

Catholicism's Dark Side

by: Douglas Lockhart

The Holy Roman Catholic Church replaces the Roman Empire as an historical entity, develops a theology of intelligent evil to excuse its excesses, flexes its pontifical authority in the extermination of heretics, and recalibrates the Jewish Messiah into a species of Divine Emperor.

The Strain of Evil Unleashed

Some years ago I read an account of Jewish families being herded into a concentration camp. Straight from some ghetto or other, and after a horrendous train journey in cattle trucks without sanitation, these hapless individuals stumbled out into the light to face even greater horror: the horror of a system specifically designed to murder them, by degree. Incomprehensible as this may now seem, such intent was then abroad in the world, and a single event in the same account will suffice to thickly underline the depth of degeneration reached. Annoyed by the crying of a babe in arms, a black-uniformed officer instructed the mother to shut her brat up. She tried, but could not. By way of reaction, the officer pulled the child from her arms, swung it round his head and smashed it off a nearby wall. Now I may have omitted or rearranged some peripheral detail in the telling of this story, but whatever the failings of my memory, the end was the same, the shattering of an infant's skull for what seems the most petty of reasons.

But could it be that this incident, blatant and basic as it may appear, conceals something subtle and important, something overlooked due to the stark brutality of the deed? Could it be that this officer's killing of that child was also an attempt to silence the voice of conscience? Is it possible that in some twisted fashion the death of this innocent signalled not only a monstrous disregard for human life, an arrogance virtually beyond description or definition, but also a blind and furious attempt to cancel out the accusing voice of innocence? Is it possible to believe that at the heart of such mental darkness there resided a faint, nagging

recognition that all was not well? Now I may be wrong, quite wrong in suggesting such a thing, but it is my suspicion that this dark story conceals a sliver of light. For that mother on that day no sliver of light was detectable, all was black and unbearable and beyond comprehension, but for us, in retrospect, there is the possibility of a tenuous relief.

A possibility, however, is not a fact; no such modicum of conscience may have arisen in that particular human being. The fury he unleashed on that child may have been as utterly devoid of feeling as it is possible to imagine. Yet others of similar station have admitted to real strain as they went about their business with what appeared to be ruthless efficiency. And the hierarchy in Berlin were well aware of the strain their specially trained units were under as they bashed and bludgeoned and butchered the inhabitants of those camps. Insensitive to an alarming degree the camp administrators and staff obviously became, but there were times when some of them seem to have buckled under the stench and the sickness and the constant level of sadism required to fulfill the Third Reich's extraordinary wishes. Ultimately, no comment can be made about those who revelled in their butchery without remorse. For who can guess at the pathologies they carried, at the aberrant states of consciousness they considered normal, at the blanking out mechanisms of psyche operative as they blindly obeyed the dictates of superiors under the thrall of National Socialism's creed of blood and soil.

What can be said, though, is that the human mind does seem capable of sustaining a terrible darkness on occasions, and that this darkness is interpreted by Christian thinkers as closely related to intelligent, but destructive forces on some other level of being and perception. Christianity, at its theological heart, believes in some such arrangement, and the Third Reich sought to release the energy of those same archetypal forces, Adolf Hitler believing himself to be a species of Messiah sent to liberate men and women from what he considered their principle weakness, lack of will. It was this philosophy, this vision of the human will liberated and harnessed and channelled which quickly gave rise to policies of subjugation and control not seen on this planet since the hey day of the Roman Empire. So perhaps William Blake was right when

he wrote in the fly-leaf of *Divine Love and Wisdom*: "There is no good will. Will is always evil." Augustine seems to have agreed with him

The Counts of Tusculum

Down the centuries, the Church which replaced the Roman Empire developed a theology of the human will subservient to God through Christ and his Church which Hitler eventually came to envy and copy. So in a strange way, the Christian Church and the Roman Empire and the Third Reich are all part of the same puzzle, each progressively influenced by the other and curiously linked in style, ceremonial and symbol. God and not the Devil may reign over this Church, but the dark side of that God is never far off in the shape of orders and rules and dogmas to be obeyed or believed without question.

