



When God is Cast from the Altar

The gang of Devil worshippers butchered their victims and roasted them on a bonfire before devouring their flesh....

Their private parts had also been cut off in the sickening ritual in a rural area of Russia.

After police arrested eight suspected members of the ring, one boasted how they had previously dug up the grave of a newly-dead girl and eaten her heart.

It is easy to sensationalize the subject of "Satanism," although, of course, wholly unnecessary. It is also common nowadays for people, awash in moral relativism and its corollary of religious-equivalency doctrine, to dismiss the Satanic element of the event as just incidental. To them, these are just some bad kids who did a very bad thing. End of story.

But let us not be so philosophically sloppy. Now, I am not going to address the matter of whether or not the Devil actually exists, and while I think those who claim Satanism does not really prescribe such barbaric rituals have taken rationalization to a new level, I will not belabor that. Instead, I will start with some simple facts.

One is that this kind of savagery was ubiquitous throughout the world for most of man's history. Cannibalism and human sacrifice, attended by rituals not to be outdone by the most fertile horror writer's mind, were the norm. Oh, these acts were not usually committed in the explicit name of Satan; it might have been in that of the Aztecs' feathered serpent god Quetzalcoatl or one of 10,000 other names in 10,000 other places. What they had in common was not the name adorning their bloody altars but that which they either did not know or denied: Jesus Christ.

If you think this will be straightforward evangelization, think again. I will spend no more time trying to convince that Jesus is God than I will trying to prove that the Devil was the first to reject Him. Instead, I will mention another fact of history: Christian civilization put an end to the aforementioned savagery.

I will also mention a perception of mine, one that I am certain is correct and will be borne out over time: as we deviate from our Christian foundation, as we reject the Christian virtues, as Christianity continues to be demonized and demons trivialized, we regress to these dark norms of the past.

There is yet another fact: we have seen brutal Satanic rituals in our nation, and such things have never





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been done in the name of much-maligned Christianity. Sure, they might have been committed by those born of Christian parents, but such miscreants might also be born of Democrat, Republican, black or white parents, or of those who are football fans. Such things are meaningless, as they amount to correlation no more than causation. After all, in other lands, these savages might be born of Buddhist, Taoist or Jewish parents, or of those who practice *tai chi*. All that these things reflect is location, not motivation.

Yet there is an irrefutable correlation here, one strong enough to indicate causation: Virtually everyone who commits such acts renounces the Christian faith. A good example of this is one of the Russian teen perpetrators, a boy who was once a church-goer but got "fed up" with God and found that "things improved" when he started worshipping Satan.

Really, though, this piece is not about Devil worship per se. There are not all that many Satanists around, and even if people do not believe in the Devil, not many would say that devilishness is good. But consider this passage from the *Sun* article:

"Devil worshippers believe in putting themselves first and their core values include pride, indulgence, ambition and meeting sexual desires."

Does this not sound an awful lot like the modern secularist creed? What set sends the messages, "If it feels, good, do it [indulgence, sex]," "Put yourself first [e.g., abortion]," and has peddled pride in the guise of self-esteem training, Christians or their adversaries?

Yet critics may say that secularism does not *explicitly* prescribe these things in just the way Devil worshippers might say that Satanism does not explicitly prescribe what we associate with it. I will just smirk and say that I will not argue that here, as there is a larger point to be made.

It is said that evil is the absence of good just as darkness is the absence of light. Thus, what do you think man's nature is in the absence of good? (Interestingly, it is precisely what it is absent Christianity.) Forget Jean-Jacques Rousseau's naive musings about how children, when left to their own devices, will evolve into angels; the truth is that, unless a powerful brake is placed on will and appetite, they devolve into demons. Philosophers may argue about whether our nature is naturally bad or supernaturally fallen, whether the remedy is psychology or grace, but about the practical nature of that nature there is little dispute. And it rears its ugly head, unless someone — or something — can cage the beast.

Therefore, to say that this or that philosophy, religion or ideology did not prescribe a given evil misses the point. At issue is not merely what a philosophy does but also what it fails to do. Without adequate moral constraints, people are animalistic, which is why cannibalism, human sacrifice and slavery have been the rule of history, not the exception. Why did we long ago identify "Seven Deadly Sins"? It was not because it made for good Shakespearean plays or Bible stories, but because man naturally exhibits lust, greed, sloth, gluttony, envy, wrath, and pride. So saying that a philosophy does not teach these things (and some do) is simply akin to stating that it does not prescribe a given frailty of man's nature; it is like saying that an administered medicine did not cause the disease, it just did not cure it. Perhaps the major reason why we formulate our philosophies is to mitigate man's flaws, to improve his condition. Thus, if a given one does not serve that end, it is at worst harmful, at best useless.

