

## *Devil Worship: A Study in Comparative Religion*

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A 'new religion' known as devil worship is currently *en vogue*. Apparently, the worshippers hope that the devil will grant them those worldly riches that the good God denied them.

The emergence of this religion intrigued me (to put it mildly), if not infuriated me. But as scholars, it is important to look at the phenomenon from the point of view of Comparative Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies, and also to look into the historical background of the *Devil* phenomenon.

From comparative religious studies perspective, we, as scholars, study and compare the religious beliefs of various religions and belief systems objectively. In addition, we have to maintain here that every religion in the world, and that includes Judaism, the so called universal religions of Christianity and Islam, and the traditional religions in Africa and ancient Mediterranean, are man-made. They are as a result of man's response to an encounter or experience he may have or may have had with something which is felt 'Holy' and which we accept as much greater than we are capable of imagining. What does God, Creator of the universe look like, a universe estimated to have originated over 20 billion years ago? Or, is the Universal God or Godhead him-/itself? - and on the other hand there are us, creatures with a life span of 70 or 80 years, living on an unimportant planet of an unimportant solar - or fixed-star - system within one unimportant galaxy, which may be part of an unimportant group of galaxies?

The religious life and beliefs in traditional societies are determined by experiences. Universal religions (Christian, Islam), that is religions which have personal founders, may take the form of the experiences of the founder (Christ, Mohammed)

or their disciples and descendants, their interpretation becomes the basis, and often the dogma, of the new religion. The new religion is determined by the beliefs and the cultural environment of the period of the interpreters. As a result, the interpretation of such religions and religious teachings and dogmas often fit in with the social and scientific developments and changes during the centuries.

### **The Perception of Evil in Traditional Religions**

People always feel that happy or unhappy events in life are due to supernatural or divine intervention, even today when some of the phenomena can be explained scientifically. In religion people believe that good as well as unfortunate events are sent by the one God Jahwe; either to punish wrong doers or test the faith of the chosen people. All these were the makings of the One God and there was no differentiation between an absolute good God and an absolute evil principle. The evil one was subordinate to Jahwe.

African religions, like any other traditional religions do not believe in a genuine absolute Evil Principle (among us named Devil) as opposed to the good God. In Africa we find the often distant, yet benevolent creator-god. Lesser superior beings, who are much closer and much important to man, are good or evil spirits, the ancestors and the living dead. Agents of evil happenings are evil spirits of all kinds, infuriated ancestors, witches, evil-eyed people, sorcerers, all of whom are said to send bad luck and misfortune to the living. Such spirits and ancestors have to be appeased, and witches and sorcerers have to mend their ways to be ritually cleansed. (Perhaps we may remember here the ancient Greek myth of *Orestes* who had to be cleansed after having murdered his mother in

order to avenge the death of his father who had been murdered in turn by his mother and by her lover). If evil-doers, witches and sorcerers did not mend their ways they were either put on a pyre (as Jomo Kenyatta says about the Agikuyu, or they were ostracised from the society. This was the harshest fate that could befall a member of the society and few did. (Socrates had to choose between exile from his home city - Athens and death. He chose death).

The perception of Evil in traditional belief systems and religions is always that of concrete events harmful to the individual as well as to the society. Evil is not seen as a principal per se in opposition to good per se, nor as an agent seducing man to commit an act of sin against God. Agents who cause evil events are special individuals whether they are ancestors, evil spirits, witches or sorcerers.

### **The Perception of Absolute Evil Principle**

A religious movement (and related movements) which originated in the Near East, Ancient Persia, between 1000-500 B.C and founded by Zarathustra or (Greek) Zoroaster had different perceptions of evil where it is believed that an absolute good god (Ahura Mazda) and an absolute evil Being (Ahriman) existed. The separation of a supreme god or superior Being makes it easier for man to understand and accept the fact that there are misfortune, sickness, catastrophes in life for which the good God is not answerable. These are the work of the Evil One, who unlike in Judaism or in the universal religions of Christianity and Islam's equal- and not subordinate -to the good God in power, strength and influence. Man always has a choice to follow the good or the evil; and there is a continuous struggle between Good and Evil, yet in the end it is believed that the good God Ahura Mazda will overcome evil. Such beliefs had a strong influence on beliefs in Judaism and on the universal religions of Christianity and Islam.

### **Religious Movements of Protest in Ancient Israel**

The Jewish religion demands absolute and total submission to the one God Jahwe. These can be seen in the traditions of the Old Testament: The faithful followers of Jahwe who obey him and are the blessed ones : The Archangels and the thrones praise Jahwe; Abel sacrifices a lamb to Jahwe; Abraham is prepared to sacrifice his only son Isaac upon Jahwe's command; Job accepts patiently the sufferings imposed upon him in order to test the strength of his faith and where this faith is understood as total submission and obedience to Jahwe. The obedient ones - in ancient Judaic faith - were the 'good ones'. The 'evil ones' or the 'forsaken ones' were the ones who did not obey or please Jahwe: Cain whose offering of the first fruits of his fields was rejected by Jahwe and who then killed his brother Abel; Esau cheated out of his father's blessings due to an eldest son; and in the New Testament, Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus Christ.