What isn't generally realised is that the Church "Christianised" ancient Rome's imperial cult and ideology, borrowed such terms as "diocese", "prefecture", "vicariate" and "consistory", incorporated court ritual into its forms of worship, adopted an autocratic attitude, refocused the whole bag of tricks on Jesus and made him into a holy ruler beyond the skies. Never again would Jesus be seen as he had once been; from there on he was a kind of Divine Emperor who stamped each pope's reign with approval. Seated on purple cushions and treated, eventually, as a Universal Cosmic Emperor who just happened to be the Son of God, the Jesus of the gospels melted clean away. Armed with impressive insignia and privileges and secular dignity, the ministers of this new Roman order progressively created for themselves an aura of sanctioned authority from above. So successful were they in this operation that Hilaire Belloc would write of the Roman Empire as never having perished at all, but as having been simply transformed into the Catholic Church. Thomas Hobbes was of the same opinion; he saw the Roman Church as the "Ghost of the deceased Roman Empire sitting crowned on its grave".

During the first three centuries of the Church's existence, the bishops of Rome were elected in much the same way as bishops

elsewhere, but from the fourth century through to the eleventh, the election of Rome's bishops (not universally recognised in the West as "Popes" with imperial authority until the eleventh century) turned into a purely political affair. From that point, "elections" were controlled by the Roman emperors, and by the eleventh century the papacy was virtually the family possession of the counts of Tusculum. In his *Anatomy of the Catholic Church*, Gerard Noel succinctly sums up this situation: "Temporal rulers stopped at nothing to secure the appointment of their chosen candidates. Coercion was freely used as was, on occasion, forcible deposition and imposition."¹ All was not as it seemed. Tusculum control of the papacy only came to an end when Benedict IX was bribed so handsomely that he voluntarily abdicated St Peter's throne.

Rome's Cesspool

The closing of the first millennium saw the beginning of a state of affairs within the Church which beggars imagination: Popes were murdered, strangled, smothered, imprisoned, done to death, caught in incestuous relationships and brought to their deaths through amorous excess. Men not even in holy orders became Pope; family dynasties ran the papacy; ante-Semitic behaviour was rife. Noel sums up the situation thus: "In what direction could the Christian community look to be saved from drowning in a cesspool of debauchery and political intrigue?"² Harsh words. In the fourth century Sylvester 1 claimed absolute "primacy" for himself, and in the fifth Leo the Great pushed the notion of papal supremacy much further by reinstating the heathen imperial title "pontifex maximus". From that moment Rome's bishops classified themselves as supreme high priest, and began to function with ever greater daring. Carrying a manufactured authority, the papacy's extraordinarily conceited notion of itself grew steadily until in 1846 Pius IX excelled all of his predecessors and introduced the notion of papal infallibility. Convinced that some mighty oracular power was at his disposal, he assumed total control of the Church and made his college of advisory bishops obsolete. They are still obsolete.

The Final Solution Revisited

In relation to the Third Reich, the Church under Pius IX was by this time well ahead of that regime in its brutal treatment of the Jews; in fact it is on record that when Hitler talked with Bishop Berning of Osnabruch in 1936, he intimated that he saw no difference whatsoever between the Catholic Church and National Socialism, and explained that he was only doing what the Church herself had done for fifteen hundred years. By 1179 the Third and Fourth Councils of the Lateran had codified the Church's attitudes and made Jews wear a badge of shame, forbade them to interact with Christians, kept them out of administration and trade and locked them up in ghettos at night. Countless thousands were slaughtered during the Crusades, and as the Catholic historian Peter De Rosa records, millions suffered and died down the ages as a result of "Bad art and disastrous theology".³ In such a fashion was the way for Hitler's final solution prepared, and the Church has not yet properly acknowledged her role in the persecution of the Jews, a persecution which, as De Rosa so clearly states, makes the cruelties of Adolf Hitler pale in comparison with the cruelties attributed to gentle Christian theologians and contemplative monks. Dark indeed this God who whispered his wishes into the ear of popes and cardinals; and highlighted when John Paul II announced his desire that the Church closely consider its treatment of the Jews throughout history.

Why Anything?

The dark side of God is the underlying theme of this essay for that is the side which confounds and scares and bedevils us, one might say. For who can not be interested in a God who so often decides to be absent when most needed? Jesus had to deal with this absent God on the cross, and many other Jews have given up their religion as a result of the holocaust. Equally, many Christians have turned their backs on Christianity because they sensed the absence

of God as indicative of there being no God at all. No God at all. Nothing recognisably intelligent to regulate the extraordinary forces of the universe, or soften the drives of the human mind. Nothing at all to fall back on when life spat out its nastiness and love crumpled in the face of anger, resentment and unfaithfulness. No God at all. Just a great silence, and an emptiness.

