

perpetual wirebrush cleansing of the faithful while always watchful for contagiously faithless heretics. The Order was in conflict with any person, creed or ideal that did not recognize its supremacy, and opponents were not forgiven. They were mercilessly hunted down and exterminated without any record remaining of their brief existence.

The establishment of a militant theocracy had been absurdly easy. The Christian evangelical movement rose rapidly from self-imposed obscurity to political dominance, using a combination of dynamic evangelism, television, money and modern techniques of advertising and propaganda, winning elections and enacting laws that discriminated against homosexuals, assertive women, non-Christians and other pariahs.

The longheld fear that communism or socialism would ultimately triumph was startlingly revised when the major communist empires and socialist states collapsed; more startling was the rapid rise in the vacuum of conservative religious orders that not only quickly dominated their parent religions but wrested political control of almost half the world with blinding swiftness.

The evangelists endured a half century quietly organizing, clinging to harsh frontier doctrines that tolerated no deviation from ancient scripture and waiting for the internal collapse of Great Sodom (the United States), which they were certain would occur. Liberal democracy was especially demonic to the protectors of oldtime religion. Women debased in the marketplace, not as chattel but as aspiring CEOs, flaunting unspeakable feminism at the waiting faithful. Homosexuals boldly challenging traditional values.

Freedom of religion disappeared when the evangelists triumphed at the polls. The first act of the ecumenical council, as congress was renamed, was to abolish all other religions in favor of a state religion established by the Holy Order. The next act was to purge heretics. Massive roundups and executions in the early years set a pattern still followed of sanctioned inquisition. Arrests and executions were a daily routine. Public trials and executions entertained and terrified the faithful. The fear of God inspired love of God as terror inspired faith.

Winston's own memory was confused. He thought he once knew about the spread of evangelical fervor that reformed the western hemisphere. TV preachers infected an ever increasing public with negative platitudes that encouraged isolation and persecution of heretics, homosexuals, free-thinking women, people of color and anyone anywhere accused of impure thought. The two primary aims of the Ecclesiastical Party, which evolved into the Holy Order once political control was attained, was to establish supreme power in all parts of the world and to eradicate completely and totally independent thought.

The Order grasped territory like a surge of locusts. Disbelief accounted for much of the early successes of the faithful, a laconic inability by many to believe the zealots were serious even as evangelitical power thrust in all directions until blunted by adversaries equally militant and eager for worldly power. The disbelievers quickly became believers or vanished.

The book's author wrote that ethnic wars in the Balkans after the communist collapse spread throughout eastern Europe and into the Middle East until a renewed Islamic surge similar to its original conquests overwhelmed the exhausted survivors and reoccupied as much territory as the old Ottoman empire at its height. These were the Great Satans, Winston thought, and the incessant war between them and Holy Evangelica was fought over the partially-nuked ruins of what had recently been western Europe. Yaweh and Allah would be no more than rival gangsters if they were judged by the rabid violence of their followers.

The Pagans were generally Oriental Asians but accommodated a large mixture of the planet's races, nor did they especially suppress polyglot religions. Instead of a single state, the Pagans were a loose federation of usually cooperative warlords. Evangelica's perpetual holy war against them was fought primarily in equatorial lands, ostensibly for conversion of souls but also for raw materials and slave-wage labor. Power see-sawed so rapidly that the native populations were never quite sure who their latest masters were.

The use of nuclear power upon the Great Satans and Pagans was an irresistible yearning of the more frenzied evangelicals. Certain retaliatory destruction provided a reluctant damper similar to the balance of terror that characterized the old cold war. Visions of thermonuclear surprise upon their enemies obsessed influential clerics of the Order. Equally obsessive were fears that the Satans or Pagans might at any moment make the same attempt. As a result a nonlitigated agreement to not use nuclear weapons in their interminable wars existed between the foes, though each constantly sought a method or opportunity to obliterate the other two.

