto-Rooters plumbers, Grant Wilson and Jason Hawes, in Rhode Island who ran

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<sup>2</sup> Electronic voice phenomena are ghostly voices that appear on audio recordings and are a common form of evidence used by ghost hunters to establish a haunting. Bader, Mencken, and Baker, *Paranormal America* (2010), 44, 107.

<sup>3</sup> On gendered power dynamics among ghost hunting groups, see Marc Eaton, "Paranormal Investigation: The Scientist and the Sensitive," in *The Supernatural in Society, Culture, and History*, ed. Dennis Waskul and Marc Eaton (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018), 76-94.

<sup>4</sup> For just one example, see LeRhonda S. Manigault-Bryant, *Talking to the Dead: Religion, Music, and Lived Memory Among Gullah/Geechee Women* (Duke University Press, 2014).

The Atlantic Paranormal Society in their spare time. The series followed Wilson, Hawes, and their volunteer team as they investigated hauntings around the United States using a suite of sophisticated electronic equipment. The team claimed to take a scientific approach to investigating and gathering evidence of the paranormal. The demonologists who work with the TAPS team, twins Carl and Keith Johnson, are introduced in the very first episode.

The premiere of *Ghost Hunters* led to an explosion of interest in ghost hunting in the United States, even though a significant ghost hunting subculture that interacted on the internet already existed. More ghost hunting reality shows followed, such as *Paranormal State* in 2007 and *Ghost Adventures* in 2008, and thousands of Americans formed paranormal investigation teams of their own. Ghost hunters have no central authority or organization to define correct belief or practice, so they are incredibly diverse in their approaches and ideas. In general, they seek evidence of paranormal forces and attempt to help families and individuals dealing with hauntings by investigating reportedly haunted locations. Often, like the TAPS team, they claim to take a scientific approach and proclaim they are just as willing to debunk false paranormal claims as they are to document quality evidence. Like TAPS, they tend to use a variety of electronic equipment. Some of this equipment detects electric energy and its fluctuations, as ghosts are often conceived of as being made of energy or manipulating energy to manifest in the physical world. For example, EMF meters of various types detect fluctuations in electromagnetic fields in the environment. Parascopes are said to detect triboelectric energy. Other equipment includes various types of cameras, including night vision, full spectrum, and infrared cameras, as well as electronic voice recorders. The cameras and recorders are meant to capture anomalous images and sounds that may be evidence of paranormal activity. Ghost hunters also frequently employ psychic or mediumistic abilities in their investigations. Some investigators claim to be sensitives, meaning they can sense spirits and spirit energy; others claim to be mediums, meaning they can sense and communicate with spirits.

Ghost hunters tend to be creative and eclectic in their spiritual and supernatural beliefs. They draw on Christianity, Eastern religions, New Age spirituality, Native American religion, psychology, and more to form their beliefs and practices surrounding ghosts. Particularly influential on ghost hunters' demon beliefs has been Roman Catholic demonology as it has been filtered through Catholic paranormal investigators such as Ed and Lorraine Warren. Generally, the ghost hunting world is obsessed with demons. It is a truism among paranormal investigators that inexperienced or unserious ghost hunters are preoccupied with demons and interacting with the demonic. Among ghost hunters, it is generally considered unwise to desire contact with demons. Nevertheless, the ghost hunting world in general is demon obsessed. The ghost hunting reality television shows frequently focus on demonic cases, even though most veteran ghost hunters claim demonic hauntings are exceedingly rare. Unlike the Spiritualists of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century United States, contemporary American ghost hunters are deeply interested in the demonic and they often seek it out.

### **Demons in America**

Ghost hunters' fascination with demons is consistent with patterns seen in the American public at large. Belief in demons is thriving in the United States and may even be stronger than it was in the middle of the twentieth century. A poll conducted in 2012 found that 57% of respondents believed "it's possible for people to become possessed by demons."<sup>5</sup> According to a

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<sup>5</sup> "National Halloween Survey Results," Public Policy Polling, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://www.publicpolicypolling.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/HalloweenResults.pdf>.

2007 wave of the Baylor Religion Survey, 48% of respondents agree or strongly agree that demonic possession is possible. Three years later, the Baylor Religion Survey found that 70% of respondents believe that demons probably or absolutely exist.<sup>6</sup> Also in 2007, a Pew Research Survey found that 68% of Americans believe that angels and demons are active in the world.<sup>7</sup>

