

Satanism as a social issue

Social Issues briefing #030, 27/10/2004.

Satanism is wrong. Obviously the private beliefs of individuals anywhere, including the armed forces, are their own affair but I hope it doesn't spread.
[Former Tory minister Ann Widdecombe]

Reports from the UK have brought to our attention Mr Chris Cranmer's recent registration with the Royal Navy as a Satanist. Cranmer may now perform Satanic rituals upon Her Majesty's Frigate the Cumberland. He also plans to lobby the Ministry of Defence to make Satanism a registered religion in the UK armed forces.

Many will be reassured by the real news of this story. Ann Widdecombe's uncompromising stance that "Satanism is wrong" finally clarifies that Tories are not Satanists. But the purpose of this briefing is briefly to consider Satanism and some of the moral dilemmas that confront them as they faithfully seek to follow the Prince of Darkness (including, of course, that doing anything 'faithfully' is a bit tricky for Satanists). We will also go on to consider a far more interesting question: the dilemma posed by Satanism to the tortured logic of liberal secularism.

Satanism *is* a principled position of sorts. Consider the several songs that Satanists could not sing along to. In "He ain't heavy, he's my brother", the Satanist is presumably opposed to such sentiments as "But I'm strong, Strong enough to carry him ... His welfare is of my concern". Similarly in John Lennon's "Imagine", "No hell below us, above us only sky ... Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too ... the world will be as one" are all spectacularly dismissive of the Satanist moral vision. Sinatra's "I did it my way" presents an interesting case. After all, it *is* satisfyingly self-centred; but at the same time, there must be some place, even in Satanism, for loyally following the lead given by the Prince of Darkness ("I did it his way"). We imagine there is probably animated theological discussion (or more accurately, beelzeological discussion) about the propriety of this anthem upon Satanist lips.

We further learn from the Church of Satan website (no, not an address that will be appended to this briefing) that Satan represents "indulgence, instead of abstinence", "vengeance, instead of turning the other cheek", and "all of the so-called sins, as they all lead to physical, mental, or emotional gratification". We might pause to wonder, then, what kind of team-player Satanist seaman Cranmer will make aboard Her Majesty's Royal frigates and submarines.

However further investigation reveals, oddly, that Satanists are not to not tell their troubles to others unless others want to hear them. They are to show respect to others while in their 'lair', and are not to make sexual advances unless given the signal. Nor may they harm little children. However they may treat annoying guests "cruelly and without mercy", and may "destroy" anyone who keeps bothering them after being asked to stop. Again, animated beelzeological discussion must revolve around the point at which children become annoying enough to deserve merciless cruelty or outright destruction. Satanists would need to be careful here, if they are not to drift into the Christian virtue of 'patience'.

Interestingly, HMS Cumberland's motto is "Tenacious of Justice". We wondered if this would pose a problem for Cranmer, since Satan is not generally considered an advocate of justice. But Cranmer is also fighting for a form of justice in seeking for the wider recognition of Satanism, which is more than a mistake by an immature Satanist since Cranmer has been a Satanist for some nine years. Cranmer, then, seems to be a liberal Satanist rather than a fundamentalist. Indeed his disarming honesty about his Satanism suggests as much, because a true follower of "the father of lies" [John 8:44] who "masquerades as an angel of light" [2 Cor. 11:14] would more likely hide their Satanism and pretend to be something else—a Tory perhaps.

Satanism, like Satan himself (in whom the authors of this briefing also deeply believe) is in fact parasitic upon all the good things that God gives. Satanists try very hard to invert Christianity and everything in it, from turning crosses upside-down to reversing Jesus 'other cheek' word

into a commendation of vengeance. But Satanism cannot and never will finally succeed in distancing itself from God, because to do so, Satan would have had to create an entire anti-universe. He is not up to it, for he is really only adept at lying, and neither are his followers. They must eke out a rather miserable existence in God's world, rebelling against it where they can, but constantly being tripped up by its goodness. They end up caring for little children, and being team players aboard naval frigates fighting for justice. These deep inconsistencies, which must be very hard for them, are thrust upon them by the realities of God's good world.