Despite the original perception of Jahwe being the one God<sup>1</sup> answerable for good and evil events, there were traces in the Judaistic religion of ascribing evil to some other superior agents who were still subordinate to Jahwe. There were the ancient Jewish traditions of the 'fallen angles', who became demons and seduced man. The biblical Satan (in Islam; '*Sheitani*') is often seen as the head of these demons. In the book of Job, Satan is seen as one of the sons of God, who can do nothing without the consent of God (G.A. Barton, p. 597). Satan is depicted as a serpent which seduced Eve to eat the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden (the fruit which gave knowledge to man).

I have to make a digression with regard to the symbol of the serpent. The serpent is a very interesting mythological symbol. Indian folk

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<sup>1</sup>Polytheistic religions are so much easier to follow: If I do not want to worship particularly Godfather Zeus, I may turn to Godmother Hera, to the goddess of love Aphrodite, or to the god of the seas Poseidon. There was no demand of absolute exclusive worship.

beliefs depict the serpent or snake as having both a positive and negative aspect. While the positive aspects are caring and fertility (water), the negative aspects are those of destruction and death (poison). The civilisation and the religion of ancient Israel is rooted in the ancient Near East, that is the civilisation of the fertile crescent, the Euphrates-Tigris valley, and in Ancient Egypt. The emergence of these civilisations was based on early agriculture dating back to about 4000 BC. These civilizations are much older than ancient Israel itself. Among the many symbols of fertility are the great mother goddess who stands for fertility of the earth and the serpent. Throughout the pre-Christian millennia there existed a 'serpent'-worship in the Near-East as well as in North-Eastern Ethiopia. The Ethiopian myth of origin of the Ethiopian kingship under the legendary Menelik I states that before the introduction of the Jewish faith by Menelik I (believed to be the son of King Solomon and Queen Makeda of Sheba-Axum), the people sacrificed to a dragon-serpent. The relationship of the serpent to the fertility may be understandable if it is conferred that wherever there are snakes there must be water. To have sufficient water was crucial for the agriculturists in the comparatively arid region. If the area was compared with Europe where there is always abundant rainfall, it becomes clear why a 'serpent cult' could never have emerged in Europe. Yet European folk beliefs - like the Indian ones - give the serpent a double aspect, the one of blessing and riches, and the other one of evil.

At a later stage in the Ancient Near-East, supreme male gods joined the great mother; this was after city states emerged and the management of water demanded a more centralised administration. Yet the great mother was part of the supreme beings up to the Hellenistic period with *Demeter of Eleusis*.

Any interesting reference to a serpent cult is

made among the ancient Jews in Egypt<sup>2</sup>. According to Jewish traditions, Moses had been a member of the Levites, the Priest Caste, which originally had organised itself around a serpent cult of Caananitic origin. In addition he had a special sacred staff which was shaped in the form of a serpent.

The ancient Jewish religion, with Jahwe as an exclusive (jealous) supreme god, rejecting the worship of other gods (yet not denying their existence), is unique in the region. A study of the serpent cult and the worship of the great mother goddess (Innin, Ishtar, Astarte) in the same region, reveals that the Jewish religion was in very strong contrast to these cults. In the Jewish religion the serpent as a symbol of fertility and the great mother goddess had to change to be symbols of evil - the symbol of 'monsters' and 'whores' (superior spiritual beings) who were worshipped by non-Jewish communities. Jahwe ordered the Jews to conquer these communities and to slay their 'monsters'. Changes in the meaning of religious symbols often take place in history of religions; for instance the term Allah for supreme (male) God of Islam is derived from similar terms (allat), which denoted female gods in the Near East. (Pers communication; Roger Schneider, Addis Ababa 1984).

Was there no opposition to Jahwe's claim to exclusiveness? The ancient Judaic belief in the 'fallen angels', who opposed Jahwe as the Supreme Lord, is already an indication of a tendency towards an attitude of disobedience, protest and apposition to Jahwe. The Apocalypse mentions a fallen angel with the name of Samiel or Samael which is one of those typical Old Testament names for the archangels: Raphael, Urael or Ariel, Michael, Gabriel. Samael was perceived as the head of the 'fallen angels'. Since the Third Century B.C, he became identical with the biblical Satan. Studying the phenomenon of the demand of absolute

<sup>2</sup>The Old Testament; Mose 1-5; *Das Sechste und Siebente Buch Mosis, sein wahrer Wert und was das Volk darin sucht*. (The sixth and seventh Book Mosis, its true value and what the people try to find therein). Introduction Wolfgang Bauer, Berlin 1979.

submission to Jahwe in Judaism ('God our Father' - a loving father, yet a dominating and punishing father), and comparing this with the difficulties modern Jewish scholars and writers had with their Jewish traditions and the dominance of the father figure as well as with the God our father (Freud, Durkheim, Kafka among others), one may ask whether such overt or covert protests can be found in modern times only. We find already in ancient times, open Jewish protest movement against Jahwe and Jahwe's demand for total submission. The total protagonist of worship of such protest movements were the forsaken ones in the Old and New Testaments. It appears that the psychological rule that pressure (demand of total submission and obedience) causes counter-pressure (disobedience, protest) had been valid for Judaic faith. One of the protest movements were the Caananites, who venerated as heroes, all the Old Testaments rebels against God such as Cain, Esau and the sodomites. They worshipped Judas Iscariot especially for freeing mankind from Jesus Christ. Related to them were the Ophites (from Greek Ophis, that is serpent) or Naasians (from Hebrew Nahash-serpent). These were a branch of Gnostics of the 2nd century. They attached special importance to Satan as the tempter in view of their great respect for gnosis - knowledge of good and evil which the serpent had enabled man to obtain. The Ophites held that the creator-God had withheld this knowledge from the first man, and thus the serpent was the real liberator of mankind, since he taught man to rebel against God. (Encyclopaedia Britanica, vol. 7).