But not quite empty, this universe, this strangely shaped chunk of space and time. A self with consciousness holding the whole scary edifice together, and a planet so infested with life that one could only marvel at its fecundity. So the next question was Why life? And the question after that Why anything? Indeed, why sight, and hearing, and love? Why horses and dung beetles and birds of paradise? Why self-consciousness? And why death? Why the death of all life after a little flutter, a little span of minutes, months or years? And most important of all, why evil? Why the concentration camps and the suffering? Or were such questions basically meaningless? Was there perhaps no point in asking them at all in the face of cosmic indifference, natural catastrophe and the vagaries of human nature?

But if there was no God, no intelligible force behind the whole extraordinary edifice, then how in the name of everything thought sacred and sensible had it all come about? How had the big bang resulted, for instance, in me sitting on a chair in a dressing gown having a cup of tea with the morning paper spread out before me? Looked at in this way, the idea of processes of growing complexity explaining every jot and tittle of life seemed to fall flat; and that in spite of the fact that such processes had obviously been at work. The inclination was to suspect that something mysterious lay behind it all, something intelligent. But as all the hard evidence suggested not just an absent God, but no God at all, then we were left, like our little planet, suspended in an emptiness, in a darkness, in a silence.

Just the white noise of space and a planet in trouble because of over population, acid rain, rampant pollution, stock piles of atomic weapons and the virus of sectarian ideas run riot. No God at all. Just genocide, starvation, torture, murder, self-interest and shoddy sentiments to juggle with. Quite an evil place, really, the planet earth, when one was honest with oneself. A kind of

concentration camp in its own right where the inmates were murdered by degree, by life. And all the beauty merely an interesting backdrop for this rabid little play to play itself out, to the end. The end would be some kind of cataclysm, we were told, the collision of our planet with a comet, the dying of our sun, the big bang in reverse. Like our own little lives, our planet, and even the universe, had only so long to live. And so in an attempt to combat the emptiness, explain the darkness and reinterpret the silence, we had invented religion. God was there in spite of everything suggesting the contrary. It was not his fault that cars crashed or children suffered or love died. He was the creator, the instigator, and he had a majestic plan for the whole edifice, a purpose, a playing out of events to a conclusion simply too big for our little minds to grapple with. And even death was part of the puzzle; we would go on after death and be made face the consequences of our deeds while alive - the afterlife was an interrogation session.

The Christian base line was this: Jesus had died on the cross to redeem all human beings from their sins; all we had to do was accept this glorious fact, live a Christian life, and everything was fixed up for all eternity. What could be simpler? Those beyond the confines of Christendom with more exotic religious notions were.....well, mistaken. Hindus and Buddhists were very nice people, but..... And Jews and followers of Islam were equally nice, but..... And anthropologists, sociologists, biologists, physicist and mathematicians were all very nice and terribly clever, but.....Christianity was really where it was all at, and to not understand this was at base to understand nothing at all.

An All-encompassing Evil

What had to be understood was that in spite of being made by God, the world was in the grip of an all-encompassing evil. The world was not evil in itself, it was in the grasp of evil; and the whole extraordinary business of being alive was the working out of a plan of salvation conceived in the mind of God before the creation of the world. We were, unwittingly, engaged in a battle, and the battle was between good and evil, between love and hate,

between God and the Devil. Evil was not simply the result of bad or inadequate perception in action; it was an immensely powerful and independent force or energy lying behind the breakdown of our lives, and our societies. There was an archetypal dimension to evil which could invade and control our lives.

Christian orthodoxy generally handled this message with some dexterity, allowing for metaphor, and much else; but those of "traditionalist" persuasion were forthright in both their literal acceptance of such ideas, and in their condemnation of those who did not accept their premise as basic and self-evident. So there was a split in Christian ranks as to how such a message should be got across, and the result was a theological and intellectual debate of some ferocity. And it did not matter to which section, or side of Christianity one belonged, the debate was evident. Whether Catholic or Protestant, every congregation had its hardliners, its liberals, its radicals, its fence-sitters. And on top of it all had appeared apologists for a re-evaluation of Christianity in the light of historical and scientific research which set many a believers teeth on edge. Such believers had of course a ready answer for those demanding a fair go on the level of scholarly probing: evil forces were behind all such approaches. Complex theories which undermined the enchanting stories of Scripture and attacked the Christian message were quite obviously inspired by God's antagonist, the devil. To say that Christ's death on the cross did not quite mean what the Church said it meant, was to be in the clutches of a Devil-inspired delusion.

