

The Malleus Maleficarum — The Hammer of Witches: A Review

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The Malleus Maleficarum — The Hammer of Witches: a review of the book by Heinrich Kramer and Jacobus Sprenger as translated by Rev. Montague Summers

Witch-hunt: an investigation of or campaign against dissenters (as political opponents) conducted on the pretext of protecting the public welfare.

Heretic: From the Greek, “able to choose”, characterized by departure from accepted beliefs or standards. It was the time when European men enslaved 11 to 15 million Africans and caused 70 million deaths of Indians in the so-called New World.

The “Burning Times” here in Europe when millions of their own inhabitants were tortured and killed, and the last vestiges of our wild ancestry wiped out. A systematic persecution of all dissenters, political opponents to the church/state and deviators from the civilised norm.

And *Malleus Maleficarum* was the book on every Judge’s bench. The handbook for every self-appointed Inquisitor, every sanctimonious christian, every law-abiding citizen. An inspirer of fear and distrust, rationalising the intrusion of christian civilised society into every corner of the earth.

The book is divided into three parts. The first ponders such questions as: “If it be in Accordance with the Catholic Faith to maintain that in Order to bring about some Effect of Magic, the Devil must intimately cooperate with the Witch, or whether one without the other, that is to say, the Devil without the Witch, or conversely, could produce such an effect.” (That’s just a sample so you can see how turgid these men were)

The second describes all the virile member/bestial transformations kind of stuff and the third relates to the judicial proceedings in both the ecclesiastical and civil courts. This covers the way the arrest, imprisonment, torture and sentencing should be carried out. One section deals specifically with “the Trial with redhot irons”

Everything by the book, by the letter of the law.

It doesn't mention the sexual assault and rape carried out regularly by prison guards and interrogators, but you know that wouldn't have bothered Frs. Kramer and Sprenger anyway. Their anti-women stance is extreme even by the church's standards and they have the usual civilised obsession with sex.

To conclude: All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable. See Proverbs 30: There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, a fourth thing which says not, It is enough; that is, the mouth of the womb. Wherefore for the sake of fulfilling their lusts they consort even with devils.

The accused witch must be “often and frequently exposed to torture. If after being fittingly tortured she refuses to confess the truth, he [the inquisitor] should have other engines of torture brought before her, and tell her that she will have to endure these if she does not confess. If then she is not induced by terror to confess, the torture must be continued.” If she remained obdurate, “she is not to be altogether released, but must be sent to the squalor of prison for a year, and be tortured, and be examined very often, especially on the more Holy Days.”

All perfectly reasonable.

The edition reviewed here has Pope ‘Innocent’ VIII's Papal Bull endorsing it. Pope Innocent VIII had two kids – his son married a daughter of Lorenzo de Medici and his daughter married Gherardo Uso de Mare, a very wealthy Genoese merchant who was also Papal Treasurer. He feared anarchy like every wealthy businessman does and was obviously very concious of the ways to influence and brainwash people. To get them afraid and docile, more manageable to the Holy Empire, he and his cronies manufactured the witchcraze so they could subdue rebellions, destroy dissent and snatch as much land as they could. (All witches had their property confiscated by the church, none was ever given back)

Published in 1486, there were 13 editions by 1520, 16 more by 1669 and translations into German, French, Italian, and English. One of the most widely read books along with the Bible, it was pushed with all the ignorant fervour you now get with the “War on Terror”, post 9–11.

Then, as now, there were many people unwilling to give up their ways and land. Many heretical movements sprung up, especially in German-speaking areas where the witch hunts were particularly concentrated.

And there were families and individuals who were happy with their pagan ways, or non-religious ways, and didn't buckle easily to the christian plunderers. The church resorted to increasingly violent measures to whip these heretics back in line.

The Inquisition itself was established by Pope Gregory IX in 1233 to eliminate the Cathars¹ and other threats to church power. This mainly meant persecuting heretics labelled the "Free Spirit Movement", a convenient banner for a highly diverse flourishing of animist or mystic thought.

