
A cursory first reading of this book was rather exciting. The excitement was sparked off by the title and subtitle, but especially by a Foreword that hinted at an endorsement by a Vatican commissioner. The excitement was heightened by the table of contents that mentioned the names of Dionysus, Gilles de Rais, Marquis de Sade, Friedrich Nietzsche and Adolf Hitler, and heightened even more by texts describing the personalities of Aleister Crowley, Helena Blavatsky, Johan Faust, Heinrich Himmler, and dozens of other characters and their roles in the unfolding of a historical drama under Satan’s occult direction.

I then felt the need for a second reading that would attempt to systematize the author’s prolific perceptions in encapsulated form for the benefit of Landas and theological readers in a hurry. Alas — the attempt was a failure. Perhaps the failure could have been predicted. Evil is a surd, inconsistent and non-systematic. So is Satan’s promotion of evil. How can such promotion be systematized?

The author’s style, tightly condensed yet elegantly crafted, reflects the non-systematic nature of his topic. It tends to be chaotic in some parts. Once in a while, I come across a paragraph that I find difficult to condense into a topic sentence, and then I ask myself: what is the point? And I am forced to re-read the paragraph and the context in which it occurs. For example, on p. 56, one paragraph appears to describe how the case of Gilles de Rais can “illuminate” five perennial themes, each of which is implicitly self-negating. If each theme extinguishes itself, how does the collection of five such themes “illuminate”? Is this collection a part of the sacred deposit that the author sees (on p. 7) as “transmogrified”? Is this bizarre term intended by the author to suggest a transmigration of traditional beliefs into ogreish stupidity? What exactly is the point? The point is that there is apparently no point. Satan’s masks are human personae that have freely opted to be reduced to pointlessness, to sheer inanity.

As an explanatory construct, this process of inanition and transmogrification may be left to the reader to verify in the case of Marquis de Sade. The author fills up 8 densely packed pages with de Sade’s adulterous, incestuous, sodomitic and coprophilic orgies that brought him fame as the discoverer of orgasmic pleasure through cruelty and sacrilege, and led him repeatedly to imprisonments alternating with confinements in a mental asylum; he unintentionally coined the now familiar term “sadism.”

The book’s 13 pages about Adolf Hitler seem to repeat the symptoms
of sadism described earlier, but with an added twist: the occultist’s craving for power. Hitler dabbled in gnostic occultism, believed in Manicheism and magic, and possessed hypnotic skills in oratorical demagoguery, which he used effectively in the service of political and then of military power. Even the blood of his own betrayed soldiers was poured out to slake his sexual thirst for power. However, individual transmogrification cannot fully explain the massive perversity that exploded into World War II and all its tragic holocausts. The fallen nature of all humanity was surely involved in such satanism.

It is very difficult to summarize the author’s last 21 pages entitled “Conclusions” and “Appendix.” Perhaps he is too profuse in the use of figures of speech and mystifying alliterations like “It (the Apocalypse) is both Requiem and Rainbow.” These contribute to the sophistication of his style but they discourage me from analyzing them for their theological nuances.

It is easier for me to assume, on the basis of the Foreword by Vatican commissioner Gesy, that Nugent is in general agreement with what Pope John Paul II says about human suffering: that it is salvific. Even psychotic suffering has salvific value. There is no way in which this can be falsified by Satan, with or without masks. Like Job’s experience of Satan, the demonic in history is pedagogically salvific for humanity.

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