These movements are interesting since they focus on man as a being who has knowledge of good and evil and thus the capacity of self-determination, which enables him, and gives him the freedom to decide good from evil, while man in paradise was not expected to eat the fruit of knowledge, thus living in a state of the innocence of ignorance.

## The Perception of Evil in Hinduism and Buddhism

Hinduism is a religion and a way of life which has its roots in the Ancient Vedic and Brahman religions in India. Since Hinduism has no founder and is not expansionist, it may be classified as a traditional religion. Buddhism on the other hand is a universal religion based on the traditional Indian religions<sup>3</sup>. In this religion there is no active absolute evil principle; but like many other traditional religions including African religions for instance, there are evil agents and happenings, men who commit crimes and evil deeds and demons as agents of evil events. Doryodhan, one of the protagonists of the Mahabharat, is perceived as the 'evil one' and as such is seen in contrast to Krishna, yet in my view he is not the evil one (devil) per se. Evildoers in Hinduism are confined to hell, *naraka*, a place of torture and pains. There are quite a number of hells all of which have their own names and titles.

The belief in *naraka* is also found in Buddhism. Yet the belief in death and rebirth or cycles of life - does not allow for a perception of the absolute evil principle. Like in Hinduism there are in Buddhism several 'hells' places of pain and punishment for evil deeds.

However, once the period of a negative *karma* has ended, rebirth as another and better being is possible. Such hells are not perceived as having a specific location, they are rather perceived as a certain state of mind and consciousness. Notions of Nirvana? Those who are confined to hell(s) have to undergo periods of sufferings and torture. From a psychological perception, the imagination of hell(s) reflects

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<sup>3</sup>One of the great religious works of mankind is the Bhagavadgita, part of the ancient Indian epos Mahabharat. Those who are interested in religious texts are advised to read it, in particular the English translation together with comments by Radhakrishnan.

the state of mind, and such tortures therefore may also be seen as spiritual self-torturing.<sup>4</sup>

The overlord of the hell(s) is Yama, who is viewed much more positively among Hinduism than in Buddhism. In Hinduism, he was originally the first man who found the path to heaven where he is now the prince of the blessed souls. There are however, negative aspects such as the fact that the soul in order to reach Yama has to pass his two dogs which guard the entrance to heaven and which do not allow entry to everyone (Rigveda x, 14). Yama is then perceived as 'king of justice' over the dead (Vicharabhu) and his messenger of death is the dove. Yama also has trapnets and footslings which symbolise the horror of death.

In Buddhism, Yama is perceived as the overlord over the hells. Buddhist mythology has it that Yama was originally a king, who during a war of great bloodshed wished to become the overlord of hells. In accordance to his wish he was reborn Yama. Eight generals and eighty thousand soldiers assist him in purgatory. Three times a day, he and his helpers have liquid copper poured down their throats as a punishment for their crimes. Yama sends to man his messengers: old age, sickness, and approaching death. These are to remind man to live a virtuous life. Yama resides in a place of copper and iron. His sister Yama rules over the female inmates of the hell(s).

In Buddhism, there exists another evil one, yet not an Evil principle per se: Devadatta, cousin and once a disciple of Buddha, who later on wanted to take over the leadership of the Buddhist religious order himself tried to have Buddha murdered. Although at his time of death Devadatta repented, he is believed to suffer long periods of torture in hell.

The perception of Yama as a 'Devil' the 'prince of hell' the 'seducer of man to sin', Hinduism or in

Buddhism does not correspond to the perception of the absolute Evil principal, which we are accustomed to see in the Devil. The beliefs in the two religions can only be compared to a prince of the underworld of the dead and of the judge over the Dead as related to the beliefs in traditional religions in the Ancient Mediterranean. (Rhadamantus, Kronos and Aiaikos, who after their life became the judges over the dead in the kingdom of Hades).

### Ancient Mediterranean Beliefs and Devil Worship in the Western Christian World

Unlike in most traditional belief systems where it was selected individuals acted as agents of evil events, in Christianity, particularly in middle age Christianity, there is the perception that everyone has the potential to be won over or seduced by the devil to act as an agent of evil. The devil was feared as the great seducer to evil and sin: that is, sin committed by man, which was sin against God. Committing sin may lead one to losing the eternal soul to the devil; or one would have been able to pledge the soul deliberately to the devil. For instance, (Faust agreeing to a pact with the devil/ Mephistopheles and signing the pact with his own blood in order to gain youth and knowledge).

