

Two Glimpses of Satan

By

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In recent times with the decline of religious practice and attendance at services of the traditional denominations of Western Christianity, times when as well there is increasing feeling that mere rationalism and popular acceptance of 'science' are inadequate to explain either internal or external reality, many people in English speaking lands and elsewhere are turning to superstition, 'magic', 'witchcraft' and 'diabolism'. Neither they nor their (often horrified) critics make very clear or specific distinctions about the objects of their cult and quest. Nonetheless as the name of Satan is (rightly or wrongly) associated with these ventures it seems good to me to investigate who he is or, at least who he is said to be.

The figure of Satan for those accused of seeking him out, whether to use him or be used by him, is no longer that of a leering man in black formal dress with a tail of his own protruding from the tails of his coat. He carries no pitchfork in his hand. Nor does his head sprout horns. His feet are not those of a goat, though in fancy and apparition his head and body may be that of a giant goat standing erect. More and more is Satan acknowledged as 'pure spirit' - someone real and malign, capable of menacing the human race and the cosmos, capable of helping through spells, curses and wonders those who invoke his name and desire to participate in his power.

Who is this 'accuser', this 'enemy, defiler and tempter' of mankind, this outcast of God and heaven? Many answers are forthcoming. Absolute dualists still maintain that he is simply the antithesis of God and good. For them he personifies badness. He is 'real' but totally evil. Others may be relative dualists willy-nilly whilst pretending an orthodox or 'fundamental' Christian stance. They rely on sparse and inconsistent statements of the Old and New Testaments to charter a course of frenzied activity. Satan is for them

commander-in-chief of an army of relentless and almost omnipresent possessors and obsessers who have invaded the human race (often because of the sins and diseases of ancestors remote or proximate) and must be dealt with *quam primum* by neopentecostal 'deliverance' or other appropriate exorcistic acts 'in Jesus' name'. There are many other views and possibilities.

In this essay I should like to gain a 'glimpse of Satan' through looking at two authors' writings on him. The authors are Elliott Rose and Bernard Leeming. Rose is an Anglican layman. Leeming was until his death a few years ago a Catholic priest and member of the Society of Jesus. Rose is an authority on witchcraft. Leeming was a sacramental theologian. Neither was centrally concerned with Satan or the problem of evil. In some ways Rose seems to me plagued with a moribund rationalism which I think he mistakes for intellectual respectability. I would call him 'subjective' in approach. Leeming is likewise limited by the neoscholasticism of his training and approach. I find him overly objective. From neither would I seek a definitive portrait of the Prince of Darkness. But as both display a certain affable cogency I think what they say is worth consideration and critique, hence what follows.

Rose's Non-Person

One of my disappointments, indeed shocks in reading Elliot Rose's *A Razor for a Goat* ¹ for me was his utter disbelief in a personal Satan. Satan as a reality thus becomes irrelevant not only to witchcraft (under study in his work) but to the philosophy and theology behind Rose's writing. I should not have considered Rose further for a glimpse of Satan - for it would be a 'glance at no-one' - were it not that beset as I am with persons and opinions the which, 'identify everything with everything else' - especially everything sordid - I find it a pleasant change to approach an analysis (however faulty) which fails to attribute all good to God and all evil (directly) to his enemy. If Rose guides us through shades of gray, it is a nice change from unconvincing black and white.

Early in Chapter Nine of his work ² Rose questions the power of Satan to accomplish what he is accused of by inquisitors and witch-triers down through the ages. Rose concedes to Summers and his ilk that many hold a personal entity which is wicked, has supernatural power; that this power is used under Divine Permission by one Lucifer 'to bind men to his service' and so to bribe or coerce them by wondrous happenings that they will sell their souls to him in return for the ability to do like wonders through his power.

¹E. Rose, *A Razor for a Goat, a Discussion of Certain Problems in the History of Witchcraft and Diabolism*, Toronto, University Press 1962, referred to subsequently in this essay as Rose, *liber*.

²Rose, *liber*, pp. 179 - 199; my discussion is limited to pp. 180-189 on Satan as such.

