

# The Devil

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Australian Catholic Truth Society No.1007 (1946)

The Devil may well be called the Cinderella of Christianity. Nobody likes him, everyone jokes about him, and the moment anyone discusses him seriously there is a frigid silence which is the inevitable consequence of a social error.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to speak seriously about the devil. It is not an easy task, for you, reader, and I are both generally (and genially) sceptical about the idea of a fellow with horns who butters our ears with seductive sales talk. We are amused at the idea of his tail, faintly contemptuous of the fire that comes from his black lips and we are inclined to ridicule his pink tights. We are homely and intelligent people who have outgrown such fancies.

But in our contempt for fancies, it would be advisable not to be too contemptuous of realities; and therein lies the difficulty of he who dares to comment seriously upon the concept of the diabolic monarch. There is a healthy and enlightened scepticism abroad which refuses to be badgered by witchdoctors into the acceptance of a satanic spook. There is a popular legend, in which even Christians are not entirely free, of a comic opera figure with a cloak. The Devil, perhaps more than any other character in history, has been burlesqued and caricatured. Woe betide the writer who tries to be serious on such a subject.

One could, of course, terrorise his reader by thundering about hell-fire and damnation in the manner of Pastor Amos at the Church of the Quivering Brethren in "Cold Comfort Farm" by Stella Gibbons "Ye miserable crawling worms... have ye come like Nimshi son of Rehiboam, secretly out of yer doomed houses to hear what's comin' to ye? Have ye come to hear me tellin' o' the great crimson lickin' flames o' hell fire?"

But no, reader. My purpose is not to frighten you, but rather to issue a warning in friendly tone — as I would do if I observed you climbing into bed with a boa constrictor. No doubt there would be a moment of initial terror, the terror of discovery, but neither the boa-constrictor in our bed nor the devil in our heart need frighten us so much that we would be incapable of taking cool and collected action to deal with the situation.

You will realise the additional difficulty of the commentator's task when I tell you that we have to consider something, the shape, colour, and size of which is a matter for speculation. The devil is a highly intelligent spirit whose outward appearance is selected for the particular occasion. I concede that he may sometimes adopt the cloven hoof and the horns, for he may very well disguise himself as a cow in order to deceive a milkmaid; but he is equally capable of being an upright business-man on his way to receive a knighthood, or even a completely uninhibited thought in our head. These things are but minor variables; it is his nature and purpose with which we are concerned.

Do not shuffle restlessly in your seat, reader, nor mutter about fables and fictions designed to frighten children into obeying the priests. You do not upbraid the courier who brings tidings of

impending flood for his assault upon your complaisance. The mere fact that you cannot comprehend the concept of a devil, or that you think his existence to be unlikely is but a trivial aside. But at the same time you have an argument when you assert the impossibility of there being a devil. There is an argument based upon the fact of God, the fact of an all-powerful and benevolent deity. If you and I both believe in God, then it is permissible for you to assert that the idea of an evil spirit, and the idea of an all-powerful and loving God are incompatible.

Your assertion, springing from the heart of your belief in God, is a powerful one, rich in persuasive force. The whole idea of a devil is repugnant to your concept of God's wisdom, goodness and mercy. You cannot reconcile the idea of God being either all powerful or merciful with the concept of a malevolent gargantua stalking the world and enticing harmless and inoffensive folk like you and me into the eternal fires of the damned,

Your argument gathers momentum: if we are simply a harmless set of innocents, should not God protect us from the evil influence of Satan. If we are not innocent, but sin in sincerity, how can God blame us for doing what we believe to be right, or at least indifferent. Either we are weak enough to be pulled from God, in which case we have a just call on His mercy; or else the Devil is strong enough to defeat God's efforts to save us, in which case God would not seem to be all-powerful.

There does appear to be a legitimate contradiction there. Yet it may only be a superficial contradiction. Consider this alternative point of view:

Suppose one person had the power, the absolute power of creating another. Something like Baron Frankenstein, only on a more competent level. Suppose the creator was a good man, that is to say, loving, just and merciful. Is it not reasonable that he would look for the love of his creation? Love always looks for reciprocation. If you love anybody, you like to think they also love you. The creator, seeking the love of his creation, would have these alternatives. If he had the absolute ability to create them, he could create them so that they would have to have no choice but to return his love. He could limit their intellect to that one channel. He could procure a blind and unswerving, even doglike devotion, by simply limiting their ability to do otherwise.