In relation to Catholicism in particular, the historical underpinnings for such a state of affairs were not hard to identify; in fact there was no need to travel further back than the reign of Pius X (1914-1922) to discover why such a head-in-the-sand attitude toward scholarship and learned debate had come to exist. What Jesus had really believed and taught was apparently of no interest to Pius and those closest to him, only what the Church taught about Jesus and his teachings - tradition was all. So afraid had this Pope become as the "modernists" closed in on the historical, that he encouraged the formation of a spy ring, a veritable Secret Service within the Vatican "...outside and above the hierarchy which spied on the members of the hierarchy itself,

even on their Eminences, the Cardinals."4 So says Gerard Noel. Fear of "heresy" among the learned was the reason for such measures, and "...the witch-hunting which ensued halted all catholic scholarly efforts to keep pace with modern learning particularly in the realm of scriptural interpretation." Noel does not pull his punches on this issue; he informs us that Catholic scholarship had later to work at a frenzied pace to make up for the wasted years.

In *Popes Through the Ages*, Joseph S. Brusher, SJ, sanitises the reign of Pius and speaks of "...priests, infected with bad philosophical ideas and worse theological ones....striving to make modernism prevail against the Church."5 Preval? He goes on to say that modernism is not about devotion to television or atomic research, but a "very dangerous adaptation of the dogmas of faith to fads of the day." And so the writings of leading modernists were banned, and an encyclical and a decree published to help tear such thinking out by the roots. This was followed by the demand that every priest take an oath against modernism, and by this measure alone the movement of reassessment and reinterpretation was stifled.

Pius X died on August 20, 1914, and it is said that "miracles" took place as the people thronged around his tomb. Beatified by Pius XII in June, 1951, this bulwark against the development of a Christianity capable of making informed decisions was canonised in May, 1954.

Catholics "cocooned" in their theologically constructed faith believed that the Church had all the answers, and that these answers could not and should not be tampered with. There was no other teacher than the Church. God had sanctioned the Church, and deviance from what the Church taught should be condemned as heresy and punished. It was as simple as that. In 1907 those who dared question established Church thinking were brought to book, and the persecution of such thinkers continued until 1914, when Benedict XV took over. Finding himself on the previous Pope's hit-list as a suspected Modernist, Benedict suppressed this inquisitional-type spy-ring and returned things to normal. But damage to the Church's capacity to redefine itself was already integral, and it would take the revolutionary presence of John

XX111 to finally move the whole edifice towards reassessment proper. Noel refers to this reassessment as "the great going-back"; which is to say that Catholic scholarship eventually got back on track and allowed the latest discoveries, particularly those in history, to seep into its consciousness.

The Cost of Continuity

And yet, in spite of this forging ahead, this apparent reassessment of her past, this seeming attempt to be open and responsible and reasonable, traditionalist views and beliefs of a medieval cast continued to control the Church. In fact it could be said that the Church played a game with herself, a game which allowed her to store away her scholarly findings and only initiate a highly controlled release of such findings to the seven hundred million men, women and children who then composed her gigantic flock. So there was a semblance of openness on the scholarly level, but when it came right down to it the method of handling the results of such scholarship were bound to the old premise that the "faith" of the people must be safeguarded at all cost. No matter that such an approach could only result in confusion and perplexity; it was more important to have "continuity" than admit failure on the level of interpretations once considered beyond dispute. Whatever the findings of historians, anthropologists, archaeologists and others, the Church was the Church and it was not going to disappear. And its teachings about God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit and the Devil, although hard to accept on many levels, remained the cornerstone of what had been, and would continue to be, the principle regulating religious force of the Western world. There was another dimension to all of this which scholarship and intellectual debate and ordinary secular intelligence could not penetrate, and it was the job of the Church to ensure that that dimension was not entirely eroded. Whatever the world might think of the idea, evil and good existed as opposing forces, and Christ's life and death were our only conduit towards comprehending what that might mean.