Historically, demon belief seems to have surged in the United States around the time of the release of the *The Exorcist* novel in 1971 and film in 1973. The movie deeply affected audiences across the country and its effects shocked a public that assumed the influence of religion was waning in society. Just several years earlier, in 1966, *Time Magazine* had released its iconic cover asking the question, “Is God Dead?”<sup>8</sup> The public response to *The Exorcist* and the other demon-themed media it inspired may have been a reaction to the God is dead rhetoric of the 1960s. More evidence of this reaction can be found in the best-selling status of evangelical author and preacher Hal Lindsey’s 1970 book *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, which elaborated on premillennial dispensationalist end-times prophecies and marked the 1970s as the age of the antichrist. The popular reaction revealed that, for many Americans, God and the devil were very much alive and well. *The Exorcist* paved the way for other demonic media such as Malachi Martin’s 1976 “nonfiction” book *Hostage to the Devil* and David Seltzer’s *The Omen* film that same year. The *Exorcist* and the reaction of which it was a part led to a marked increase in the public demand for Catholic exorcisms and played a large role in sparking the rise of charismatic or neo-Pentecostal deliverance ministries that aimed to deal with the demonic in the decades that followed.<sup>9</sup> Judging by some measures, the surge of interest in the demonic that started in the 1970s and the following decades has held steady or even continued to grow. Prominent American Roman Catholic exorcists testify to the increase in demand for exorcisms by pointing to the growing number of American exorcists officially appointed by the Catholic church. In a 2016 interview, Father Vincent Lambert reported that when he was appointed by his archbishop to be the exorcist for Indianapolis in 2005, he was one of only twelve officially appointed exorcists in the United States. He reported that at the time of the interview, the number had grown to around fifty.<sup>10</sup> Another American Roman Catholic exorcist, Father Gary Thomas, reported in a 2018 piece in the *Atlantic* that there had been fewer than fifteen recognized Catholic exorcists in the United States in 2011, but that number had grown to well over 100.<sup>11</sup> Also relevant are Gallup’s findings that the percentage of Americans who believe in the devil, a

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<sup>6</sup> “Baylor Religion Survey, Wave III (2010),” The ARDA, accessed October 13, 2020, [http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Codebooks/BRS2011\\_CB.asp#V99](http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Codebooks/BRS2011_CB.asp#V99).

<sup>7</sup> Russell Heimlich, “Goblins and Ghosts and Things That Go Bump in the Night,” Pew Research Center, October 27, 2009, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2009/10/27/goblins-and-ghosts-and-things-that-go-bump-in-the-night/>. Thank you to Joseph Laycock for tracking down most of these statistics. For more on the prevalence of belief in demons and exorcism in the twenty-first century US, see “Why Are Exorcisms as Popular as Ever?” The New Republic, December 28, 2015, <https://newrepublic.com/article/126607/exorcisms-popular-ever>.

<sup>8</sup> See Joseph Laycock, “The Folk Piety of William Peter Blatty: *The Exorcist* in the Context of Secularization,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 5 (2009).

<sup>9</sup> See Michael W. Cuneo, *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty* (New York: Doubleday, 2001). I also want to thank Joseph Laycock for our discussion about *The Exorcist* and its aftermath.

<sup>10</sup> “A Day in the Life of a Modern Exorcist,” YouTube, Vice, September 21, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7szlOjtKGY0&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>11</sup> Mike Mariani, “American Exorcism,” The Atlantic, December 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/12/catholic-exorcisms-on-the-rise/573943/>.

concept closely linked to demons, rose from 55% in 1990 to 70% in 2007.<sup>12</sup> In 2014, the Baylor Religion Survey found that 58% of Americans absolutely believe in Satan, while 49% absolutely believe in demons.<sup>13</sup>

### **Demons according to Ghost Hunters**

To understand American ghost hunters' demonic experiences, one needs to understand what ghost hunters are talking about when they talk about demons. As I explain above, there is no organization or governing body that has the power to establish or police ghost hunters' ideas and practices, so they can be diverse. Speaking generally, ghost hunters often draw on Christian cosmology to think about demons. Demons are conceived of as evil spirits with a desire to torment humans. To get a sense of how demons are imagined by ghost hunters, one can start with two of the most influential demonologists in paranormal investigation circles: Ed and Lorraine Warren. The Warrens, a Catholic husband-and-wife team, were paranormal investigators based in Connecticut. They rose to prominence in the 1970s and remained active until Ed died in 2006 and Lorraine died in 2019. One event that catapulted them into the limelight was their investigation of the infamous Amityville haunting of the 1970s. More recently, the Warrens rose out of paranormal circles into the wider realm of popular culture through the film *The Conjuring*, its sequels, and its spinoffs. In *The Conjuring*, actors Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga play Ed and Lorraine Warren in a story based on a 1971 haunting in Rhode Island investigated by the Warrens. The Warrens' writings, interviews, and lectures in the last decades of the twentieth century were central in forming many paranormal investigators' views of the demonic realm both before and after the boom in ghost hunting initiated by the October 2004 release of the Sci-Fi Channel reality show *Ghost Hunters*. Many ghost hunters looked to the Warrens for guidance about demons and demonic hauntings until the Warrens' deaths, and the teachings they left behind are still referenced in the current moment. Some of the most prominent demonologist in paranormal circles, such as John Zaffis and Carl and Keith Johnson, learned directly from the Warrens. The Warrens are indeed controversial figures among contemporary ghost hunters, with some highly praising them and others seeing them as frauds or attention seekers; however, one still finds the mark of the Warrens on some of ghost hunters' most widespread ideas about demons. The Warrens will serve as a strong base on which to build an understanding of how ghost hunters see demons.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Frank Newport, "Americans More Likely to Believe in God Than the Devil, Heaven More Than Hell," Gallup, June 13, 2007, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/27877/americans-more-likely-believe-god-than-devil-heaven-more-than-hell.aspx>. One might be tempted to attribute the rise in American devil belief to the 2001 September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. To the contrary Gallup polling found that the percentage of Americans who believe in the devil had risen to 68% by May 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Bader, Baker, and Mencken, *Paranormal America*, 196-197.