But if he did that, he would be procuring their devotion by taking advantage of his own superiority. If the creator is absolutely good, would he choose such a way of securing their loyalty? If the creator really loved his creation, do you think he would be capable of forcing their love in return? A love freely given is much more precious.

Note again the two alternatives the creator has: to limit his creation's will so that the Thing must, like it or not, love its Maker. Or give to the Thing the power of making its own decision — to love or not to love its Maker.

Obviously, in the second alternative, the Creator is himself proving a greater love on his part than in the first alternative because he is giving more away. Recognising the precious nature of a love freely given, and the worthlessness of a love forced by any means, the Creator is thus prepared to stake all on getting the genuine, rather than the spurious article. He is giving the creation, not only the ability not to love him; he is giving his creation the power to withhold everything from his creator, for which his creator created him. He is doing this for no other reason than love.

Thus is love compatible with hate; thus may evil flow out of good. Thus indeed may a devil have a place in God's world.

Sin is not simply a breach of the law of God. Sin is that word by which we describe the act of rejecting God. We sometimes think of sin as being wrong; we would be more accurate if we thought of it as foolish. We cannot commit sin in ignorance as we can a civil offence. We can cross against the red light without seeing it, and still be fined. But if we cross against the heavenly red light without seeing it, we are not fined. We might observe the worldly red light for convenience only, and at the same time express our sulky dislike for the government. We commit no civil wrong by doing that. But if we observe God's laws in that frame of mind, then we commit sin — not by the act, but by the implicit rejection of God.

The fact of sin and the fact of God's mercy and goodness cannot be contradictory; they are necessarily complementary. Our ability to commit sin is derived directly from God's, goodness in giving us a free choice. God did not order a blind, restricted faith. He asks for the love of man, freely given.

It is the same with Hell. We tend to think of Hell as a place where those who have crossed against the Heavenly red light are jailed among the red hot coals.

It is, perhaps, an understandable error, but none the less it is false. For Hell is simply that place where the souls of those who have rejected God — rejected Him absolutely and of their own free choice — foregather after death.

It may be uncomfortable because rejecting God is also a rather foolish rejection of good things. But if we deliberately stay away from a banquet because we affect a dislike for the persons giving it, even though they have invited us, we cannot very well blame them if we feel some remorse at the thought of the delicacies we have missed.

Why, then, should any normal, sane man wish to reject God. One reason is that man's free will is not subjected to one, but to two opposing forms of persuasive influence — the wishes of God as expressed in God's law, and the propaganda of the devil. Man is not a perfect creature, but an odd mixture of contradictory impulses which date from the first free choice — that made by Adam and Eve, who could not see any reason why God should forbid them to taste the fruit of a certain tree; the Serpent's persuasion turned contemplation into temptation and finally into what we call sin — the first or original sin.

Why did Lucifer, the devil, do this? Why, in the first place did he rebel against God? You know he did, of course, for there is ample biblical evidence to support it. The reason why he did it is not at all clear in detail. Theologians who love the professorial game of hairsplitting have never been able to fully agree, but they have agreed on this simplification — that Lucifer's sin was pride. Lucifer was the greatest of God's Creations, but like the lowliest man, he was possessed of that faculty given to him by a loving and merciful God, of making up his mind. For any one of a number of reasons, he found the position of subordination incompatible with his desires. It was simply a case of "non-serviam"; "I will not serve", or, as Milton has expressed it in *Paradise Lost*, "better to rule in Hell than serve in Heaven."

Lucifer was the greatest of God's creatures. Odd that a being possessed of the radiant majesty of an archangel, should experience the sin of pride, but we may well recollect that pride usually grows with ascents in dignity and status, and even on earth comes mainly to those who already have a full quota of dignity and status. History is littered with the remnants of autocrats who had gained much and wanted more; they are the temperamental heirs to the Light Bearer's tradition. It may be that Lucifer had been given what we term colloquially, a preview of the Incarnation; and it ill-befitted

the Chief Archangel to bend the knee before a baby born in a manger in an Asiatic village. The Chief Archangel decided to open business on his own account. The fall of Lucifer is adequately described in the scriptures. In Luke 10:18, the Saviour claimed to have seen "Satan as lightning falling from Heaven." The incident is described in greater detail in Apocalypse 12:7-9. We know Christ was tempted by Satan during the forty days fast in the desert; and the New Testament recounts cases of diabolic possession and makes numerous direct and oblique references to the Evil Spirit.

