

# Belief in the devil does not preclude intelligence

To the editors:

Father McBrien's article regarding the TV viewing of the exorcism on "20/20" seemed to imply that most intelligent, college-educated Catholics, are too sophisticated to believe in the real existence of the devil. He went on to write 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 the Holy Father still knows best."

Dear Father McBrien, you have wrongly excluded those Catholics who are college-educated, who do believe Jesus fought the

devil, and who believe totally in the directives of the Holy Father. Many Catholic leaders wonder why so many Catholics have lost their faith; it is because the supernatural has been yawned at by the current new age of intellectualism.

Within the Catholic Church there are many of us who believe the biblical truths affirmed by Marian sightings, recently including Medjugorje. These intelligent Catholics love and follow their Pope and do believe the doctrinal truth that the Evil One, the devil and his demons, exist.

My future wife believes the teachings of the One Holy Catholic Church which state



that there should be no birth-control except the rhythm method, and that abortion is murder. She is a educated nurse, and as well, she believes in the existence of the devil. The most important advice she has given me is that the devil wants us to believe that he "does not exist," and therefore, we must pray to God for discernment and for protection.

If any intelligent Catholic is to believe in the mercy of God, he must believe in Jesus. If he believes in Jesus, the risen Lord, he must believe that Jesus exists in a world that is more knowledgeable about the devil than any mortal can be. If Jesus exorcised immortal evil-spirits 2,000 years ago, then those same spirits must exist today. An intelligent believer can only conclude that possession by immortal evil spirits is possible. How this happens is beyond our mere, limited intelligence.

As for the Marian sightings, columnist Father Shamon reported that a scientist took a Geiger-counter to test the apparition in Medjugorje. The Geiger-counter read normal until the children became aware of an apparition of Mary, then the counter read 300,000. Explaining that extremely high reading is impossible for the most intelligent Catholic. Faith, on the other hand explains it all. Our "faith," Sacred Scriptures says, "is substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). My faith tells me that the devil is real and the "20/20" program was allowed by God to show that reality. The show proved that Jesus is more powerful than Satan.

Frank L. Nett

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## Columnist's conclusions stem from intellectual pride

To the editors:

As a regular reader of Richard McBrien's "Essays in Theology" column and a "student" of his — I'm part-way through his 1,300 page *Catholicism* — I was very interested in his reaction to the exorcism shown on "20/20." I watched both the show and the subsequent discussion on "Nightline" in which he participated. And, I just finished reading his column on the subject that appeared in the (May 2) *Courier*.

His statements on "Nightline" suggested strongly that his primary reason for not believing in demons and demonic oppression is that it makes one look ridiculous. This conclusion is enhanced by his column in which intelligence and a good education are equated with rejection of all that seems "bizarre" in our tradition.

As he states, 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. What I see going on is named "intellectual pride." And, it's still a sin. One cannot help being reminded of St. Paul, who revelled in the opportunity to look the fool for Christ.

I am 37 years old, college educated, and deeply involved in and committed to the Church — ministerially and financially. I think my credentials as a liberal, educated Catholic are fairly well-established. As Father McBrien says, my faith does not depend on "weeping statues, spinning suns, Marian apparitions or alleged exorcisms." It depends on my personal experience of Jesus Christ and on an extensive education in the history of the Church. However, nothing about my faith or my experience or my intelligence precludes belief in demons, apparitions, or private rev-

elations. Nor am I unable to find value in the use of sacramentals, where their use is properly understood.

I think the real objective of the "20/20" project was exactly what they said it was — i.e., to let people know the church has power over the demonic. My only reservation about the show was that they talked about the extremes of possession and exorcism with only passing mention to the much more common and more easily rectified instances of oppression.

Richard McBrien can't prove demons don't exist and he certainly can't prove that believing in them makes one stupid, uneducated, and repressed. I resent his presumption in trying.

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## Fasting and sacrifice can lead to new peace in the Lord

To the editors:

There are two very important yet practically non-existent practices within our Church today. They are the practices of fasting and sacrifice.

