

For your edification and entertainment, I offer a teaching tale, once related to me by a certain minor, and rather witty, demon I know. It concerns a visit, his highness the Devil made to Heidelberg, many centuries ago. I trust you find such apropos.

Once, long ago, the Devil was leisurely strolling in the Black Forest near Heidelberg Castle. He was in a most jolly mood for it was a beautiful spring day. The sun was shining overhead. The sky was without clouds and its blueness stretched as far as one could see. The air bore the clean scent of the day following a night rain. Fresh greenery was breaking forth on ground and on tree.

In truth, the Devil was on vacation and chose to visit the Rhineland—for he had many pleasant memories of his old friends from the Eastern lands—the sackers of Rome. He smiled to himself as he remembered these days of plundering, raping, killing, and good times with his friends. Hard to find friends like these today, sadly he thought.

Soon he noticed that he was in the little city itself, and as the day was growing warm and he was thirsty, he decided to stop for a mug of beer and a chat with some of the locals.

He looked about and found a busy patio full of rather dour beer drinkers and pretty large-bosomed serving wenches. He sat down at an empty place, in the midst of the drinkers, and ordered a large mug of beer for himself and everyone else, plus appetizers for all. Needless to say, all the men turned to thank him with a toast and a cheer. The drinker to his right asked his name and where he was came from as he was not dressed in a manner with which they were acquainted.

The Devil stood up, addressing all those present, “I am on vacation mostly, but, I need to seriously discuss some spiritual matters with your local Lutheran minister. Including, his continual and needless berating of Heidelberg’s fine citizens as to drinking, wenching, and otherwise enjoying God’s grand creation.”

The drinker to his left said, “If you are hear to speak with our minister about such matters, I imagine you must be a Master of the Holy Scriptures.”

Another man looked up from his beer asking, “Are you a man of God? I am not sure, for you are not dressed as a cleric nor appear so stuffy and self-righteous.”

The devil remained standing. Smiling and looking around offered a toast to all present. “My new friends, you are correct. I am well-acquainted with the Lord and have been so all of my life. I am something more than a cleric and have never been accused of being stiff or self-righteous. You can all see that I like your beer . . . not to mentioned your fine breasted young ladies. So here is a cheer for all of you. Live a good life and enjoy what God has provided—be it food, beer, or bedtime indulgences.”

After downing his pitcher of beer, he ordered another round. “My fine ladies, bring another set of large mugs for my friends and for yourselves. I am never short of monies, but, it is not often

that I find such a nice crowd to share brews with.”

So the girls brought more beers and food and then sat down to listen to such a wise and generous man of God.

The Devil, still standing, began, “I have spoken to many wise persons over my life and have learned and come to practice some of such wisdom. If I might have your permission, I would like to share some of this with you. What say you?”

Everyone lifted a beer and good-naturally shouted a go forth.

Bowing to everyone, the Devil began, “Some of those with whom I debated taught that no man has a permanent soul from God Above. All that God provides is the seed for a soul. To make a soul takes much effort and sacrifice. Consequently, very few succeed in making a soul.”

One of the beer drinkers, a philosopher, yelled out, “Seems reasonable to me.”

The Devil smiled a very big smile, saying, “Well, reasonable or not, it is not true. For I know for a fact, a fact given to me by the holiest hermits in the Holy Lands, that God gives everyone a soul and that is the end of the matter.”

The drinkers all murmured in agreement.

The Devil continued, “Souls are very precious to God and so he does not waste them. God realizes that people cannot live a perfect life so when they die he makes them do some minor repentance in Purgatory as a payment and, then everyone—it is onward to heaven and some eternal fun. Damnation is a figment of a distorted church minister.”

The local philosopher piped up, “This is not true, God makes you work for your soul.”

The Devil responded, “Dear Friend, even if this were true, God would not make it too hard. Moreover, you do not have to start working on a soul today for you have many days ahead. I have been assured by the very best of priests and protestant ministers that 2 weeks of hard soul work is enough for God.”

Hearing such, the philosopher replied, “I guess you must be correct, as long as we do some real work.”

By the end of some four more rounds of beer and food, the Devil had convinced everyone that: [1] each one really had a soul, [2] everyone went to heaven eventually, [3] the payment for getting to heaven was really not so much—even a poor man could afford payment—in labor if nothing else, and [4] that a good life, a Godly life, is filled with church going on Sundays and religious holidays and beer and wenching on other days.

The Devil rising from his seat made one last toast, “Friends, now that you know the real truth,

enjoy life and enjoy going to church. Just agree with the preacher and he will come drink with you and all shall be well in Heaven and on Earth. Wish me a good trip.”

And everyone did indeed wish him a good trip.

As he returned to his vacation, he thought to himself, “Now that was a pleasant day indeed, and unexpected to boot. Another misguided set of citizens—and so lazy. I may need to ask God for a larger portion of heaven—so many followers.”