



OCCULTISM IN AMERICA

Satan: A nice and funny guy??!!

Fr. Pishoy Salama St. Mark Church, Toronto, Canada

Last year, I escorted a group of children and youth to a local theatre to watch the “Passion Play” which was about the life, ministry, passion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. After the play was over, all the actors came down from the stage to meet and greet the audience. Among the characters that were greeting the audience was ‘Satan’, still dressed in his red suit with the horns and the pointy tail. As we were about to leave, one of the children came running at me and said: ‘Abouna, guess what, I just met the devil, he is actually a nice guy, and pretty funny too!!!’ Being astonished at the kid’s comment, I then clarified it by saying I think that you just met the actor who played the role of Satan in the play. This man is actually a Christian who loves our Lord very much, but the real Satan is not like that at all.



Today, we live in a society that knows no real distinction between godliness and genuine evil. There is a great confusion between what was always thought of as righteous behavior, which has now become ridiculed, and what was understood as pure evil which has become more acceptable and main stream. I remember my atheist professor in the first lecture of my humanities course in college called ‘Founders of Christianity’ who said: ‘In this course, we will take off the hollows from the heads of all the Biblical characters including Jesus Christ and Paul the apostle’. By saying this comment, he meant that there will be no special

privileges granted to any individual regardless of any preconceived ideas or beliefs about them. On the other extreme, fictional, mythical and evil characters of the past are being deified and extremely promoted as powerful and mystical heroes. The media industry along with the occultists is promoting the belief in the influence of supernatural or supernormal powers. These characters appear on shows and games as highly attractive, powerful, influential and possessing a good sense of humor too. By doing so,

youth become more attached to their character and subconsciously start relating to them in theory and in practice.

Recently, we have seen many youth become more attracted to occultism without realizing that their feet are slipping into Satan’s domain; with its poison being wrapped in candy coating. Among the common practices of occultism in main stream America is “Yu-Gi-oh!” cartoon and cards, the Harry Potter Phenomenon, Ouija Board, Tarot cards, and Wicca.

Starting ‘em Young:

Not too long ago, cartoons were simple ways for children to learn morals and values that would steer their upbringing in the right direction. There was always a battle between good and evil but good always



prevailed at the end. The evil character that was always portrayed as a ghost, a skeleton or a witch always lost the battle and thus children always were confident that ultimately good shall prevail. Now, cartoons and children's movies have made a great shift in their plots and outcomes. It is the evil characters that are the heroes who come victorious at the end. To justify their plot, the creators of these productions inject the evil characters with a few virtues that could be appealing to the righteous as if to justify their use of evil and demonic powers to attain their goals. While children are attracted to their evil endeavors, mentally they are justified because of their virtues and their struggles.



An example of this phenomenon is the Yu-Gi-Oh! cartoon and trading cards. This is the story of Yugi Moto, a Japanese spiky-haired high school freshman, and

his friends Tea, Joey, Tristan and Mai. Although Yugi's divorced parents are hardly mentioned in the plot, his loving grandfather provides him with advice and parental leadership. His grandfather gave Yugi the Millennium puzzle, an ancient Egyptian game, hoping it will help him cultivate logic and reasoning. It is worth noting that Yugi places his confidence in cards and his mysterious millennium puzzle, leaving no indication that there is a power greater than magic at work in their lives. Mysticism and the supremacy of the dark powers are evident in characters such as Pegasus who strives to achieve immortality by "Stealing souls" for the purpose of reincarnation. Even though the trading cards rule book says that opponents must possess good manners in telling the truth, not touching each others cards without asking and starting the game with a friendly hand shake, yet there are many dangers lurking behind the friendly surface. The story line of the game contains a fair amount of mysticism, magic and occultist themes. Some of the monsters are scary for younger children, and some Japanese versions of the cards also contain mild cartoon erotica. Other television shows

and cartoons that include occultist themes which target children and pre-teens are "Tales from the crypt keepers", "Creep school", "Sabrina, the teen age witch" and "Bewitched".

Indeed, our Lord Jesus said: "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea... woe to that man by whom the offenses come" (Matt 18:6,7).

Harry Potter:

The Harry Potter book series and movies have become very famous among the youth who often call him a good sorcerer and his powers as harmless magic. I



I believe that readers, including children, are finding out about genuine occultist rituals and, in fact, are being shown that these practices have actual power they can learn to use in their own lives. Harry Potter clubs in local high schools are becoming more famous where student gather together to read the books, watch the movies and share experiences. We should not underestimate the influence of the media on our lives and on others. I remember as a teenager, every time I would watch a sports event, I would meet up with my friends and play that same game and subconsciously try to imitate all the fancy moves that I have seen the pros do on television. For many who are not established in their faith, watching Harry Potter or reading the books could have a similar effect. The following dangerous ideologies appear in this book series and lurk in the innocent minds of its readers:

Animism – A spirit or life force inhabits all creatures and nature, sometimes inanimate objects as well.