Rose sees that whatever be said of Divine Permission to make of what he considers a 'personified abstraction' the absolute antithesis of Christ as God incarnate is not a viable position. His analysis of the Incarnation as 'concrete' (having real and direct effect on the world of matter) is as apt as it is orthodox but his brief asides on Late Judaism and Early Christianity and the supposedly *peripheral* role of Satan in both do not tally with Rabbinic and Patristic literatures or with the speculations bases on them which follow into the Middle Ages and beyond. Rose's antithetical stance: 'I do not believe in the Devil' is more anti-credal than it might appear. To write off Satan's role as 'Persian influence' or 'gnostic aberration' is not consistent with extant writings or traditional belief.³

This *Mishna*, the *Talmud* and the vast literatures of the *midrash* and *Ka'bbala* genres all attest to a personal Satan and a host of underlings.⁴ Christian writings from the New Testament onwards speak forth in the same vein. Langton⁵ refers to Ignatius, Clement, Polycarp, Pseudo-Barnabas, *Shepherd of Herm*, Papias, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, Athenogoras, Pseudo-Clement, Ireneus, Tertullian, Minucius Felix, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, most of whom are relatively Orthodox (though some of theme rather bizarre) and all of whom see Satan as a person, a 'concrete' entity. Going on in his analysis from the 'Third to the Eighth Century Langton cites Cyprian, Eusebius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Chrysostom, Augustine (who treats the doctrine of the Devil and of demons upon so large a scale that it would almost be possible to construct a complete demonology from his pages') Gregory the Great and John Damascene. None of these authors gives an 'abstract' or merely symbolic view of Satan.

Turning to Scholastic Literature, Anselm, Bernard, Peter Lombard all take Satan as real, angelic personage very seriously. Thomas Aquinas devotes nine whole questions to Satan in the *Summa Theologiae*⁶ and makes, according to the editors of the latest bilingual English-Latin edition of 61 volumes no less than one hundred and forty five⁷ references to a very wily and most important Prince of Darkness. Surely all this writing, some of it formative and normative for centuries of prereformation Christian theology in East and West cannot be glibly dismissed as 'peripheral'!

To return to Rose,⁸ he next puts aside centuries of 'angelology' to question why Christ could not die for the sins of angels. He seems blissfully

³Rose, *liber*, p. 180.

⁴Vid. I. Singer, ed. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, N.Y. Ktav n.d. Vol XI 'Satan' pp. 68 - 71 (paes. 69).

⁵E. Langton, *Satan, a Portrait, a Study of the Character of Satan through All the Ages*, London, Skeffington 1945, pp. 44-75 vid. praes, pp. 55-64. Cited below in notes as Langton, *Stn.*

⁶Langton, *Stn.* p. 69 nn. 1 & 2.

⁷T.C. O'Brien, ed.: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 61: General Index, pp. 108-109 and 307).

⁸Rose, *liber* p. 181.

unaware of the one-decisioned will ascribed to angels or of the necessity (or 'convenience' at least in rigid medieval terms) of nature-for-nature restoration.

God must become man to restore man; an angel to restore angels. Pure Spirit becoming 'mixed-spirit' is of course part and parcel of the Christian mystery of the Incarnation. What God as Pure Spirit becoming lesser and created pure spirit would be or accomplish is hard to imagine.

Rose's further conjectures on sin and Hell, on temptation and the problem of Evil evade the troublesome intricacies of Christian Tradition much too glibly. While he is right in denying an absolute Evil, he is more than a bit simplistic in denying *any* direction or aim to a relative one. It would be well if Rose could see the difficulties posed to moralists by, say, the contemporary trade in hard drugs or by repressive governments at extremes of Right or Left in the light of the problem of Evil as such as analyzed by Traditional Christianity. Of course the most commendable quality of Satan, his intellect, is recognized by Christians and, indeed, never overlooked. Whether he be heroic or grotesque, the argument is that Satan *is*. To go on to reduce sin to sloth and virtue to fortitude is to ignore not only a huge range of ethical teaching on everything from humility to charity and from pride to hatred of God, from Aristotle to Kant (and beyond) but to set aside most human experience, possibly other than Rose's. That evil (suddenly on p.184 in lower case) 'occurs as decay and is experienced as disharmony' may well be true. But what of the gigantic range of phenomena 'decay' and 'disharmony' can entail - a fair sight more than the 'weakness' Rose equates with sin?

