Resisting Voodoo: The Wrong Way [1]

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Another news story which caused me some concern recently was posted on 21 February on the BBC News website. The story was entitled Voodoo religion's role in helping Haiti's quake victims [2]. In brief, it examines the lack of any notable or organised relief efforts on behalf of the Voodoo community in the wake of the January earthquake in Haiti.

Again I need to admit that I do not know anything about Voodoo as a religion. The article, in fact, enlightened me somewhat on this matter. But what disturbed me in this article, were the reported Christian attitudes:

> Many Christians - especially Protestants - regard voodoo as devil worship. [...] "Some Christian communities do not want to give food to voodoo followers,"

Here we see two powerful forces at work: fear and prejudice. This has unfortunate and disastrous consequences.

Idol Worship

Before anyone makes up their mind on anything, they should be informed about it. Voodoo is a complex religion which is often misunderstood. But it is sufficient to say that it is a pagan religion, despite claims of having a Christian heritage. Any religion which does not acknowledge and bring glory to the one true God is a false religion. Idol worship (practising false religion) is a grievous sin and led (after numerous calls to repent) to the fall of Jerusalem in 591 B.C..

While idol worship is sin, all sin deserves death and all people are equally undeserving of grace. Yet grace is given to all who turn away from their sin (sincerely and completely) and towards God and Jesus (through whom only the forgiveness of sin is possible).

To the Christian, anything which does not bring praise to God should be an abomination. Yet rather than running away from "sinful" people, we should approach them with the good news of Jesus, for He Himself said

> "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'[1] For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." — Matthew 9:12b–13 (ESV)

Devil Worship

Satanism is generally regarded as the worship of Satan: the great deceiver and accuser spoken of in the Bible, the fallen angel Lucifer, the Serpent, the Beast, and the antithesis of the loving and eternal God. But organised Satanism is often poorly understood: for example, the the Church of Satan (founded by Anton LaVey in 1966) does not involve Satan worship directly, as the Church mostly comprises atheists and agnostics who adhere to a philosophy of materialism and individualism.

Note that I used the word "directly" in the last sentence: Satan is the great deceiver and leads people astray with terrible lies. Satan takes the form of whatever would be most appealing to people which will also lead them away from God. One can argue that, behind any false religion, lies Satan.

But somewhere along the road, many Christians developed an intense fear of direct devil worship. They fear that such practises will invite demons and evil spirits into their presence, which can do terrible harm to them and everyone around them. Where exactly the line gets drawn between "devil worship" and "not devil worship", I do not know.

This fear is sometimes perceived as irrational, and many times is. A few examples:

- In many conservative Christian societies, the Pokémon craze from a few years ago was held as ultimately being Satanic.
- The peace sign, while having a secular origin[2], is often regarded as an inverted Latin cross with a broken crossbeam, which is considered blasphemous and Satanic.
- In the 70's, some people believed that rock and roll music had Satanic messages embedded in them, which became apparent if you played the music backwards.
- In 2007, there was a row over a Roman Catholic school in Australia which refused to accept a boy who had the surname "Hell"[3]. This surname does not refer to the place of eternal damnation, but rather is German, in which it means "bright". (The German word for Hell is "die Hölle".)

Spiritual Warfare

But is there anything to all of this? Some Christians today wage what is called "spiritual warfare", which is a proactive opposition to demons and evil spirits. But are such things real? We find supporting evidence in the New Testament, where Jesus Himself drove out many evil (unclean) spirits from people. In the gospels, the driving out of demons is often described as a healing process, eventually curing a person of some ailment or disability. Jesus also speaks of (and, at one point, to) Satan[4].

But spiritual warfare is generally considered to take place in the spiritual realm, rather than the physical. A glimpse of this can be seen in Daniel 10:12 (emphasis added):

> Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. **The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia**, and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come." — Daniel 10:12–14 (ESV)

Christian and Jewish scholars generally hold that the "Michael" referred to here is the archangel, while the "prince of Persia" is some sort of demon exercising influence over the Persian empire. Some Christian scholars, at least, believe the speaker ("he") to be the Messiah. This passage thus says: the Messiah was on His way to deliver a message to Daniel, but was resisted by a demon and held up a number of days until an archangel "rescued" Him. There are also other examples in other apocalyptic material.

