

FEATURE

Former 'St. Elsewhere' actor returns in 'Hack'

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

HOLLYWOOD — Catholic actor David Morse, now 14 years removed from his role as Dr. Jack Morrison on the NBC drama "St. Elsewhere," returns to series television this fall as the title character in the CBS drama "Hack."

In between, Morse has played a number of roles to refine his acting craft, among them that of Father John McNamee in "Diary of a City Priest," based on the real-life Philadelphia priest's book describing his life ministering in Philadelphia's inner city.

Morse, who lives in Philadelphia with his Philly-born wife, took on the role "partly because it was Philadelphia but also because I knew John McNamee through my wife's family. I knew he was one of the most interesting men, not only in Philadelphia but also in this country."

You say you didn't see "Diary of a City Priest"? You and everybody else.

"It got a little bit of a showing on PBS. It was supposed to have a real showing on PBS," Morse said, meaning a nationwide feed. But then a film distributor "suddenly wanted to release it," he added, so the few stations already committed to airing it were allowed to air it. Then, Morse said, the distributor backed off.

What's left of it (a 77-minute version) is now available on video. "The problem is what they did get to see is not the version we really liked," which premiered in 2000



CBS/CNS

David Morse stars in the CBS drama series "Hack," as a disgraced ex-cop turned cab driver trying to put his life back together as an anonymous crime fighter.

at the Sundance Film Festival to great acclaim, Morse said.

The U.S. bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting called the film a "bittersweet, documentary-like tale" with "touches of ironic humor. Morse's face is etched in sadness as he resolves to accept the mystery of God and be more generous even as he daily struggles with the consequences of parishioners' addiction and poverty."

"Hack," which airs this fall 9-10 p.m.

Eastern time on CBS, shows Morse as Philadelphia taxi driver Mike Olshansky, now scraping for a living after being thrown off the police force following his arrest for tampering with evidence. Olshansky learns that, even though not a cop anymore, he can still try to help people.

Starring with Morse is Catholic-schooled Andre Braugher, best known for his work on NBC's "Homicide: Life on the Street," as Marcellus Washington, the Morse char-

acter's former partner who was every bit as guilty as Morse but whom Morse protected. And Catholic actor George Dzundza portrays Father Tom "Grizz" Grzelak, Morse's priest who's been known to place a wager here or there and down a shot of whiskey.

"At this point (Olshansky's) not even thinking of redemption. He's just trying to put his life back together," Morse said.

"And there may be something in putting your life back together where you have to have some redemption, because you really have to face some things about yourself, and he's not ready to face those things," the actor added.

"I get a little concerned about it becoming trite," Morse continued. "His relationship with the church especially, what that represents, (and with) his father who is a Catholic — which is not now in the pilot but was in the pilot — it's a very complicated relationship."

Morse had five mostly rewarding seasons on "St. Elsewhere." He still harbors resentment, though, that at the end of the series' run, Morrison was raped in prison.

It was galling to him because (the writers) knew he did volunteer work at a youth correctional facility in Chino, Calif., on weekends during the show's run. Morse, at the invitation of the chaplain there, helped Hispanic teens practice the Sunday readings for Mass.

"They knew I was doing this, and they couldn't do something good about being in prison," he said.

Catholic medium views his work as ministry to bereaved

By Tricia Hempel
Catholic News Service

CINCINNATI — It's standing room only at the Sharonville Convention Center north of Cincinnati on a Saturday morning. Among faces a reporter spots in the crowd of 1,800 are a nun, an elderly woman with a rosary and a fellow parishioner.

Clearly, there are Catholics among the audience members, each of whom has paid \$50 to attend a "Crossing Over" seminar hosted by John Edward, star of programs of the same name on the SciFi Channel and in national syndication.

Edward, it would seem, talks to dead people for a living. And Americans are anxious to hear what their deceased loved ones have to say. On the TV show he joins a gallery of a hundred or so people and moves where his visual images direct him to go, passing messages from the dead to the living.

Psychologist Gary Schwartz of the University of Arizona, who tested Edward and a handful of other mediums over the course of several months, was a disbeliever before his 2000 study. But based on the results, he believes that some people, Edward included, do possess this power, though he is quick to caution that there are many frauds in the field who prey on the gullible and the vulnerable.

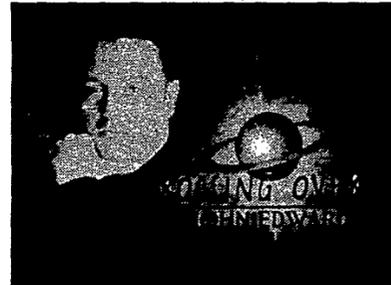
For Catholics, there are greater issues than whether someone claiming to be a medium is a fraud or not.