<sup>14</sup> A person following the footnotes will soon notice that I have only cited one book, Gerard Brittle's *The Demonologist*, in my overview of the Warrens' beliefs about demons. This particular book, based on interviews with the Warrens, is easy to access and these citations should make it easy for anyone exploring to delve deeper into the Warrens' thought. Other materials on and from the Warrens largely align with what is found in *The Demonologist*. I should also note that even the Warren organization seems to recognize the normative value of *The Demonologist*. The production team of *The Conjuring* film, which consulted directly with Lorraine Warren, gave the book to Vera Farmiga when she was doing research for her role as Lorraine. Furthermore, the Warrens' son-in-law, who used to sell tickets to events in which one could meet with Lorraine Warren and view some of the Warrens' haunted objects, used to give out copies of *The Demonologist* to whomever bought two or more tickets.

The Warrens often refer to demons as “inhuman spirits” to emphasize that, unlike a ghost, an inhuman spirit is “something that has never walked the earth in human form.”<sup>15</sup> According to the Warrens, demons are fallen angels, an idea that is common in Christian cosmology.<sup>16</sup> Demons are driven by their absolute hatred of God and their desire to see the ruin of humankind. The Warrens admit that it can be difficult to tell the difference between a malevolent human spirit and a demonic inhuman spirit, but certain signs reveal when a spirit is demonic. Lorraine explains, “Only the demonic...has the power to bring about such incredible negative phenomena as fires, explosions, dematerialization, teleportation, and levitation of large objects.”<sup>17</sup> Dematerialization is when objects cease to exist for a time and teleportation is when objects are moved instantaneously from one place to another. Whereas an earthbound human spirit might do little things like “levitate a pencil or break a cherished teacup,” in the case of a demon “the whole house would be ruined in a deliberate, orderly way.” Demons are said to often look monstrous or appear as dark voids in the environment.<sup>18</sup>

Demons also physically harm people. Ed Warren, describing his years of experience confronting the demonic, says, “I have been burned by these invisible forces of pandemonium. I have been slashed and cut; these spirits have gouged marks and symbols on my body. I’ve been thrown around the room like a toy. My arms have been twisted up behind me until they’ve ached for a week. I’ve incurred sudden illnesses to knock me out of an investigation.”<sup>19</sup> Author Gerald Brittle summarizes what the Warrens told him about demonic hauntings in interviews:

Everything associated with the spirit was terrifying and negative. Quite distinct from a ghost, which would vanish if fear was aroused, this spirit only *intensified* in an atmosphere of fear. Its arrival was accompanied by a sense of utter terror and foreboding; an undeniable sense of evil and wild animosity would fill the room. Often a foul, revolting stench—of sulfur, excrement, or rotting flesh—would fill the area where it materialized; many times it would leave behind a residue of blood and other bodily fluids. And like a beacon, it projected an unmitigating sense of hate and destructive jealousy; its every action was cruel, violent, and wrong. Furthermore, the Warrens noted, when these bizarre entities were present they played dirty, used foul language, and caused injury.<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes demons are known to leave rather obvious clues to their identity, such as by turning crosses upside down or by scrawling blasphemies on walls and mirrors. One might hear diabolical laughter, or a “threatening voice, sounding like no human being you ever heard” may order one to leave a haunted location. Demons can make many frightening sounds, from heavy breathing and knocking to explosions, bestial noises, and bloodcurdling screams.<sup>21</sup> Demons can be identified by their reactions to “religious provocation” as well. They will lash out and produce preternatural phenomena when confronted with “religious articles [such as a crucifix or holy

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<sup>15</sup> Gerald Brittle, *The Demonologist: The Extraordinary Career of Ed + Lorraine Warren* (New York: Graymalkin Media, 2013), 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-155.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46, 99, 100, 196.

water], the recitation of prayers, or reference to God or Jesus Christ.”<sup>22</sup> Demons will also manifest in some of the ways that human spirits can manifest, such as by causing a sudden drop in temperature in a room or malfunctions with electronic devices such as telephones.<sup>23</sup>

The ultimate goal of a manifesting demon is to either possess a person’s body or drive them to murder or suicide (or both).<sup>24</sup> According to the Warrens, before a demon gets to the final phase of possession, its activity will go through two prior phases: infestation and oppression. During the infestation phase a demon will essentially begin haunting a person’s home or another location where the person spends time. A series of small paranormal disturbances will build up over the course of weeks or months. The point of infestation is to create fear and generate the negative psychic energy from which demons draw power. The Warrens explain that infestation will not occur, or will not get far, unless a person creates an opening for the demonic and invites it into their lives of their own free will. A demon must be invited. There are many ways to invite the demonic in. One could perform black magic, or hold a séance, or use a Ouija board. In one famous Warren case, two young women invited demonic infestation by paying too much attention to and trying to communicate with a doll that would preternaturally move on its own and which they later believed to be haunted by the spirit of a dead little girl. It turned out that, in reality, a demonic force had taken hold of the doll. People who attempt to reach out to more innocuous spirits often end up contacting the demonic instead. The Warrens also note that if one engages in dark behavior or has a dark attitude, one will attract dark spirits. Evil and sinful acts attract demons, as does a “dour, depressive person.”<sup>25</sup>