Winston closed the book and stared at the floor. He understood that his flashes of intuition about the past were really fragments from his not completely laundered subconscious. As he read he had felt *deja vu*; he had once known most of what he read. Doublethink had sealed off his knowledge, though brief fragments leaked through occasionally, which usually startled him. At that moment he wished his diary was near. He felt an intense compulsion to restore the truth, to correct every revision he had personally contributed to the big lie.

Julia arrived and they quickly made love on an old four poster bed, a furnishing of the attic apartment which had initially attracted them.

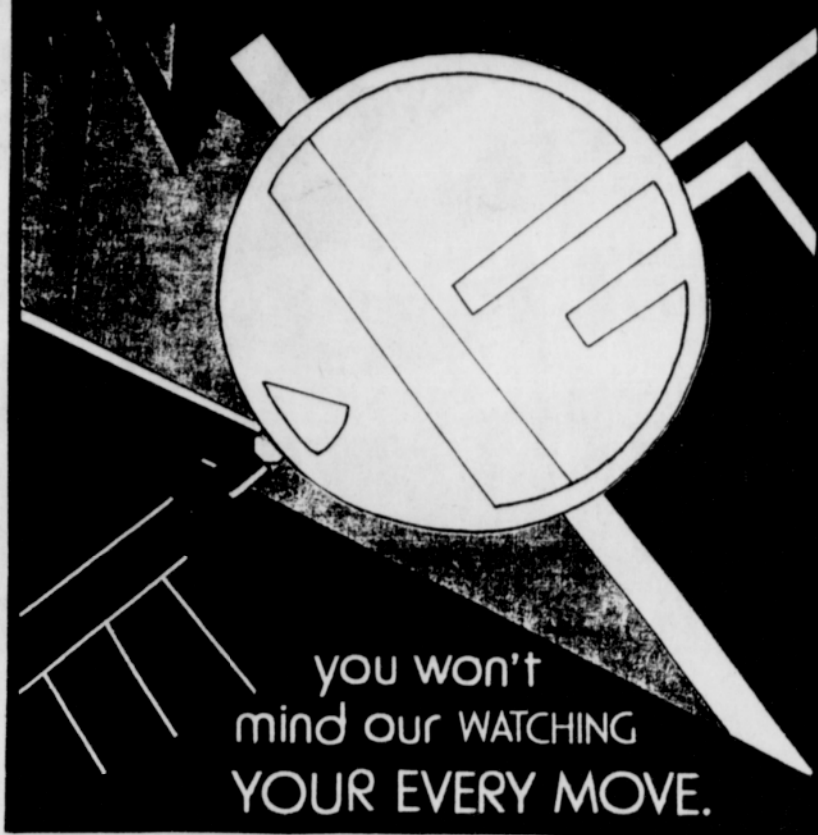
Afterward Winston attempted to synthesize what he had read earlier. Julia nodded often as he spoke.

"That's simply a surface explanation," she said. "The real question is not why religious zealots contradict power for faith, but why the subject majority allows bigots and sadists to victimize them with superstitious hatred."

"What about the soul?" he asked. "How is the soul so easily jeopardized?"

"Winston, dear, that was not even the question when the Order took over. Even many Jews, my parents among them, thought God had abandoned them during the Holocaust." Fate of the soul was not very important except to fanatical cults of evangelical Christians, she said. Their leaders terrified them with eternal damnation if they did not seize political control of Great Sodom (the former U.S.), but that was a strategy to galvanize support for a religious insurrection. Supreme power on

If you have nothing  
TO HIDE...



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earth was their real goal, Julia said. Humans died but power was eternal.

Homosexuals were the initial Jews of the religious takeover of civil government, she said. A homosexual "agenda" was claimed, made at least as bad as ancient aspersions still in use that Jews control the world's wealth and keep good and decent common folk in perpetual poverty. Homosexuals did not kill Christ, but much public revulsion was generated about their "unnatural" lifestyle that threatened to undermine traditional American values.