In Christian Ethiopia, the Amharic term for 'devil' is *Saytan*, a term related to Satan or *Sheitan*. Christian art in Ethiopia reflects the belief that the 'blessing eye' of a saint or the 'evil eye' of an evil one affect the viewer. *Saytan*, is reputed as having a frightening face - dark blue or black, with large fiery eyes, hairy and having horns - is felt to be of such evil and danger to man that he was never portrayed full face, unless an Absolute Holy one (the Cross, Maryam or Mary, Christ) inactivated him.

Such images then show Maryam, Christ or the cross standing on top of *Saytan*. Examples can be found among the murals in churches like Narga Selassie (Lake Tana Island) and Debre Berhan Selassie (Gondar).

<sup>4</sup>There are certain physical depressions under which old people may suffer: "And why have I not done this? Or that?" - apparently taking the form of self-accusations, but also of remorse, which might be interpreted as a form of 'last judgement'. I have to mention that this is seen as a mental or emotional disease.

Protests against Christian teachings comparable to those in Ancient Israel, can be found in Western Europe where the domain of the Latin church, in the Middle Ages had several movements which called themselves 'devil worship'. Thus there existed 'the devil's mass', and people believed that the worst one could do was to recite the 'Our Father' - the holiest prayer in Christendom - backwards. These movements were taken seriously by the church. Yet even more dangerous were the protests against the official Christian and Catholic Church which came from the heretics of various orientations, such as Johan Hus and Giodano Bruno among others. These heretics were duly put on a pyre. At the end of the 16th century-the Protestants broke away from the Catholic Church only in order to succumb later on to mass persecution of alleged 'witches', which by far surpassed the terror of the Catholic inquisition. There are caves in England which apparently served some sort of deliberate 'leading a sinful life' movement in the 18th century (that is now within the realm of the Anglican Church), a movement that was under the patronage of some local squires. In these caves, the adherents met and lived up to all those liberties and alleged sins which the virtuous faithful were not supposed to commit, that is enjoying themselves with a group of women and with certain drinks. (Drug abuse was not known at that period). Fortunately nothing was mentioned about murders.

In European Christian middle age, beliefs in the devil played a much greater role than today. People were unable to ascribe all the hardships of life to God or Christ alone: famines, droughts, floods, epidemics, wars and mercenaries who robbed from the people whatever they could. There were, though, great floods similar to those mentioned in the Bible, devastating floods at the North Sea coast of Germany and the Netherlands, one of them causing mass migration from the Netherlands to what is now central Germany. Such floods were seen as having been sent by God to punish 'sinful man' as did the great floods in the

Old Testament. One medieval German text refers to a *Suntflut* in Germany, the 'great flood' to punish 'sin'.

Generally, people felt that by living a strictly virtuous (in Middle Age understanding) life, they would in the end gain a blessed life in paradise, be close to God and live eternally<sup>5</sup>.

To determine whether religion and beliefs are created by man's demands, scholars trace the image people had and may have today of the devil back to similar ones from other civilisations. The Western term for 'devil' in European languages; devil, *diable*, *diavolo*, *teufel*, may be seen as related to the ancient Greek term *diabolos*; the one who cheats, who betrays, who spreads false rumours. It may be that the physical image and the avenging aspect of the Christian devil were influenced by the image of a hairy Etruscan demon (*Tuchulcha*) and by Egyptian avenging spirits in the underworld, where the dead had to be judged by the way they had lived. Both civilisations had an impact on the Hellenistic world of the Mediterranean, which in turn influenced the average people as well the philosophical orientation of the early thinkers.

There are other traditions which have formed the European image of the devil. In some traditions, the devil was perceived as a fallen angel being evil in the beginning. In early Christian eras, the devil was identified with *Lucifer* (from the Latin word *lux*, light, and *ferre*, to bring), the bringer of light or the morning star (Venus). This brings to mind the Greek culture hero and the demi-god *Promethius*, who shaped man out of loam or earth, to whom the gods then gave breath and thus soul of life. Once Promethius stole the Olympic fire (light) and brought it to Man, he was punished and chained to the Caucasus Mountains. The myth continues that an eagle devoured his liver during

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<sup>5</sup>The difference between the ends of pursuing a virtuous life in the Middle Ages and pursuing a virtuous life in Victorian England were that in the middle Ages, you were virtuous for the sake of God, your soul and paradise; in Victorian England to keep up with the standards of the society and for the sake of a reputation within such a society.

daytime while the liver healed again during nighttime.

Christian traditions combine the perception of *Lucifer* with *Jesaja* 13, 12 (lat.) *Luke* 10, 18 and the Jewish traditions of the fallen angels, among them *Heronimus Bosch*, 15th century, and *Pieter Bruegel (the Elder)*, 16th century, *Lucifer* can be identified as mentioned earlier with *Samiel (Samael)*. *Lucifer* is also referred to as the prince of Hell, and the prince of this world as opposed to the world of God. European folk tales and belief systems are filled with accounts of *Lucifer* ('.....and in the end came *Lucifer*.....'), and of how clever peasants tricked the devil; and then of course there are all the stories of the devil's grandmother! She would sometimes help mortals trick the devil.