After infestation, demonic activity intensifies, and a demonic haunting will enter into the oppression phase. Oppression is ultimately a psychological attack meant to dominate a person’s will. Once a person’s will is broken, the demon can take possession of them. During oppression, a demon’s supernatural manifestations will become more intense, and the demon will try to directly affect a person’s mental and emotional state. If oppression is successful, the next step is full on possession in which a demon takes control of a person’s body.<sup>26</sup> For the Warrens, demon possession looks much like it was portrayed in William Peter Blatty’s book and film *The Exorcist*. The possessed person’s physical features become grotesque, and the demon or demons speak through the person in strange voices. A possessing spirit will seek to mutilate the body it inhabits or “take off on a spree of wild physical mayhem. The demonic spirit isn’t content simply to possess the body: its mind is fixed on death. The basic motive behind possession is that ‘One can kill many.’”<sup>27</sup> In fact, in a murder trial concluded in 1981, the Warrens testified that Arne Cheyenne Johnson killed his landlord under the influence of demonic possession.<sup>28</sup>

To get rid of demonic infestation or oppression, the Warrens used house blessings or bindings. These were performed by the Warrens themselves or a priest, usually a Catholic priest. A house binding forces the demonic spirit “to either show itself (if present) or move on.” A binding, when performed by Ed Warren, involved moving room to room with a crucifix and holy water. Holy water was sprinkled “at all four points” of a room and Ed said aloud, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I command all spirits – whether human or diabolical – to leave this dwelling and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 81, 99.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 87, 99.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 127-136.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 138-150.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 220-221.

<sup>28</sup> Gerald Brittle, *The Devil in Connecticut* (New York: Bantam, 1983).

never return.”<sup>29</sup> In the case of full-on possession, a priest must be called in to perform the Roman Catholic rite of exorcism.

### **Building on and Reacting to the Warrens**

While the Warrens and their school of thought about demons are supremely influential, many ghost hunters deviate from their schema, either building on the Warrens' school or contradicting it in significant ways. Due to the diversity of ghost hunter belief, I will not be able to exhaustively survey every way in which ghost hunters deviate from the picture of demons laid out by the Warrens. I will provide a few examples and explain how those examples reflect general tendencies of belief and practice among ghost hunters.

Kurt, a ghost hunter based in central Ohio, tries to provide a non-sectarian account of the origin of demons. He believes there were pools of positive and negative energy generated by the Big Bang, and that demons are made from the negative energy. When describing the origin of demons and what they are, he says “I try to do this as non-denominational as I can. Because it doesn't actually matter...if you believe in a magical being that lives in the sky and waves their hand, or if you believe that it's an old man that lives in the sky, or if you believe in the power of the planets, or whatever, or you can be an atheist. One thing that we know for a fact...that happened, and I do say fact because it's been proved beyond theory, is that we know that there was a Big Bang...Out of that explosion you had two pools of energy...you had a positive energy and you had a negative energy, and...that negative energy is what, I honestly (sic), has become the demonic part, if you will.” He explains that we know the Big Bang was a big explosion, and “every explosion, you're gonna put out positive ions, you're gonna put out negative ions” as we see in “atomic explosion tests that we've done.”

In Kurt's description, we see two prominent tendencies among ghost hunters: a tendency to deviate from institutional religious teaching and become religiously eclectic, and a tendency to scientize. Toward the first tendency, many ghost hunters, perhaps the majority, have roots in traditional religious faith but no longer affiliate with the faith of their upbringing. Many of them are “Nones” or are “spiritual but not religious.” This being the case, it is unsurprising that many ghost hunters do not strictly adhere to the very Catholic school of the Warrens. In this case, Kurt wants an account of demons that can function across religious traditions. We also see Kurt using scientific language. He appeals to the Big Bang, which he takes care to note is proven scientific fact. He attempts to draw on the chemical processes of an explosion and he uses the language of energy. Ghost hunters often depict their investigations of the paranormal as scientific endeavors. As we can see in this example, that tendency can move into demonology.

Like Kurt, other ghost hunters often draw on resources outside of the Roman Catholic Church and other traditional Christian institutions to deal with demonic hauntings. One popular ritual for dealing with demons or negative spirits in a space is called a cleansing or clearing. Khoa<sup>30</sup> is not a ghost hunter, but they do overlap with ghost hunters' demonological milieu. They are the owner of a metaphysical shop in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, and they offer home cleansings for a fee. They are willing to tailor a cleansing to a client's religious sensibilities, but they also offer one according to their own set of spiritual beliefs. They call the highest tier of home cleansing a home exorcism. As part of their ritual, they will use a blade, such as a pocketknife or athame, a ritual knife meant for spell work, that is meant to metaphysically cut dark bonds on the home and the people who live there. They will also perform sigil work, in

<sup>29</sup> Brittle, *The Demonologist*, 99-100.

<sup>30</sup> Khoa is a non-binary individual who uses they/them pronouns.



which they draw sigils, or powerful magic symbols, meant to drive away evil and bestow protection. They will often leave the client with a sigil to place beneath their doormat. Khoa also often performs candle magic, or magic that involves the burning of various candles. They do smoke cleanses using plants believed to hold spiritual power. The cleansing material is lit on fire, then blown out so that it is smoldering and releasing smoke. The smoke is what does the cleansing of the space and the atmosphere. Khoa's cleansing is just one example of the type of non-Christian practices that may be used for dealing with demons. Oftentimes ghost hunters will note that the particular religious tradition or ritual of a cleansing or clearing does not matter as much as the power of the clearer's "intention." It is the power of a practitioner's intention or will in an exorcism or clearing that makes the ritual effective.