Rose touches on what use Satan might have for matter. However he fails to distinguish between 'wonders' and 'miracles' and does not I think give 'apparitions' involving the *seeming* assumption of matter enough importance. A traditional analysis would allow that Satan's supposed offer of power to witches or anyone else is *bogus* but that does not mean either the offer or the thing offered is utterly non-existent.

As to the Black Mass, having myself run across a black missal (reasonably priced, as I recall, and looking for all the world like the thin volumes out of which I once celebrated Requiems in Latin) in a trendy book-shop off Hollywood Boulevard, I should be more inclined than Rose to think there *is* such a thing. He is, of course, mountainously better qualified than I in tracing its history and relative unimportance to witchcraft. I must admit there is a crypts-dualist tendency in most of us trained in scholasticism to balance evil with good. If there is a Universal King and Source of Light, there must be (it is contended in the context of this tendency) a Prince and instigator of Darkness. If there is an Act of Supreme Latriatic Worship to God, there must be, then, at the lowest end of the scale an ultimate blasphemy, a Black Mass. As Rose's discussion degenerates into a prolonged sneer at 'pentacles on the floor' perhaps we can leave him here, an incredulous theorizer of real but limited erudition to be looked at as some one 'off on a limb'.

Fr. Leeming's Sable Bogey

As we turn to the collection of essays published in English by Sheed and Ward with the title *Satan* in 1951⁹ and based on an earlier volume of the series edited by P. Bruno de Jesus-Marie, O.C.D. as 'Collection de Psychologie Religieuse' in *Etudes Carmelitaines*, there is much to contrast with Rose's rotund negations. The essay most to my liking for this purpose is Jesuit Fr. Bernard Leeming's 'The Adversary.'¹⁰ As Canon Moeller points out in the introduction¹¹ all of the essays in this early part of the collection deal with a 'theological Satan' but whilst Fr. Farrell's 'The Devil Himself'¹² and Pere de Tonguedec's 'Aspects of Satan's Activity'¹³ deal with theoretical and practical aspects of Satan as subject not completely foreign to Rose's approach, the 'middle ground' of Fr. Leeming's essay has both the historical and saliently descriptive features which seem best to me to balance with (and even, perhaps, 'correct') Rose's view.

Leeming starts by stating that we are warned by revelation of 'a disembodied intelligence which is malignant and ceaselessly hostile to man'. He is personal, not divinely as is the Holy Spirit or humanly but diabolically and really. Athanasius is cited for identifying him with sin and death and Lactantius calling all devils 'tenuous and incomprehensible spirits.'

While granting something could be known of evil personages from nature Leeming refuses to labor the point and turns to revelation, especially Paul's 'mystery of iniquity'. Four are the headings Leeming will explore: antidualism; antipelagianism; destruction of diabolical works through the Incarnation; and the need for grace to 'overcome the wiles of the devil and the concupiscence of the flesh.' He looks at each.

Leeming mentions the dualisms of the Priscillianists of the Sixth Century, the Docetists of the First, the Mainchees of the Second, Third and Fourth and the Albigensians of the Twelfth and Thirteenth. Against them the 'free choice of a *created* spirit' (italics mine) as source of evil and enemy for man to overcome in the guise of 'spiritual power of a malignant but finite spirit.' Pretense rather than real equality with God is the accusation. Thus contempt is the proper pose, witness Athanasius's gloss on Job in the *Life of Anthony*. Thus the 'comic figure' is the result of man's proper reflection on the folly of Satan's pride.

Leeming notes, moreover, that Satan is not only posited against God but envious of the dignity of man. Cyprian and Gregory of Nyssa see this in terms of man as a corporal creature being made in the image of God, Basil in man's

⁹Bruno, ed. *Satan*, London Sheed & Ward, 1951.

¹⁰B. Leeming, 'The Adversary', in *op.cit.*, pp. 19-39.

¹¹C. Moeller, 'Introduction' in *op. cit.*, pp. XV-XXV.

¹²W. Farrell, 'The Devil Himself' in *op.cit.*, pp. 3-18.