The adequacy of the scriptures for proving historical facts may be questioned: this certainly is no place to begin an entirely separate discussion on the authenticity of the Bible, but it may be stated here that those people who are prepared to accept the authority of the Bible in regard to the pleasant things it postulates have no sound ground for not accepting its authority on the unpleasant things it postulates as well.

We have neither the time nor the inclination in this essay to argue with the materialist to whom the whole of the Bible, which for the most part he has not read, is repugnant. Such a man will believe many things: he will believe Caesar's account of the Gallic Wars, which is far less reliable; what is worse, he will, after proof after proof to the contrary, believe what he reads in the newspapers. But there are none so blind as those who will not see, and there is a certain type of man for whom one can only pray. They measure fact by likelihood, and the Bible offends both their limited mind and their unlimited ego.

But there are in addition to these, a number of well-meaning folk who have a kind of sentimental attachment to the Saviour, who believe quite readily that Christ was God, but whose pleasant, friendly, and charitable Sunday-afternoon notion of religion cannot quite comprehend the Evil Spirit. They have watered down their faith, not to what they understand like the egomaniacal rationalist, but to what they wish to believe. To believe in a happy after-life is not unpleasant. It is more pleasant than not to believe in any after-life at all. There is a difference only of degree between the man who won't believe in God because God's law and God's Being impose too many restraints and the man who adjusts God's law and God's Being to suit himself.

If a man believes in the divinity of Christ, he is caught. He cannot honestly escape belief in the Devil. The capacity for self delusion required to wriggle out of that would be too much.

The notion of a devil is not, however, peculiar to either the Catholic religion in particular or the Christian religion in general. We have already adverted to the fact that no figure in history or legend has been so perpetually burlesqued as His Satanic Majesty. This may of course have an inner significance. It may be the cheerful singing of the man on the scaffold, or the affectation of innocence so characteristic of the small boy with an uneasy conscience. To laugh at the devil may be a ready method of forgetting him.

However, taking an overall view of tradition and popular antiquities, it is hard to find a more universally well-known identity — which, by and large, is not a bad feat for a fantasy, if that is all he is. Perhaps the best known devil of legend is the Mephistopheles of Goethe's Faust, who answers to all the popular specifications — cloak, waxed moustache, horns, tail, and such cloven hooves as an operatic stage manager can devise. But the Devil is mentioned in Shakespeare and not entirely in a cynical sense, and both Dante and Milton found him a fit subject, not for a sneer, but for an epic. In Mr. John Brand's "Observations on Popular Antiquities," however, there is a long list of popular fables about the devil, such as the story that goats are never seen for twenty-four consecutive hours

because at least once a day they visit the devil to get their beards trimmed and combed. Mr. Brand writes as if there were little difference between the habits of the devil and the habits of the Catholic Church. Obviously he does not believe any of these fables; neither, reader, do you or I. But I cannot help being impressed by the attitude to the devil of the three greatest poets of all time, and I cannot help contrasting it with the attitude of a little upstart cynic of the nineteenth century. Mr. Brand wrote his book at a time when nineteenth century materialism had disposed effectively, not only of witchcraft and sorcery, but of God as well, and was busily engaged in establishing the capitalist and the empire-building buccaneer as a model of human perfection. The capacity, of people to believe in plausible tommy-rot was never more fully demonstrated than in the cult of Darwinism, which spread like a bushfire among the intelligentsia, and if it be admitted that to some misguided people both the devil and God have been objects, of superstition, neither of them can approach as opiates of the people, the vast ramifications of tea-cup reading, walking under ladders, black cats, lucky charms, good luck tokens, astrology with its good days for this and bad days for that, the blind faith in bookmakers' systems, or lighting three cigarettes with one match, to mention but a few of the allegedly enlightened habits and customs of a civilisation which is too enlightened to believe in a devil. Did I mention the film industry, which its celluloid fantasies and cultic 'stars'?

If we are to be influenced at all by the beliefs of others, we may as well be influenced by people whose opinions are worth while; I have no doubt but that Shakespeare is as reliable an authority as Havelock Ellis or Bernard Shaw. It is neither rational nor dignified to substitute for a tolerably well established belief in a spirit order, with good and bad elements, the almost mystical rationalism of Freud, and Bertrand Russell, especially when the devotees of the latter indulge in everyday superstitions which would put to shame the voodooism of the lowest grade savage. I remember very clearly one free-thinking young lady who, while being fanatically horrified at the suggestion that she pay any honour to the Mother of God, was far more fanatically addicted to the observance of Mother's Day. She had thrown off the shackles of orthodox religion. But she had not freed herself from the influence of modern advertising.