The "Catechism of the Catholic Church" says, "All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm readings, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone."

Some of the country's best-known mediums — Edward, Sylvia Browne, James van Praagh and George Anderson — were raised Catholic, although only Edward still professes to be a Catholic.

In live seminars, the 32-year-old New York native speaks for some time about his strict Italian-Irish family, his faith and religious upbringing and his disbelief in the paranormal until an experience at the age of 15 left him convinced that telepathy, precognition, clairvoyance, psychokinesis and communication with the dead are possible.

He calls his work a form of ministry to the bereaved and tells his audiences they



"don't need a medium to appreciate and communicate with those on the other side. Nor should you get fixated on the other side at the expense of your life here on earth."

In an interview for *The Catholic Telegraph*, Cincinnati archdiocesan newspaper, Edward says, "The problem that comes down with this — and I totally respect it — is that the Catholic Church doesn't want to endorse this."

"However," he adds, "there are people who do this work legitimately and who see this work as being inspirational and helpful. I have had nuns, priests, rabbis and different ministers from all walks of life come check me out to be sure I wasn't taking advantage of their parishioners."

As word got out about his psychic abilities, Edward said he began to feel less wel-

come in the Catholic Church.

Through his friendship with "Father Patrick," a Long Island priest whom Edward writes about in his book, *One Last Time*, he feels he has been pulled back onto "the team" of the church.

"My whole preparation before I even got here today was praying the rosary. That is my prayer," he said. "I do each decade with a different devotion for the people who are here today: for the people who are going to be read, for the people who are going to come through, and for me, so that I don't let my ego get in the way."

In his worn jeans, black golf shirt and half-moon glasses, Edward presents a complex picture of an ordinary young man who demonstrates sincerity, religious faith — and seemingly supernatural powers. He knows it's a dilemma for other Catholics.

"One of the priests I've sat with says he knows there's positive and negative and how do we know this isn't the negative coming through and duping people?" he said.

He said part of his answer to that is to look at the results. "A number of the letters I get have said that thanks to 'Crossing Over' it's brought them back to church; they lost their child, but they got their faith back, now they understand there is a process in that, there is divine intervention."

Broadcast networks' plans for Sept. 11 programming eyed warily

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Watch television walk the fine line between reverence and exploitation as broadcast networks and cable outlets bulk up their schedules with special programming related to the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

It's a safe bet that nearly all of them will be a little patriotic, a little compassionate, a little historic. The real question is whether it will all be a little too much.

It seems that in the 500-channel universe 497 of those channels are going to try to commemorate, observe or look back somehow on 9/11, as it's become known in shorthand. New shows are announced daily, and still others will be promoted between the time this is written and the time you read it.

ABC's "Good Morning America" is

trumpeting its Sept. 9 edition as the first time a full program has taken place inside the Pentagon. A day later, ABC will air a two-hour "Report from Ground Zero" in prime time.

MSNBC plans what it calls "Four Days of Remembrance" Sept. 8-11 with all manner of documentaries and talk shows.

The A&E cable channel has announced two prime-time specials for Sept. 4 and 8. Its sister channel, the Biography Channel, will air four "Biography" features on influential figures in the Sept. 11 aftermath from 8 p.m. to midnight EDT Sept. 11.

The Showtime pay cable channel will premiere on Sept. 9 a collection of short films shot by students exploring the effects of the terror attacks, with replays Sept. 11 and 14.

CBS will rerun its top-rated "9/11" special in the days leading up to the attacks' anniversary.

Even PBS, which last September hastily rearranged its schedule to introduce new documentaries on terrorists and the Middle East, will trot out a three-part special of its "In the Mix" series for young adults called "The New Normal." It deals with how the things that are different since last September look to be like the way things could be for a long time to come.

And that's just seven networks — three over-the-air, three basic cable and one pay cable.

There is indeed a danger that repeated revisiting of the Sept. 11 attacks — especially with some of the horrific video

footage taken of the jet crashes — will make Americans more fearful and distrustful of their surroundings. Past studies have shown how TV news coverage of crime can make viewers more afraid of the world around them.

The bumper stickers still proclaim "Never Forget" as a result of Sept. 11. The question is whether people need to be bombarded with reminders.

It's also true, though, that the coverage will not be 24 hours a day, seven days a week on every channel. There should be a variety of perspectives on the event, but without seeing each program in advance, there is no way to guarantee that.

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