

Airing of 'exorcism' showed hidden agenda

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

In mid-April our attention was drawn once again to the topic of exorcism in the church. ABC-TV devoted half of its popular "20/20" program to what it proudly billed as the first exorcism ever shown on national television.

I would suspect that the reaction to this episode varied from group to group within the Catholic Church.

My impression is that many (probably most) parish priests were either very uneasy about, or strongly opposed to, the televising of the "exorcism." Indeed, every priest I spoke with before and after the event was against televising it.

Parish priests have a pastoral sense, and their pastoral sense tells them: (1) that you never invade the privacy of an intimately spiritual encounter (be it the confession of sins, a counseling session, or, in this case, an alleged exorcism); and (2) that you always have to be concerned about a negative "spill-over" effect of events of this sort.

Many disturbed individuals live in the world, and viewing an alleged exorcism on television only serves to heighten their state of anxiety. Some of them might be led to believe that they, too, are possessed.

A second group-reaction would be that of the college-educated Catholic, whom recent scientific surveys reveal to be

among the most actively committed to their church — ministerially and financially.

If initial reactions are reliable, many in this group viewed the "exorcism" episode as part of a broader pattern of recent developments, which have been pushing them to the margins of their church.

These Catholics testify that they are being made to feel that their own experience and intelligence can't be trusted, that they have to be protected from dangerous ideas, and that "Father" (ultimately, "the Holy Father") still knows best.

The faith of such Catholics has nothing to do with weeping statues, spinning suns, Marian apparitions or alleged exorcisms.

For Catholics who have had the benefit



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of a college or university education (including up-to-date courses in theology and Sacred Scripture), this is the bizarre side of Catholicism. They thought it had all been left behind with the council.

Not so. The fact of the matter is that the recently deceased Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre was not alone in his refusal (or inability) to internalize the Catholicism of Vatican II.

Many others in the church still have never really been transformed by the council. They simply have not undergone the conversion experience which the late Cardinal John Dearden of Detroit so often spoke about in relation to his own participation in the council.

These are the Catholics who still cling to a Catholicism of miraculous medals, of private revelations, of devils and fallen angels, of Marian sightings, of papal commands, of unquestioned obedience, of deferential women and of sexual repression.

Perhaps the bishop of West Palm Beach — where the "exorcism" took place — let the cat out of the bag when he suggested that the televising of the event might convince people that the devil is real and that demonic possession still occurs.

The archbishop of New York implied as much last year when he caused a national stir with his reference, in a homily at St. Patrick's Cathedral, to exorcisms performed within the archdiocese.

Significantly, the archbishop did not say "No" when one of his own priests asked permission to go forward with the "exorcism" project for ABC Television.

The real objective of that project, I submit, was to help bring back that old-time religion when everyone, women especially, knew their place, when Catholics obeyed without question every directive from on high, and when there was never any question that the Catholic Church was the one, true church with all the answers to all the important questions we have about life, both here and hereafter.

From time to time, we have to name what's going on. And in naming it, perhaps we might also "exorcise" it of its power over us and the church.

Jesus promises apostles he will always be near

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

All of those closest to Jesus had come with him to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. The sun was just coming up over the mountain and the garden was bathed with its light and warmth.

It was far different from the last time they had all come to this place together.

"It is good for us to be here again," reflected Peter. "Especially now that we know the whole story."

"I had a terrible feeling last time," John said. "I could feel that something awful was going to happen."

Matthew looked around at the others. "Well, I still have that feeling that something is about to happen," he said.

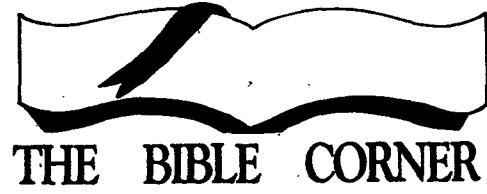
"What do you mean?" Peter asked.

Before Matthew answered, Jesus, who had been off in the distance praying, came and joined them. "Come," Jesus said, "let us walk together."

The small group headed toward the Mount of Olives. "Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?" one of the apostles asked him.

"It is not important for you to know when that will happen," Jesus replied. "My father sets the time for that. What is important now is for you all to go everywhere and be my witnesses."

"Lord, we are ready," Peter said



eagerly. "Where should we begin?"

"Not just yet," Jesus smiled gently. "First I want you to go back to Jerusalem and wait until I send my spirit to help you."

"It sounds like you are leaving us again," Matthew said anxiously. "Aren't you coming with us, too?"

"No, I am going," Jesus said. "But you won't really be alone. When the spirit comes, you will remember everything I taught you while we were together. The spirit will help you be my faithful witnesses."

"It won't be the same without you here with us?" cried Peter. "You are our best friend."

"And you are my special friends," Jesus said. "Yes, it won't be the same. But I promise that I will still be with you all in a different way."

"We won't be able to talk with you," John said.

"I'll hear you when you pray to me," Jesus told them. "Tell me everything that's

on your minds and in your hearts. There are ways that I will speak to you if you pay attention for my answers."

Jesus paused and looked around at their downcast faces. "I will be here with you especially when you break the bread and bless the wine," he said.

They had reached a place at the top of the Mount of Olives. Jesus blessed each one of them and whispered a special word as he hugged them.

"I have another promise which I want you never to forget," Jesus said. "Someday I am coming back for you and all of my followers. Everyone who believes in me receives the gift of eternal life."

Before any of the apostles could say anything more, Jesus' face and body became so radiant that it was like looking directly into the sun. As they knelt to the ground, a strong wind blew overhead. They didn't dare look up again until it was quiet. Jesus was gone.

"What are you all waiting for?" a voice suddenly cried out. Two men with white robes stood where Jesus had once been.

"Go back to Jerusalem and wait as he told you," the other man said. "Jesus will return someday just as he promised."

"Come on," Peter urged. "There is much to do. We must choose another apostle to take the place of Judas. Soon Jesus will send the spirit to help us."

Scripture reference: Acts 1:1-11.
Meditation: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

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To recognize the achievements of seniors at both public and Catholic high schools throughout the Diocese of Rochester, the *Catholic Courier* will present a special **Graduation '91** supplement in its issue of **June 13**.

This annual section includes feature articles, listings of graduating seniors, information on commencement exercises, and photographs of class valedictorians and salutatorians.

Parishes throughout the diocese are being asked to submit lists of parishioners who are graduating from public high schools. Parents who wish to have their sons and daughters included in these parish lists should contact their pastors or religious-education coordinator as soon as possible. We cannot accept any names over the telephone.

This annual supplement has long been among our most popular, and local companies and organizations should find it an ideal opportunity to promote their enterprises while applauding the scholastic efforts of diocesan youths.

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