Polarity – good and evil, or other opposites may be seen as part of each other, or as mirrors of each other.

Amulet – A charm believed to contain special powers



or magic which is worn or carried as protection against misfortune.

Astral projection – used by those calling themselves psychic vampires, who believe they can leave their body and in astral form secretly feed off the spirit or energy of another person.

Black magic – It is the use of sorcery or magical powers for evil intentions or selfish gain.

Channeling or Spiritism- contact with spirits through methods such as summoning, evoking or invoking, using a spirit guide, using drugs, using Ouija board, worshipping spirits, or various rituals. A new television program called ‘crossing over’, with John Edwards as its host, has been gaining fame among main stream America which uses channeling as its means for contacting the dead. Obviously, it is a demonic practice and is forbidden in Christianity.

Familiar(s) – a spirit often assuming the form of an animal, or an actual animal used as a helper for sorcerers or witches.

New-paganism – umbrella term for contemporary revival of pagan nature worship. Practices include polytheism, divination, magic & casting spells.

Scrying – a form of divination by gazing into an opaque surface such as a crystal, glass, water surface or dark mirror.

Other themes include sorcery, reincarnation, clairvoyance, energy healing and witchcraft.

God has clearly condemned each and every one of these practices and said that anyone who is involved in such demonic traditions shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven (Deut 18:9-14, Gal 5:19-21).

Ouija Board:

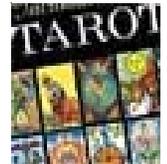


The Ouija board is not a mere game but is actually a mechanical device used by those who believe they can contact the dead, and elicit information from them. “Ouija” is derived from the French and German words for “yes”. The spirits, who are allegedly present at the session,

supposedly control the hands of the human participants for the purpose of answering questions. These questions can involve the nature of the after life, events which occurred while these spirits still existed in the physical realm or events which will occur in the future (divination). The Ouija board has been used by children and adults as a game but it is indeed much more than that. We hear many stories of demon possessions and evil actions as a result of participating in this ritual. Isaiah the prophet warned against such practices by saying: “when they say to you ‘consult the mediums and the wizards who whisper and mutter’, should not a people consult the dead on behalf of the living?” (Isa 8:19). Attempts to contact the dead were condemned by God. (Lev 19:31, 20:6, 27, Eccl 9:5,6).

Tarot Cards:

Tarot cards originated with the Chinese in the 10th century A.D., not too long after, the Hindus added 10 suits, representing the 10 incarnations of Vishnu. Around the 14th century, the cards appeared in Europe and were predominantly used by the gypsies as tools for fortune telling and advising. The message of the Tarot is appealing because of its mysticism and partial truth. While the cards may correctly say that man has a problem, and needs help from outside, their solution is wrong. Many who use the Tarot think it will help them manipulate their destinies. Thus, the Tarot is an occultist tool. There are several sets and sequences of Tarot cards. Source books frequently contradict one another when it comes to assigning symbolic values and meanings to the cards. The possibilities for divination are inexhaustible. Also, when a question is asked, who or what is supposed to be answering and what is the source of the power behind the cards? Most of the occultist practices require the emptying of the mind via drugs, hypnosis, blank, meditation, yoga or chanting which opens the mind to demonic possession.



The Holy Bible is very clear on condemning those who



follow fortune telling. When people turn their destinies over to the occultist practices, they are turning away from God. “For the idols speak delusion; the diviners envision lies, and the false dreams; they comfort in vain... therefore the people are in trouble because there is no shepherd” (Zech 10:2). When the apostles Barnabas and Paul arrived on an island called Paphos, they met with a sorcerer called Elymas who was named a false prophet and a son of the devil. When Elymas tried to prevent the ways of the Lord, the hand of the Lord came upon him and he was blind for a time (Acts 13:6-11). Finally, in Acts 19:18-20, many who believed who had previously used occultist practices burned their books of sorcery and magic which was worth fifty thousand pieces of silver (about \$32,000). When the people burned these evil books, the Holy Book of Acts says that ‘the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed’ (Acts 19:20).