Though many or most ghost hunters are interested in demons, not every ghost hunter believes in them. A particular ghost hunter might not believe in demons for a variety of reasons. At times, demons do not fit into a particular ghost hunter's theology or cosmology. A ghost hunter may align themselves closely with professionalized parapsychology. The founders of psychical research who led and wrote for the Society for Psychical Research in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were not particularly interested in demons and were more likely to see accounts of exorcism and the demonic as folklore or mental pathology rather than legitimately supernatural activity. The same can be said for the founders of laboratory parapsychology later in the twentieth century. In 1949, laboratory researcher J.B. Rhine, who could be considered the founder of modern parapsychology, was alerted to the case of alleged demonic possession that would later inspire William Peter Blatty to write *The Exorcist*. In the case, Rhine did not see diabolical activity. Instead, he saw evidence for psychokinesis and theorized that the demonic phenomena were caused by the power of the young victim's unconscious mind.<sup>31</sup>

Nineteenth century Spiritualists and turn-of-the-twentieth-century psychical researchers were not as fascinated by demons as twenty-first-century ghost hunters, even though they all share a scientific quest to prove the reality of spirit phenomena, ultimately because demons did not fit into Spiritualist cosmology. Spiritualists saw all souls and God as fundamentally good. Upon death, a human soul entered an eternal progression into higher and higher levels of enlightenment, and souls could then share this higher wisdom with seance sitters. There was little room for demons in this optimistic universe. Psychical research has its roots in Spiritualism and was founded to investigate spiritualist phenomena. On top of this, psychical researchers at the turn of the twentieth century may have been more skeptical of the supernatural than twenty-first-century ghost hunters. In fact, though many Spiritualists joined the Society for Psychical Research at its founding, there was a large-scale Spiritualist exodus from the Society in 1886 after prominent investigator Nora Sidgwick published a report stating that popular medium William Eglinton was a fraud.<sup>32</sup> Like the founders of laboratory parapsychology, many psychical researchers likely saw belief in demonic possession as delusion or manifestations of misunderstood altered states of consciousness. Another possibility is illustrated by William James in his 1896 Lowell Lectures on exceptional mental states. There he equates demonic possession in his time with Spiritualist phenomena. He believes the frightening experiences of

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<sup>31</sup> William J. Birnes and Joel Martin, *The Haunting of Twentieth-Century America* (Tom Doherty Associates, 2011), 356.

<sup>32</sup> John Beloff, *Parapsychology: A Concise History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 75-76; Gauld, 203-204.

demon possession of yesteryear have been replaced in his day with positive experiences of mediumship.<sup>33</sup>

Like the Spiritualists, some ghost hunters may also hold a theology or spirituality that does not leave room for an objectively, totally, and essentially evil being like a demon. Many of the ghost hunters in this category still leave room for spirits that behave badly or in evil ways without being objectively, totally, and essentially evil, as they are depicted in the Catholic tradition of the Warrens and some other Christian strains of thought. Defining demons as objectively and essentially evil is important for many ghost hunters, as will be seen later when I discuss experiences of the demonic. For the purposes of this chapter, I will only call those spirits that are evil in this way demons. As I will show, many ghost hunters themselves make this distinction when discussing whether they believe in demons.

Some of the ghost hunters who reject the existence of demons as I have defined them hold what Catherine Albanese would classify as metaphysical spirituality.<sup>34</sup> This type of spirituality includes New Age spirituality, New Thought, and theosophy. In these spiritualities, the cosmos is essentially good even if individual souls sometimes experience trauma or lack enlightenment, causing them to fail to express fully their own goodness. Some beings behave badly, but they are not essentially evil beings. A variant of this metaphysical outlook can be found especially among people who identify as witches or some variety of pagan. Rather than focusing on the idea that the cosmos is ultimately good, they will emphasize the ambiguity in all things. Jodi, a pagan and ghost hunter from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, believes demons are a “heavily Christianized construct.” While she does not use the term demon, she does “believe that there is evil, that there are things of near full darkness;” however, she continues, “I do not feel things are so black and white, purely or absolutely good or evil. As such, I don’t see even dark entities as without use or recourse.”

### **Rudolf Otto and Demonic Experiences**

One reason many contemporary American ghost hunters value or crave encounters with the demonic is because those encounters function as powerful religious experiences. They are powerful in both their emotional intensity and effectiveness as well as in their ability to grant cosmological assurance. By cosmological assurance, I mean reassurance about the way our cosmos or the universe and reality in which we live is structured. Demonic experiences are more cosmologically reassuring than simple experiences of spirits of the dead. An experience of spirits of the dead is evidence of the persistence of life after death, which is often very comforting for an individual. An experience of a demon is evidence not only of a spirit world, but of the potentially more comforting existence of a greater moral order to the cosmos and the existence of a good higher power. A demonic experience has more cosmological significance than an experience of spirits of the dead.

When I call demonic experiences religious experiences, I want readers to recognize that experiences of the demonic can be just as impactful and significant in the lives of experiencers as any experience we traditionally label “religious,” such as mystical experiences or ecstatic worship experiences. We can conceptualize demonic encounters as religious experiences by

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<sup>33</sup> Eugene Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States: The 1896 Lowell Lectures* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 93-95.

<sup>34</sup> On metaphysical religion and ghost hunting, see chapter three on scientism.

using the lens provided by early-twentieth-century German theologian and philosopher of religion Rudolf Otto.

