

Some people who have witnessed these events would willingly acknowledge that the manifestations are indeed spiritual, *but are not from God...*" (emphasis added).

It is important to understand that the Catholic Church forbids Catholics to have anything to do with Spiritism, which she condemns as a destructive superstition. The Holy See has issued at least five decrees prior to 2003, (1840, 1847, 1856, 1898, 1917) forbidding Catholics "to be present at spiritistic conversations or manifestations of any kind, even though these phenomena present the appearance of honesty or piety, whether by interrogating souls or spirits, or by listening to responses, or only by looking on, even with a tacit or expressed protestation that one does not wish to have anything to do with wicked spirits."

Spiritism is simply a modern form of pagan necromancy condemned by the Law of Moses. "There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord" (Deut. 18:10-12).

Some of these practices survive or reappear from time to time in contemporary culture. Instead of taking the form of false religions, however, today they may present themselves as programs of self-improvement or psychological therapy, or as new forms of "spirituality." Whatever their guise, one must be careful to avoid any participation in false worship and superstition.

Necromancy is a dark and dangerous practice. Attempts to summon the ghosts of the dead are forbidden. Such attempts, called

spiritism or spiritualism, always risk evoking demonic activity, and often are undertaken for the sake of divination and/or magic. The séances conducted by supposed mediums often involve religious elements whose doctrinal basis denies Jesus' divinity. If Catholics undertake such practices to seek reassurance about the fate of their loved ones, they show lack of confidence in prayer and the rites of the Church, and manifest underlying defects in their faith. Those who seek guidance through a medium also show lack of confidence in divine guidance (see 1 Chr. 10:13-14). Participation is a grave matter, and the Church warns her members to avoid having anything to do with such practices.

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Spiritism

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In one form or other spiritism is at least as old as the scriptural story of Saul and the Witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:3-25); but in its present phase it dates from a little more than one hundred and fifty years ago, and had its origin in America.



The Shade of Samuel Invoked by Saul

In 1848, In Hydesville, N.Y., two sisters, Margaretta and Mary Fox, girls of twelve and fifteen respectively, claimed to be able to communicate with the souls of the dead. The story as told by themselves was that they had heard some mysterious rappings, which they thought might be coming from the spirit of a man who had been murdered in the same house. They afterward discovered that the noises could be used as a code of signals in communicating with the souls of the dead. It was agreed between the girls and their new acquaintances in the other world that when the spirits were questioned the answer "Yes" should be indicated by one rap, "No" by three, and "Doubtful" or "Wait" by two. Later on,

the Fox family removed to Rochester, N. Y., and there it was that spiritism as a system took shape.



A 1903 photograph taken during a séance conducted by a "medium"

The girls gave exhibitions of their powers, acting the part of "mediums," i.e., persons professing to be able to produce spiritistic manifestations. Spiritism became the sensation of the period. It soon spread from America to England and from there to the European Continent. Mediums arose in every part of the world, and to the rappings were added other manifestations even more strange. The spirits showed their presence by the turning and tilting of tables, by ringing bells and by playing musical instruments. Under the supposed action of the spirits bodies and other objects were levitated into the air, and phantom forms and faces appeared. Particular spirits were invoked and made to answer questions. Secrets were revealed, and predictions were made. As the entire world knows, Spiritism in all its forms has continued and even thrived to the present day.

The Fox sisters mentioned above were twice caught perpetrating fraud. A relative, in

a written deposition presented before a court of law, exposed the full details of these frauds. According to this statement, foot movement produced the mysterious raps. Later in life the girls admitted and then recanted that the séances were a hoax. Apart from fraud, hallucinations, and outright exaggerations, which probably account for 98% of these "manifestations", there have been a small percentage of phenomena, which baffle all attempts at rational explanation.

At the present time there are a number of television programs airing, which depict communication with the dead, among which are *Medium*, and *Ghost Whisperer*. It must be understood that these programs are pure fiction, designed to be entertaining, and have no basis in reality or fact.

As to the main question, whether there is any real communication with intelligences of another world, Catholics as well as others can form their opinions according to the evidence. It is quite in accord with Catholic teaching to believe that spirits involve themselves in the affairs of the living; but there are good spirits and then there are evil spirits. One thing we can be assured of is that it is inconceivable that either God or His good spirits (including the souls of the just) can have anything to do with such séances or other performances. Spiritism thrives on idle and even criminal curiosity and its effects can be quite harmful, both mentally and spiritually.

Exorcist Father Francesco Bamonte describes the psychic damages caused by spiritualism.

"Phenomena like self-exclusion from the social daily context, states of dependency like those of alcohol or drugs, loss of rationality and freedom, dissociation from one's

personality to the point of feeling that someone has entered one's person; voices that superimpose themselves on prayer and blaspheme and (which can) lead to suicide.

Fr. Bamonte went on to say, "Spiritualistic practices are a mistaken way of seeking truth. People hope to receive real information on God, man, the beyond, the past, present and future, from what they think are the souls of the dead. In reality, they are generally no more than tricks which sometimes make them enter into contact with their own subconscious.

"In other cases, however, they enter into contact with demonic spirits which pretend to be the souls of the dead. That's because the phenomena and manifestations of spiritualism are not always tricks, fiction, suggestions, psychological mechanisms, manifestations of the subconscious or creations of the psyche, which some like to suggest so as to explain unusual events, including the demonic or supernatural.

"The cases of infestation or diabolic possession, in which exorcist priests have had to intervene after a spiritualistic séance, show clearly how this practice is a favorite way for the devil's destructive action on people."

On February 3, 2003, the Church issued, "*A Christian reflection on the "New Age"*", which comments on the participation of the Evil One, "One of the most common elements in *New Age* 'spirituality' is a fascination with extraordinary manifestations, and in particular with paranormal entities. People recognized as "mediums" claim that their personality is taken over by another entity during trances in a *New Age* phenomenon known as "channeling", during which the medium may lose control over his or her body and faculties.