

DIVINIZATION: SHOULD CATHOLICS CONSULT PSYCHICS AND MEDIUMS?

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An opportunity to look into the future is very tempting, especially at certain times in our lives when we're suffering from financial woes, loneliness or bereavement. This is when the temptation to visit a psychic—or "medium"—can be almost irresistible.

This is probably why consultation with psychics is such a booming business. [...] P]sychic megastars such as Sylvia Browne, John Edwards, James Van Praagh and George Anderson have raked in millions of dollars for their services, for book sales and television appearances.

According to Richard Dworman, editor of the "Infomercial Marketing Report," Dionne Warwick's "Psychic Friends Network" and "Your Psychic Experience," annually take in about \$50 million and \$35-\$40 million, respectively. Hourly rates for psychic readings can top \$250 an hour with superstars like Browne charging \$700 for a 30-minute telephone session.

This business is not lacking in customers. According to a recent [around 2007] Gallup poll, 28 percent of Americans believe some people can hear from or otherwise communicate with the dead, which is up from 18 percent just 11 years [earlier].

So who are these people and where is their power coming from?

Most of the psychics we would normally encounter are either clairvoyant, or serve as mediums who channel spirits. One former clairvoyant, Catholic author and public speaker Moira Noonan, explained the different kinds of psychic abilities in her book, "Ransomed from Darkness."

"A clairvoyant is someone who can see into the past, present or future. This is different from a psychic who is clairaudient, one who gets information by hearing, or clairsentient, one who does so by feeling," she wrote. "I received information by seeing, which means I saw movies playing in my mind. When someone came to me for psychic counseling, I could see events in their life flashing before me and know many things about them—personal things."

Psychics who call themselves clairvoyant claim that their abilities are natural. Mediums claim that their information comes from spirits whom they "channel."

Father Lawrence J. Gesy, cult consultant for the Archdiocese of Baltimore and lead author of "Today's Destructive Cults and Movements," has encountered people with these abilities for many years in his work and believes everyone has psychic abilities to some extent.

"A mother has psychic ability. She knows when her child is in harm's way," he said. "Haven't you ever known that something was wrong before it happened? We all have this. It's an instinctual psychic ability."

"There are some who have the ability—and I've experienced people like this—whose powers are so strong they can see beyond the veil of this world into the next. I don't understand it, but they do. And I really believe that is just a part of their makeup."

The problem is when people who have these abilities put them to the wrong use, such as acting as fortune-tellers. Scripture has shown God's disdain for such practices:

"Let there not be found among you anyone who immolates his son or daughter in the fire, nor a fortune-teller or soothsayer, charmer, diviner or caster of spells, nor one who consults ghosts and spirits or seeks oracles from the dead. Anyone who does such things is an abomination to the Lord." (Deut 18:10-12)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says we must reject all forms of divination, including "recourse to mediums" (CCC, No. 2116), which are psychics who channel spirits of the dead in order to get information.

"In channeling, you're basically invoking spirits and allowing them to use your person, your body, your voice, to speak through you," Father Gesy said. "Therefore, what you're going to get may appear to be of God but it isn't."

The Pontifical Councils for Culture and Interreligious Dialogue agree. In their document, "Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life," they say that people who have witnessed mediums go into trances and channel spirits "would willingly acknowledge that the manifestation are indeed spiritual but are not from God, despite the language of love and light which is almost always used."

Aside from the obvious dangers inherent in mediumship, sham artists abound in this profession. Many of the popular TV psychics use methods such as hot and cold reading to make their abilities appear genuine. In cold reading, they glean information from the way people act, speak, dress, etc., and use high probability guesses about the nature of their audience. In hot reading, people disguised as missionaries or door-to-door salesmen are sent into the neighborhoods where the show is being televised to glean information about the prospective audience.

An even more disconcerting trend among psychics is to bill themselves as Catholic. They pad their advertisements with just enough Christian-sounding language to convince the faithful that their services are OK.

For instance, Anderson, who was born Catholic, claims in his own promotional literature that he channels saints such as St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Rita and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.

Edwards, another famous psychic who has his own TV show on the Sci Fi Channel, claims to have priests and nuns as clients and often prays the rosary and meditates before making contact with the spirits.

Many Catholics fall for these ploys, mostly because they don't understand Christian prayer, Father Gesy says.

"Meditation is praying to God or to the saints for their intercession. We're not channeling them. The difference is that we're invoking and praying to them. A medium is inviting the spirit to enter them and speak through them or use them."

The channeling of saints is never of God, Father Gesy said.

"We don't channel saints. We cannot ask a saint to come and use us and our voice to speak through us. A saint won't do that. It may appear to be a saint but remember, Satan is an angel of light and he can appear to be of God. You may think it's God, but God is not channeled nor are the saints."

According to an article by Mark P. Shea, editor of the Catholic Exchange Web site, titled "You Can Trust Me, I'm A Psychic," he explains: "It is one thing if a person is made the recipient of a supernatural insight or gift (as for instance, St. Bernadette was when the Blessed Virgin appeared to her at Lourdes). It is quite another if a person defies God's express will by seeking supernatural knowledge and power in ways the Lord has expressly forbidden in the First Commandment.

"And of course, the mere fact that someone has an unsought dream or supernatural insight about the future still does not mean that person is necessarily being visited by God. As Saints Peter and Paul say, your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. And he 'disguises himself as an angel of light.'" (1 Pt 5:8, 2 Cor 11:14)

That these spirits can be evil and harassing is attested to by plenty of psychics themselves.

"As I became more psychically proficient, I actually began to see angels and demons," Noonan wrote. "I saw so many things, most of which I didn't want to see. Demons, after all, don't approach one gently, asking 'Do you have time for me now?' Once the door is open, they bombard you.

"I eventually found it hard to sleep because my mind was always rushing, without interruption . . . Ask anyone who's been a psychic, especially a clairvoyant. They will tell you the same thing: They have no peace."

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