It would therefore seem like there is a cataclysmic war taking place in the spiritual realm.

Resisting Evil

Jesus drove out demons and gave His disciples the power to do so, but to the people who He taught He always emphasised faith and godly living. Indeed, it was only by faith that Jesus' disciples could perform healings and miracles. When this faith lacked, they were powerless[5].

I want to stress the fact that one should not take the spiritual realm lightly or approach the matter of demons and evil spirits callously. However, if your faith in fully in Jesus, why should one fear devil worshippers[6]? The devil has already been defeated on the cross, and whoever has given their lives over to Jesus, need not fear, for they already have victory. If one is overcome by a cold fear when he or she sees the peace symbol, why is that so? Do they lack faith in their Saviour?

The Right Attitude: the Example of Jesus

Throughout His ministry, Jesus emphasised faith and godly living. Rather than calling people to arms against the forces of darkness (this was His mission, not ours, anyway), He told people to "Go and sin no more". After His assumption, His disciples implored those who came to faith to live a life worth of Jesus': of service and obedience. Peter tells us (emphasis added):

> "**Dear friends, I urge you**, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. **Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.**" — 1 Peter 2:11–12 (NIV)

So the point which I am building up to:

1. Jesus already defeated evil.
2. We have salvation through Him if we accept Him as Saviour and appoint Him as ruler over our lives.
3. If we have done this, we desire to be more like Him (out of our own), as scripture also tells us.
4. We then live our lives to *reflect* Jesus to others, by being obedient, living a life of servitude and being without malice or prejudice.

We address the problem of "devil worshippers" by not shying away from them and shunning them, but by showing them Jesus through our words and deeds and our very lives. The goal of this is not to "keep evil at bay", but to show the people the love of Jesus so that they too might long to be like Him!

Rather, the missionaries spoken of in the aforementioned news article are point out, and the world asks: "Where is the example of Jesus in their lives?".

Another Unfortunate Consequence

In the same news article, another attitude was mentioned which troubled me.

> However most mainstream Christians - notably [Roman] Catholics - have insisted on not marginalising the voodoo faith. Father Reginald Jean-Marie of Notre-Dame, the largest Roman Catholic church in Miami's Little Haiti, insists: "Any system of belief that people cling to especially in a time of crisis can be of help to them."

From this excerpt, it seems as if the Roman Catholic church agrees with the way I argued. However, there is something in the quote by Father Jean-Marie which unsettles me. His comment seems terribly tainted with post-modernism: "They are in their corner and we are in our corner: that is the way the world works and we should all just get along.". This attitude does not sit well with me. We should never accept that the world has been sectioned into set religious parts.

While it is true that, when facing a crisis, hope (any hope) is of great psychological benefit to a person. But the hope which non-Christians cling to is ultimately false hope: after the initial psychological boost, there will be nothing real there for those who do not trust in the living God[7]. While the actions of missionary workers should reflect Jesus, their words must proclaim Him, so that those who are lost and broken can learn of true hope!

Conclusion

The points which I tried to make in this article, are

1. The people who lived through the Haitian earthquake, whether Voodoo adherents or not, at the start of this year has been through enough and do not deserve to suffer further because of bigotry and fear on the part of Christian aid workers. What they need more than food and water is love, but the aid workers have the perfect opportunity to give them all by distributing relief supplies and showing them the love of Jesus through their conduct.
2. There should be no room for compartmentalized and isolationist views of religions: God's salvation is meant for *all* people. (While tangible aid is vital in a catastrophe such as the Haitian earthquake, it is still not the most important. People should be told where they can find true hope and salvation.)

- 1. Hosea 6:6a
- 2. The peace symbol was designed Gerald Holtom and is a superimposition of the semaphores for "N" and "D"—which stands for "Nuclear Disarmament"—and became prominent in the British and American anti-war movements in the late 50's and the 60's.
- 3. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6283950.stm [3]
- 4. Matthew 4:1–11, Matthew 12:26, Mark 4:10–20, Luke 10:17–20, Luke 13:16, Luke 22:31, etc.
- 5. See, for example, Matthew 14:28–33 and Matthew 17:14–20.
- 6. Cf. Acts 19:11–20.
- 7. Isaiah 57:13
- . Photo credit: AlBakker [4], "voodoo doll [5]".

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