

Life of the Spirit

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THE APOSTOLATE OF SATAN

By

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THE world has little belief nowadays in the existence of a personal devil. If you meet Satan only, let us say, against the background of the Parisian society of Baudelaire's day you may be tempted to dismiss him as just part of the paraphernalia of a fashionable dilettantism; if you know him only in terms of medieval gargoyles and illuminations you may think him just one of the many childish fancies of a superstitious age. But in fact it is very unsound and unscientific to leave the matter there. Underneath all the superstitions of the Middle Ages, the fashionable posings of a later society, the unreasoning panic of the recurrent periods of witch-baiting, there does lie a world of a very different sort: a world of deadly and horrible seriousness, where men know exactly what they are doing and do it ruthlessly and effectively, a world that you know to be real because of its horror. That world is with us still.

Since the time of Socrates there have been some who have tried to explain sin in terms of ignorance: 'we needs must love the highest when we see it,' and if we do wrong it is because we do not see clearly enough. That theory can indeed cover many of the facts—it was Christ himself who said 'They know not what they do'—but it does not cover all the facts. There is such a thing as the love of evil as such: it is to be found in the heart that lives not in love but in hate; and then, to realize more and more the true nature of evil is only to pursue it the more vigorously.

There are others who explain all moral evil in terms of evolution: we are not long emerged from the animal kingdom, and there are times when we regress to more primitive standards of action: we return to the herd-level, the animal level. But leaving aside the question of the validity of this assumption, there are forms of evil which are not merely animal; which cannot be explained simply in terms of a regress to a lower type of consciousness simply because they would be horrifying at any level of consciousness, and can only be explained in terms of corruption by, and obedience to, an evil agency outside the natural evolutionary process.

Some people have the faculty, denied to most of us, of *feeling* the presence of this more-than-human evil. (Animals have it too.) For those of us who have not, it is easy to follow the prevailing

climate of opinion. Materialism has reigned too long to leave us untouched unless we are very careful: for all our belief in God and his revelation, we may find it hard really to believe in our hearts in the existence of Satan, or at any rate to do more than accept the fact in a theoretical way, without allowing it to affect our practical way of life. But to do that is again to be very unscientific: to absorb uncritically a prevailing climate of opinion and allow it to determine our behaviour is as superstitious as anything we can find to deride in the ages we think of as superstitious.

The only scientific procedure is to face *all* the facts, and to see where they lead. The facts, in this context, can be reduced to three categories: the testimony of those who, it appears, have an immediate awareness of the presence of evil—to which must be added the general findings of some modern psychology: the explicit and unquestioning belief of those whose wisdom and veracity it is difficult or impossible to doubt—and above all, of Christ himself; the long history and present continuance of the underworld in which the existence of personal evil is not only an accepted fact, but a source of effective *power*.

We should not underestimate the importance of this last point. There are people who cannot be bothered with psychological oddities, and have no time for religion; there are few who cannot be touched by terror. This is not the place to attempt to describe in detail the underworld of Satan; but we may remind ourselves that it is many centuries now since St Paul wrote to the people of Thessalonica of the evil power, the 'mystery of iniquity,' already at work in the world; and that through succeeding ages that power has been worshipped and obeyed and invoked; and that as Satan has been called the Ape of God, so his worship apes the worship of God, and its ultimate horror is the use for its liturgy of the Victim of the Christian Sacrifice.

Now a Christian tradition, springing partly from St Paul and partly from the *Apocalypse*, suggests that after the founding of the Church of Christ the evil power, though active in the world, was at first to be held in check, but that in the latter days that check would be removed, Satan would be 'unleashed,' and his influence would therefore become more manifest and more terrible. And there are some who hold that in this last century that unleashing has taken place, and that therefore we must realize that a crisis of a special sort is upon us. That may or may not be the case; but again there are certain facts which we should view together. It is the fact that the events of the last hundred years have led to a crisis of which Berdyaev has remarked that it is not a crisis *in* human history but the crisis *of* human history. It is the fact that evil, and human degradation, have reached a depth to which history does not seem to supply a parallel on anything like the same scale. It is the fact that the Church has been and is being heavily persecuted ~~and~~ in some parts of the world, sys-

tematically wiped out. There are two other things: first, there seem at any rate to be indications that while as always there is great holiness to be found, and to be found frequently, in God's family, at the same time the hold of many Christians on their religious convictions is becoming more tenuous, their interest, even, in the things of the spirit more unreal, as though indeed there were an influence in the world making it harder for men to believe and love with all their strength. And secondly, there seem also to be indications that the worship of Satan, in the most literal sense of the word, and consequently the invocation of the power of Satan, have been increasing in recent years: and whether or not the increase is a fact, there is no doubt about the cult of Satan being a contemporary fact, and a fact to be reckoned with.

It is, then, worth considering that when we put these various facts and suggestions and possibilities together they do seem to cohere. Their coherence does not mean that the end of the world is at hand (though of course it may be: and we should be not only better Christians but better citizens as well if we were as aware of the possibility as were the early Christians); but it does mean that the present crisis of humanity is very far from being a merely natural and political one; it does mean that behind the economic stresses and the political tensions a critical point has been reached in the cosmic struggle, of which these are only some of the surface manifestations; and it does mean that we can fight best for humanity if we realize that our battle is ultimately with 'principalities and powers' that are not of this world.