As pointed out already, the devil was the principle of the absolute evil, that is causing evil, and more so, seducing mortals to commit evil. The brave and virtuous knight of the middle ages was felt to be the one who neither feared death nor the devil. In the 16th century, the German artist *Albrecht Dürer* fashioned a copper engraving about a brave (certainly also God - fearing) knight, next to him death<sup>6</sup>) and the devil.

The Devil in Dürer's engraving is based on folk beliefs. He has the face of an animal, is covered with horns with a face covered with hair. Others relate his appearance as a hairy body, with a tail, and is often depicted or described with one horse-leg or a goat-leg and one human leg. Folk stories often add that, once the Devil appears in his true form, he is accompanied by the 'sulphuric stench and the smoke of Hell'.

One may easily trace the image of the hairy and horned devil back to the goat-legged hairy Greek god *Pan*, originally a god of agriculture. *Pan* is the

god, full of mischief, chasing pretty maidens, yet also the god who taught the Olympian god, *Appolon*, the knowledge of prophesy, and *Appolon* thus became the lord of the *Delphian Oracle*. *Pan* is believed to be the inventor of a herdsman's flute, the 'pan flute', which is still used in the orchestras today. There were also many 'Pans' and even 'Pan-maidens'. The Greek term 'Pan' for 'all' made him in the end the 'All-god', the 'Great god', then perceived even greater than the Olympians themselves. *Pan's* tends to frighten people and make them temporarily insane at mid-day - unlike the Centre and Northern European 'ghost hour', of mid-night between twelve and one. *Pan's* Roman counterpart was the god of agriculture and animal husbandry *Faunus*, who in turn gave rise to the belief in many fauns, beings who lived in the forest, half animals (goats) with human heads and full of mischief and tricks. Neither the ancient European civilisations (Greece, Etruria, Rome, the Germanic and the Celtic world) nor Ancient Egypt, nor the Ancient Fertile crescent had a clear perception of a genuine devil, the principle of the absolute evil, though there are evil beings and evil gods.

There are other images in the religions of the ancient civilizations which may have shaped the Christian image of the devil: like *Hephaistos*, the Greek god of the art of metallurgy and metal weapons. His Latin name is *vulvanus*. One myth has it that *Hephaistos* was so ugly that, when he was born, his mother *Hera* (sister-consort to the supreme Olympian god *Zeus*) grasped him by one leg and threw him down to Mount *Etna* in Sicily. Since that time he is lame. His forge and smithy are within the volcano *Etna*. The Christian devil is imagined to live in hell. The English term hell-like the German term *Holle* is derived from ancient Germanic *hel*, the goddess of the underworld who is a daughter of the *Asa* god *Loki*, the evil-bringer among the *Asa*. The *Asa* were the ruling dynasty of the Germanic gods. Christian hell is the underground world, full of fire - or purgatory fire.

<sup>6</sup>Let us briefly make a digression and refer to the image man in Europe had of death, a skeleton of ten with the scythe and the hour-glass as symbols of cutting off life. It is striking that neither African nor Asian, nor Pacific nor ancient American civilisations - at least in art - had an image of what death looked like. Death also appears in European folk stories - as he does in European classical art (*Holbein*) - and we also find accounts of how a poor discharged soldier tricked death; or, how death as a godfather to a doctor helped in curing the sick - if he wanted to.

Other folk stories have it that the devil once ordered an impoverished, discharged soldier/mercenary to serve him for seven years, yet without demanding the soldier's soul. The soldier had to put firewood under the big kettles where, sinners had been put in. The soldier-despite warnings - opened a few kettles, but when he saw that his sergeant, his captain and even his general were in these kettles, he put more firewood under the kettles - and with that service the devil was very pleased.

It can be stated that the devil is primarily interested in winning as many 'souls' for his kingdom as possible. (the precondition for such a belief is that men believe he has one eternal soul, such a perception that does not exist in many civilisations). The devil promises worldly riches against a pledge of the 'eternal soul' after death, a pact to be signed by the pledger with his own blood. Yet sometimes it is innocent mortals who help the devil to win the souls of sinners, without having to sign any pact. The soldier, like many other, was given gold as some sort of payment for his services. It is evident that such gold was often given in the disguise of dirt, dust, rotten leaves, and that the recipient was advised not to open their bag with the dust until they had arrived home. It is while alone that one found that the dirt had turned into gold. Such tales end nicely: 'And he had enough for the rest of his life.'

The devil's abode is in hell, the underworld, and being the giver of riches reveals some aspects about the devil, one of them being what modern worshippers are interested in most: The devil is the giver of worldly riches. The Western devil has his forerunners in the beliefs of the ancient Mediterranean. Hades the god of the ancient Greek underworld, was a brother of the Olympian supreme god Zeus and thus of equal rank. Hades was the overlord of the dead, the 'shadows' and is invisible. Since he did not permit a return of the

dead to earth, he was hated by man<sup>7</sup>. The Greeks also had a place for selected 'shadows', Elysion, the island of the blessed.