¹³J. de Tonguedec, 'Some Aspects of Satan's Activity in this World', *op. cit.*, pp. 40-51.

angel-likeness and both Maximus the Confessor and Anastasius of Mt. Sinai in man's dominion of earth. But *pride* is the reason for diabolic hatred for Augustine, Cassian and Thomas Aquinas. Jealousy of the Incarnation is also cited in Suarez and, in modified form, in Scheeben and Boyer, and its New Testament bases in John 8,40; 1 John 3,8; Matthew 32, 35 and Hebrews 12, 24. But all ends with the devil as creature and man without sin as his superior.

On the second tack Leeming points out that for Pelagians grace is mere aid ('an extrinsic help'). This for Leeming is superficial since it overlooks the contrast between human ideals and the actual accomplishments of men. Christianity finds something *wrong* with the world and the Empire of Death is Satan's, for Satan holds man captive in his power, as the Council of Trent puts it, equating the reign of death with that of the devil. The nature, quality and extent of this reign are not defined by the Church, but Christ came to destroy it (John 3,8). Concupiscent man, meanwhile, is at war with himself, tugged by Satan and by God. So, for Augustine, as cited against the Pelagian Julian of Eclanum, man always and everywhere needs redemption, a new work, a restoration of harmony, a freedom from Satan.

Leeming now turns to the nature and worker of this redemption, death seen as triumph accomplished by Jesus Christ, who (in the words of the Council of Sens) 'became man to free us of the devil' and under Christ's infallible power in redemption, the Council of Trent would put us, though retaining our free will.

Christ then is a ransomer. But what did he pay to whom? Origen says 'He delivered Himself to our enemies. He shed all his precious blood for which the devil thirsted' - Satan was allowed to kill Christ. But he was deceived because he could not hold his victim, who rising makes us all partakers of new (and definitive) power. Still, God's wisdom respects nature and takes Satan into account but never giving him more than his due, leaving him trapped, tricked and defeated.

If he is defeated, Leeming still maintains he will not give up. He continues to tempt man who must both be on his guard and suffer certain evils knowing all the while that Christ the Conqueror was once tempted and killed. Why should God, asks Leeming, allow these evils? So that the final triumph will be great, according to Chrysostom. For Aquinas God makes use of the evil of Satan and his minions somehow to placate nature, and Leeming adds perhaps to elucidate the problem of evil_ Satan does all this through outward not inward influences: by false apparitions, depressing and wearying pressures, swaying us from good. All of this is most subtle and only to be seen in the light of faith by discerning directors.

Finally Leeming asks how satisfied Satan is in successful temptations. Since Aquinas maintains that Satan 'recoils from all that is and all that is not' his is but a 'fantastical satisfaction' or, as Leeming puts it ironically a 'wretched joy' (which is part of his punishment for Augustine), since this 'joy'

is futile and incomplete, and is frenzied for Chrysostom. Christ who can overcome cobras and cancer, atom bombs and Satan should be trusted. Otherwise everything goes to Hell!

Conclusion

Is Leeming's account satisfactory? It is more so than Rose's. Inasmuch as it identifies some sort of *person* with evil it appeals as an explanation for many things that cannot be attributed to human guile alone. But if Rose is glib, Leeming seems to me naive. The explanation is made to fit too much. The person of Satan deprived by Rose is given more than his due by Leeming. Rather than an influence towards bad, he is almost a source of woe. Too much hangs in the balance of wills: divine, diabolic and human. Unknown factors perhaps as complex in their origin as in their continued thrusts remain either to be explained or at least accounted for.

Both Rose and Leeming admit much that Western man has held for centuries. Each has his own limited but fairly credible grasp of history. Each gives us a glimpse of Satan. However, I should be loath, on basis of their writings examined above, to invite either one to conduct an exorcism. 'Things that go bump in the night' may not require fanatics, but effete rationalists cannot put peace to them. Somehow those who deal with Hell must have a fuller portrait or at least an 'Identi-Kit'. They must *believe* Satan has power, must *imagine* that power concretely personified, must proceed as if already victorious and must, as I see it, (hardest of all) be able to give a cogent explanation of their doings. Perhaps this is too big an order, but it is the only *malleus* I can at present conceive. □