

# Cthulhu Cult? Why Not?

*Cthulhu Prayer Breakfast Homily 2001*

by Robert M. Price

**I**T'S ALWAYS A SURE BET AT A LOVECRAFTIAN GET TOGETHER: you can get laughs the easy way by pretending that you and the audience are members of a bonafide Cthulhu Cult or congregation of the Starry Wisdom. I'll be glad to prove it in just a few minutes from now. But first I want to share with you a notion that occurred to me the other day: that in a sense, a serious sense, it might not be a bad thing to emulate the Lovecraftian cult of the Old Ones.

Of course I don't mean becoming a bunch of literal occultists. That's a blind alley for most of us. And we don't want to become half-witted zealots like those goofballs splashing around the bayou in their birthday suits till Inspector Lagresse surprised them with his Candid Camera. (I know, that may look a bit like us this weekend, but that's not my point. Everybody's entitled to a Raccoon Convention once in a while.)

No, I want to think a few steps down the path marked out by Dirk Mosig some years ago. If Lovecraft's Mythos was symbolic for a particular stance in the world, a particular view of one's own existence, how would we describe that self-understanding? Because, even though you don't cotton to the idea of worshipping a giant octopus, you might find that you share that Lovecraftian view of existence.

There are many possible applications of Lovecraftian philosophy. One of them would be Deep Ecology. This is a type of misanthropy where one views the human race as an infection, an infestation that the world needs to be cured of, and the sooner the better. I sometimes feel this way. I don't like to, though. It implies a hardness of heart that I don't relish. A shrinkage of spirit. This is why I make a point of never watching Judge Judy or Jerry Springer. I don't want to come to the point of hating the human race. But if one did, that would be a type of genuine Lovecraftianism.

Mosig saw that the Old Ones Lovecraft mythologized stood for the blind cosmic forces indifferent to us and ultimately but unwittingly destructive of us, like entropy, evolution, and the plain old progress of time itself. If we are Earth First ecologists, like Poison Ivy on the Batman cartoon, we identify with these cosmic constants and recognize ourselves as anomalous incidents in the grander scheme of things. I cannot but think of the parallel to the Hopkinsian Calvinists of the Colonial era who were willing to be cheerfully condemned to hellfire for the glory of the God who sent them there. What they didn't seem to realize was the great irony that this meant they had the last laugh over against God. Like Sisyphus, they were triumphing over a vengeful God precisely by embracing the plague he visited upon them. And this is why I cannot embrace this form of Lovecraftianism. I believe that we are in fact superior to the cosmic forces simply in that we know about them while they do not know about us.

But another way of understanding the Cthulhu Cult and what it stands for is this: Old Castro and his brethren stood in a posture of radical negation vis-à-vis this particular world system, a house of cards built by inept fools and destined to collapse. It looked good while it stood, while it was falling in slow motion, but if one partook of the Gnostic vision of Alhazred, one could recognize that slow descent. One could rejoice in its doom. If one lived on the margins of that human system, as the half-breed sailors did, as the bayou degenerates did, as the Eskimo diabolists and deathless Chinamen did, one could already live as if that condemned order had passed. One had the liberty of carving out a subterranean counter-cultural realm in which to breath freely, to live in accord with one's own superior values. Those values might include a Decadent aestheticism such as many of us prize. It might include old Victorian or Colonial styles, such as Lovecraft prized. In any case one will dwell in one of Ligotti's "little zones," one of Berger and Luckmann's "finite provinces of meaning."

And one waits for the fall of the world system. Jean Baudrillard explained it. About us we see the accelerating onrush of a capitalist-commercialistic behemoth that values all persons only as commodities, consumers, units of production and consumption. The tobacco industry is the most flagrant example: it coldly calculates the affordable differential between new recruits and dead veteran customers. Just numbers, not persons. How can the CEOs of chemical companies live with themselves, knowing that to cut costs they dump zylene gas into the rivers in Mexico, causing hideous mutations and mutilations? It is all a matter of numbers, and so are you.

All our values are dictated, even created, as a matter of advertising propaganda. We are loyal to political parties in the same way we are to product brands, and in fact there is no difference. We think we have a democracy, and yet we are pretty much stuck with the candidates that the media feel inclined to let us know about. We think we are getting the news, but in fact we receive prepackaged Newzack censored by the corporate interests that own the networks, in principle no different from the government catechism the Eastern Bloc countries learned to disregard as so much humorless comedy.

We are suckers, rats in the maze. This system hastens and hurtles toward its own final stultification, and no one can stop it. Baudrillard himself says the only thing to do is to partake in it and hasten its self-destructive triumph. But there is the possibility of what Albert Schweitzer called an Interim Ethic. We can bind unto ourselves the whole armor of cynicism and at least laugh at Big Brother. Laugh all the way to the gallows, it may be.

But there is one particularly insidious assault inflicted upon us by the rulers of this dreary age, ruled as it is by Disney and Clinton and MTV and Madison Avenue. It is Prometheism in reverse. The corporate Lords seek to drain from you and me any childlike sense of fantastic wonder. If you want to see proof of that, look at any Disney travesty. While ostensibly nourishing and indulging the viewer's sense of wonder, they in fact coopt it by reducing the great fairytale themes of the past into modern, second-rate, commercialized, bastardized exercises in homogeneity and political correctness.