Hades' consort was Persephone, the daughter of the great mother goddess Demeter, the goddess of the earth and of the earth and of rich harvests and crops. In the period after Homer, that is around 800-700 B.C, Hades was identified with Pluton (or Plutos) (lat. Pluto). The god of riches, which in early times consisted of agricultural produce. Hades, the god of the underworld and overlord of the dead, was the god who gave riches. Such a perception makes sense, as it is the earth which provides agricultural riches. The Greek playwright Aristophanes describes Plutos as blind, and he therefore hands out riches blindly and unjustly often to those who do not deserve them.

### **Religions which Allegedly Profess Devil Worship**

An issue may be raised on whether-apart from the present cult of devil worship-there are religions which do worship the devil or some evil principal. In many communities, there exists defamation of one group by another. Where worshippers of a certain superior being are termed by their neighbours as 'devil worshippers'. Up to the 18th century in Germany, it was sufficient to be a Catholic, a 'Papist' in order to be defamed by Protestants and vice versa. Examples in the old testament, where the gods of non-Jewish city-states were declared 'monsters', and Jewish victories over such a city-state were seen as a victory of Jahwe over the 'monster' of such and such a city-state.

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<sup>7</sup>It is interesting to note the difference in the perception of death and life after death in the ancient Mediterranean as compared to the Christian middle ages: To the ancient Greeks and Romans it was this life which was enjoyable. To medieval man it was life in the other world, in paradise with god, which he had to look and live for. There is in the Odyssey a famous passage when Odysseus comes to the underworld to consult 'the shadows' of some of the great fallen heroes of Troy about his own return home to Ithaca: He meets the 'shadow' of the great hero Achilles, who says to him: 'Better a serf in the house of a landless man and live than here as a king of all these dead men,' (song XI, comp. Odyssey, Penguin Classics, p. 184.



To illustrate the point, examples can be drawn from two ethnic groups, the Yazidi and the Hottentots<sup>8</sup>. To outsiders, the Yazidi have been termed as 'Devil worshippers'. They are related to the Kurds of Iraq and the neighbouring lands and are found in the Sinjar Hills of Iraq. There are also some groups in Armenia and in the Caucasus. The Yazidi claim descent from Adam and their name is thought to have been derived from a founder, Yazidi which in the Persian (Iranian) languages is probably derived from Ized (for Yazata), an angel of God. In Armenia and the Caucasus they are described as demon worshippers. The term 'devil worshippers' to describe Yazidi has been used since the 19th century, when some popular writers (Karl May, based on older reports he read) claim to have visited them. While 'Devil worship' refers to the worship of some personified evil agent, hostile to God, ironically the name Yazidi literally means 'God worshippers'. The Yazidi practice a religious dualism. They worship a supreme good God and minor beings, among them Melek Taus (the Greek term is *taos*, that is peacock), which stands for the chief (and in Judaic beliefs fallen) angel. The term melek sounds familiar-being of a Semitic language-it is related to the Swahili term *malaika*, angel. The Yazidi of the Caucasus and Armenia hold that Satan (or *Iblis* in the Muslim/Semitic world), the fallen angel, will be restored to divine favour and be ranked under God in the end.

However, the Yazidi religion, being a syncretistic religion with mazdean, manichean, zoroastrian, Christian, and Islamic element, does not believe in a 'devil', or in 'evil principle', or 'Hell'. Rather it believes that their passive transcendent God bestowed power onto his seven angels (archangels) to rule the world. These are represented by the peacock in art. The sacred books of the Yazidi are 'The book of revelation'

<sup>8</sup>I am indebted for some detailed information to the MA students who attended my class on African Belief systems and systems of thought: A.W. Kagunya, B.A. Mulemi and A.R. were, on the Yazidi. Mr. Mulemi delivered a seminar paper. He consulted Parrinder 1971, Wedeck and Baskin 1971, and the Encyclopaedic dictionary of region (comp. bibliography).

and the 'Black Book'. Since the Yazidi believe that evil (evil events) cannot come from the supreme God, they attribute it to the peacock who is an agent of God and, thus, a co-creator with God. This is the basis for the worship of *Melek Taus*. The Yazidi have a ruling priest bearing the title Mirza Beg, Mirza being the Persian title for 'Prince', Beg-like the Turkish *Bey*-stands for official.

There are intriguing points in Yazidi religion. The (fallen) angel Melek Taus is seen as subordinate to the good God, he is an agent of God (as are the other archangels), who oppose God, and yet he will at one time regain God's favour and be restored to his heavenly rank. On another level Melek Taus' hand, is seen as the agent of evil events and is worshipped. Although this paper does not seek to get depths of gnosticism, it is important to mention that there can be found related philosophies a lower (material) world, created by a lower ranking God - Melek Taus, who is perceived as an active evil agent as opposed to a higher (spiritual) world. The soul is imprisoned within the material world. Salvation is possible only with the help of Christ (quoted from *lexikon der symbole*).

The other intriguing point to note is Taus (*taos*), the peacock. The peacock belongs to the pheasant family, and originally comes from India. In India the peacock was believed to be the mount of the God of war, Kartikeya, the peacock being the symbol of magnificence and glamour was also perceived as a symbol of noble life beauty and love in connection with Krishna and Radha. From India the peacock came to Mesopotamia, that is the fertile crescent (Iraq), and Greece. There, it was seen as a wonder of nature and as a sacred animal. Greek myth has it that the goddess Hera, sister-consort to the supreme god Zeus, took the hundred eyes of the murdered heavenly guard Argos and placed them at the tail feathers of the peacock. In early Christian art the peacock is the symbol of the resurrection of man.

