

## A Sermon on Dehumanizing Orphans and Children

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for September 22nd, 2024 (and beyond)

Ignorance and superstition were historically, and to some extent still are, quite rampant. Various health challenges were not yet identified as being other than a trick, curse, or some form of divine retribution brought on the family by evil and/or punitive supernatural forces or beings. Modern storytelling has continued the tradition with films such as “The Bad Orphan” (2024), “Orphan” (2009), “Orphan: First Kill” (2022), and historically in the myth of Loki who is the adopted son of Odin in some Norse Myths but others have Thor as the father and Loki as Odin’s adoptive brother. There’s also Beowulf with Grendel who in the film version with Anthony Hopkins as the patriarch is actually his bastard offspring with a water-nymph of some sort played by Angelina Jolie. But, does that make Grendel an orphan if only abandoned by his father and still raised by his mother? Do you have to be abandoned by both parents to be considered an orphan? Myths around orphans and other children have labeled them monsters, changelings, and foundlings.

In Judaism historically and reportedly ““Those foundlings which were suspected of having been born through illegitimate connections were placed outside of the fold, and they might not intermarry with Israelites, nor with other foundlings or illegitimates. The only persons whom they were permitted to marry were proselytes and liberated slaves; and the offspring of such marriages were in the same status as the foundlings themselves (K̄id. 74a; Maimonides, l.c. 33; Eben ha-'Ezer, 4, 36).” Source: <https://jewishencyclopedia.herokuapp.com/articles/6255-foundling>

In Irish folklore “Changelings were fairies who had been left in place of a human child or baby who had been stolen by the fairies.” Source: <https://www.irishpost.com/life-style/exploring-the-irish-mythology-changelings-170347>

“Changeling, in European folklore, a deformed or imbecilic offspring of fairies or elves substituted by them surreptitiously for a human infant.” Source: <https://www.britannica.com/art/changeling-folklore> This one in particular expressly disavows the disabled blaming supernatural trickery on the health conditions of offspring and/or orphans.

“Many Celtic, Germanic, and Norse myths tell of children being kidnapped by fairies or other supernatural beings to be replaced by a monstrous substitute” Source: <https://awnnetwork.org/changelings-and-the-folk-history-of-autism/> And, above the developmentally disabled are labeled monstrous.

One malady not identified above is Postpartum Depression, which is likely where evil mothers or stepmothers get their mythology to some extent.

The issue here is that there is some truth on which to base some of the myths, though it is similar to saying all humans are murderers because some commit murder. And, when

arguably attacking or demonizing an already vulnerable demographic with attachment and/or abandonment issues or depicting such demographics as monsters where impressionable ones may internalize and self-identify based on the mythology or lash out defensively reinforcing the mythic stereotype, are we as a society perpetuating a self-fulfilling prophecy?

“Florida woman, 22, accused of pretending to be teenager, molesting young boys”  
Source: <https://www.wptv.com/news/state/florida-woman-accused-of-pretending-to-be-teenager-molesting-young-boys>

“Boston social worker, 32, accused of posing as 'traumatized child as young as 13' at high schools is seen in court as new details about how she carried out elaborate scheme emerge” Source: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12859395/Boston-social-worker-accused-posing-child-court-photos.html>

“A family thought they were adopting a 6-year-old girl. Now they claim she's an adult con artist.” Source: <https://www.businessinsider.com/docuseries-examines-complex-case-of-ukraine-orphan-may-be-adult-2023-5>

So far, we’re looking at a lot of adults pretending to be minors for the purpose of committing various crimes. But, they weren’t children.

“LONDON (AP) — A British foster child who told police “Looks like I got my first kill” after he ran over the 60-year-old woman caring for him with her own car was sentenced Wednesday to two years in custody. The boy, who was 12 at the time, fatally struck Marcia Grant when she tried to stop him from taking her car and fled the scene on April 5.” Source: <https://apnews.com/article/british-boy-foster-mother-killing-278e6651e99593b17a00bc71c37bfc85>

“Texas parents charged after 7-year-old foster son found dead in washing machine in July” Source: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/crime-courts/texas-parents-charged-7-year-old-foster-son-found-dead-washing-machine-rcna57662>

There is horror to be had on all sides. And, stepparents and foster/adoptive parents are not immune in fairytales nor the thriller/suspense/horror genre(s). “Domestic Disturbance” released in 2001 is just one example.

“Our recent study of mothers found not guilty by reason of insanity in two U.S. states found that the perpetrators were often depressed and frequently experienced auditory hallucinations, some of a command type. Over one third of the homicides occurred during pregnancy or the postpartum year. Almost all the mothers had altruistic or acutely psychotic motives (22). A small New Zealand study that interviewed the mothers after their filicides found that psychotic mothers who had committed filicide often killed suddenly without much planning, whereas depressed mothers had contemplated killing their children for days to weeks prior to their crimes (49).” Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2174580/>

“Among mothers suffering from postpartum psychosis, about 5% will attempt suicide and 4% will commit infanticide, said Michele Davidson, a postpartum psychosis expert and board member of Postpartum Support International.” Source: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/postpartum-psychosis-rare-condition-spotlight-killing-three-children-m-rcna68165>

Do you dehumanize orphans and other children? Do you dehumanize the disabled regardless of age? Are you a monster too?

For the sake of humanity, please follow the golden rule and don't be a hypocrite. Also, don't treat health challenges like they have supernatural origins just because you need a microscope at times to identify or confirm cellular composition or activity that explains the symptoms experienced and exhibited by the afflicted. The microscope wasn't invented until the 1590s, but the first one that worked properly wasn't invented until 1830. Source: <https://www.microscopeworld.com/t-history-of-the-microscope.aspx> Before then, fevers could at times explain some odd behavior.

“The exorcists of India and China expel malignant demons from patients afflicted with fever, dizziness, frenzy, and so on. Especially are these phenomena common in Korea, where demons play a large part in the common religious conceptions.” Source: <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.1086/474423> (1911)

There are reasonable explanations for unreasonable beliefs and actions. And, there are disadvantaged people who are yet to be enlightened or have been frightened away from considering multiple sources of information as a result of arguable exploitation of the Freedom of Religion/First Amendment. If all you are exposed to in terms of literature was written before the Age of Reason, then you are behind the times and likely unfamiliar with my work and that's not even the tip of the iceberg which is an idiom all of which may be beyond your comprehension. It doesn't make it any less true.

For those interested in starting #TaoFu Self-Defense Exercises, please see <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> and begin at any time.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.