This is why, of all the criticisms of Christianity, perhaps the silliest is that it is unrealistic. What it asserts about God's nature can always be argued, for it is hard to prove the divine, but what it teaches about man's nature is so perfect it seems divinely inspired. Thus, while some may scoff at the mystical



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and metaphysical and claim the faith is mythological, note that it is, above all, practical.

In other words, a typical psychologist — a person secular to the core — may dismiss talk of Jesus forgiving sins and performing miracles. Yet, if he truly understood his craft and Christianity, he would at least have to cede that the faith is a brilliant cure for our "disease." Not only did Christianity define man's characteristic faults with scientific precision, it then prescribed the remedy of holy virtues. Lust was countered with chastity, gluttony with temperance, greed with charity, sloth with diligence, wrath with patience, envy with kindness, and pride with humility. We may now consider these virtues self-evident and take them for granted in the same way that Rousseau was so immersed in Christendom that he could take civilization for granted and assume that children naturally became moral. But, for example, pride was not always considered a grave flaw, or, in the least, man did not always have a perfect yardstick of humility that could reveal even its most subtle, deceptive or universally accepted and admired forms. Why, for much of history, the man to pattern yourself after did not ride a mule and wash others' feet but was a bloodthirsty warrior with an ego whose proportions matched his lust for power. It was "What would Alexander the Great do?" I suppose. Certainly, it was his example the young Julius Caesar lamented not living up to.

Let us consider another aspect of Christianity as cure. Many high-profile atheists, such as Christopher Hitchens — who was recently parading about the country peddling his irreligious book — argue against the faith with a point they seem to think is somewhat deep and clever. They say that an atheist is actually more virtuous than a believer because when he acts rightly, it is not because he fears eternal punishment but simply because it is the "right" thing to do. Thus, the atheist's is the higher, more evolved motivation.

Yet, if these critics ever determined to "know thy enemy" and bothered to study the theology of what they condemn, they would not feel so clever. Long before psychology was born (interestingly, the word "psychology" means "study of the soul" {from "psyche," Greek for "soul"}) and Erik Erikson taught about the stage of "psycho-social development" in which a person only understands that something is wrong if he is punished for it, Church fathers understood that people existed in different stages of moral development. Sure, it is ideal when people do the right thing simply for the sake of it, but what of the many who do not? Does a good psychologist ignore this swath of humanity, this widespread phenomenon of man?

Thus did the Church talk of love and fear of God and promulgate the teaching of perfect versus imperfect contrition. Perfect contrition is ideal; it is when one is sorry for a misdeed because he loves God and violated His laws (in secular terms, loves what is right and violated it). Imperfect contrition is when one is sorry simply because he fears punishment.

While being in the latter state is not ideal, having something to mitigate it certainly is. Thus, we can argue about whether Heaven and Hell exist, but can their value as the ultimate positive reinforcement and ultimate disincentive for the less morally evolved be disputed? I don't think so, and I suspect that Dr. Erikson, who grew closer to Christianity later in life, would have agreed.

Of course, as a man of faith, I am not merely a utilitarian with respect to Christianity. Yet its utility is striking. People argue about whether it is an expression of the divine or just an invention of man, but what is overlooked is that if it did not exist, we would have had to invent it. Or, at least, something virtually indistinguishable from it. That is, if we could.

Really, a fair hearing finds that Christianity fits fallen human nature not like a glove, nor like a



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straightjacket, but like a form-enhancing garment that minimizes faults and accentuates strengths. And, at the end of the day, its critics are motivated more by fear of Truth than love of it; they are attached to their misshapen forms and fear that the garment will somehow fall on their shoulders. Why, Christopher Hitchens himself has admitted that he does not *want* God to exist, that he dislikes the concept of an eternal rule maker. And comedian Bill Maher, another noted atheist, once said "The concept of Absolute Truth is scary." It sure is — when you fear it will spoil your fun or puncture your pride. Ego, by the way, can so fill the Church of Self that there is no room for God to enter.

Thus, our modern-day Pauls of Tarsus may boast about how their worldly philosophy begets more heavenly motivations. But given what drives them to cast God from the altar, it is their own moral evolution about which they should wonder.



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