In 1976, Laurens van der Post pin-pointed a logical anomaly in relation to the above. "The coming of Christ," he observed, "had

abolished neither the darkness nor the devil. They existed, still active and valid as ever in life."⁶ This was an important observation; nothing had changed in relation to good and evil except the creation of a theological escape hatch through which every single human being in existence had to go to avoid damnation and the torments of hell. God's world, as this friend of Carl Jung's came to realise, was still full of an old night and unrepentant evil. Whether we liked it or not, evil was a living element of reality with which we each personally had to deal; and it seemed that that was how God wanted it. The crucifixion of Jesus, in spite of an elaborate "victory" theology created over the centuries, had not quite fulfilled its earlier promise. John's gospel had Jesus promise that his death on the cross would result in the prince of this world (Satan) being cast out; but Satan had been as active as ever after the event, and this suggested a delayed fulfillment. Paul had believed that the power of the Devil had been destroyed by Jesus' death; but this was flatly contradicted by passages showing that the Devil had continued in his role of devouring beast. So it was not an immediate victory that Christianity had won over evil, it was a victory to come as the *Book of Revelation* made clear. Only the Second Coming of Christ would initiate the casting of Satan and his hosts into the lake of fire and brimstone.

A Host of Fallen Angels

Satan's "hosts" were composed of fallen angelic beings and human beings seduced by such. The lesser angels who followed Satan into exile became demons, the human beings in his pay "Satanist" by definition. The only problem with all of this was that the angels said to have followed Satan - then called "Lucifer" (light bearer) into exile - had apparently done no such thing. In the Jewish Apocrypha they had in fact fallen in love with the daughters of men long after the event of Lucifer's fall, taken them to wife and borne children of great historical renown. As a result of this state of affairs, impiety had taken root on the earth, and God had had to destroy almost everyone on the planet with a watery avalanche. In the *Book of Enoch*, God had chained these

lusting angels in the dark places of the earth to await judgment, and by means inexplicable their gigantic progeny had turned into evil spirits, or demons. In the *Books of Adam and Eve*, written in the last quarter of the first century, and believed to be either Christian in origin, or influenced by Christianity, Satan had incited other angels to disobey, and all had been simultaneously cast out of heaven. So went the topsy-turvy stories of how evil had come to this beautiful planet, and one could only wonder at the mythological contradictions, and at the unresolved issue of how angels from a non-physical dimension could experience sexual attraction.

According to Christian teachings a tenth of all the hosts of heaven were said to have followed Satan down to our realm, and this exodus, along with what appears to have been a subsequent migration of angelic beings to earth for purely carnal reasons, leaves one with the impression of a God curiously ignorant of his angels' needs and ambitions. Heaven riddled with pride and carnality? What kind of place had heaven become that such a change in character and atmosphere could have erupted? And why hadn't the ringleaders been dealt with sooner? And what about the physical aspect; were these beings somehow human in spite of their divine origins? The angels of the Old Testament were called *malachim* - literally, "emissaries" - and constituted a kind of divine postal service between heaven and earth. Prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, angels of a distinctly anthropomorphic type had appeared to Lot, and although human in appearance, had been immediately recognised as angels. In spite of looking like human beings, there was something about angels that gave them away, some recognisable characteristic or capacity which ear-marked them as different. Appearing as if by magic seems to have been one such characteristic; arriving physically above the heads of their contactees another. Abraham, we are told, had to raise his eyes to look at three men who appeared; and he asks them to not pass over him. He then invites them to wash their feet, rest, and eat. Curious stuff. On having done so, these angels then proceed to Sodom and the task of mass destruction they had come to execute.

Many centuries later Augustine would maintain that the Devil and his angels were expelled from heaven and cast into darkness. But he did not mean by this the bowels of the earth; he meant the earth's atmosphere - the vault of the heavens. This was the realm mysteriously given to them by God, and although a prison in comparison with the heavenly heaven, it constituted a vast area within which, and from which, they could exercise their desire to subvert the human race. And having once been angels, they could not be robbed of that status, merely demoted; they would retain their angelic bodies, their ethereal natures and their extraordinary powers. Lords of the "upper air", they would move around as they had once done on God's behalf, with speed and surprise on their side. As can be imagined, the contest between fallen angel and human being was really no contest at all; at least not until Jesus appeared on the scene. After his redemptive death on the cross, Satan and his angelic gang could no longer push human beings around: the name of Jesus was all they needed to put Satan and his minions to instant flight.