One member of the Free Spirit movement was interviewed by German mystic Heinrich Suso in 1330:

Whence have you come? I come from nowhere. Tell me what are you? I am not. What do you wish? I do not wish. Tell me what is your name? I am called Nameless Wildness. Where does your insight lead? Into untrammelled freedom.

In the early thirteenth century, David of Dinant taught that "God and Matter and Mind are one substance." and Amalric of Bena held that "God was the formal principle of all things, and that every single person was as much God as was Christ." The works of both men were condemned as heretical and burned. A group of fourteen clerics, which included Amalric's secretary, rubbished the notion of sin and began to preach "all things are One, because whatever is, is God." In 1210 they were burned at the stake.²

Things were beginning to intensify by the 13th and 14th centuries and the church compiled lists to be used as handbooks in the persecution of dissenters which included the following "errors" of heretics:

A man unified with God could rob from others, could lie or perjure himself without sin, and, if a servant, could give away the property of his master without license. More than that, the perfect could eat in secret as much and whatever they wished and could avoid work... There is no need for any mediation on the part of the clergy or any need to seek counsel from learned men." and "he could exceed the traditional bounds of charity and arrive at a state beyond good and evil."

¹ The Cathars didn't acknowledge the sacraments, the doctrines of hell or purgatory, or the resurrection of the body and developed their own church and ritual, rejecting the authority of the Church. They had lives of simplicity and penance in which salvation lay only in the Lord. Thousands were killed and many more tortured into accepting orthodox faith and by 1244 they had been crushed.

² "The Brethren of the Free Spirit — divine amorality".by Paul Harrison www.totse.com

The lists of course have the usual sexual stuff with most heresies encouraging “the satisfaction of the desires of the flesh in every way”³ The Ad Nostrum (another list) mentions more ‘errors’ propounded by heretics: “He need not honor his parents nor work with his hands, and he can receive alms, even if not in orders, or indeed steal, since all property is held in common.” They also preached that man should follow his own interior instincts rather than the Gospels and those free in spirit can do whatever they wish with their bodies without sin. A perfect woman need not obey her husband and all should be released from servitude including those who had been previously bound to a king or other lord.

These animist anarchist ideas were the leftovers from our wild past. They continued to be spread and lived throughout Europe and many people were prepared to die rather than surrender to civilised christian morality.

It is wise to remember that when the word “God” is used, the heretics and witches do not mean it in the same sense as christians and other religious do. Although the American Indians had no concept of “God” their ideas of the Life-force or animating spirit were labelled “God” by modern anthropologists. Even by calling it Life-force I am not doing justice to the idea animists have of Life.

It is worth bearing this difficulty in mind when reading heretical texts or christian versions of them. “God” is an easily understood and generally accepted way to talk about the LifeForce, but the heretical idea of “God” and the religious one of it are utterly different.

Most of the stuff I found on the web about heretics and witches is written by academics who don’t have any idea what animism is about and the accounts we have of heretical thought or witchcraft come from hostile church sources, especially Inquisitorial records. So we have to read a lot between the lines to figure out what might have been going on.

³ Those are from Nordlinger and Albert Magnus lists. “The decree of Vienne also listed eight errors of ‘an abominable sect of malignant men known as beghards and faithless women known as beguines in the Kingdom of Germany’ which are generally considered to be the essence of the FreeSpirit heresy. The first tenet was the central one. This stated that man can attain such a degree of perfection in his earthly life that he is incapable of sin. In this state he can achieve no additional grace because such would give him a perfection superior to Christ. The second point followed that such a man need not fast or pray because in his state of perfection sensuality is so subordinated to reason that he can accord freely to his body all that pleases him. Similarly the third point was that such a man is not subject to human obedience or to any laws of the Church because ‘where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty’ (2 Corin. 3:17) — from “The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages”, Robert E. Lerner, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1972,.(extracts on web at: www.scitec.auckland.ac.nz/prints/book/consum/gnos/lerner.htm#anchor_189274)

