

Catholicism's Dark Side

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The Holy Roman Catholic Church replaces the Roman Empire as an historical entity, develops a theology of intelligent evil, 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. 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 this account will suffice to underline the depth of degradation reached. Annoyed by the crying of a babe in arms, a black-uniformed officer instructs the mother to shut her brat up, she tries, but fails, and in reaction he pulls the child from her arms, swings it around his head and smashes it off a nearby wall. I have omitted some of the details, but the end result is the same: the shattering of an infant's skull for what seems to be the most petty of reasons.

This incident, blatant and basic as it appears, may however conceal something subtle and important due to its stark brutality: this officer's killing of the child may have been an attempt to silence the voice of conscience. The death of this innocent signals a monstrous disregard for human life, but it may also signal a blind and furious attempt to silence the voice of innocence. At the heart of this mental darkness there may have resided a faint, nagging recognition that all was not well. On that day no sliver of light was detectable, all was black and unbearable and beyond comprehension, but in retrospect it may contain a tenuous relief.

A possibility 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 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 unimaginable degree these administrators obviously were, but some of them did buckle under the stench and the sickness and the constant level of sadism required to fulfill the Third Reich's extraordinary purpose. Little can be said about those who revelled in such butchery without remorse; dire pathologies must have been at work alongside greed and avarice, the thrall of National Socialism's creed having lulled the mad, the bad and the well-intentioned into the same mental space.

The Counts of Tusculum

The Church that replaced the Roman Empire developed a theology of the human will subservient to God through Christ and his Church that Hitler eventually came to envy and copy. In a strange way, the Christian Church and the Roman Empire and the Third Reich are all part of the same puzzle, each 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 is not generally realised is that the Church "Christianised" Rome's imperial cult and ideology, borrowed terms such as "diocese", "prefecture", "vicariate" and "consistory", incorporated court ritual into its forms of worship and refocused the whole shebang on Jesus. Never again would Jesus be seen in his own light; from that moment he reformed as a Divine Emperor who stamped each pope's reign with approval. Seated on purple cushions and treated as a Universal Cosmic Emperor who was also

the "Son of God", the Jesus of the gospels melted clean away. Armed with impressive insignia, privileges and secular dignity, the administrators of this new Roman order created for themselves an aura of sanctioned authority and did more or less whatever they liked. So successful were they that Hilaire Belloc would write of the Roman Empire as never having perished at all, but as having been 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 4th century through to the 11th, the election of Rome's bishops (not universally recognised in the West as "Popes" with imperial authority until the 11th century) turned into a purely political affair. From that point, "elections" were controlled by the Roman emperors, and by the 11th century the papacy was virtually the family possession of the counts of Tusculum. In his *Anatomy of the Catholic Church*, Gerard Noel sums up the 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 that beggars the 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 commonplace. Noel sums up the situation: "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 4th century Sylvester 1 claimed absolute "primacy" for himself,

and in the 5th Leo the Great pushed the notion of papal supremacy 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 accordingly. 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.

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; it is on record that when Hitler talked with Bishop Berning of Osnabruch in 1936, he intimated that he saw no difference 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 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 ears 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 that confounds and scares and bedevils us. 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.

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, 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. All the beauty merely an interesting backdrop for this rabid little play to run its course. The end would be some kind of cataclysm, the collision of our planet with a comet, the dying of our sun, the big bang in reverse. Like our lives, our planet, and even the universe, had only so long to live, and in an attempt to combat the emptiness, explain the darkness and reinterpret the silence, we had invented *God*. God was there in spite of everything to 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 playing out of events to a conclusion simply too big for our little minds to grapple with. Even death was part of the puzzle; we would go on after death and be made to face the consequences of our deeds while alive - the afterlife was an interrogation session.

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 between good and evil, between love and hate, between God and the Devil. Evil was not simply the result of bad or inadequate judgment; 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 that could invade and control our lives.

Christian orthodoxy handled this message with some dexterity; ultra-conservative Christians were unswerving in their condemnation of those who did not accept Christianity's ancient premise. There was a split in Christian ranks, and the result was a theological and intellectual debate of some ferocity. Whether Catholic or Protestant, every congregation had its hardliners, its liberals, its radicals and its fence-sitters. And on top of it all were apologists for a re-evaluation of Christianity in the light of historical and scientific research - forms of research that set believers' teeth on edge. Believers had a ready-made answer for those demanding scholarly re-evaluation: evil forces were behind those who undermined Scripture. Those who attacked the Christian message were obviously inspired by God's antagonist, the devil. To say that Christ's death on the cross did not mean what the Church said it meant was to be in the clutches of a Devil-inspired delusion.