Otto argued that when one encounters the numinous, one experiences a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.<sup>35</sup> Put simply, the numinous, for Otto, is the divine. To be more precise, it is that indescribable, transcendent thing one encounters when one encounters the holy. It is that part of the holy that is left over once you take away the aspect of holy that means completely good or morally right. According to Otto, the term holy has “a clear overplus of meaning” once you subtract that part of its meaning that means completely good, and that overplus is what is captured by the term numinous.<sup>36</sup> Otto goes as far as to say this powerful, transcendent aspect of the holy was what was originally meant by some of the early terms for holy, such as the Hebrew *qadosh*, the Greek *hagios*, and the Latin *sanctus*, before they later came to mean good or morally right.

Otto, as a Christian theologian, believed that he was naming something supernatural, divine, or transcendent when he used the term numinous. For Otto, the numinous was of God. This element of Otto’s thought might be objectionable to readers or scholars who want to examine religious experience without appealing to the existence of the supernatural.<sup>37</sup> Fortunately, it is not necessary for us to adopt Otto’s theology in order to use his terms and his lens. Otto can be useful whether you want to grant the existence of God or the supernatural or not. We need only grant that many people have the experience of encountering something they would term divine or transcendent during religious experiences.<sup>38</sup>

Otto describes the experience of the numinous as a *mysterium tremendum* - a terrifying mystery. Otto writes that *mysterium* “denotes merely that which is hidden and esoteric, that which is beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar.”<sup>39</sup> *Tremendum* is only meant to evoke fear or terror as an analogy. It is not the common fear of something scary. It is more akin to the holy fear of the Hebrew Bible, the “fear of God” or “fear of the Lord.” Otto suggests the closest English word to his sense of *tremendum* might be “awful” as long as we maintain its association with the word “awe.” To imagine how fear or terror might be associated

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<sup>35</sup> As far as I can tell, nowhere in *Das Heilige* does Otto use the phrase *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* even though many commentators have used this phrase to summarize and communicate his ideas. Otto frequently uses *mysterium tremendum*, and he has an in depth discussion on the term *fascinans*, but never does he join all of the terms together.

<sup>36</sup> Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 5.

I am using John W. Harvey’s 1929 English translation of Otto’s work. I feel comfortable doing so especially because Otto himself approved of the translation, writing, “An English critic has said that ‘the translation is much better than the original’; and to this I have nothing to object.”

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> Eminent historian of American religion Robert Orsi has come to the defense of Otto and his concept of religious experience. Orsi argues that the religious studies scholar often finds that their subjects encounter something not accounted for in social and cultural reductionist accounts of religion. The divine is real to their subjects in a way that problematizes scholarly attempts to bracket the question of whether the supernatural is real. There is something extra in the equation of religious experience: “2 + 2 = 5.” Orsi stops short of arguing that the something extra in religious experience is supernatural, and I will as well. Orsi’s argument and defense is useful in that it allows us, in the case of ghost hunters’ demonic experiences, to consider more clearly how those experiences feel for believers and the effects of how those experiences feel. See Robert A. Orsi, “The Problem of the Holy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert A. Orsi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 99.

<sup>39</sup> Otto, 13.

with experiences of the numinous, one might reference the theophanies of the Hebrew Bible. In particular, one can look at Exodus chapter 20 in the Hebrew Bible, that pivotal chapter where God gives Moses the Ten Commandments. After Moses and his brother Aaron receive the commandments on Mt. Sinai, they find the people of Israel standing before the mountain terrified by the presence of God:

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.’ Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin.’ Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.<sup>40</sup>

We find another example of fear in an experience of the numinous in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. In the gospel of Luke in the New Testament, there is an account of angels appearing before shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus, and the entire angelic display is depicted as terrifying:

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

How, then, is Otto’s *mysterium tremendum* related to the fear ghost hunters experience when encountering demons? Otto writes that the antecedent stage to fear of the numinous or “religious dread” is “daemoniac dread.”<sup>41</sup> Otto is using the term daemoniac in its ancient Greek sense. In ancient Greek thought, a *daemon* was a superhuman spirit which could vary in power and moral temperament and was often conceived of as less than a god. Though we eventually get the English word “demon” from this term, *daemons* were not conceived of as necessarily evil. They varied in temperament like the classical gods of the Greek Pantheon on Mt. Olympus. Otto sees daemoniac dread as an antecedent stage to religious dread because, like many Western scholars of his time, he sought to rank forms of religion in terms of how civilized, advanced, beautiful, and good they were. Otto’s view is also evolutionary, with more primitive forms of religion evolving into more civilized forms of religion. At the bottom of the religion hierarchy would lie things like magic and animist forms of religion, while at the top would lie modern Western (especially Protestant) Christianity. Otto’s assumption is that a phase of fear and worship of daemons or powerful spirits in a society, Greek or not, proceeds and is lesser than the fear and worship of gods as part of what might truly be called a religion. Otto is granting that an encounter with a powerful spirit is closely related to or even a form of the experience of the *mysterium tremendum* of the truly numinous. Otto also includes among primitive forms of *mysterium tremendum* the “dread of ghosts.” Otto calls the dread of ghosts a “queer perversion, a