“Grant to nature all that it desires without remorse of conscience.” — Marguerite Porete⁴

“Nothing is sin except what is thought of as sin.” — Johann Hartmann

“Whatever the eye sees and covets, let the hand grasp it.” — John of Brünn

The only thing we can be certain of is that there was a huge diversity in heretical thought. While there are obvious similarities between groups and individuals, there was no set doctrine, no fixed dogmas — only beliefs as individual and varied as you can imagine.⁵

According to a Franciscan chronicler, when three heretics were arrested and interrogated in Constance in 1339. “They confessed to more than thirty errors so vile that they made their audience sick... One was that there was as much divinity or divine goodness in a louse as in man or any other creature, another that communion bread should be served to pigs. They also supposedly maintained that if a man and a woman had sexual intercourse on an altar at the same time as the consecration of the host both acts would have the same worth.⁶

Another group called the Adamites wanted to live as Adam and Eve did before the Fall into civilisation.

According to John of Viktring, men and women of various classes assembled at midnight in an underground hideaway which they named a temple. There Walter, ‘a priest of the devil,’ said mass and delivered a sermon. Then the assembly put out the lights, chose partners, and feasted, danced, and fornicated. This, they said, was the state of paradise in which Adam and Eve lived before the fall.⁷

⁴ Around the end of the 13th century Marguerite Porete wrote “The Mirror of Simple Souls” which was condemned and burned by the Bishop of Cambrai. She refused to be shut up and eventually was arrested and tortured. Refusing to answer any Inquisitors questions even after a year in prison, the authorities eventually executed her by using extracts from her book as evidence. She was burned along with a converted Jew who “relapsed” and spat in hatred on an image of the Virgin.

⁵ In 1307 at Aix-en-Othe the Bishop accused a man of having said that normal baked bread was as good as bread consecrated on the altar and that it was better to confess to a tree trunk than to a priest. How many individuals were accused on this kind of basis? How many we never hear about?

⁶ The report finishes...“Finally, though this was not an error so much as an anecdote, when one of the heretics was asked by three women to teach them about the Trinity, he had them take off all of their clothes and lie on their backs. Then, after binding each by the leg to the other, he violated them all sexually “in the most scandalous manner,” and, “casting his lecherous eye on their exposed shame,” he said “here is the Holy Trinity.” Afterwards he had intercourse with each of them separately.” (from “The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages” — see note 3).

⁷ Ibid.

Then there was the more normal beghards and beguines who believed a lot of christian stuff, but embarrassed the church by actually living as christ supposedly had done. They abandoned all possessions, wandering around the country preaching about the corruption and wealth of the church. Individuals varied in how revolutionary their teachings were — some said that the church was a useless parasite that should be disbanded, others were more reformist and hoped the church would just punish its corrupt clergy.

The degree to which other people described as “Free Spirits” were revolutionary or reformist is not clear. The texts that have survived — very few — were often watered down versions of what was preached by nonliterary heretics. It’s impossible really to know how many revolutionary heretics were around in the Middle Ages or to know how much of their ideas that have survived have been altered or diluted. Also, taking into account only the standard “Free Spirit Movement” texts would be like a person in fifty years trying to analyse our ‘movement’ (such as it is!) by looking only at Greenpeace press statements.

Many of the Free Spirits were anarchic revolutionaries, advocating a life free of church/state interference. And then again many were christian and/or very wishy-washy — like modern hippies — watering down their work to try to escape the noose or stake. But the church burnt them all anyway, not allowing any deviation from their civilised codes.