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 how such an attitude toward scholarship and learned debate had evolved. What Jesus had really believed and taught had been of no interest to Pius and those closest to him, only "tradition" mattered. So afraid had this Pope become as the "modernist" thinkers closed in, he

had encouraged the formation of 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 Fear of heresy among the learned was the reason for such measures, "the witch-hunting which ensued halt[ing] all catholic scholarly efforts to keep pace with modern learning particularly in the realm of scriptural interpretation." Gerard Noel does not pull his punches; 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 He adds ominously 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, a measure that helped stifle all levels of dissent.

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. In 1907, however, those who dared question Church thinking had been relentlessly persecuted until Benedict XV took over in 1914. Finding himself on the previous Pope's hit-list as a suspected modernist, Benedict suppressed Pius' spy-ring and returned things to normal. Damage to the Church's capacity to redefine itself had however become integral, the necessary impetus for reassessment coming subsequently from the revolutionary presence of John XXIII. 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 benumbed consciousness.

The Cost of Continuity

In spite of this reassessment, traditionalist beliefs of a medieval cast continued to control the Church through a storing away of her scholarly findings. Initiating a highly controlled release of such findings to the seven hundred million men, women and children who composed her flock, she continued on much as before. There was a semblance of openness on the scholarly level, but the method of handling such scholarship was bound to the old premise that the "faith" of the people must be safeguarded at all cost. It did not matter that this resulted in confusion and perplexity; it was more important to have continuity than admit failure on previous questions. Whatever the findings of historians, anthropologists, archaeologists and others, the Church was the Church and it was not going to disappear amidst a welter of modern suppositions about self, other and world. There was another dimension to all of this that scholarship, intellectual debate and ordinary secular intelligence, could not penetrate, and it was the Church's responsibility to ensure that this 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 pinpointed 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 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. The crucifixion of Jesus, in spite of an elaborate "victory" theology, had not fulfilled its earlier promise. The promise in John's gospel that Jesus' death on the cross would result in the prince of this world

(Satan) being cast out, had not eventuated: Satan had been just as active after that event as before. Paul, too, had believed that the power of the Satan had been destroyed by Jesus' death on the cross; but this was contradicted by passages showing the Devil to have continued in his role of devouring beast. 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 humans seduced by such. The lesser angels who followed Satan into exile became demons, the humans in his pay defined as *Satanist*. The only problem with this was that the angels said to have followed Satan - then called "Lucifer" (light bearer) into exile - had done no such thing. In the Jewish Apocrypha they had fallen in love with the daughters of men long after the event of Lucifer's fall, taken them to wife and bore children of great historical renown. As a result of this, impiety had taken root on the earth and God had destroyed almost everyone on the planet with a watery avalanche. In the Book of Enoch, God had chained these lusty angels in the dark places of the earth to await judgment, and by inexplicable means their 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. 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 an 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 that 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 about to *pass over him*. He then invites them to wash their feet, rest, and eat. On having done so, these angels proceed to Sodom and the task of mass destruction they had come to execute.

Centuries later Augustine would maintain that the Devil and his angels were expelled from heaven and cast into darkness. But he did not mean the bowels of the earth; he meant the earth's atmosphere - the vault of the heavens. This was the realm given to the Devil's angels 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. Having once been angels, they could not be robbed of that status, merely demoted; they retained their angelic bodies, their ethereal natures and their extraordinary powers. Lords of the "upper air", they moved 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 angels and human beings was no contest at all; at least not until Jesus appeared. After his redemptive death, Satan and his angelic gang could no longer

push human beings around: the name of Jesus being all that was needed to put Satan and his minions to flight.

In relation 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. 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 demon lost its power to tempt another and had to return to hell. By the late Middle Ages this kind of confidence had been all but forgotten. Satan was by then in every nook and cranny; he had successfully broken through and enlisted the help of human beings to corrupt the faith from within the Church itself. Heresy mongers flourished, their often subtle rearrangements of the faith designed to lead whole sections of the Church astray. And so was born that attitude that feared knowledge and remained aloof from the rumblings of a rudimentary science: the myth of a Church in possession of eternal truths was up and running.