Wicca:

Wicca is a complex religion often associated with witchcraft, occultism and neo-paganism. The term originated from the Anglo-Saxon word “Wicce” which means to bend or shape nature to your service. Wiccans worship nature and use spiritual forces to get results. They try to separate their practices from Satanism but in many ways they are still similar. Wiccans live by one central rule called ‘The Rede’, which says “Harm no one; do what you will”. In other words, witches are free to do whatever seems right to them, as long as they avoid harming others. They worship ‘the mother goddess’ and her companion ‘the homed god’. They say that both of these deities manifest themselves in nature. They believe that the goddess is in everything – in rocks, trees, earth and the sky. Most Wiccans celebrate eight holidays or ‘sabbats’ centered on the solar cycles and ‘esbats’ centered on the lunar cycles. A very important celebration for the Wiccans is Halloween which is supposedly a time of heightened interaction between the natural and supernatural worlds. Magic and spell casting are an integral part of Wicca. They say that

these acts are performed to cause a desired change and to overcome loneliness, to attract money, to bring inner power and to blind an enemy. Witches acknowledge that spells can be used to do good or harm. The vast majority of new Wiccans join the occult as teenagers as members predator on those who are left out, lonely, don’t belong and the vulnerable to offer them a chance of belonging and empowerment. Informal groups of Wiccans called covens have popped up in most cities in the United States. Wiccans preach sexual liberation, feminism, Satanism and the new age movement.

It was clear that God condemned Saul for going to the witch of En Dor to seek the spirit of Samuel. God had departed from Saul and would not answer him by prophets nor by dreams (1Sam 28). Also, Manasseh did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking Him to anger ‘In both courts of the temple of the Lord, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his sons in the fire, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists’ (2Chron 33:5,6).

Signs of Occultist Involvement:

- + Withdrawal from church: lack of participation in the holy sacraments, Holy Bible reading and church activities. Also, the possibility of seeking an alternative meeting with other hidden or unknown groups.
- + Internet networking: participation in suspicious chat rooms, instant message buddies, email newsletters and websites.
- + Dress and appearance: wearing dark, black gothic or natural colors could be a signal. Also, satanic, monster or evil characters or symbols would appear on the clothes.
- + Reading habits: books for teenagers on witchcraft, magic, divination, etc. are very popular at local book stores. Books such as how-to guides like “The book of shadows”, “A witch’s bible”, and even “The complete idiot’s guide to Wicca and witchcraft” could



easily be acquired or purchased.

+ New language: teens would start using new vocabulary in occult terms or religious terminology that seems offensive or not understood.

+ New interest in alternative issues: radical environmentalism, radical feminism, the Goth subculture, drugs, exclusion from society or family, violence, cutting one's self; among others. It is usually the occurrence of a combination of these phenomena that would alert us to the problem and not just one issue.

“Let us charge into the good fight with joy and love without being afraid of our enemies. Though unseen themselves, they can look at the face of our soul, and if they see it altered by fear, they take up arms against us all the more fiercely. So let us take up arms against them courageously. No one will fight with a resolute fighter” (St. John Climacus).

Think About it:

+ There is only one God who is to be worshiped and praised, even the demons themselves “believe and tremble” (Jam 2:19)

+ “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age” (Eph 6:12). Yet, our God is mightier and will always give us victory if we stick to Him (Luke 10:18-20). Remember that the Egyptian magicians could only copy some of the signs which God performed on the hands of Moses but then they failed and confessed saying: “This is the finger of God” (Ex 8:19) admitting to God’s supremacy over their demonic magic.

+ Beware of false teachers and prophets who will come as wolves in sheep skin (Mat 7:15) and they will try to snatch away and mislead God’s children.

+ Keep your guards up at all times and do not fall into any new teaching or cult without realizing its dangers (Gal 1:6-9).

A Final Word:

“I saw the snares that the enemy spread out over the world and I said groaning “what can get through from such snares?” then I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Humility’. (St. Anthony the Great)

If you, or someone you know, have been involved in such occultist practices then you should:

+ **Know that you are on a dangerous road that would lead you to destruction.**

+ **Speak to your confession father and find out how to return to the way of the Lord.**

+ **Terminate any contact with the people who had drawn you into that way and destroy all objects acquired while with them.**

+ **Return back to our beloved Coptic Church and start discovering its beauty and treasures.**

+ **Become more active in the church and warn others not to fall into the same trap.**

May the Lord protect our Church and our youth from any harm, through the intercession of the Holy Theotokos St. Mary, St. Mark the evangelist and the prayers of H. H. Pope Shenouda III and his partner in the apostolic service H.G. Bishop Youssef. Amen.

Dear Reader:

If you came across anything related to this article and wonder if it is right or wrong please send us your questions and we will answer them in the following issues.