These ‘enemies of the church’ were usually called heretics before *Malleus Maleficarum* and witches afterwards.⁸ For propaganda purposes it was perhaps easier to generate fear and suspicion of witches — because of their ‘supernatural’ powers they can kill cattle, shrivel up your willy, etc. The *Malleus Maleficarum* makes it clear that witches regularly destroy property, sicken livestock and generally behave malevolently towards the community.

With the publication of *Malleus* the witch-hunts intensified and some reckon up to four million were killed, though the true number will never be known. The death rate was highest in German-speaking places, and their immediate neighbors, especially Poland. Witch hunts were frequent in Scotland and England, but there were almost none in Ireland. (They didn’t need an excuse there — the English just killed everyone who disagreed with them.) They were not widespread in Russia and rare in Iceland and Portugal, and while there were many investigations in Italy and Spain, few were executed. Although the witch hunts were at their height

⁸ In 1486 a Papal Bull to the Bishop of Brescia and Inquistior of Lombardy, “emphasises the close connection, nay, the identity of witchcraft with heresy.” (Introduction to the *Malleus* by Rev. Montague Summers) Summers holds that “In fact heresy was one huge revolutionary body, exploiting its forces through a hundred different channels and having as its object chaos and corruption. The question may be asked — What was their ultimate aim in wishing to destroy civilisation? What did they hope to gain by it?”

in Europe in the Middle Ages there were other notable campaigns of persecution against witches. For example, in 367 a crusade was launched in the East with many magicians, 'soothsayers' ('truth tellers') and others killed. Every major religion preached against witchcraft – even Manichism had Ten commandments, one of which forbade the practice of magic.

Civilised people have always feared witches and magick as it can unleash unpredictable energies and has an anarchic, un-lawful nature. In early Constantinople a man named Sopater was executed for "binding the winds by magic" causing the cargo-bearing ships to crash. We will never know to what extent many of the later witches and heretics were causing trouble, sabotaging property, etc. If we never hear of the acts of the ELF in the national media now, then how would we know of acts carried out hundreds of years ago by uncompliant individuals and groups?

With the obliteration of witches went knowledge of our herbs and healing methods – handy for the christian doctors then anxious to gain money and power. Birthing, abortion, infanticide and contraception were other skills either made illegal or appropriated by institutional professionalism. Women especially found any power they had as village midwife and healer taken off them.⁹ Traditional community bonds disintegrated and in Sweden, for example, in 1664, church ordinances increased the penalty for certain offenses from fines to corporal or even capital punishment. These "crimes" included premarital sex, communal feasts and processions, public singing and dancing, may poles, and wedding processions – long-held customary traditions.

The distrust and suspicion generated by the witch-hunts severely eroded traditional ways of life. People were afraid to talk to anyone who might turn out to be a witch, as under torture many were made to inform on friends and neighbours. Civilised people, always herdish animals, became even more domesticated – paranoid, isolated individuals, living in fear of the courts and clergy. The world they created was one of fear and isolation, where anyone outside the norm was shunned. It was a form of selective breeding as the trouble-makers, thinkers and healers were bred out and the conformist collaborators populated Europe.

⁹ Although in places like Finland, Russia and Estonia more men than women were killed, overall about 85% of those killed were women. Women can be naturally more intuitive, more in touch with Life/Power/Whatever you want to call it. Don Juan described women as having a direct relationship with the Nagual, whereas men had to work on it a bit more and many initiation rites in primitive tribes are concerned with trying to get the boys to open up. In a lot of places the girls are assumed to just know this stuff instinctively. I'm not suggesting that women here in civilisation have this gift – it's obvious that they don't – but in a culture where intuitive forms of knowledge are prized, women do seem to have a natural ability to tune into energies around them. Maybe by the time of the witch-hunts more men had lost this ability, while women were still a little 'tuned in' and therefore a much bigger threat to civilisation.

Diabolus means slander or enmity. Hence Satan is ‘the slanderer’, ‘the enemy’. Now they call them “terrorists” – the forest peoples still left on earth who fight to keep their forest home, the earth liberation front fighting to slow down the destruction in their home, the individuals fighting many battles to hold onto some of their freedom.

