

Religious Persecution:

An underlying theme in *The Lord of the Flies*

Like many excellent works, William Golding's novel, *The Lord of the Flies* can be read on many different levels. It is possible to read the book literally, as a mere story about boys marooned on an island. It is also possible to read the book as an indictment of the nature of man - as being pure evil without society's boundaries. A further analysis of *The Lord of the Flies* reveals something else - the novel has many references to religious persecution throughout history. Golding uses many religious elements along with metaphors representing the death of Jesus, the torture of Jews in the Holocaust, and the ascent and reign of Hitler in Nazi Germany to present an underlying theme of religious persecution that proves his grim outlook on the nature of man.

Golding's use of religious elements allows for the plausibility of the religious persecution theme. The island the boys find themselves on is pristine and untouched - like the Garden of Eden - until they arrive. However, once the boys arrived, they left a scar on the island, in much the same way Adam and Eve left a scar in the Garden of Eden. Another religious element Golding uses is in the title of the book. 'Lord of the Flies' translates into 'Beelzebub' in Greek - a name for the Devil. This suggests the entire book is about the epitome of religious evil - the Devil himself. A final religious element is well hidden. The "stick sharpened at both ends" exists not only in Golding's description of the killing of the sow, but also in the Bible in the story of David and Goliath. After David kills Goliath, the giant's head is cut off and placed on a "stick sharpened at both ends" and is used to frighten enemies. The similar usage of the stick in this novel (in which the beast's head is used to frighten the enemies of Jack's clan), alludes to the fact that the book has a religious undertone. The combination of these religious elements makes it easier for the reader to think of clues found later in the book as descriptions of religious events.

If it is accepted that religion is a part of this book, it becomes possible to see the killing of Simon as metaphorical of the killing of Jesus. Both Jesus and Simon spent their final night on top of mountains (Jesus on top of the Mount of Olives) and see visions of man's sin. Also, both Jesus and Simon were philosophers and lovers of beauty, able to see good even when all seemed bad. Like Jesus, Simon was able to take himself away from evil, he "turned away from them and went where the just perceptible path led him...he came to a place where more sunshine fell." Finally, both were persecuted for their beliefs. Simon and Jesus tried to tell everyone else about their sin and their capacity to be redeemed. Instead, both were killed because of the sin of others; Jesus died for the sins of the Israelites and Simon died because the other children recognized him as the symbol for their sin - the beast. The similarities between Jesus and Simon are too numerous to be coincidental, Golding's Simon is the Bible's Jesus.

In much the same way Simon's death represents the death of Jesus, Piggy's death is a metaphor for the Holocaust. Golding was a Jewish man living in Britain during World War II. He was deeply troubled by the images he saw of the Holocaust and he portrayed that masterfully in this novel. Piggy was different from all the other boys as the Jews were different from the Germans. Piggy was referred to only by his derisive nickname, much in the same way as Jews were stripped of their names and called 'Jew bastard' or 'kike.' Piggy represented most of the intelligence of the boys' society and the Jews have been regarded as one of the most intelligent groups in the time of Nazi Germany. Both the Jews in WWII and Piggy were constantly ridiculed by a powerful group - the Jews by Hitler's men, and Piggy by Jack's men. Also, just as the Germans followed Hitler's men's actions, the boys followed the actions of Jack's men. Finally, both the Jews' and Piggy's differences were the ultimate cause of their murders by the others. This preliminary evidence points towards a relationship between Piggy and the Jews of the Holocaust, but a Hitler-character from the book must be identified as well.

Golding chose Jack to represent Hitler. Jack was a boy who wanted power and didn't care how he got it; he used propaganda to turn Ralph into someone who sympathized with Piggy's "stupid" views of keeping the fire alive. Hitler was a man who wanted power and also didn't care how he got it. He too used propaganda to turn the former leadership of Germany into a group of people who sympathized with the "evil" Jews. Both Hitler and Jack took advantage of stereotypes to assume power and dictatorship. Jack and Hitler spoke of bettering their societies by cleansing them of unpopular beliefs. Jack promised to rid the boys of Ralph's petty fire concerns and Hitler promised to rid the Germans of the Jews unfair banking 'schemes.' Also, both Hitler and Jack had right hand men who were in charge of the extermination of enemies. Roger was Jack's chief executioner and Adolf Eichmann had the job of ridding Germany of the Jews. Also, neither Jack nor Hitler had full control of their seconds in charge. Roger was the only one to ever speak against Jack when he said, "that's not the way," in reference to the capture of Sam and Eric while some historians have implicated Eichmann in a plot to kill Hitler. The final hint that Jack is Hitler is shown by the fact that Ralph was suddenly rescued on the verge of death and the Jews that were rescued from the concentration camps were close to death as well. The combination of the comparison of Hitler to Jack and Piggy to the Jews shows the reader that Golding had definite intentions of referring to the Holocaust in his book.

The theme of religious persecution now seems quite strong. Did Golding intend for the reader to discount the theme of man's inner-self being evil in order to accept the religious persecution theme? This is not the case. The two themes, must be taken together to depict Golding's grim indictment of man's nature. He shows that when "the Lord of the Flies" - be it the Devil or man's evil nature - is allowed to take over, disaster occurs. In Jesus's time, the Devil was allowed to take over, resulting in the death of G-d. In the holocaust, man's inner beast was allowed to take over, resulting in the extermination of six million Jews. Golding's point is that at every point in time when society deteriorates, men show their true, beastly selves - even in the case of young boys marooned on an island. Golding did not create the story of The Lord of the Flies, it was created for him by history. Golding does not include the religious persecution theme so people feel warned of what is to come, but rather he wants people to be reminded of what has come to pass. If people forget the true nature of man, the story of the young boys on the island shows it will only happen again. By including a nuclear war in the story, Golding alludes that the next time society deteriorates, may be the last.