It is a sick society. Don't be well adjusted to it! To be well-adjusted to a sick society is to be sick oneself, and we live in a Plague Zone, as HPL said.

Don't let the network Mind Parasites get to you!! Don't let them convince you that you are better off without your soul! Once Steve Fabian told me how he squared off against his all-too-respectable businessman brother. As far as this man was concerned, Steve was engaged in childish pursuits: drawing funny pictures. But Fabian put him in his place. With all his sophisticated three-piece-suited expertise, with his portfolio and corporate lifestyle, was he much more than, as Fabian put it with matchless diplomacy, "a beast of the field," with nothing more on the menu, essentially, than securing the needful resources to stay alive? He was much like another depressing in-law type I recall from somewhere, who said he read only those books that stood to hone his corporate knowledge. Look, pal, why not put the pistol to your head right now? There wouldn't even be a mess, since there can't be anything inside to splatter!

Don't let the guidance counselors, the experts, those whom Lovecraft called the "self-blinded earth-gazers," get you down! Lovecraftian fiction, all similar fictional pursuits, are like those archaeologian stone idols of Cthulhu about which his minions prance and caper. I don't plan to do much literal capering, much less prancing, but I mean to occupy myself with the intellectual's equivalent: to read, to imagine, to allow myself to drift away on those star-winds. "I don't care if I never come back!"

*[Billy Graham voice:]*

But you may say to me, "Bob, I'd like to do what you say. I'd like to occupy myself full time with profitless exercises in outré literature, but I have a family to feed, a retirement to provide for. I don't have the luxury of full-time preoccupation with HPL." Of course you don't, my friend! That makes it all the more imperative that you use the time you have left over from the salt mine to gain some perspective! In your soul, however twisted and damned, you are free. You shall read your Lovecraft, and HPL shall set you free!

Yes, brothers and sisters, this morning I want to tell you about a savior. A man born like any other man, except maybe that his father had gone insane from syphilis. A man whose blessed mother passed away in the Jane Brown Hospital for the Insane. A man whose mother dressed him up as a girl with blond curls and told him he was too ugly to be seen publicly. Well, anyway. This was a man who possessed nothing. Who lived a life of fasting and asceticism, who lived on a diet of canned beans and cold spaghetti. For you and me! You see, he knew he had come into the world for just one purpose, well maybe for two purposes: to hate Jews and swarthy ethnics, and to write those scriptural tales that you and I know and love. And when he finished writing them he left this dreary world, bequeathing (mainly to August Derleth) a great tradition of which we are proud to be a part.

You and I worship the blessed Trinity: Howard, Smith and Lovecraft. All were prophets, all driven by the Muse. And all said what I'm saying this morning. Remember Howard's great epic "Red Nails" about the crumbling tenebrism of civilization. Like me, I know you've memorized it! Who could say it better? And Lovecraft wrote truly of the Id-hordes of Non-Western anti-rationalism and religious neo-superstition that we witness belched forth today. But Smith, with his characteristic poetic diction, cut directly to the point. He called what we live in "shitilization."

Cthulhu Cult? Why not? Sounds good to me! If that means a secret allegiance to an unrecognized and ancient ideal of imagination, a god of fiction named Lovecraft, whose words will never pass away, not even his semicolons if S.T. Joshi has anything to say about it. If that's what it means to be a cultist, a literary cultist, it may be, then sign me up! Ia! Ia! Cthulhu fhtagn!

In fact, if I'm not mistaken, I think I feel the presence of the Lord! I feel all green and viscous! Tentacles everywhere! Yes, I feel Great Cthulhu fumbling at the latch of consciousness! I think he has a word to say to us!

*[Charlton Heston voice:]*

O my people! My channeler What's-His-Face is right in all he has said! Ye are all like a thousand young having gone astray in this time of spiritual desolation. So as to lend some sure guidance in these days of confusion I shall henceforth reveal unto you the Ten Cthulhuvian Commandments:

I Thou shalt shamble.

II Except thou shamble, thou shalt not enter the sunken kingdom.

III Shamble ye the good shamble lest thine angles beneath thee become exceeding slippery and thou land upon thine ass.

IV He that shambleth not may yet perchance to shuffle, and much the same result is like to be obtained. Provided thou shuffle when Saturn be in trine.

V Thou shalt gibber.

VI He that gibbers must also shamble or at least shuffle.

VII Thou shalt wear naught but black T-shirts... but then I see you've taken care of that one already!

VIII Thou shalt not try to pronounce my name as "Clooooloo" among unbelievers and so make my name a laughingstock among the nations.

IX Thou shalt not make reference to "The Caller of the Black" and "The Inhabitant of the Lake" as the "early work" of Lumley and Campbell.

X Neither shalt thou make unto thyself any Derlethian pastiche.

You shall hasten to post these commandments in school classrooms all throughout the land, whether they like it or not. You shall call in and pester Dr. Laura with them, and no end of a nuisance shall you make of yourselves in promoting them, lest the land sink forever into a moral slough of degeneracy from which it can never emerge. Or don't. It's all the same to me. I sleep most of the time anyway. Thus saith the Lord of R'lyeh.

*[Regular voice:]*

Well, what can I add to that? Uh... did he say anything about getting a sports car for the channeler? I, uh, guess not. Okay, time for the Benediction:

*Go now, in the blessing of Great Cthulhu, Tsathoggua, and Him Who Is Not to Be Named! Amen.*

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