For those who wish to make some study of the case for a personal evil spirit, I recommend you to the more or less standard bibliography on demonology, black magic, devil worship; and certain aspects of spiritism, coupled with such biographies as those of the Cure of Ars, Saint John Vianney, who had vivid personal experiences. If you are genuinely interested in manifestations of the supernatural in general, there is a collection of treatises, at least as well documented as many scientific treatises.

I have always inclined to the view that loose distinctions between the natural and the supernatural create an invidious comparison, which immediately has the effect of offending certain people's rationalistic sensitivities. If we were to think more in terms of the known and the unknown, and if we were to treat the natural and the supernatural as being both essentially reasonable, we would at least see that there is continually as much visible evidence for the existence of a personal evil spirit as there is, for example, for a thing like atomic energy. For example: get right down to the depths of your own soul and see if you can entirely explain all your own conduct without reference to those opposing forces of good and evil which we have already discussed. We may agree that there are certain standards of behaviour which are good. We do not kill, we do not steal, we do not covet our neighbour's wife. We may be entirely agreed that these rules are necessary for society's well-being. But the materialist, who would have you believe that man's actions are guided solely by reference to the common good, has only one answer to the question why, in spite of all men's reason, why in

spite of all the perfection and disinterested platonism of the materialist man, why in spite of all these things, man still does what is wrong — even by materialist standards. His only answer is that man is a creature of impulses over which he has no control.

There are some materialists who will not admit the existence of any objective standard of right or wrong, but will insist that right and wrong are purely relative. All that means is, it's wrong when you do it, but not when I do it. The State finds it necessary to impose a set of overall laws on human conduct — modelled in most cases on the Ten Commandments, let it be observed. Is it not obvious that when societies all over the world have recognised this fact, and have recognised the basic similarities between their respective sets of laws, that there must, over the whole range of mankind, be something which can only be termed the natural law. To deny the natural law is to avow the law of the jungle. True, some materialists will not hesitate short of that, but I don't think we can admit them into serious discussion. If, then, there is a natural law, why is it ever broken? Why is it that a man who believes in the general principle of not coveting his neighbour's wife, will in fact covet his neighbour's wife? The Christian has, of course, the answer — that man is an imperfect creature, subject to two compelling external influences — God and the Devil. In short, Man is free to choose God, but he is equally open to suggestion by the devil as well.

The materialist has no answer to this problem. He will mumble something about impulses, or reflexes, and ask what does it matter. He must declare himself for the law of the jungle or the natural law. If he espouses the law of the jungle, he lays himself open to the legitimate charge of being a far more disruptive force in society than the veriest witch-doctor who ever existed; if he admits the natural law, he cannot explain why he doesn't always obey the natural law.

You see, instead of the spiritual man, who freely recognises that he is an imperfect creature, torn between conflicting desires, and who strives after perfection out of the love of God, we have evolved the humanitarian man — a person suffering from elephantiasis of the ego, who believes he is capable of doing good for its own sake, but who does not admit an objective standard of good, cannot define what good is, and recognises at the same time an uncertain law which has no lawmaker.

We all agree that “love thy neighbour” is a good thing, but we are far more solicitous for the welfare of a foreign people whom we do not personally know than for the welfare of our next door neighbour whom we do know. We are against capital punishment for criminals, yet we see a virtue in killing the very sick. We are prepared to treat all our criminals as pathological cases deserving of sympathy, yet we are thirsty for the blood of war criminals. We consider that two men who fight a duel to satisfy their honour are rather foolish and uncivilised, yet we raise no objection to whole nations fighting duels. We insist upon writing democracy into the constitution, yet we refuse to speak to our next door neighbour if he happens to belong to another political or religious group. We will subscribe to the Food for Britain appeal and any other that comes along, yet if we see a man prostrate in the gutter, we presume he is drunk, and pass him by with a sneer. In short, this “humanitarianism” is a condition of feeling good, rather than doing good; and it has produced a higher level of sheer hypocrisy, provided a subterfuge for worse evils than the plain humble spiritual life for which it is a substitute, was ever accused of doing. The merely humanitarian man is not only conceited, he is also a hypocrite.