And what are the weapons which the Christian should use? Obviously the way to beat back the power of evil is to increase the power of love, and that is the first thing to keep in mind.

You have to imagine the world as though weighed down by a dense pall of black vapour—*aer caliginosus*, St Augustine called it—blinding and stifling, and shutting out the blue of heaven: the pall of evil and hatred. And there is only one thing which can pierce through the darkness and let in light and life and love: every time there is an act of pure and selfless love, every time a soul gives itself to God, or the Samaritan tends the stranger, the curtain is broken through, and from heaven there streams into the world of men a renewal of life. Darkness and light—the dark fire of evil of which William Law speaks, and the light which is life—the struggle between the two is the history of man; you can see the immensity of the power of darkness in its effects even if you cannot be sensible of its presence; and against it, it is clear, man of himself can do nothing. There is indeed today a very widespread feeling precisely of helplessness: the doom hangs over our heads, and we feel powerless to avert it; we feel that processes move inevitably to their catastrophe. But that is true only of human power unaided: the darkness can in fact be pierced, the situation can be controlled and retrieved, in the greater power of

the Light. Only, this is a power which leaves to men the responsibility of using it. The might of God is present and active in the world; but it is dependent, in the normal way of Providence, upon the activity—the vision and love and effort—of the human beings who are its instruments. It is more or less effective in the world in proportion as men are more or less aware of God and his presence, more or less perfect in love of his will and obedience to it. And that is to say that the supreme need is for contemplative souls—men and women of prayer, men and women who live in the love of God.

There is something else. We cannot of course remain content with a purely negative and defensive fight against the spirits of evil: we need to go over to the attack, by doing what we can to carry the power and the presence of God into the world in which we live our daily lives. But more than that, we can try to turn the weapons of Satan back upon Satan himself: we can try to turn him into an unwilling apostle of the truth.

There comes a point after which the only motive of credibility would seem to be terror. The facts about the worship of Satan are capable of inspiring quite a deal of terror. They may therefore have the effect of making the existence of Satan credible to a materialistically-minded world. But Satan, whatever else he is, is not *ultimate* reality: to believe in Satan is to be led to believe in God. There must be an object of the Satanic hate.

More than that. The centre of the Satanic cultus is the sacred Host: it is there as a fact, a reality, a source of power as well as an object of hate. Convince a man of the reality of satanism and you may be helping him to faith in the reality of the Mass. If you can do that you are turning evil into an apostolate for the truth; and that is the best of all ways of fighting it.

But there is one danger which we have at all costs to avoid, and without which all this awareness of Satan would hinder rather than help. 'The kingdom of God is within you'; but so also, alas, is the kingdom of Satan. We know well enough the temptation to find in someone or something a scapegoat to bear the burden of our own sins, so that we can go on feeling blameless ourselves. To turn Satan into a scapegoat is like turning God into a mascot: it relieves us of all sense of responsibility. M. Denis de Rougemont has recently reminded us that to induce men to deny his existence is the devil's great triumph, but perhaps to induce them to saddle him with all responsibility for the evil in the world is a greater achievement still. The way to wisdom is, as Augustine tells us, humility; and the way to humility is, for us, the sense of sin; so that to make Satan alone responsible is the perfect form of self-stultification. To recognize the effects of the darkness in the world, to recognize both its intrinsic horror and its power, is to be armed against it only if we see that power as affecting ourselves, struggling to establish its dominion over ourselves, and joining forces with

the evil within ourselves. The little red demons whose tails swish out at us from the pages of medieval history have no doubt done a great deal of harm in persuading a more sophisticated age that the mighty spirit of darkness is as unreal as they; but in the last resort it is our own fault for being so uncritical, for being unable to disentangle the doctrine from its popular symbols, and, moreover, for being unable even to grasp the fact that those symbols were themselves true inasmuch as they did convey the fact that Satan is not a remote entity, safely confined to the few strayed souls who frequent the witches' sabbaths, but on the contrary an ever-present urge, within ourselves, to make of each thought and action an increase of darkness over the earth.

How then are we to turn Satan into an unwilling apostle of the truth? First, by drawing attention to his presence in the world, and to the clue provided by that presence to the existence of more ultimate realities. Secondly, by showing how that presence is not something external to the human race, but on the contrary something which makes the human heart its battleground, and can make it its possession. If you can say to yourself and then to others: 'This is what Satan does in the world in general, and can do to you in particular, unless you call upon God constantly to take you from the dark power into the light, and give yourself wholly to live in that light,' then you are using Satan to strengthen faith in God, and more than that, you are using Satan to open your eyes and the eyes of others to our need of finding God and living in God—you are strengthening love. If there were only a sufficient volume of prayer and love—the prayer that expresses love and the love that expresses prayer—in the world, then the dark cloud that weighs down on us would not only be pierced here and there to let in the light, but would be dissipated, and the world as a whole would be open once again to the infinite skies. . .

It is a frightening thing to think about the dark power and all it can do to the world of men. But in this, as in regard to other signs of the times, we are not allowed to despair, for there is a greater Sign that overtops them all; we are to have the faith and hope and love that cast out fear, even though we must be prepared to see many more horrors come upon the world; for a greater than Satan has told us what the end will be: 'Fear not, I have conquered the world.'