After that, Julia said, the rest was easy. Jews, homosexuals and assertive women were driven underground like every other refugee from the Holy Order, always awaiting arrest, forced confession and extermination. Did you know, she said to Winston, that AIDs sufferers were not only uncared for but were encouraged to spread the epidemic among gays and lesbians, racial and ethnic minorities, drug users and independent-minded persons engaging in illicit sexual activities?

"Us!" he exclaimed in shock.

"Don't worry my darling," she said in a careless tone.

"We'll both be dead before we get sick."

"Dear Winston," she said quietly after a few moments,

"Why do you think sex is a criminal act, that we risk death every moment we are with each other?"

"Because it is disloyal," she answered before his mouth opened. "Because love is disloyal. It threatens absolute power."

"We will abolish the orgasm," a voice shouted from a wall.

Jack-booted men in black uniforms rushed up the stairs while others crashed through the attic's windows from ropes on the roof. Winston and Julia had only the briefest moment to stare helplessly at each other before they were ripped apart and kicked to the floor.

A thin elderly man in a black overcoat stood over them. He wore insignia of the thought police officer corps. Winston recognized him with a shock as the kindly owner of the souvenir shop downstairs who had rented him the attic room.

"God's eyes are everywhere," the man said loudly, raising arm and finger. His was the voice that had shouted from the wall, obviously a bug installed to spy on the illicit lovers. "You cannot escape the eyes of God!"

The elderly officer kicked Winston just below the ear. He saw the boot the instant it crashed into his head and lost consciousness.

They were separated, of course. Winston did not see Julia again.

He regained his senses in a cell. He was somewhere in the Ministry of Love. He had no idea the time, day or night, nor would he for many months. He lived among eternal lights; his cell beamed as bright as a television light stage. He was left undisturbed at first, but under constant surveillance. He was hungry and not allowed to sleep. "Smith! You will remain awake," a voice shouted from a telescreen loudspeaker whenever his eyes closed or his head drooped. "Pray in the proper manner!" (which, though compulsory, at least permitted him to sit on a bench and he was not forced to clasp his hands and point them upward). He felt almost too exhausted to maintain a reverent expression but each time he slipped out of a prayerful attitude or catnapped the loudspeaker peppered his numbed brain like buckshot.

Others were temporarily crowded into his cell, and though he recognized one or two the loudspeaker screeched whenever he attempted conversation. A man he thought a perfect moranic booster of the Order sat next to him briefly and moaned over and over, "I am a sinner. I deserve to be punished."

"What did you do?" Winston whispered.

"I sinned in thought," the man screeched. "Thank God my daughter overheard me talking in my sleep," he said rather proudly. "She informed the thought police before I became a sinner in deed."

Then one day -- or it might have been night, Winston thought -- the high priest he had trusted with his innermost objections entered his cell. The priest smiled grimly. "You act surprised," he said as Winston stiffened. "But you knew all along, Winston. You knew the instant of your first deviant thought that this was your fate and that I was your confessor."

Winston shook his head, confused, his mind flooding with self-ordained persecution. You knew I was your Inquisitor, his betrayer accused.

Winston realized that although Catholicism, officially portrayed as the parent religion (not Judaism), had been swept into the dustbin of theology, certain purgatories had been grafted onto the protestant succession. The necessity of confession by the accused, publicly demanded for high profile heretics, Jews and captured Satan/Pagans, was a hybrid from the truncated papists who at least kept private the sins of the confessed. For prisoners of Winston's status, minor functionaries guilty of small heresies, the trials would be perfunctory, a televised laundry list of sins whose only interest was the inevitable execution, its form selected by an interactive poll of viewers whose choice ranged from ancient stoning to holographic dissipation of human cellular structure, sort of a swirling crimson fog as the condemned disincorporated.

The woman has already betrayed you, the inquisitor told Winston. "Now you will betray her," he said.

The torture he always feared began.

Winston was beaten, kicked, forced to grovel to avoid a bite of whip or a boot in his face. He confessed to more than he, was accused of. He informed on everyone he knew, and signed everything. He betrayed Julia. He begged God's mercy. Yet nothing was enough to prevent pain. He waited impatiently to be tried for heresy and executed.

