

7. *Peace*. St. Paul speaks frequently of the peace that comes from God (Rom 15:33, Phil 4:9), and Jesus mentions peace as one of the manifestations of his spirit (Jn 14:27). This is a quality that always accompanies communications from God; the soul experiences a profound and stable serenity in the depths of its spirit." (pp. 402-3)

Fr Aumann mentions other signs also: *Confidence in God, Flexibility of will, Purity of intention, Patience in suffering, Self-abnegation, Simplicity, Liberty of spirit*.

### Signs of the diabolical spirit

"...[S]ince the devil may disguise himself as a good spirit and even cause what appears to be authentic mystical phenomena, it is helpful to mention briefly the various signs of the diabolical spirit.

1. *Spirit of falsity*. The devil is the father of lies, but he cleverly conceals his deceit by half-truths and pseudo-mystical phenomena.

2. *Morbid curiosity*. This is characteristic of those who eagerly seek out the esoteric aspects of mystical phenomena or have a fascination for the occult or preternatural.

3. *Confusion, anxiety, and deep depression*.

4. *Obstinacy*. One of the surest signs of a diabolical spirit.

5. *Constant indiscretion and a restless spirit*. Those who constantly go to extremes, as in penitential exercises or apostolic activity, or neglect their primary obligations to do some personally chosen work.

6. *Spirit of pride and vanity*. Very anxious to publicize their gifts of grace and mystical experiences.

7. *False humility*. This is the disguise for their pride and self-love.

8. *Despair, lack of confidence, and discouragement*. A chronic characteristic that alternates with *presumption, vain security, and unfounded optimism*." (p. 412)

Fr Aumann mentions other signs also: *Impatience in suffering and stubborn resentment; Uncontrolled passions and strong inclination to sensuality, usually under the guise of mystical union; Hypocrisy,*

*simulation, and duplicity; Excessive attachment to sensible consolations, particularly in their practice of prayer; Lack of deep devotion to Jesus and Mary; Scrupulous adherence to the letter of the law and fanatical zeal in promoting a cause.*

### Signs of the human spirit

"The human spirit is always inclined to its own satisfactions; it is a friend of pleasure and an enemy of suffering of any kind. It readily inclines to anything that is compatible with its own temperament, its personal tastes and caprices, or the satisfaction of self-love. It will not hear of humiliations, penance, renunciation, or mortification. If any director or confessor goes against its inclinations, he is immediately branded as inept and incompetent. It seeks success, honors, applause, and pastimes. It is always a great promoter of anything that will arouse admiration or notoriety. In a word, the human spirit neither understands nor cares for anything except its own egoism.

"It is sometimes difficult in practice to judge whether given manifestations proceed from the devil or from a purely human and egoistic spirit, but it is always relatively easy to distinguish between these two and the spirit of God. It will be possible in most cases, therefore, to determine that a given spirit could not possibly be from God and that it must be combated, even if one is not sure whether it is in fact from the devil or the human ego." (p. 413)

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Pamphlet 172

## Apparitions True and False

Father Peter Joseph

I am not opposed to private revelations. But I *am* opposed to false revelations; I *am* opposed to dubious revelations; I *am* opposed to disapproved revelations; I *am* opposed to obsession with private revelations. I am opposed to all these things precisely because I *do* believe in genuine private revelations and their role in the life of the Church.

The abundance of alleged messages and revelations in the past forty years makes ever more necessary the traditional caution and discernment of spirits. Amid today's confusion and spiritual wasteland, many Catholics are seeking contact with the supernatural via new private revelations, regardless of whether or not they have been approved, or even whether or not they are in accordance with the Faith.

### Private revelations occur

God may, and sometimes does, grant revelations to private individuals. Those who receive them, and are perfectly certain that they come from God, should believe them. But the Church never imposes on Catholics the obligation of believing anyone's private revelations, even those of the great saints. The Church gives her approval to them only when she is satisfied after rigorous examination of their spiritual utility and of the evidence on which they depend.

### The Catechism

The Catechism at #67 says: "Throughout the ages, there have been so-called 'private' revelations, some of which have been recognised by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to 'improve' or 'complete' Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. ... Christian faith cannot accept 'revelations' that claim to surpass or correct the Revelation of which Christ is the fulfilment, as is the case in certain non-Christian religions and also in certain recent sects which base themselves on such 'revelations'." (See St Thomas, *Summa* II-II, q.174, art.6, ad 3).

Whom does the *Catechism* have in mind? Among others, Moslems and Mormons. Mohammed claimed that the Gospels misrepresent Christ, and Mormons believe there is a Third Testament.

### Sources of revelations

There are three sources, ultimately, of revelations, visions, prodigies, and suchlike things: God, man, or the devil.