If the ultimate proof of the existence of God lies in the order and majesty of the Universe, then the ultimate proof of the existence of a devil is surely found on earth — where in spite of all our

enlightenment, our humanitarianism, our intelligence and our reason — in spite of all these things which are supposed to free us from the bondage of dogma and elevate us to the highest levels of human conduct — we find only the squalid filth of the slums, the unwholesome business of thieving and robbing which passes for trade, the exploitation of human lives in the interests of profits, the robbery and carnage which passes for war, the subjection of human personality to the slavery of the machine. This is the legacy of the humanitarian materialist, the person who thinks that society can get along without God, and who, by refusing to recognise the appeal of a higher life, retains no resistance to the call of a lower one.

I regret that I cannot show you a little devil sitting here on my desk, spitting fire and brimstone. I can only say, open your eyes and look around you.

We have dealt with the relation of the devil to God. What, then, of the relations between the devil and Man. In a word, temptation.

Temptation is not what it seems.

I recall once seeing a very fine illustration to Goethe's Faust, of the temptation of Marguerite in the Church. It is an impressive picture, but it is not an accurate one. Marguerite is kneeling in her pew, she and the entire congregation are intent upon the service, and standing alongside her in the aisle, bending down and muttering, is the sinister figure of Mephistopheles, sword, red tights, cloak and all.

Such a picture is, of course, a simplification of the subject of temptation. Satan does not use the method of external suggestion largely because it is hopelessly inefficient. You know yourself that you will seldom be willing to commit a wrongful act proposed by your friend; you may very well be indignant at his temerity in suggesting that you rob the orchard that night, or that you covet Smithson's wife. You may even rebuke him. But at the same time when the idea occurs to you independently, then, by the fact of it being your own idea, you are more favourably disposed to it, are you not? Obviously, then, if your closest friend cannot tempt you to commit evil, it is unlikely that an evil spirit, whom you would immediately recognise from his very deportment and attire would succeed. With a great show of virtue you could shout "Vade retro mihi, Sathanas." "Go and get behind me, Satan."

Satan is no fool, and perhaps the best proof of that lies in the nature of both temptation and sin. For in the first place the external temptation of Satan is invariably presented to us as our own personal idea, often supported by our own apparently intelligent and apparently unbiased reasoning. Temptation is not an open suggestion to some obvious crime. It is rather a reasonable, and thoroughly plausible belief in one's own freedom from Satanic influence.

You have probably heard people say, that although they do not espouse any particular religion, they believe in "live and let live," they do no harm to anyone, and they cannot see why they should have to do anything in a positive sense to win God's favour.

Now that is a difficult proposition. But it has to be faced because it is said so often. The answer to it is contained in what I have already said of sin, namely, that sin is not the breach of a heavenly law in the sense of going against a red light, but is intrinsically the rejection of God. We might now go further than that and say that if God asks for our devotion, he asks for something that is not given by simply doing nothing. God asks that we go to Him; not that we just sit and vegetate. Serving God is not a passive thing, but something active.

Now, concurrently with this, is the fact that, although we may be tempted towards sin, by the evil spirit who desires that we shall sin, and who is prepared to strain every effort on his part to make us sin, we are not tempted towards virtue, because God, does not want to interfere with our free choice, Thus at the outset the two opposing influences to good and to evil are on the surface initially weighted against God.

That is an important thing, to remember, because it means simply that the person who says, "I shall do nothing," is in fact exposed more to one influence than the other. He is exposed to the direct and unhindered influence of Satan, while lacking the open support of God. You see the difference! Both God and the Devil want to capture our souls. God wants us to make a free choice, the Devil is prepared to exploit every opportunity.

But since we agreed at the outset that God is just, what we ask is just about this? Surely the scales are weighted against us? God wants us, yet he will not help us. The Devil wants us and will help us.

The answer is contained in that old and oft abused and misquoted maxim that God helps those who help themselves. God has provided a battery of fortifications against the devil for the use of those who require them. To those men who say to him, God, we are against the devil, but the fight is a hard one, will you help, God has replied yes, and these are the fortifications — the sacraments, prayer, grace, and all those elements contained in the organism which we know as the Church. The protection is there. It begins with the sacrament of Baptism, the initial cleansing of the soul. It is continued in the sacrament of Confirmation, which has been called the sacrament of strength. It is maintained week to week, or, better still, day to day, by the sacrament of the Eucharist, the sacrifice of the Mass, and the sacrament of Penance. Extreme Unction (the Sacrament of the Sick) is the sacrament received at the moment of death, and Matrimony and Holy Orders are sacraments for the most part alternative for those adopting a particular way of life.