On my last pilgrimage to Medjugorje, I was bombarded with the message to fast and make sacrifices. Our Lady at Medjugorje stresses that prayer and fasting as

well as sacrifices go together like peanut butter and jelly. She says that with prayer and fasting natural laws can be suspended and wars avoided. She wants us to do this strictly on Wednesday and Fridays. A bread and water fast is what she calls for, but if this is impossible cutting down on meals, doing without dessert, or even eating regular meals with no in-between

snacks also would do. Jesus tells us to fast not to show off to hold it over someone's head who does not fast (Luke 18:9-14). Jesus also tells us that we should not be miserable about it. Better not to fast at all if we are going to behave in this manner! We should groom our hair and wash our face and be cheerful about fasting and self-sacrifices (Luke 6:16-18).

When we do this, we give back to God what He has given to us. We unite ourselves with Our Lord who fasted for forty days in the desert. We grow in a spiritual strength to destroy the power of Satan in our lives in our world this is called mortification.

We can and must expect temptation when we fast and sacrifice ourselves. The Devil tempted Jesus. He will tempt us as well.

Through fasting, I have learned what it is like to be hungry on a small scale. I realize that while I do without two meals a day and in-between meal snacks out of my own choice, many are forced to accept one meal. I have learned to be grateful for my blessings in life.

A sacrifice is an act of self-denial. Our Blessed Mother at Medjugorje suggested that a good sacrifice for us would be to do without television and radios. If we turned off our sets for one day, we would have time to say a rosary, go to Mass, read Scripture plus any number of secular activities could get accomplished.

At Fatima, Our Lady urged us to pray and make sacrifices for poor sinners. As Mary told the children, "Many souls go to Hell because they have no one to make sacrifices and pray for them!" Remember, that was in 1917! It hasn't gotten better.

Our Lord asked us through St. Margaret Mary Alacoque to make a holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament. This definitely calls for sacrifices. Especially for those faithful who go to Church in the wee hours of the morning for nocturnal adoration.

I will conclude on a practical note. Be reasonable with fasting and self-sacrifice. If you mess up, you can start again. Also on special occasions don't worry about not fasting or sacrifices. As long as it doesn't become a routine excuse, God wants us to be happy. So why not try to fast and sacrifice yourself as well as pray, repent and be converted. You will begin to find a new peace and joy in Our Lord.

Peter Cole  
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## New Age article did not show movement's dark side

To the editors:

My letter is in response to your lead article on April 4, 1991 concerning new age spiritualism. (*Catholic Courier*: "Faith or fad? Phenomenon attracts followers seeking alternative spiritual path"). I am distressed a more objective analysis of the phenomena was not obtained. The reason is the serious claim by Constance Gumbey and others that this movement is definitely linked to the occult along with worship of Satan. If such worship, the perception of Jesus as a mere-ordinary mortal and the creation of a new world order are underlying themes of this spirituality, as they maintain, shouldn't these claims have been investigated? Might this movement be a source of danger to all of us?

If we as individuals have failed to find spiritual enrichment in our Catholic faith as a result of our own ignorance and/or that of our own Church leaders, might we alleviate the situation through continuing Catholic education as well as the pursuit of individuals in our church who possess such enlightenment? Isn't this safer than searching for untenable solutions involving feminine gods in pagan mythology, crystals and mind control?

Constance Gumbey claims that people have been under the influence of evil spirits when they were involved in the movement. They often heard voices urging them to kill parents and loved ones. Is this an example of the personal and ethical responsibility that is advocated by new agers?

If the thrust of these supernatural and

mystical experiences, as mentioned by Nathan Kollar, can be unhealthy and not necessarily from God, doesn't this support the possibility that this movement may be satanically linked?

Shouldn't you as a representative of the diocese have been more thorough in describing a phenomena that could cause serious harm to its practitioners? Might a description of objects used by members in the new age movement such as crystals, indicate that they are as evil as astrological cards and fortune telling? Does the heavy financial involvement of Sheila Hand and Alice Jenkinson in the new age bookstore bias their opinion on the subject? Might truthful but detrimental information be

withheld for fear it might result in financial loss and jeopardize their livelihoods? In the future, please present a more balanced article on topics like this that cause more harm than good and which leads us away from Jesus as the true Messiah.

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**EDITORS' NOTE:** As the article noted, the term "New Age" is a catch-all term for multiple belief systems that do not lend themselves to blanket assessments. The intent of the article was not to define which beliefs are "good" and which are "bad," but simply to provide readers with background on the topic.

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