Under the heading of *God*, I include God's holy creatures, such as Our Lady or another Saint or an angel.

Under *man*, I mean any human knowledge or skill or trickery or imagination or any human activity or machine or device causing anything to happen. Under the *devil*, I include the devil himself or any one of the other demons.

### The power of the devil

Very few people are aware of the devil's full powers, and his ability to deceive. Many Catholics think that as soon as any prodigy occurs, it *must* be the work of God. But, as I said, messages and prodigies can issue from three sources ultimately: God, man, or the devil. It is the work of discernment to identify who is at work in a given case.

It is knowledge of diabolical trickery which makes the Church cautious here. My next part on the power of the demons is taken from Father Jordan Aumann, a Dominican priest, who taught for many years at the Angelicum University in Rome.

### What the devils can and cannot do

The devils *cannot* do the following:

- (1) Produce any kind of *truly* supernatural phenomenon;
- (2) Create a substance, since only God can create;
- (3) Bring a dead person back to life, although they could produce the illusion of doing so;
- (4) Make truly prophetic predictions, since only God knows the future absolutely, and those to whom He chooses to reveal a portion of it. However, the devil's intelligent conjecture about the future might *appear* to mere mortals a prophecy;

(5) Know the secrets of a person's mind and heart. However, their shrewd intelligence and observation may enable them to deduce many things about a person.

But the devils *can* do the following:

- (1) Produce corporeal or imaginative visions;
- (2) Falsify ecstasy;
- (3) Instantaneously cure sicknesses that have been caused by diabolical influence;
- (4) Produce the stigmata;
- (5) Simulate miracles and the phenomena of levitation and bilocation;
- (6) Make people or objects seem to disappear by interfering with a person's sight or line of vision;
- (7) Cause a person to hear sounds or voices;
- (8) Cause a person to speak in tongues;
- (9) Declare a fact which is hidden or distant.

Whatever nature or science can cause, the devils too are able to cause, according to what God may permit. See the Book of Exodus where the magicians and sorcerers of Pharaoh were able to accomplish *some* of the prodigies wrought by Moses and Aaron (Ex 7:11-12; 7:22; 8:7; 8:18-19; 9:11). Close to 200 A.D., Tertullian writes, "first of all, they [the demons] make you ill; then to get a miracle out of it, they prescribe remedies either completely novel, or contrary to those in use, and thereupon withdrawing hurtful influence, they are supposed to have wrought a cure." (*Apology of the Christian religion*, 22).

*In the face of the fallen angels' power to deceive, it is no wonder that the Church is always very slow to declare a miracle or message authentic.*

The devil has superhuman intelligence and is very clever, and to pretend that you can definitively judge in favour of something's authenticity, without help, is presumptuous.

To know if something is false, it suffices to know that it says something contrary to the teaching of the Church. Hence, it is easier to pronounce against visionaries than in their favour. But the mere absence of doctrinal error is not enough. There have to be other *positive* indications.

The following quotations are from the final chapter of the rock-solid book *Spiritual Theology*

(Sheed & Ward 1980) by Dominican Father Jordan Aumann.

### Signs of the divine spirit

"The following characteristics are general signs of the divine spirit:

1. *Truth*. God is truth and cannot inspire anything but truth in a soul. If a person believed to be inspired by God, therefore, maintains opinions that are manifestly against revealed truth, the infallible teaching of the Church, or proven theology or philosophy or science, it must be concluded that the individual is deluded by the devil or is the victim of excessive imagination or faulty reasoning.

2. *Gravity*. God is never the cause of things that are useless, futile, frivolous, or impertinent. When his spirit moves a soul it is always for something serious and beneficial.

3. *Enlightenment*. Although one may not always understand the meaning of an inspiration from God, the effect of any divine movement or impulse is always enlightenment and certitude rather than darkness and confusion. This is true both for the effects on the individual who receives the inspiration and its effects on others.

4. *Docility*. Souls that are moved by the spirit of God accept cheerfully the advice and counsel of their directors or others who have authority over them. This spirit of obedience, docility, and submission is one of the clearest signs that a particular inspiration or movement is from God. This is especially true in the case of the educated, who have a greater tendency to be attached to their own opinions.

5. *Discretion*. The spirit of God makes the soul discreet, prudent, and thoughtful in all its actions. There is nothing of precipitation, lightness, exaggeration, or impetuosity; all is well balanced, edifying, serious, and full of calmness and peace.

6. *Humility*. The Holy Spirit always fills the soul with sentiments of humility and self-effacement. The loftier the communications from on high, the more profoundly the soul inclines to the abyss of its own nothingness. Mary said, 'I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say' (Lk 1:38).