

Living in the World Without Being of the World--Avoiding the Occult

I don't know about you, but so many times as I examine my conscience before confession, I skip over the First Commandment. Of course, I know, "I am the Lord your God, you shall not have other gods before Me." But I always figure that that is the one commandment with which I am in total compliance. One day I decided to read the expanded examination of conscience for the First Commandment on one of the many cards/pamphlets I have. The words jumped out to me, "Have I... betrayed Him through occult practices?" I did not think so, but I needed to look into what was meant by occult practices. As I did, that was when the words I had heard numerous times through my youth became clearer to me, "It is difficult to live in this world without becoming of this world." There are so many occult practices that have invaded our everyday life that we are almost oblivious to them. That is by design to deceive us; we have to be careful or we can inadvertently fall into sin; we must guard against this.

We can see an example of this in Deuteronomy. I missed following Ascension Press's, "[Bible in a Year](#)" podcast with Fr. Mike Schmitz when it first came out in 2021, but I started January 1st of this year. (I highly recommend listening to this podcast from the beginning. Bonus—starting January 1, 2023 he will be doing a podcast "Catechism in a Year") One passage that struck me to the core was in the Old Testament when God commanded Joshua that, when he came into the land that God promised His people, the Israelites "should not leave a single soul alive" (Deuteronomy 20: 16); this included men, women, children, and livestock, "lest they teach you to make any such abominable offerings as they make to their gods, and you thus sin against the Lord, your God." (Deuteronomy 20:18). Wait! What? Don't leave a single soul alive? Reading further in the lives of the Israelites you can see why. As the Israelites intermarried with pagans, they slipped into adopting worship of the pagans' gods even though they kept up their worship of the one true God as well. (It was like the God's chosen people were trying to cover all their bases.) Spoiler alert—it does not end well for them.

So, we can see how important it is that we avoid occult practices at all costs to avoid offending God. In addition, I have also learned that anything that does not come from God has the distinct possibility of having demons attached and that by participating in an occult practice one opens oneself up to demonic attachment. This is another reason we avoid the occult: not only to avoid offending God but also to protect ourselves from demonic attachment, which is real. If you do not believe in demonic attachment note how many times Jesus drives out demons, or read about some of the currently very busy exorcists in the Church. A really good introduction to this topic is a document written by Bishop Donald Montrose, D.D., [Spiritual Warfare: The Occult has Demonic Influence](#). Demons are real and should be avoided at all costs.

So, as we navigate this world with our eyes on the prize—heaven—what exactly should we be avoiding? In my research I stumbled on an eight-page list of possible demonic entry points. This is a [checklist](#) used by counselors of people seeking deliverance from curses. As I read through the list, I realized that in my youth, I was guilty of nine of these "practices" that were sold to us as being "just for fun," including tarot cards, Ouija board, astrology, chain letters, and

lucky charms. Notice, many of these are directed at children, especially the Ouija boards. But on this list, I also noticed many practices that I have seen otherwise good Catholics get themselves involved with because they are so ingrained in our culture. These practices include acupuncture, yoga, reiki, palm reading, crystals, hypnosis, martial arts (including Thai chi), and superstitious practices like “knocking on wood.” Pretty much anything that has its roots in a religion or belief system not given to us by the One True God or anything that is “New Age” can be very destructive to our immortal souls. There is a very good document published by The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue— [Jesus Christ the Bearer of the Water of Life](#) which explains the New Age in detail and why its practices should be avoided. Another very good resource is the book, *Counterfeit Spirituality: Exposing the False Gods*, by one of this year’s conference speakers, Bryan Mercier. In his book, Bryan covers in depth the origins of many of our common practices and why they are counter to our Catholic Faith. Fr. Brandon Walsh points out in his excellent [homily](#) that Jesus tells us, “those who are burdened, yoke yourself to me”—stop spiritually yoking yourself to pagan deities. Father Walsh tells us that, when we follow an occult leader, we open ourselves up to bondage to whatever that occult leader—the fortune teller, yogi, acupuncturist, sensei, etc.—is yoked. Father stresses the importance of looking into the origins of practices as the way to discern if they are dangers to our souls.

So, what is a good Catholic to do? First, never “empty yourself.” The vacuum left is an open invitation to bad spirits. Always open yourself up to God. Never “center yourself on you.” Always center yourself on God. So many of the saints tell us to pray constantly; with every breath God gives us, offer it to Him. The next step is to know the occult practices that we have been guilty of practicing, whether wittingly or unwittingly, and confess these to our priest. In another [excellent homily](#) I listened to recently, the priest tells us that if we have a particular sin that we are chronically guilty of and cannot shake, it is possibly due to an attachment we are totally unaware of. He suggests repeating this adjuration, “In the name of Jesus, I bind the spirit of (cursing, gossiping, envy, anger, panic, fear, etc. ... any spirit here that is not of the Holy Spirit) and send you to the foot of the Cross to be judged by the Lord.” Father encourages us to remain in a state of grace, pray the rosary, wear our brown scapulars, and bless our food before we eat or drink. Finally, the next time we renew our Baptismal vows we should fully appreciate and comply with the part where we “renounce Satan and all of his works.”