The other example of alleged 'devil

worshippers' are the Hottentots of Southwest Africa (Namibia). Scanty accounts of their practice exist. (see bibliography, Eno Beuchelt). They worship God; but tend but more to appease the devil. Their philosophy is that God is good anyhow, but the devil is dangerous, and has to be appeased in order not to send evil. Considering that the Bantu and the Hottentots have been in contact with Dutch immigrants (Afrikaaner) since the latter's arrival in the 17th century, and considering the Afrikaaners' strict religiosity (Protestant, of the narrow-minded type of the 17th/18th century), then certainly the devil as a deterrent from sin must have played a great role, it may be assumed that beliefs in an evil one filtered into the Hottentot religion. While the belief in the devil (the absolute evil principle) appears to be un-African, the attitude of the people is typical African: You appease the devil the same way you appease an angry ancestral spirit.<sup>9</sup>

### The Present Religion of Devil Worship

The section moves from the field of comparative religion and goes more into religious and philosophical speculations. The present 'religion' of 'devil worship' so far is intriguing as it suggests the impression that a 'supreme being' was deliberately chosen, and that this decision in favour of the devil in its Western image is not based on a genuine encounter with a superior being, which gives rise to a new religion. (such encounters are for example Moses, Jesus of Nazareth and Mohammed; but comparable experiences can also be found in Africa in the recent past). The superior being 'devil' was probably deliberately chosen with the hope and promise that this Being would grant worldly riches-and not knowledge! The issue why superior beings were not chosen, who were friendlier in nature than the make-up western

type 'devil' can be raised. These include the friendly Chinese god of riches, the elephant-headed Hindu god Ganesha who grants success in worldly and in spiritual life or the capricious Roman goddess *Fortuna*. Why the 'devil'? It would appear that-unlike in the middle ages-the devil was not chosen because people believed in his very existence and wished to protest against the ruling Christian-Catholic dogma with the supreme God the Father, and Jesus Christ, but rather with the specific intention to make up a 'superior', models of which are superficially known only, a superior being who is not supposed to be identical with the Christian God.

Devil worshippers then decided to believe in such a Being. The Christian God does not give riches, while this Being allegedly promises riches. This point may be seen as an example of the general religious disorientation of modern man. The Christian religious symbols (as those of other religions) are no longer understood within the setting of the modern pluralistic and scientific world, and they therefore cannot have beneficial effects on man; man looks for other gods and religious symbols. In more positive cases western men grasp for Asian pseudo-religions like Hare Krishna or Guru Maharaj. In negative cases they grasp for pseudo-religions as offered by political fanaticism (fascism and communism are the most striking examples) - which often have in the end catastrophic consequences for mankind. 'Devil worship' promises worldly riches; and perhaps it is true what the communist teachings always maintained, that modern (western) man worships and prays to capital.

One may perhaps imagine a devil, who does exist, and who laughs his head off about naive man. He-the devil-gives riches. Apparently the devil promises to his adepts worldly riches for a certain period. After that period the riches will disappear and the adept's soul will belong to the devil! Such beliefs correspond to European and American folk beliefs ('The devil and Daniel Webster'). But the

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<sup>9</sup>I am indebted to Dr Nagendo for making me aware of another African ethnic group who believes in an Evil Principle (Devil) as opposed to the good God; the Bukusu in Kenya. Apparently, no outside influence can be traced.

devil remains the cheater (diabolos). One only has to think of ones friends who may at one time or other have been rich and thereafter lost everything (this without having pledged their soul to the devil). An example comes to mind of a friend in childhood whose family was rich, and she learnt very early to drive a car. The family lost everything during the great inflation in Germany in the 1920s; they built up their business again; but the end of World War II they again lost everything. This is not an exceptional case. People who gain riches and power today may lose everything tomorrow. One only needs to examine the life history of quite a number of prominent figures in Africa, Asia, America and Europe.

### **Is there a Devil?**

These again are speculations, since we are neither able to maintain with certainty that there is God nor that there is devil. Hans Kung in his book *Does God Exist?* analyses in depth the stand of thinkers on the question of the existence of God. The author himself does not doubt the existence of God. The devil is not mentioned, or referred to in the index. Kung's book, which is certainly the work of one of the great thinkers of this century, is significant in that it does consider a likely existence of an evil principle as pointed out above, the 'devil'. Martin Luther, early 16th century, is said to have been confronted with the devil, while he was translating the bible. Luther had been confined to Wartburg castle in Thuringia. When the devil appeared in his chamber, he threw the ink pot against him. The stain of the ink at the wall is still visible and is shown to visitors although perhaps the stain might have been renewed several times over the centuries).

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam demand that one should 'not make an image of thy God'. God is invisible (as are the gods and spirits in other civilizations). Christianity believes that God revealed himself in his son Jesus Christ; Islam

believes that God revealed himself in the Holy Quran. Others may maintain that God reveals himself a million times every second. Scientists, who-like for instance Einstein or Heisenberg-are often deeply religious, may see him/it when studying the wonders of the macro or the micro-cosmos. We may find a revelation of God in a flower or by looking into the eyes of a child. We may also maintain that we find God within our heart.

