

VIEWS OF A ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGIAN

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Roman Catholic theology deals with parapsychology only very indirectly, when dealing with the nature of the preternaturally marvelous and its verification. Nevertheless, certain ideas and directions emanating from this theology are of interest for the parapsychologist. A first principle of theology is that one must not envisage a preternatural origin for a phenomenon until it is established that no plausible natural explanation of it can be proposed. In other cases, the Church does not deny the possibility of a special intervention of God, but it refrains from giving an official opinion. This attitude is eminently encouraging for parapsychology as it incites scientists to explore all approaches which are little known as yet, but which may explain those apparently abnormal facts.

When the Church recognizes a miraculous fact, it never forces it upon the faith of its members; it only declares that it is worthy of belief as in the case of the apparitions at Lourdes. As far back as the 18th century, Pope Benedict XIV warned against the powers of imagination applied to illness and cure. In a book published in 1751 by Father Azevedo, S. J., by order of the Pope, he says, "Imagination can create illnesses, and make them disappear."

Roman Catholic theology sets aside antiquated but still persistent hypotheses based upon the intervention of superhuman entities of which spiritualistic circles make such an exaggerated use. It reduces true miracles and true apparitions to a few very rare and very special cases the cause of which can only be God Himself.

We have been asked, from the Church's point of view, does parapsychology exist as distinct from conventional psychology? The Church does not need to ask itself such a question, yet we do well to answer in the negative. It is only our present ignorance of certain psychological or organic possibilities of man which provides parapsychology with a provisional object of study which, in fact, remains in the field of conventional psychology. There remain the genuine supernatural phenomena, those which theology designates as miraculous. The Roman Catholic Church remains convinced that the progress of scientific psychological observation and experiment will only further the verification that they are outside the scope of science because their origin is to be found on a much more elevated plane.

Roman Catholic religion is in perfect harmony with R. Amadou's statement in his book *La Parapsychologie*. "This young branch of science gives, and will go on giving, the scientific key to many phenomena. It does not conclude, and will never conclude, that everything, in the Cosmos and in Man, is reduced to phenomena, the only key to which would be in the possession of science."