

Excerpts from “The God of Contemporary Atheism” by
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Sartre’s God and the Christian’s God

Sartre is said to be the most popular writer in Europe. His atheism is described as not just mere denial of God’s existence but as rejection of God; a rejection considered by its proponents fundamental for man to exist having its core drive in the will that God does not exist or in the challenge to that deity. We find this existential rejecting stance clear in the writings of Nietzsche, one of the exponents of atheistic Existentialism who wrote “Atheism is something instinctive in me. If there were gods, how do I bear not to be a god myself?” But who is this god that Sartre and Nietzsche reject and is he our God, we the Christians?

Sartre’s God

In an attempt to get to know Sartre’s god, we will refer to his famous plays “The Flies” and another play called “Satan and God”.

“The Flies” shows us a god whose concern is to manipulate people and turn them into pliable tools to implement his selfish motives; a god who is willing to humiliate people and sanction them with sluggishness and submissiveness; a god who dreads people’s liberty and considers it a threat; so he tries in various ways to enslave them and blind their vision. A man rises before this god and demands the fullness of his human statute and would not see its realization except through shunning this tyrant god considering himself his sole reference. Thus the master-slave deception was taken a foundation for understanding man’s relation with his god.

The play “Satan and God” shows the same concepts. In this play, the protagonist, a German prince from the middle ages who at the beginning tried to defy God’s authority by committing extreme evil. So, he shed blood, spread destruction and disseminated terror all around him. When he was told that evil was a common thing whereas good was peculiar to God alone, he decided to challenge God in another way by going along with Him in doing good. So, after having played the role of Satan, this prince started to play the role of God Himself. However, this good led to the destruction of those to whom he desired to establish a paradise on earth. Consequently, after having failed in his two attempts, he was finally “enlightened” to atheism. So, he rejected God in order to give opportunity to man. This atheism, which before took the form of challenge was nothing but the final picture of his rejection of God. But who is this god that the prince had rejected? He is this sadistic being who rapes, blinds and bombards man. He is this being who wills to destroy man; and even when he does good, his benevolence to mankind is spitefulness and malicious. The gist of the matter, according to the protagonists, is that God cancels man’s existence. Thus the protagonist arrived at: “If God exists then man is nothing”; and “if God’s existence cancels man, it is necessary then to cancel God in order for man to be.” That was the final destination arrived at by the director of the play proclaiming that he had “killed God” reiterating twice Nietzsche’s famous quote “God is dead”.

One might ask, how could man, just out of his own will, determine God’s existence or non existence? To understand this we need to go back to Sartre’s understanding which clarifies that what is important is not God’s existence in itself but His existence in relation to me. God said “*I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people*” (Leviticus 26:12) meaning that it is not important for me to be God but what is important is my attitude towards them and their attitude towards me. In this respect Kierkegaard, the father of Existentialism said, “every sin is a sin against faith, because it is refusal to make God my point of reference, my God.” It is therefore, an existential atheism if not accompanied by theoretical

atheism. The deep meaning of Sartre's atheism is "I will not accept to have a god because the existence of such a god will cancel my existence." The question to be asked: is the god in both of Sartre's plays who cancels man's existence, convicts man with enslavement, bondage, abjection and destruction the same God of "the Book of Revelations"?

The God of the Book of Proclamation

In "The Flies", Sartre referred to Deity by the name of "Jupiter", a name related with "Prometheus", that being who had stolen fire from heaven and begot man from it. Jupiter was thus outraged and punished Prometheus with an eternal punishment. This story from the Greek mythology depicts the relation between manhood and deity as one of animosity because man's existence was a preemption of God's Power thus making man's existence a direct opposition to God. This is exactly Sartre's understanding expressed in his book, "Being and Nothingness"; the created "cannot assert himself except against his creator".

God is Love

Jupiter, to whom Sartre attributed possessiveness and envy, is not God of the Scriptural revelation because God of the Scripture manifest in Jesus Christ about Whom Christ said "...*He who has seen me has seen the Father...*" (John 14:9) is neither envious nor possessive but is full of giving. In the past He said about Himself, "*the fountain of living waters*" (Jeremiah 2:13). David addressed him saying "*As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God*" (Psalm 42:1). A spring is a continuous flow and perpetual giving. In the New Testament, St. John wrote "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8). Jupiter of "The Flies" said, "I do not love anyone" thus following his father in his selfishness and alienation. But God of the Holy Bible does not only love but is Love itself. That is why He is a trinity because love relationship presupposes the existence of more than one person. The first hypostasis is not known about except in relation to the second "the father is not a father except in relation to the son". The second hypostasis is not known about except in relation to the first "the son is not son except in relation to the father". God, in His essence, appears to us perpetually reciprocally giving. "*And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them*" (John 17:10). In the New Testament, when the Father appears, He glorifies not Himself but the Son. At Baptism He declares, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" (Matthew 3:17) and likewise, the Son came to the world to glorify the Father, "*I have glorified You on the earth*" (John 17:4).

This love inherent in God's very essence clarifies the type of His relationship with mankind; a relation that could not be anything else but a loving and giving rapport "*I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me*" (John 17:23). In the Old Testament this type of association appeared in the Holy Book of Song of Songs as lover-loved type of affiliation. In the New Testament, it appeared in Jesus' life given to us unto death. It was granted unconditionally and boundlessly upon the sinful and righteous, the evil and the good alike. Thus we came to understand that God is an unconditional giver. "*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:7-8).

Through Jesus Christ Who is "*the image of the invisible God*" (Colossians 1:15) we came to understand and realize God's character. All the traits of arrogance, hard heartedness, possessiveness and cruelty attributed to God by Sartre are as far from God as earth is from Heaven.

Through the crucified Jesus Christ we came to fathom that "*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends*" (John 15:13) and that God is totally offered for us. If it is said that creatures are created for His glory. What is God's glory? God's glory, according to a spiritual writer, "is

not in taking but in giving, the glory of LOVE is to love The glory of a spring is to fill, irrigate, satisfy and cleanse. The glory of a wick is to ignite, light and give warmth.”

In Louise Ave’s book “Our Father”, he says that “God created out of love in order to present and donate himself, to grant life to other creatures through His life, to give joy to others through His joy” (page 48).

St. Irenaeus in the second century said “Man’s life is God’s glory ” as if pre answering back Sartre’s imaginations whereby he called his god Jupiter “the god of death”; and was pleased to see the living beings resembling the dead while we heard our God say “*For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him*” (Luke 20:38) and saw Him reveal His aims in His words, “*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10).

Thus it is revealed that God’s intention is not to demolish my existence but to provide me with His existence. He wants me to participate in all of His life, enrich me with His bounties and grant me all the richness of His presence. God does not wish to humiliate man but just as a father worthy to be called father, is glad to see His son grow into a man; so was God happy to make us partakers in His divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

Where was the fear that Sartre had spoken of through Jupiter of “The Flies” that had “a gourmet odor in the nostrils of the gods”? The apostle St. John has answered Sartre back before time saying, “*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love*” (1 John 4:18). (To be continued.)