The question of God versus devil, or good versus evil, is based on the values of man on earth. Neither the creator God of the universe, nor other intelligent beings on planets of other stars within other galaxies may share our values, and perhaps they do not know of good and evil in our understanding. It is up to human societies or man to maintain such values - or social life would not function. Since on earth God is believed to watch over good and evil in man, it can be said that it is essential that our God had taken human form (Radhakrishna compares Christ to Krishna), otherwise he/it would remain beyond the grasp of human comprehension, (or on the other hand, man would remain beyond the grasp of the comprehension of the absolute Godhead?)

What about the devil, the principle of evil, and the cheater? Despite the many imaginations and images of what the devil may look like, the devil is basically perceived invisible (compare the Greek god of the dead, Hades), although folk stories have it that the devil often appears in disguise, (for instance as the distinguished nobleman in a 17th century Spanish attire, a little pale and always slightly limping.)

There is also the story of Eve being seduced to eat the forbidden fruit with the promise by serpent-Satan: 'You will know the difference between good and evil'. It is interesting that it is serpent-Satan and not God who gives the forbidden fruit of knowledge and cognition to man, the very qualities which chased man out of the paradise of innocence and childhood demanding no responsibilities, yet

also the very qualities which are expected to make man a mature independent human, who has his own mind to determine his life for the good or for evil. Yet the devil remains the cheater and Adam and Eve were not told that thus, death was to come into the world.

Is there a devil or a principle of absolute evil? There would be certainly many different answers to this question. In a modern German play by Carl Zuckmayer (set in the times of Hitler Germany) 'The devil's general', the protagonist general is asked by a young officer: 'Do you believe in God?' The general answers: 'I do not know. I have not seen him. But the devil- I have seen. And if there is a devil then there must also be God.' In this case the protagonist (and the playwright) identify the 'Devil' with Adolf Hitler and it is debatable as to whether Adolf Hitler was the devil himself or just an instrument used by the devil. It can also be said that once there is an evil principle as there is God, and once God reveals himself in this world as we are taught by Christianity, then the devil as the principle of evil must also reveal it/himself. And taking our values of good and evil, of blessing and suffering, you only have to look around at the atrocities in the world which are committed by man towards man everywhere. You only have to turn on television and other services. Whether we ascribe it to historical events or to the intervention of an evil principle, evil as well as horror and terror reveal themselves, perhaps even more strikingly than good. It is significant for our times that we do not interpret such events as related to an evil principle, which the middle ages would have done.

Is there a devil who seduces man to sin, to follow his ways or to commit evil? Again, it is difficult to tell. Artists and thinkers throughout the ages have always developed their own interpretation of how man can be corrupted to evil. I think of a famous story by the Ukrainian 19th century writer Nicolai Gogol: The Portrait. The evil one is hidden in a portrait and whoever gets

hold of this portrait is corrupted to commit evil and in the end even to destroy what he/she originally cherished most.

In Nazi Germany for example, the national-socialist leaders carefully selected the candidates to become heads of concentration camps or to be leaders of execution commandos. The people selected were originally not necessarily criminals. They may have had perhaps some flaws in their characters such as a trend of sadism, some craving for power and fame, and some degree of over-emphasis of 'fulfilling one's duty' - slight flaws which all of us have in one way or other. These made them an easy instrument for national-socialist polices, and once in office they duly carried out the tasks they were asked to perform. On the other hand the national-socialist authorities selected great architects and artists to become their followers not to commit crimes, but to enhance the reputation of national-socialism. Promises were not always riches, but very often 'for the sake of the fatherland', it is your duty for your fatherland' or, more enticing - giving artists just those very tasks they had been dreaming about for their whole life. Such people included the architect and engineer Albert Speer, who later on spent the last decades of his life condemned to inactivity as an inmate of the allied prison for top war criminals in Berlin-Spandau. Others included the sculptors Arno Breker and Josef Thorak, whose great talents and skills as artists were corrupted once they followed National-Socialist ideology. Such corruption by National-Socialist ideology was not necessarily the work of the evil devil - yet such an interpretation certainly offers itself to those who do believe in a personalized evil principle.

Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) maintained that God could be found within ourselves as well as in the world-but then, should we assume that evil and the evil one do exist, it may also follow that we find evil within ourselves, too, and that the evil one may easily seduce us to follow his ways, but as human beings one has a choice on which of the two

to follow and the choice may very often be on the edge of a razor's blade. Thus man finds himself all of a sudden within the belief of having a choice between good and evil. Yet the sceptics may debate on what is good, and what is evil?

To go back to devil worship. Psychology teaches us that words, as do beliefs, have an effect on us. 'It is thy faith which has helped you'! This accounts for the teachings of Jesus Christ as well as for the effectiveness of magico-religious practices in traditional belief systems. I must say, I still do not understand why the 'Devil worshippers' chose the devil as their being of worship, whether he does exist or not. The devil is not only the great seducer, he is also the great cheater (diabolos). May devil worshippers find themselves cheated in the end.

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