It is because the battle against the devil is a battle, calling for the use and application of particular weapons, that the "humanitarian" man or the merely good man are rarely humanitarian or good at all. It may be possible that in any given case they are embryonic saints. But it is not likely, precisely because the condition of feeling good is akin to the lowering of your guard and is therefore the moment when you are most likely not to be doing good.

You cannot get away from certain basic facts. God demands a standard of near perfection. You have the divine virtues of faith, hope and charity which can be rattled off the tongue with much more ease than they can be observed. Temptation is either (a) a rational and intelligent desire to do something we shouldn't or (b) a lazy and indifferent antipathy to doing something we should. The result is that friendship with God is only achieved by a constant and unceasing active performance or abstention.

Again, the pull to evil is the pull to superficially pleasant things. Many of us, for example, would feel far happier if the rule against lust were repealed. It is of little use maintaining a virtuous stand against a temptation we have never felt; there isn't much virtue in doing something you don't mind doing; indeed, you may be exposing yourself to positive danger by weakening your defensive system. The person who appreciates that lust is a physically enjoyable thing is far more likely to keep away from the possibility of committing it than the person who adopts an offhanded attitude towards it in ordinary life, and is suddenly seized with opportunities and desires completely new to him.

It is the same with all other sins. To heartily despise one individual is to obliterate all the virtue we derive from overt charitable work, and faith in God on Sunday is of small account unless accompanied by faith on Monday as well. Mephistopheles would not be fool enough to tempt Marguerite while she is preparing for Communion in the pious atmosphere of a church. He is far more likely to wait until the following Saturday night when Marguerite is a little heady in the exuberant atmosphere of an uninhibited party. And if he does nothing else he can claim some success if Marguerite only contrasts her own piety with the sinfulness of all around her. Satan, as I said, is no fool. If you go to church often, he will tell you how good you are. If you avoid occasions of passion and affect a highbrow disdain for the type of entertainment you get at certain music halls, he may fit a little halo around your head. If you organise balls and bazaars for the suffering poor of Europe or the orphans at South Melbourne, he may provide you with a next door neighbour who in all intelligent reason you cannot regard as your own moral or social equal.

It has been rightly said that it is often the great sinners who are closest to God — Mary Magdalen, and St. Augustine, and the millions of others who have known and learnt to dread the big sins. Perhaps the man who lives near you, whom you know to be a drunkard addicted to vice and wife-beating is in fact nearer to God than you are, for who is to know what goes on in his mind in his awakening moments, whether from his soul there sometimes comes the anguished cry that the Saviour uttered in the agony of the crucifixion: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?”

The person who knows sin through experience is not likely to get the same innocent joy out of it as the person who lives in a perpetual atmosphere of unassuming rectitude. There are too many examples of divine grace showered on the habitual but repentant sinner for us to doubt that. The thief of Calvary is perhaps the best example; he was a man whose identification of himself with God — by the humility and infinite pathos of his self-realisation — was promised Paradise that very day, a fortune which very few of us who have led good lives could hope for.

It is not the sinner who wanders through the dark passages of his own torment that Satan is so much concerned with. That kind of man is capable of hating sin, Satan and himself with a passion that amounts almost to ferocity. It is the adequate man, the man who feels good, the man who aims at a negative sufficiency and no higher that Satan is concerned with. You do not have to murder a man to merit damnation; it may be sufficient merely to think ill of him. We cannot tell just how or what in other people constitutes a sin, even though we often offer uninvited opinions on the subject; and Satan is never happier than when we are searching other people’s souls instead of our own.

There are many people who think that the teaching of the Catholic Church on this vital subject is brusque, cruel, and arbitrary. It may be based upon a priest they have heard thundering about hellfire from a pulpit; it may be based on the superficial and strictly formal attitude of a number of Catholics. But whatever it is, it is wrong; the Church has never claimed to be free of sinners. The doctrine of the devil is none of those things. It is the doctrine of a militant service to God, bred from the knowledge that we need Him. There are many of us who are prepared to die for God. That is not enough. We must live for Him as well.

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