His Inquisitor said he was not ready for the release of death. His impure mind was to be thoroughly cleansed before it was blown apart. The inquisitions of the past failed because the condemned died as martyrs, which enflamed heresy. The state trials and public confessions staged by the early 20th century totalitarians were known to be false and lost their force. The Holy Order did not make that mistake, the Inquisitor told Winston. "All confessions made here are true. We make them true. We will burn all evil and illusion out of you. We will reshape your mind. You will love God in your heart and soul. Then we will kill you."

Winston and everything that ever related to his existence would be expunged from memory and record. He would be, the Inquisitor said, "lifted clear out of the stream of history."

"What about my soul?" Winston's voice cracked.

"The soul belongs to God," the Inquisitor answered, anticipating the question, which all heretics asked. "If God wishes to dispose of a soul, then it is necessary for us to erase any trace of it." There is no hell such as Dante and the medievals conjured, the Inquisitor said. The rejected soul disappears from all memory of having existed. A nonsoul in the manner its corporeal persona is made a nonperson. The true hell.

Once again Winston was left alone for awhile. He was properly fed and allowed to sleep. He expanded from near emaciation to an almost healthy appearance, though most of his hair had fallen out and his hands were misshapen from broken fingers. His nose remained mashed but he was given a bridge to replace broken teeth.

He worked very hard to transform his brain. He forcibly shut down his heresy, disguised from himself his continuing hatred for the Order. He attended all religious services and functions within the huge Ministry. He radiated purity in form and manner. He strained toward spiritual oneness with God, which required constant personal abnegation mixed with abject terror. Yet he hoarded his hatred in a small place, readied for the instant of his death to flood his being like an inflated rubber raft.

But even this small refuge was ripped out of him. One night Winston shouted Julia's name while dreaming. Instantly awake, he was clearly aware of his final undoing.

Winston was taken from his cell to a large room where his Inquisitor waited. Across the room was a large cage filled with birds. Hundreds of birds. Winston loathed birds. Birds made his skin crawl. He could almost bear to see a bird through a window but outside near them he felt sick. His worst nightmare was of being at the center of a swirl of birds.

The Inquisitor nodded and two guards roughly grabbed Winston and dragged him toward the birdcage. Winston screamed when he saw they intended to shove him inside the cage. He almost lost consciousness as he stared at hundreds of sharp scissorlike beaks. His head throbbed with their shrill shrieks and whistles. The Inquisitor moved to quickly open the cage door. Winston felt the guards begin to push him.

"Do it to Julia!" he screamed. "Do it to Julia! Not to me!"

"Free at last!" the Inquisitor smirked.

Nothing was left in Winston to resist. A light of primitive mystery beamed in his brain, dissolving any remaining molecules of doubt and disbelief hiding in his brain. He was a true believer, unabashed and unashamed in his passionately tearful proclamations of his return to the faith. Born Again, he shouted to all who would hear in the immense labyrinth of the Ministry of Love. He waited eagerly for his upcoming trial, ready to reveal and confess everything to the inquisition court and the great mass transfixed at their television screens. He exulted in framing what he would say to the judges and primetime audience, carefully composing his final testament of faith.

Winston had won victory over himself. He loved God.

George Orwell was the original author of this story. His novel 1984, written in 1948 just before his death (he reversed the last two numbers of the year for his title), projected an iron future of absolute power, perpetual war and inquisition. Winston Smith labored in the Ministry of Truth, improperly loved Julia, was forced to betray her and love Big Brother instead; but Orwell's vision was a secular one. He did not speculate on a militant theocracy. Robert Heinlein, who wrote straight science fiction rather than political novels predicting the future, more than once explored a possible political takeover by religious sects, usually on the far right spectrum. He warned of America's puritanical streak, predicting that populist sentiment coupled with fervid belief in frontier values might very well produce an elected theocracy, which would immediately set about dismantling the democracy that gave it power. The above story is a hybrid attempt of both writers' visions.

-MPMc