This takes 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 was a Church massively out of step with the modern world and its decisive

historical and scientific discoveries. The next handful of popes did little to correct the situation, 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 duplicating 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 is said to be related to an archetypal force with a troubling double aspect: God, it seems, has a *shadow*. In spite of much Old Testament evidence to the contrary, conservative Catholic Christianity is convinced that God and the Devil are forces in keen opposition, and that through Christ she has the means to control the Devil. Enter Adolf Hitler as someone out to destroy Christianity and replace it with a religious organisation of his own making. Hitler had believed in opposing forces battling it out on some other dimension of existence,⁸ and that placed him in the occultist camp, proving that the Church's theology of evil accurately reflected the nature of that hidden reality. No thought given to the fact that Hitler's occult vision had only been possible because the Church had constructed that vision; no thought given to the fact that such constructions 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 prophetic tones 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. Lanz, a renegade Cistercian monk of six years' standing, had founded the Order of the New Templars (*Ordo Novo Templi*), a racist organisation whose philosophy was based on the legends of the Holy Grail, and 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 had introduced the idea of selective breeding. Heinrich Himmler saw to

it that Lanz's ideas were put into brutal practice, his methods for dealing with inferior races being incorporated into Nazi strategy, the Reich's swastika-bedecked flag having itself been conceived by Adolf Lanz as early as 1907.

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 soldiers. 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 libidinal energies. Viewing Hitler as a saviour figure who would free the German psyche from the sin of weakness (the Church's version of this was the "weakness of sin"), the new Reich, like the old Church, conceived of a kingdom without limit within which every knee would bow, or be made to bow. In a strange twist of theology and mythology, the Furer's system of belief and methods of subjugation became unnervingly similar to that of the Church whose symbols and titles were that of the old Roman Empire. Schooled in an occult system based on complex religious reasoning, every frightful thing conceived and initiated by Hitler came to reflect what the Church, in the name of Christianity, had inflicted on the world in its own fashion, the security of mind furnished by both organisations supportive of a new, terrifying normality.

God's 'Tempter'

Christianity spoke of an evil being of great power in opposition to the supreme deity. Dante had described this being as a giant with heads coloured red, yellow and black, and down the centuries descriptions of this being had held the human imagination captive. Behind such descriptions resided the idea of a once great angel of God fallen from the divine presence whose *raison d'être* was the

moral destruction of the human race. Therein lay a puzzle, however, for how had such a 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 arisen in a mind with direct, constant access to the Supreme Being? Sympathetic to Lucifer's plight, Milton and Goethe saw Satan as a tragic, yet heroic and even reasonable, man of the world, J.B. Priestly and Christopher Marlow as similarly reasonable and capable of physical manifestation. The popular notion of Satan that arose was of a horned figure dressed in a one-piece suit of red complete with pitchfork and cloven hooves, an image that safely reduced this being of stupendous supernatural power and evil intent to the level of a pantomime character. But not completely, for behind this comical figure stood the Church's old Satan, and in their hands God's onetime angelic helper was turned into an eternal antagonist.

In Satan's kingdom the powers of darkness prevail, Christ's sole mission being 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, 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 recorded achievement is that he forces God's hand against an innocent man, namely Job. In this tale Job knows nothing of Satan; he ascribes his intolerable condition to God alone, the roll of "tempter" later passing over to Satan. Separated from God altogether, Satan establishes a demonic kingdom in opposition to God's kingdom. Norman Cohn points to a parallel story development about God tempting King David in 2 Samuel 24 (probable early tenth century) with a repeat of 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, this text alone suggests Satan to be a principle of evil in his own right, and it is the only time that the noun "Satan", meaning *adversary*, is used as a proper noun.¹⁰

With the development of monotheism the tribal God Yahweh underwent a metamorphosis and emerged as omnipotent,

omniscient and omnipresent, there being no room for a counteractive evil of any dimension, or seriousness. 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. 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 the Jews later developing "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 in operation.

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 a scapegoat to be blamed for the errors into which we ourselves fall. This is a sophisticated approach to the question of what Satan or the Devil or Lucifer might mean; but it does not 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, 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 that overpowers. 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 can be so terrifying it is beyond dilution by psychological theory, so inundating that even specifically designed Church rituals may fail when trying to deal with it.

The popular Christian theory of evil, dependent as it is on a God *out there* somewhere, and therefore in some sense an object, yet simultaneously not an object (otherwise God would be bound by cosmic events), promotes a topsy-turvy notion of evil that elevates it beyond its station, concretises it, and in doing so 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 principle of evil can 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. Or are they actually identical given that we have been made in the image of God? So is God mad; is he insane? Have we been misinformed about his mentality and habits? Could it be that the apparent absence of this 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 that 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 or 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 the dark side of God. Such a side undoubtedly exists, and it manifests itself in our psyches, in our individual natures, and in the institutions we create. We are more than we seem to be, 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 realisation that everything is just a bit 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 that point onwards we are enmeshed in a net of secret doubts and fears that almost disable us. The danger we face is the danger of giving in to inadequate explanations, inadequate formulations of knowledge and experience because they are easier to handle. I would argue against that route. We may not arrive at the answers we search or hope for, but it is better to have tried and failed than not to have tried at all. To fail in our trying is not an affront to what and who we are; it is a disguised success in that it speaks of indomitable courage in the face of indomitable odds.

References and Notes:

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