Cranmer makes a further interesting confession. Coming across a Satanist 'Bible', "I then read more and more and came to realise I'd always been a Satanist, just simply never knew." Whereas Augustine took the Christian Bible, reads it, and was converted, Cranmer's was not a conversion but a *realization*, and one that bears eloquent testimony to Jesus' own understanding of reality. When Jesus sends Paul to people, it is "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." [Acts 26:18]. That is, according to Jesus, all people are Satanists until he rescues them. That they do not generally realize their status is attributed, in the Bible, to Satan's skill at deception.

It is precisely at this point that Cranmer is much clearer about the state of reality than is the confused stance of liberal secularism, according to which all creeds are equal as long as we are tolerant of each other. As a spokesman for the Royal Navy reportedly explained, "We are an equal opportunities employer and we don't stop anybody from having their own religious values." The spokesman hides the simple fact that of course they *will* stop Cranmer from "having religious values" if these involve destroying a bothersome officer. The spokesman pays lip service to a notion of equality that masks a very solid and serious moral vision of communities—Her Majesty's frigates, in this case—that obey authority, respect persons and uphold justice.

Ann Widdecombe went on to say that "the Navy should not permit Satanist practices on board its ships". Indeed, with Her Majesty currently crowned as 'Defender of the Faith', there are clear legal grounds for forbidding the open expression of Satanism upon her vessels. However were Charles to be crowned 'Defender of Faiths', as was proposed some years ago, a secularist dilemma will go to heart of the monarchy. Is he to defend all faiths *except* this one?

The reality, of course, is that the *liberal* moral vision has always been firmly rooted in the history of Christendom and Christianity. The Enlightenment did not float to earth out of a vacuum. It only stripped the Christian moral vision of its references to God, and sought to make it 'objective' and 'rational'. Liberal secularists keep trying to hang on to tolerance, justice and peace as if these are free-floating secular values. But of course they are not: they come from the history of a particular religion's impact upon a particular time and place.

Liberal secularism usually runs for cover from any discussion about the merits, or not, of particular religions. The strategy usually adopted is to mumble something about people being entitled to their beliefs as long as they harm no one. But of course the discussion with Mr. Cranmer cannot take this course, because his faith, especially in its fundamentalist form, is opposed to the protection of communities and espouses the harming of at least some people.

But as various other religions increasingly make their claims among us, the secularist conceit of a free-floating morality that can be made to comprehend and explain all those silly religions, is stretched to breaking point by religions that simply cannot be made to fit this conceit. The time has come, then, for this society to recommence discussion *of religions themselves*: to compare them, contrast them, explore their merits, consider their bases, and even to be converted to them. The time may even have come for liberalism to declare broadly in favour of one of them—to choose a faith, as it were, that remains worth defending.

*Andrew Cameron & Tracy Gordon,
for the Social Issues Executive, Diocese of Sydney*

Sources/Further Reading:

“Navy approves first ever Satanist,” *BBC News World Edition* Sunday 24th October 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/3948329.stm.

HMS Cumberland: <http://www.royal-navy.mod.uk/static/pages/1567.html>.

Conditions of use:

1. You may forward this paper to others, as long as you forward it *in full*.
2. You may freely publish it (e.g. in a church newspaper) as long as it is published in full, not for profit, and including the ‘Note’ paragraph. (You don’t have to include these ‘conditions’.)
3. Media and academic publishers should cite this paper according to their professional standards. We would appreciate audiences being directed to www.sie.org.au.
4. Not-for-profit publishers may use the ideas in this paper without acknowledgement; **but** if quoting it directly, please cite title, authors, and the web link www.sie.org.au.
5. Permission may be given for use in publications for profit. Please send details of your proposal to lisa.watts@moore.edu.au.