In relationship to all of this, Norman Cohn puts his finger on one very important aspect: the later Christian exaggeration of, and morbid interest in, things demonic. He notes that the dark fascination filling medieval descriptions of things Satanic is quite lacking in the disputations of the early Church Fathers. In fact Origen is convinced that Satan's power is lessening in strength; for when a Christian successfully stands up to a demon in the name of Jesus, and wins, he believed that that demon lost its power to tempt another and had to return to hell. By the late Middle Ages this kind of confidence had been undermined and all but forgotten. Satan was by then everywhere, in every dark nook and cranny, and he had now successfully broken through and enlisted the help of human individuals to corrupt the faith from within the Church itself. Heresy mongers flourished, and their often subtle rearrangements of the faith were designed to lead whole sections of the Church astray. And so was born that attitude which feared knowledge and remained aloof from the rumblings of a rudimentary science. The myth of a Church uniquely in possession of eternal truths was what had to be believed, and God help

anyone who contradicted that carefully elaborated idea with a few ideas of their own.

This brings us back to the reign of Pius X. Peter de Rosa writes: "Pius X instigated such a purge of scholars that fifty years after his death the effects were still being felt. LaGrange in Scripture, Duchesne in history were made to toe the papal line or find themselves on the heap of discards. Duchesne was forced to give up his chair at the *Institut Catholique* in Paris; his seminal book on the origins of Christianity put on the Index.⁷ All books and magazines produced by Catholics were censored prior to publication; a priest required permission to write to or for a newspaper. Angelo Roncalli (the future John XXIII) came under suspicion of being a modernist, and the result of it all was a Church massively out of step with the modern world and the decisive historical and scientific discoveries of that world. The next handful of popes did little to correct the situation, and even Pius XII, a fore-runner of John XXIII in many of his ideas, failed to move the Church away from absolutism. Jesus remained crowned and seated on purple cushions, his autocratic stare focused on an imaginary past. The Church duplicated that stare by remaining aloof, unapproachable and beyond criticism as it contemplated an imaginary future.

Satan as God's Shadow

The human mind is capable of sustaining a terrible darkness, and this darkness, for both van der Post and Jung, was related to a fundamental archetypal force with a troubling double aspect - God, it seemed, had a "shadow" of some proportions. In spite of much Old Testament evidence to the contrary, Christianity was convinced that God and the Devil were separate forces in keen opposition, and that through Christ she had the means to control the Devil. As someone out to utterly destroy Christianity and replace it with a religious organisation of his own, Hitler was a "Satanist" by definition; he consciously believed in opposing forces battling on some alien dimension of existence for all eternity.⁸ So there was plenty of evidence to place Hitler in the esoteric, or occultist, camp, and that in itself was interpreted as a

fundamental proof that the Church's theology of evil accurately reflected a hidden reality. No thought given to the fact that Hitler's occult vision was only possible because the Church had invented that vision; no thought given to the fact that two such inventions in collaboration did not sensibly constitute a proof of anything.

In a letter written by the known occultist Adolf Lanz as early as 1932, Hitler is described not only as a "pupil", but in tones prophetic described as someone who "...will one day be victorious and develop a movement that makes the world tremble - "⁹ Hitler came to power one year later. A renegade Cistercian monk of six years' standing, Lanz had founded a racialist organisation of his own called the Order of the New Templars (*Ordo Novo Templi*), and based its philosophy on the legends of the Holy Grail. In his *Occult Reich*, J. H. Brennan states that this new Order was deeply interested in the concept of an Aryan master race, and that for reasons of purity introduced the idea of selective breeding. Heinrich Himmler saw to it that Lanz's ideas were put into brutal practice, his suggested methods for dealing with inferior races incorporated into Nazi strategy. And if this alone is not sufficient to convince of an occult background to Hitler's thinking, then Adolf Lanz's choice of a flag bearing a swastika as early as 1907 should be enough to sway opinion in that direction.