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<sup>40</sup> Though Otto does discuss the Old Testament as a rich source of numinous dread, I do not believe he ever cites this passage in particular. He does cite one of Luther’s sermons on Exodus 20.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

sort of abortive off-shoot” of daemonic dread, yet he still recognizes the affinity between dread of ghosts, daemonic dread, and dread of the truly numinous. Ultimately, the *mysterium tremendum* experience “first begins to stir in the feeling of ‘something uncanny’, ‘eerie’, or ‘weird’” like one would experience when encountering a ghost or hearing a ghost story.<sup>42</sup>

By outlining the more “primitive” forms of numinous dread, Otto paves the way for us to link demonic horror with religious experience and to even paint demonic horror as a type of religious experience. If we do away with Otto’s hierarchy of religions, we can recognize that dread of ghosts, daemonic dread, and religious dread are not actually separate categories or stops along an evolutionary progression. We can say that all of these forms of dread are some sort of numinous dread. They all fall under the category of religious experience. Otto himself begins to move in this direction when he draws an analogy between daemonic experiences transitioning into divine experiences and a man’s taste in music becoming more refined. He explains that a man with an uncultured ear “may be enraptured by the sound of the bagpipes or the hurdy-gurdy,” though after he progresses in his musical education, he can no longer bear the sound. Nevertheless, the man would have to admit to himself that the feeling conjured and the faculties he employed were the same when he listened to the bagpipes and hurdy-gurdy then and when he listens to more refined music now.<sup>43</sup> Otto’s concept of numinous dread is valuable as a phenomenological description of at least some common forms of religious experience. As our excerpts from Exodus and Luke above begin to show, and as Otto shows in his own work, terror or fear or dread of a specific sort is often a major component of religious experience. Often present in an experience of the divine is a “fear of the Lord.”

### **Ghost Hunters’ Experiences of the Demonic**

Fear or dread is usually one of the central components of a ghost hunter’s demonic encounter. Paranormal investigators who claim to have encountered the demonic often describe the event as not only one of their most intense experiences, but also as a horror beyond all horrors. As one would expect from an encounter with a *mysterium tremendum*, people often describe demonic horror with a sense of awe. Lorraine Warren describes one encounter with a demon: “I could not begin to relate the sheer desperate terror I felt as that morbid black thing inside the whirlwind came closer and closer to me. I tried to move, but I couldn’t. I tried to scream, but no words came out! I felt a sense of doom then that I have never felt before.”<sup>44</sup> A Miami-based paranormal investigator with whom I spoke likened the feeling of coming face-to-face with a demon to the initial shock of encountering one’s greatest fear drawn out indefinitely. Bishop James Long, a demonologist of the American Old Catholic Church, describes encounters with demons as follows:

the pure hatred will rattle your entire body. When you are in the presence of true hatred, the desire to see beyond what you are feeling emotionally will immediately subside. The desire to want to see the entity that is causing such emotional turmoil will cease to exist. Standing in front of something that has pure hate for you is an experience one never forgets. The hatred and evil is more powerful than any other emotion you will ever experience in your life. A complete dread engulfs your entire being.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>44</sup> Brittle, 6.

<sup>45</sup> Long, 100.

From these examples, we can see that demonic experiences can be as powerful as any other religious experience.

Demonic experiences' continuity with other less-ambiguous experiences of religious dread is not the only aspect that marks them as powerful religious experiences. Demonic experiences are also profoundly cosmologically significant. They are potent experiences that prove to the experiencer not only the reality of the supernatural, but also the reality of a divine moral order. The blatant evil of the demonic assumes the existence of cosmic good and evil.

Strictly speaking, the experiences of the *mysterium tremendum* Otto describes are amoral. Otto-type experiences simply evoke awe at the numinous other. Moral knowledge does not flow automatically from these experiences. In the case of ghost hunters' demonic experiences, a further conclusion is drawn after the awful experience. Part of what evokes awe in a demonic experience is the pure hatred and evil one feels when confronted with a demon. As my examples show, ghost hunters often draw the conclusion that evil is an objective reality and the cosmos is ordered into the categories of good and evil, with God as the ultimate good that counterbalances demonic evil. Strictly speaking, Otto experiences do not convey moral knowledge, but ghost hunters draw moral cosmological conclusions from demonic experiences.

Gerald Brittle, who wrote *The Demonologist*, a book detailing many of Ed and Lorraine Warren's demonic encounters from the 1970s, comments on the cosmic significance of these encounters: "When considered in totality, what the Warrens say cannot help but challenge our whole notion of life, death, and man's place on this planet."<sup>46</sup> For an example of the way demonic experiences can affect a ghost hunter's worldview, one can turn to the reflections of prominent paranormal investigator and demonologist John Zaffis. Zaffis is well-known in ghost hunting circles and even at one time had his own Syfy Channel reality series called *Haunted Collector*, in which Zaffis located haunted objects in the homes of people seeking help and safely removed them. In his 2004 book *Shadows of the Dark*, Zaffis describes the religious doubts he held before getting involved in paranormal investigation and demonology: "I was never a strong Catholic beforehand at all. I grew up in the 1970s and we questioned everything, and I mean everything. We questioned the Devil, we questioned God, and we questioned our parents and society." Things changed when he began his career as a paranormal investigator and began encountering demons: "It opened my eyes up...If these things could really happen and there are such things as demonic influences, I was ever more convinced that there had to be a Higher Power, or there has to be a God. With me, when you look at something, there is black and white, there's Yin and Yang, there are always two sides to everything. If there is a negative here, [there] has to be a positive." Zaffis held a desire for proof of the reality of the divine, and he was not satisfied to rest on traditional religious claims alone. He says, "Sure, I was taught in [Catholic] school that God existed, that spirit was real, but I never really accepted any of it at all. These types of [demonic] experiences started to make me realize that there is definitely a Higher Being, which I refer to as God."<sup>47</sup> Tiffany, a paranormal investigator based in Maryland, describes in her bio on her paranormal group's website how her view of the cosmos has been affected in a similar way by her experiences of the demonic: "I've never been religious, regardless of the fact that I was raised in the Catholic church. But, I've seen enough to know that there is true evil in

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<sup>46</sup> Brittle, x.

