

Vatican by Augustinus

The existence of Satan

The Pope's two homilies have brought out from under their rocks many who would like to see evil go unnamed.

The two homilies by the Pope on the existence and nature of the Devil have provoked the most incredible reactions and the most varied comments, many of them frivolous, on a subject which is certainly not easy, much less banal.

It has been written that John Paul II is an obscurantist proposing to bring back a medieval Church; that he is an apocalyptic; a providentialist; that he wants to restore taboos and break with modern thought. In short, to have brought up the problem of Satan's existence again has touched off a scandal—as if evil did not exist on this Earth.

It is hardly amazing that a discussion on the origins of evil could stimulate so many such reactions. Paul VI had already said: "The problem of evil, seen in its totality, and in its absurdity with respect to our unilateral rationality, becomes haunting. It is the greatest difficulty for our religious intelligence of the cosmos. Not for nothing St. Augustine suffered over it for years: *Quaerebam unde malum, et non erat exitus*, I looked for the source of evil, and I did not find the explanation."

But it is absurd to get upset when a Pope reminds the world that not only does Satan exist, but is the cause of destruction, division, slander, and that his genius is precisely that of making men believe he does not exist. "The skill of Satan in the world," said John Paul II, "is that of inducing men to deny his existence in the name of rationalism and every other system of

thought that seeks every loophole in order not to admit the deeds."

We suspect that those getting angriest are in fact spokesmen for those whose interest it is to keep the spirit of evil ignored and hidden from men's eyes. They are those who, substituting themselves for God, want to make life and death decisions for entire peoples and continents.

They are those responsible for the usurious economic policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, who are condemning millions of persons in the Third World to death.

They have sabotaged every attempt to impede the proliferation of locusts and grasshoppers which are now devastating Africa, provoking one of the greatest famines of recent history.

They are those who demand the drastic cutting of health spending in the West and thus favor euthanasia for the old and ill. They are those who inspire the imperial policies of oriental dictatorships. They are the instrument of the Evil One on this Earth.

Just as they weave their criminal and diabolical designs, they attack anyone who denounces evil by its own name.

The usual technique for hiding Satan is to pass evil off as a pure invention of the human mind, thus reducing it to a merely psychological reality, which it is not necessary to oppose.

The Italian communist philosopher Massimo Cacciari, noted for his ties to the Gnostic-fascist circles of the

"New Right," and the Maoist-leaning daily *Il Manifesto* of Rome intervened into the question, exposing philosophical hooves and forked tail. The Pope has gone too far, they write, criticizing what they term "a conciliatory, neo-humanistic Catholicism, for everybody. A wholly secularized Church which seems to have forgotten the Christianity of tragedy and of the cross."

In practice, Pope John Paul II is upbraided for trying to realize the Augustinian Christian ideal heralded by Paul VI. "They are trying to make theological-scientific talk," Cacciari shouts in disgust, "at the expense of an oriental-type mystical transcendence."

Where—wonder these new Nietzsches—is the "Christianity that does not resolve, nor sum up, nor sanction, nor legitimize, nor reaffirm, nor reconcile?" Against such a "Christianity of Tragedy," the Pope proposes too many certainties, a defense of moral values, and (Satan forbid!), he has said that "the whole world lies under the power of evil" and has called on all men to prepare for battle for a victory over the Devil.

The Pope also put an end to innumerable speculations on "suffering Christianity, which leaves open abysses and splits, which suffers contradictions without softening them, for which the world keeps its negativity, the Christianity, in sum, of authentic dialogue where not only is the risk opened up of absolute separation, but of the complete loss of identity," which Cacciari and like-minded philosophers like so much.

It's true, and such existentialists perhaps were the first to catch on; it is the end of doubt, of soul-searching dialogue and sociological discussions; and the beginning of the certainty of a battle to stop evil.