Impressed by the Church's ruthlessness down the centuries, Hitler copied that organisation's basic shape and format on the political level, and with surprising thoroughness proceeded to house the whole hierarchal structure within a recognisable religious framework. Consciously designing the Schutzstaffel (SS) units on the Jesuit Order, he left it to Himmler to develop this elitist group into a magically-oriented order of super-obedient troops. Striving to control the human will through rigorous discipline and a break down in all sentiment, the Third Reich followed the Church's historical lead and began to harness the libidinal energy of the German people. Viewing Hitler as another Christ, as a modern Saviour who would free the human psyche from the sin of weakness (the Church's version of this was the weakness of sin), the new Reich, like the Church, conceived of a kingdom without limit, a kingdom within which every knee

would bow, or be made to bow. In a strange twist of theology and mythology, the Furer's dark system of belief and methods of subjugation were unnervingly similar to that of the Church which proudly carried the symbols and titles of the old eagle-bedecked Roman Empire. Schooled in an occult system based on complex religious reasoning, every frightful thing conceived of and initiated by Hitler was a reflection of what the Church in the name of Christianity had itself inflicted on the world century by century. Yes, she had also done much good during those centuries, much to delight the eye, gladden the heart and undermine insecurity in the face of a God so often felt to be absent, and the Third Reich no doubt intended to be just as kind and sensitive and supportive of its own when its new, supra-normality was installed world wide.

God's 'Tempter'

At the theological level, Christianity spoke of an evil being of great power, a being in constant opposition to the Supreme Deity. Dante had described this being as a giant with three heads, coloured red, yellow and black, and down the centuries numerous descriptions of this being had held the human imagination in sway. More importantly, however, there resided behind such descriptions the idea of a once great angel of God fallen from the divine presence whose whole *raison d'être* was the moral destruction of the human race. And herein lay the heart of the puzzle, for how had such an august being fallen away from God when he was neither tainted by a physical nature, or in receipt of human emotions? How had the sin of pride (the specific sin Lucifer was accused of) arisen in a mind with direct and constant access to the Supreme Being? Both Milton and Goethe saw Satan as a tragic, yet heroic and even reasonable, man of the world; and J.B. Priestly, along with Marlow, had Satan capable of physical manifestation. This suggested that Satan, in a manner not yet properly understood, had a physical aspect. The popular notion of Satan was of a horned figure dressed in a one-piece suit of red complete with pitchfork and cloven hooves. This image had strongly influenced the public imagination, reducing what had once been considered a

very dangerous being indeed to the level of a pantomime character whose kingdom was at the earth's fiery centre.

And so God, through Jesus, struggles with Satan, his one time friend, companion and helper, and the world is split into two camps which must forever relentlessly oppose one another. In Satan's kingdom, the powers of darkness prevail, and Christ's sole mission is the destruction of that kingdom. Unlike Yahweh in the Old Testament, the God of the New Testament is confronted by a Satan no longer in his pay, as it were, but by a being formidable in power and totally separate from himself. In the Old Testament Satan is one of God's courtiers, and as Norman Cohn observes, his achievement is that he forces God's hand against an innocent man, namely Job. But in the tale itself Job knows nothing of Satan; he ascribes his intolerable condition to God, and the reason for this may be that the prologue carries a theological view at variance with the story's main text. In earlier times the God of the Old Testament would have had no trouble with the roll of "tempter", but later this "duty" is passed over to Satan, and then separated from God altogether in the creation of a demonic kingdom where Satan rules. Cohn points to a parallel story development about God tempting King David in 2 Samuel 24 (probable early tenth century) with a repeat of exactly the same story in 1 Chronicles 21 (probable fourth century) where responsibility is switched from God to Satan. In the whole of the Old Testament, it is this text alone which suggests that Satan is himself a principle of evil, and it is the only time that the noun "Satan" (adversary) becomes a proper noun.¹⁰

With the development of monotheism in the Old Testament, the tribal God Yahweh eventually underwent a metamorphosis and emerged as omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. As such, there was no room for a counteractive evil of any dimension, or seriousness. In fact so strenuously were these characteristics of God affirmed, that evil paled into insignificance. Satan, when he appeared at all, was God's accomplice, not his antagonist. Norman Cohn interprets this state of affairs thus: "Satan, in fact, developed out of Yahweh himself, in response to changing ideas about the nature of God."¹¹ But after the incident between God and King David, the Jews developed what Cohn terms "....a new, complex

and comprehensive demonology":¹² the age of the apocalyptic with its clear cut dualism, its revelations and ambitions for the future was now the name of the game.

