

Dr. Mark Rutland: Why We Want Perfectly Imperfect Heroes but Purely Evil Villains

Many today hold a lopsided view of heroes and their villains. They want their heroes mixed. They do not believe in moral giants, nor do they desire them. Rather than merely tolerating the flaws of their icons, they adore them, truly “worshipping” only those with clay feet.

That is exactly what makes Jesus so distasteful to them. It is not the humanity of the incarnate Christ with which they struggle. It is His divine holiness.

Don Lemon of CNN recently proclaimed that Jesus, when he was on earth, “admittedly was not perfect.” Admitted? By whom? Certainly not by the Bible. Certainly not by 2000 years of Christian theology. Perhaps by Lemon’s fellow announcer, Chris Cuomo, who nodded sagely at this bizarre announcement. And perhaps by many who know if Jesus was indeed perfect and therefore perfectly divine, He is worthy to be worshipped and, even more importantly, obeyed. If Jesus were morally flawed, our own glaring weaknesses would suddenly not be sins anymore. Surely not. They are rather part of that endearing human mixture we find so adorable about ourselves. If Jesus were as mixed as we are, He could not and cannot, need not redeem us from the common stain which He himself shared.

Strangely enough, however, these same modern minds so willing to embrace their flawed heroes also demand their villains, especially political villains, be pure, unalloyed evil. They will not tolerate even the thought that a villain, once corporately identified as a villain, might have a trace element of a single redeeming virtue. Whatever makes a villain a villain, and that varies, of course, depending on who is

deciding about whom, once the label is applied, any hint of amelioration from any quarter is intolerable. Whatever cocktail of virtues and sins is swizzled together to create the beloved “perfectly imperfect” modern hero is disallowed for a villain.

Purity of villainy is also a convenient litmus test in and of itself. Anyone who dares to hint of some tiny speck of good or even that something done by the villain might be partially good is now clearly a villain. Anything but total, heartfelt, hate-drenched denunciation of the villain makes the one reluctant to do so a villain as well.

The desire for impure heroes and pure villains is, on the surface, an apparent contradiction. In reality, it is predictable.

Heroes who are mixed vessels are less intimidating or, to use a more biblical word, less convicting. If the earthly Jesus were as imperfect as Lemon says He was, if He had His own little issues, then mine can hardly be sins. Therefore, I needn't repent. I needn't serve or worship or obey a savior who isn't a Savior at all but a pretty good guy able to manage His sins better than most. That, after all, is admirable but hardly worthy of worship.

By the same token, if the designated villain is pure evil, I need have no mercy, no understanding, no grace or forgiveness. In fact, those are disallowed. Utterly! No kind word is permitted, no suggestion that there might be some good in the villain or even some reason he should be allowed even to live. My hatred for his evil now becomes not just virtuous or one virtue among many but the indispensable moral merit badge without which I cannot be admitted to “the club.”

Any action in opposition to a purely evil villain is purely good. To defame, libel, falsely accuse or harm or even kill a purely evil villain is an act pure and perfect in its

righteousness. And anyone who disagrees or shows some slight reluctance to burn them at the stake becomes suspect. The thus-labeled villain now becomes the great moral watershed. Those who see how evil the villain is are now on the side of the angels (whom, we must suppose, are mixed as well).

Those whose passionate hatred of the villain's unmitigated evil may not be all good. We've already agreed that the mixture is desirable. They are, however, on the good team. Anyone who doubts the pure evil of the villain is obviously a card-carrying member of "Team Villain" and ought to share the villain's fate.

Mention in some circles that you're not absolutely certain Barack Obama is the Antichrist, and you may well discover, to your shock, that *you* are the Antichrist. Elsewhere, dare to express a faint hint of doubt that President Trump is a malignant and rabid racist intent on every imaginable evil, and you will find that in any cult, the painful price of doubt is higher than you imagined.

Remember, the leader you so thoroughly despise may not be as evil as you think. And even if he is, you have been granted no special permission to hate him.

There is one pure hero whose feet are not clay but burnished bronze, and He is the Lord of love and grace and peace. There is no shadow of turning in Him. He alone is holy, and His holiness is love.

We are called therefore to live in love. With our eyes fixed on Him, our souls anchored in His grace and our lives filled with His spirit of love, we become fountains of living, healing grace and not toxic streams of arrogant, judgmental hate.

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain. He alone is worthy. {eo}

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