

My Atheism

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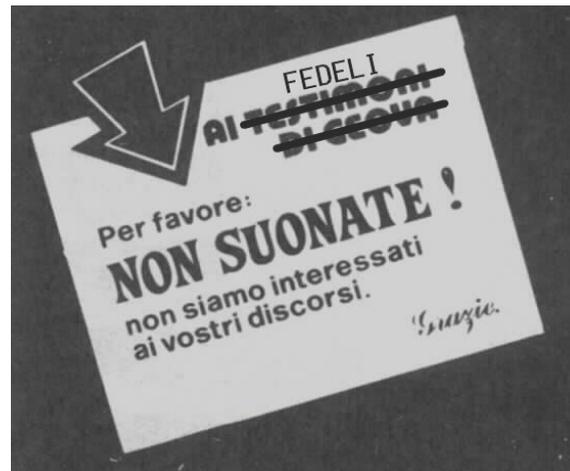
For some time now, my homepage on the public internet has featured my declaration of belief in Modern Satanism. What may have appeared to be a relict to some is actually of recent date and has survived several updates. There is, of course, a contrarian gesture inherent in the declaration, but even though I neither am a member of the Church of Satan, nor regard Anton LaVey as an individual particularly worthy of admiration, naming ‘Satanism’ does not exhaust itself in the mere piquing of those who might be piqued by it. To counter the misunderstandings hitherto condoned, such as inevitably arise when Modern Satanism is named as religious affiliation without any explanation, I shall be slightly more verbose about it now.

It is true – I have a chip on my shoulder with regard to religion. The world is ridden with disease, hunger and misery, and yet my declaration of war has been not against them, but against religion and spirituality. This may seem glaringly misplaced to some, but I, just like everyone else who is not forced into a battle, am allowed to make use of my freedom to choose mine. Yes, I could as well simply not believe and leave it at that, as do many who do not feel the need to make their irreligiousness explicit. But that would be acting contrary to my conviction that my position is justified and does not need to be kept quiet about so as not to offend the religious majority.



Daarom sprak ik, spreek ik en zal ik blijven spreken. [Therefore I spoke, speak, and shall continue to speak.] (Geert Wilders)

However, my publication of this statement should not be read as an invitation to dialogue, for I am thoroughly uninterested in any dialogue with the religious or spiritual. I am only broadcasting to make plain my position, and I do not see any value in staying in receiving mode for the religious. In writing this statement I am already making a concession from which I had wanted to refrain, because making it means stepping towards the very people from which I would rather be separated by an impenetrable wall. If, on top of that, I should be supposed to listen to what they might suggest I consider, a single word sums up my stance towards it – нет.



I have repeatedly come across the opinion, explicit or not, that being religious is a requirement for maturity. That the adult person is a Christian. Atheism – a sign of immaturity; a condition of which the grown-up Christian says with a good-natured smile that it will be outgrown eventually. Eventually, one will come to understand that one has been given the privilege of being a whole person in Jesus Christ, while the pitiable, who have not yet been able to grasp it, have to continue existing as incomplete persons, until they are able to believe at last – perhaps if Jesus in his infinite mercy takes them in and frees them from their inability to believe.

But what is it I should be able to believe as a mature person? That some two-thousand years ago in the Middle East, there was a preacher who performed miracle healings, and that by his death on the cross, eternal life and the remission of all my sins are bestowed upon me. That some one-thousand four-hundred years ago, also in the Middle East, the Archangel Gabriel revealed to a merchant the ultimate divine truth as it is written in the Qur'an, authoritative for me and all other human beings. That over centuries God inspired the formation of the collection of writings called 'Bible'. And if I am not ready to settle for such specifics, then at least that God exists, or a higher power, or, to preserve the greatest possible freedom in being indeterminate, simply 'something'.

That among the religious there are some who are intelligent, self-critical and educated in the sciences is a known fact to me. I do not claim that irreligiousness correlates with intelligence or the degree of education, and should there be results in support of such a hypothesis, they are not of interest to me. The religiousness of which I speak is an attitude that is found in intelligent and stupid people alike. Intelligence brings about a higher aptitude at framing religious beliefs in such a way that they are more compatible with rationality. Thus the intelligent believer is more likely to say that he decides to believe by virtue of his reason. The arguments that may be brought forward in support of a rational decision to believe however are irrelevant where, from a certain stance towards his own life, and with no less rationality, someone decides to remain free from belief.

It is a stance that embraces life's indeterminacy and contingency and does not see the absence of an absolute point of reference as a deficit. A stance, also, that in the face of the fleetingness of human existence does not give in to the reflex of ascribing to one's own life a being embedded in a context of meaning which requires that there are things beyond this world. I need no god with whom I can be in a personal relationship; no life after or before this life; no redeemer who saves me from my sins; no prophet on whom to model myself; no religious texts that help me navigate this world. I am fine. What right would anybody have to say that there is something missing from my life? Or, even better, that in my heart of hearts I desire those things?

Then there are those for whom religion takes place mostly in the sociocultural sphere and its transcendental dimension is not all that important. To declare one's belief here means to declare that one belongs to a group; to be a Christian thus to belong to the community and in a further sense to the church, and to uphold the values passed down in a Christian culture. The biblical stories do not only convey a mentality; they fulfil a cohesive function, as does the cult. By their repetition, the community affirms itself. Again – I am fine. I need no community that gathers at church on Sunday; no pastor by whose sermons I may be edified, and to whom I can turn when I am in need of counselling; no home group that meets for Bible reading and prayer.

There may be a contradiction in the formation of a Satanist organization insofar as it means attempting to unite pronounced individualists in a group. Nevertheless the Church of Satan with its chapters worldwide, the Black Order of Lucifer in Switzerland, and others deserve credit for successfully establishing themselves as organizations that represent Modern Satanism. Whatever may be said about their individual members or leading figures, if one does not get past a knee-jerk reaction of snickering at the mention of the name 'Satanism', because it evokes images of teenagers dressed in black, or of Mr Wehrli's unfortunate TV appearances, one does not do the matter justice.

The Church of Scientology's thetans-and-Xenu mythology is a valid mythology, and I do not see why it should be ridiculed while its Christian counterpart is to be taken seriously. Because it is two-thousand years younger than the Christian mythology, was invented by a science fiction author, and is part of a widely scorned new religion? Who knows what will be the majority religion in two-thousand – one-thousand, three-hundred – years, if religion has not ceased to exist.

Did I simply not get it? Is there a development that has not yet taken place, and that, once it sets in, will allow me to find my piety? Have I just not yet experienced my key moment? Will I, too, eventually get it? No, I do not think so.

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