Satan Psychologised

In *The Kingdom of the Gods*, Geoffrey Hodson identifies Satan as a personification of the "I-making impulse from which arises the delusion of separateness,"¹³ and views the Satan of popular theology and public imagination as no more than an excuse, a scapegoat to be blamed for the errors into which we all fall. This is a sophisticated approach to the question of what Satan or the Devil or Lucifer might mean; but it does not fully explain the idea of a being of concentrated demonic power as believed in by many Christians, and by others of different religious persuasion. There is, under certain circumstances, it seems, something incredibly tangible about evil; which suggests that at its most concentrated it is more than a mere mode of perception, and sometimes a presence which overpowers. Now what this presence signifies is difficult to determine, but one thing is sure, once sensed, it is impossible to any longer consider it innocuous. The presence of evil is a truly terrifying experience which can neither be ignored, nor satisfactorily diluted by psychological theory. In fact it is sometimes so powerful that even the Church may fail when trying to deal with it.

But how can there be a Devil, a tangible and concentrated force of evil if there is no God, indeed, if the cap "D" devil is no more than a personification of the I-making impulse? And if the Devil is the opposite of God, and there is no God, then does that not automatically disallow the existence of the Devil? For if God is truly absent, truly non-existent and not merely in hiding, then it is axiomatic that the Devil too does not exist. There again, if evil is merely the absence of good, as some Christians believe, then the very absence of the font of all good must surely initiate a monstrous evil into existence. This is of course to form an illegitimate mix of ideas, but this is the mix most of us carry at the back of our minds, and it gets us into endless trouble. The popular

Christian theory of evil, dependent as it is on a God out there somewhere, and therefore in some unimaginable fashion an object, yet simultaneously not an object (otherwise God too would be bound by cosmic events), unwittingly promotes a topsy-turvy conception of evil which elevates it beyond its station, concretises it, and in so doing reduces human beings to no more than playthings between gigantic opposing forces beyond time and space. So the question is: How can God be defined as all good if he allows an evil only marginally less powerful than himself to exist? If an intelligent evil can constantly bedevil our minuscule hopes and aspiration, and on occasions subject us, like Job, or the mother of that murdered child, to unbearable physical and mental torture, then the mind behind such a state of affairs has without doubt similar pathologies to our own. And this should come as no surprise, for is it not said that we are made in the image of God?

So is the Christian God mad; is he perhaps insane? Or have we simply been misinformed about his mentality and habits? Could it be that the apparent absence of God has a significance far beyond the notion of desertion or non-existence? Could it be that the dark side of this creator God of ours has not been properly understood; indeed, that good and evil and the complex relationship between them constitute a mystery which we have to reinterpret for purposes of survival?

Exploration, not Declaration

In his engrossing and provocative book, *The Disappearance of God*, Richard Elliot Friedman suggests that we are at a crossroads, and must decide how to proceed on to our destiny. But how? What exactly must we do or think or be to earn such a destiny? That is the question we have to ask, and our answer should be robust enough, compassionate enough and intelligent enough to avoid exclusiveness. If our answer is other than that, if we fall into exclusiveness, into narrow-mindedness and prejudice and self-opinionated certainty, then we have surely failed in our task. Exploration, not "declaration", is the tack we have to take.

As already stated, the underlying theme of this essay is to explore the dark side of God. Such a side undoubtedly exists, and

it manifests itself in our psyches, in our individual natures, in nature itself, and in the institutions we create. We are more than we seem, and there is more to the world we inhabit than is obvious at first glance. At first glance everything is as it ought to be; at second glance we are confronted by the embryonic realisation that everything is just a touch more complicated than first thought. By the third and fourth glance we are caught up in a series of mysteries so demanding that we fear we will never make sense of our lives at all; and from there on in we have to brace ourselves for the final struggle, the final onslaught of doubt and fear and incomprehension. That is the challenge of our lives, of our physical, mental and spiritual existences, to partake of this extraordinary journey of exploration and not stop too soon. The danger we face is the danger of giving in to inadequate explanations, inadequate formulations of knowledge and experience because they cause us less pain. But do they? I would argue that in the end they cause us the greatest pain of all, the pain of knowing, deep within, that we have lied to ourselves, and to the world.

Ultimately we may not arrive at the answers we have so diligently searched for, the answers we have hoped for. But I believe that it is better to have tried and failed than not to have tried at all. And I have a suspicion, born from experience, that to step out on such a journey is in itself to set in motion a profound mystery in its own right.

References and Notes:

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