<sup>47</sup> Zaffis and McIntyre, 7-11.

the universe, and much of it hiding among us. If that evil exist[s], then a supreme good has to exist as well. I think that extreme good, who or whatever it is, put me here to do what I do.”<sup>48</sup>

I can provide one case study that aptly demonstrates the religious significance and enchanting power of demonic experience. I interviewed one ghost hunter, a dentist in Iowa, who became a “Christian,” a term he uses as a general term, and then a Roman Catholic as a result of his experiences with the demonic. He reports that the beginning of his move from being not particularly religious to being a Christian was a specific incident he experienced in the eighth grade. For a period of time, he had been having paranormal experiences. He was having nightmares, he was seeing three-to-four-foot-tall shadow figures running around, and he was hearing knocking on his bedroom walls. One night, an eight-foot-tall black shadow in the form of a hooded figure appeared in his bedroom. He hopped out of his bed and began praying more fervently than he ever had before. This caused the shadow figure to disappear, and he was never bothered again until he encountered dark forces through ghost hunting later in his life. He tried to interpret this experience from “a science-minded point of view.” He explains, “I had a phenomena [sic] that was going on, my independent variable was that I prayed, and after that, I had no more phenomenon.” When I asked if the experience was a conversion experience for him, he explained that the event convinced him that God or a higher power exists, something that is more powerful than the forces that had been plaguing him. Prior to the event he was involved in the Christian youth ministry Young Life, but he found himself persistently questioning the existence of God. This questioning is unsurprising given that his father was an atheist, and his mother was a Unitarian. The shadow figure event “made God absolutely, 100% a reality” for him. The conversion to Catholicism came much later and arose out of a process of reasoning from the starting premise that the demonic is real. He explains, “the big kicker for me is that...I know that the demonic thing is for real...and I know that God exists and can clear this stuff up and can kick this stuff out. And so therefore, if the Catholic Church has a 2000-year history of being, basically, paranormal investigators and able to...perform exorcisms, perform blessings, and all that sort of thing and it works, the only conclusion that I can come to is that...God is real, Jesus is real, and [the Bible’s general message about angels and demons is real]...if it’s not real, why does this stuff work?” When I told him it sounded like his paranormal experiences led him to become Catholic, he responded, “that’s 100% true.”

Timothy K. Beal, in his work on monster theory, builds on Otto’s likening of religious experience to terror. He argues that monsters are monstrous because they are “otherness within sameness.” They are, as Freud says, *unheimlich* or uncanny. Beal holds that there are two primary reactions to the monstrous – it is either demonized or deified. When monsters are demonized they are labeled a threat to “our” order and the “order of the gods.” When they are deified they are marked as a “revelation of sacred otherness.” Beal notes that, often, the monstrous is both demonized and deified. This is what we see in ghost hunters’ encounters with the demonic. The demon is of course demonized as a violation of all that is good and holy, yet it is also treated, often not consciously, as a revelation of divine order in the cosmos. Demons violate the good and orderly while also making the good and orderly real.<sup>49</sup>

Experiences of the demonic are religious experiences. They have no less power to orient the lives of people than other experiences traditionally labeled “religious.” Through Otto’s lens,

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<sup>48</sup> “Investigators,” Spectral-Echo Paranormal Association, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://spectralechoparanormal.weebly.com/investigators.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 5-10.

we can see that demonic experiences are phenomenologically similar to other powerful experiences we deem “religious.” Otto may have been wrong about the *sui generis* nature of religious experience, but he provides insights into what religious experiences feel like for those who experience them and the emotional effects they leave. Beal reminds readers that Otto believed in a “transcendent wholly other” and even in the introduction to *The Idea of the Holy*, the work where Otto introduces his ideas about encounters with the numinous, he “discourages readers from reading his book if they have not had such an experience of the sacred.” Beal does not so discourage readers and neither do I. Like Beal, I see value in Otto’s likening of experiences of the holy to experiences of terror despite his theological commitments. We can liken the terror of a perceived encounter with God to the terror of a perceived encounter with a demon.<sup>50</sup>

Around the United States, ghost hunters are longing for the terror of the demonic. They crave an experience of the numinous from its dark side. Ghostly experiences give them a taste of the *mysterium tremendum*, but an experience of the demonic intensifies the encounter with the numinous. A ghostly experience provides evidence of the reality of the supernatural and perhaps the soul, but a demonic experience provides more powerful evidence of the supernatural and establishes some order in the cosmos. It is not all meaningless and relative: good and evil truly exist, as attested by the existence of essentially evil spiritual monsters.

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<sup>50</sup> Beal, 7.