It reaches ever more ridiculous proportions, as they tighten their grip over all life. They, like their Inquisitor fathers, can’t afford to leave any people live as an example contrary to their doctrine. And of course they want the land – the timber, oil, gas... They dress it up in press releases as ‘terrorism’ to justify their plunder and murder, and with the mention of “terrorists” think they’ve a license to do anything to protect their interests, just like years ago they mentioned “witches”¹⁰

Washington-AP – The head of the international police agency Interpol wants a worldwide crackdown on music and software piracy. He says the illicit proceeds are helping fund terrorist networks, including al-Qaida and Hezbollah. Interpol Secretary-General Ronald Noble is calling for stepped-up efforts to trace the proceeds of pirated CD’s, DVD’s, computer software, and counterfeit clothing and cigarettes.

The language of hypocrites and liars. Pretending their money-making exploits are matters of national security. Pretending their plunder of oil and timber is for the good of ‘undeveloped’ thirdworlders. Their war against Life, all life, goes on. Their propaganda attempting to excuse it gets ever more elaborate.

Just as the majority of people kept their heads down and pointed the finger and hid behind rational excuses, listening to the screams of their neighbours, watching the flames lick their freedoms to ashes, so now the majority go along with the persecution of forest people, anarchists, and other heretics. They allow themselves to be hypnotised by television, cinema, newspapers, radio, billboards... as the propaganda machine reaches into every home, every mind.

And they fear the non-normal realities. They believe in devils and evil and all that rubbish. They shun the shadow worlds and paranormal ways.¹¹ They subdue their own wild natures and train themselves to see only their solid, measurable, mundane reality, persecuting anyone who doesn’t agree with their civilisation

¹⁰ It’s interesting to see how this is repeated throughout history. Tacitus records “Therefore to scotch the rumour that the fire had taken place by his own order Nero substituted as culprits and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians.”

¹¹ Paranormal means ‘beyond normal’. It’s worlds away from the christian idea of ‘supernatural’ ‘above nature’. Nothing can be above nature, nothing can be outside of Life. Paranormal also has some definitions as “beyond the range of scientifically known or recognizable phenomena”.

dogma. They live lives completely devoid of freedom, of intuition of Life, of forest ways. Disconnected from all the rhythms of nature, alienated from their true wild selves, separate from all other life-forms.

Religion perverted our animist experiences into rigid codes and strict laws. Spontaneous experiences of the wonder of Life became book-bound commandments. Wild outdoor gatherings became litanies in stone churches. Sexual pleasures were dulled to marriage.

Magick became a childish triviality — like Harry Potter and Sabrina the Witch, sanitising witchcraft beyond recognition. The idea of magick being a technique to focus on nonnormal realities is completely absent in most modern people. The witch hunts largely succeeded in their systematic attempt to wipe out any knowledge of that which is beyond words. That which we know intuitively.¹²

Civilisation has always been afraid of those who ‘know’ (‘Witch’ comes from *wit*: ‘to know’), those who seek the truth behind propaganda lies, those who know all imposed rules are bullshit, designed to rob us of our freedom.

They said “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live”, but we do live on. In every digger trashed, every lab burnt down, every single act of defiance; in every experience of ‘that which is beyond words’, every sensing of Life’s mystery and power, every blow struck against the chains of civilisation,

We live. We live.

That is more what I mean than anything ‘outside of nature’ — a ludicrous idea.

¹² Old English *wigle*: ‘divination’, *wiglian*: ‘to divine’. *Divine*: to perceive, make out, or discover intuitively or through keenness of insight. (All in the Webster-Merriam dictionary, as are all definitions mentioned) This animist way of knowing is in complete contrast with civilised habits of prioritising reason above intuition. “Let a man obey the law of his intellect rather than that of nature...” the *Malleus* warns, yet no knowledge can come purely from the intellect.

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