

Myths We Live By

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Ancient myths die hard. They continue in disguise in popular culture long after they are rejected in orthodox religious thought. The pagan Indo-European myth of our cultural ancestors is still alive in our North American fables, sports, movies, politics and business.

Central to the Indo-European worldview was the myth of a cosmic spiritual conflict between Good and Evil. When the spread of the Indo-Europeans from inner Asia to Europe, Mesopotamia and South Asia, this myth in its various forms became the basis for the religions of Babylon, Sumer, Canaan, Greece, India and Germany, to name a few.

Fundamental to the Indo-European myth is the belief that Good and Evil are two independent entities coexistent from eternity. In this dualism, Good and Evil come from two opposing superhuman agencies. The classical example is found in ancient Persia in the battle between Ahura Mazda, the good divine being, and Ahriman, the equally eternal and powerful personification of evil. Human beings are nothing but puppets or pawns in their hands.

Humans, therefore, live in fear of the spirits, good and evil, for these control their destiny. On their part, humans seek to manipulate the gods to their bidding through magic, placation, bribing and manipulation.

In this battle, the ultimate Good is order, and to achieve this one side or the other must gain control. The ultimate Evil is chaos. In the biblical worldview, not all chaos is evil. It is the unformed material out of which God created the universe (Gen. 1:2). It is the birth of a child which introduces turmoil into the routines of the home.

The evil god (Asag, Vritra, Tiamat, Ravana, and others) is an autonomous being in

constant battle with the good god (Ninurta, Indra, Marduk, Rama, and others) for control of the world. Applied to the biblical narrative, this view sees Satan and demons as autonomous beings. They may have been created by God in the beginning, but now they no longer depend on God for their strength or very existence.

Given this dualism, all reality is divided into two camps; God and Satan, angels and demons, good nations and evil ones, good humans and wicked ones. The line between the camps is sharp. There are no shades between them.

Our modern dualism is seen in our tendency to categorize in opposites: good-bad, big-small, sweet-sour, success-failure, and truth-falsehood. This duality colors our political views. Other nations are either capitalist or communist; for us or against us (addigital sets and this makes decision-making easier and neater)

Cosmic control is determined in Indo-European mythology by a battle in which power determines the outcome. If the good wins, righteousness, peace and love can rule. If evil wins then evil reigns. To win, therefore, is everything (add scriptural view of winning, running race, present dying to self).

In Indo-European battles, the good become like their enemies: they end up using violence, entering without warrants, lying, committing adultery and killing without due process. The sheriff cannot draw first, but when the outlaw does, the sheriff can gun him down without a trial. All of this is justified in the name of victory so that good may righteousness may reign. In this worldview, it is unthinkable that a god would let enemies win to bring judgment on his people because they have sinned. Loyalty in battle is more important than righteousness.

After victory the gods can inaugurate a kingdom of justice and peace. But if the gods use wicked means to win the battle, have they not become a party to evil? Our answer, found in Hinduism and the New Age, is that good and evil are ultimately one: both sides of the same coin. A second answer, found in Zoroastrianism, is that both coexist in an eternal struggle in which neither side achieves a final victory. Even if good triumphs, evil will rise again to challenge the good.

In the Indo-European worldview, the battle is the center of the story. When it is over, the story is done. There is no story worth telling about the “happily ever after.” This fascination with battle is evident in our modern sports. People pay to see a game. When the battle is over, everyone goes home and waits for the next battle.

The Indo-European cosmic myth dominates modern American thought. It is the basis for our westerns, detective stories, murder mysteries and science fiction. It is sold in Superman, Spiderman and most of our cartoons. It is reenacted in Star Wars, dramatized in video games and taught in the New Age Movement. It is played out in football, basketball, golf and tennis. It is affirmed in our theories of evolution and market capitalism (give example)

The Scriptures speak of spiritual warfare, but that warfare does not fit the Indo-European myth. The central issue in biblical warfare is not power. In the Old Testament both Israel’s victories *and defeats* are attributed to God. Their victory is due to their faithfulness to God and His laws, their defeats are God’s punishment for their forsaking Him. The central issues is not power but the relationship between people and God. (Add battle is defensive, A christian is victorties wins by holding onto the good, specifically to God, no simply by being powerful . It is

God who enables them to do so. The battle isn't won by being strong but being closely tied to the who is strong.)

The heart of the gospel is *shalom*, which begins with right relationships between people and God in worship, obedience and holiness. Prayer in Indo-European thought is a means to control the gods; in biblical thought it is submission to God.

Shalom is also right relationships between humans. These are not characterized by hierarchy and exploitation, as in the Indo-European world, in which the strong lord it over the weak. Right relationships are expressed in love and servant care for one another as people fully created in the image of God, no matter how broken or flawed they are. Shalom is to be for the other regardless of the other's response.

Shalom gives priority to building relationships and community over completing tasks. This demands that we give up our Western need to control people and situations around us. It means we accept corporate decision making in the church, and accountability to the community.

In contrast to the Indo-European myths in which humans are hapless victims of cosmic battles between the gods, the Bible places the blame for suffering on humans themselves. They are sinners, coconspirators with Satan, and his host in rebellion against God.

Acts. 21:13

John 12:24