

World is not a battleground for Satan, Mary

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

There is a certain type of Catholic for whom religion has to do mainly with Satan, Mary, and the pope.

Ordinary, everyday life is a minefield of demonic activity. Satan is behind every major natural disaster and personally orchestrates every expression of moral evil.

According to such Catholics, Satan spends most of his leisure hours inciting theologians to disobedience against the pope and other forms of intellectual depravity. He may have even instigated the feminist movement. Who knows, perhaps the Second Vatican Council as well?

Satan's chief and most powerful adversary, according to this unique eschatological theory, is Mary, the Mother of the Lord. It is Mary who, over the cen-

turies, has been holding Satan's arm in check. It is Mary's foot that presses against the Evil One's neck, keeping his face buried in the ground.

But Mary only seems to employ her considerable powers against Satan if she is asked — indeed almost cajoled.

People must pray the rosary. The pope must consecrate the world to her Immaculate Heart or declare a Marian Year. Shrines must be opened. Devotions must proliferate.

The view of human history proposed by such Catholics is one in which Satan and Mary are constantly intervening in world events as perennial adversaries.

They are the major players on the stage of history, not Ronald Reagan, or George Bush, or Mikhail Gorbachev, or the leaders of the People's Republic of China.

The real forces at work in the world are not political or economic or social, but spiritual. They are Satan and Mary locked together in combat in a manner reminiscent of an old Star Trek episode on television.

John Cornwell's recent article on the Medjugorje phenomenon in *The Tablet* of London (April 7 issue) echoes the forgoing impressions.

He himself heard the pilgrims being told week in and week out that Our Lady's message is that things will go well in the world if there is a return to the rosary, but things may go badly if there is not.

The atmosphere at Medjugorje, Cornwell reports, "is rife with the feeling that the Virgin needs to be appeased, and with the threat of impending doom: Chernobyl, AIDS, the earthquakes in the Soviet Union and in California, even the crash of the



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space shuttle (he) heard cited as 'chastisements' in Medjugorje by priests leading pilgrimages from Ireland, Britain, and America."

In this view, "Our Lady is controlling, and indeed sanctioning, in a quite literal way, acts of global retribution — 'chastisements'..."

On the evening Cornwell left Medjugorje, a Franciscan asked him to describe his reactions.

"I think I am going home to read the gospels again," he replied.

"Dear Mister John," the Franciscan said gently, laying a hand on Cornwell's shoulder, "wouldn't it be best for you to read Our Lady's messages?"

"These were his last words to me," Cornwell wrote, "and I find them even more distressing now than I did two years ago."

Over against this apocalyptic view of Catholicism in which Satan, Mary and — to a lesser extent — the pope are the dominant figures, is a more traditional view which places Jesus, the Eucharist, and ministry at the center.

Catholic faith is about Jesus and His gospel, i.e., the *good news* of salvation. As the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World put it, Jesus came "to rescue and not to sit in judgment" (n. 3).

Jesus issued warnings, but they were directed mainly against those who closed their hearts to the poor or who self-righteously set themselves above others or who refused to forgive their neighbor or who turned religion into a business or who made laws or rules more important than people.

Catholic faith is also about the Eucharist, which the Council described as "the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed" and "the fountain from which all her power flows" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, n. 10).

Authentic Catholic piety is centered on the Eucharist, not on private devotions, no matter how useful or spiritually fruitful they may be for specific individuals.

Finally, authentic Catholic piety should normally lead us to practice the ministry, i.e., to a life in service to our brothers and sisters in need: the homeless, the poor, the bereaved, the handicapped, the aged, the oppressed.

"This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

Teachers of God's truth cannot be suppressed

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

Gamaliel got up and began dressing before dawn. All night, his anxiety had weighed on his mind like a huge stone. What was the truth? He was supposed to be a teacher of the law, an upholder of the truth. And yet, he had stood by and been in agreement with the jailing of the followers of Jesus.

The truth was that a great miracle had occurred outside of the temple in Jerusalem. A beggar, who had been lame for over 40 years, was suddenly walking. A great crowd had gathered in the temple courtyard to hear his story. "Look at me! I can walk! Those two men over there cured me," he cried pointing at Peter and John, two of the followers of Jesus.

For their part, the two men took no credit for the miracle. "Faith in the name of Jesus Christ has cured him. Jesus was the Messiah promised long ago by God through the prophets."

Gamaliel was surprised when he heard Peter and John speak. Both men had all of the appearances of rough, uneducated laborers. But their speech was as eloquent and polished as men of schooling.

Peter's next words were his undoing: "What you did to Jesus Christ was out of ignorance. His crucifixion and death were



all part of God's plan to save people from their sins. Jesus conquered death by rising on the third day. Now all who believe in Jesus will receive eternal life."

What was truth? The priests had sent the temple police to arrest Peter and John after that. They were brought before the council and ordered to stop preaching about Jesus Christ.

Before they left the council, Peter turned to the members and asked, "Which is right — to obey God or men?"

The preaching by these apostles had gone on as before. Shortly thereafter, Peter and John were arrested and put in jail. Today they would be brought before the council again.

What was truth? Gamaliel decided that he would go to the prison and speak to Peter and John before the council convened. He finished dressing and proceeded quickly to the prison.

"Where are the followers of Jesus?"

Gamaliel asked the guard on duty.

"Gone, without a trace," the guard replied.

"Well did anyone see them escape?" Gamaliel asked.

"It is a very strange thing. These men are gone. And yet, the prison doors remain locked. None of the guards on duty saw anything. This morning, someone reported that they saw these men preaching at the temple," the guard said.

When Peter and John were finally brought in before the council that day, no one made any mention of the prison incident. Instead they said, "You were warned to stop telling people about Jesus Christ. We continue to receive reports to the contrary. What do you have to say?"

"We are witnesses to all that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, did," John replied. "And we will continue to tell others of the truth about him in obedience."

The council members were so furious that some of them talked of putting the followers of Jesus to death. But Gamaliel made a different recommendation.

"I advise caution in this matter. There have been many other movements in Jerusalem before. Some of the leaders also gained considerable followings," he said. "When they died, their movements came to nothing. Leave these men alone. If what they teach is of human origin, it, too, will come to nothing. But, if this is true teaching from God, you will soon find yourself fighting against God himself."

Scripture reference: Acts 3-4:22; 5:17-42.

Meditation: "So Jesus said to all those who believed in Him: 'If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples; you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'" (John 8:31-32).

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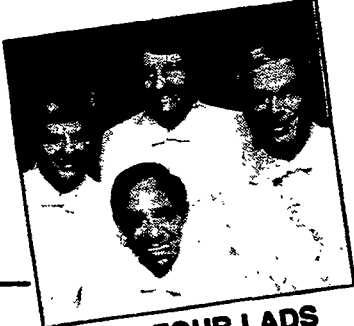
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