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Edited By
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CHAPTER SIX

Created Spirit Beings

Angels

Carolyn Denise Baker

Although angels are mentioned in many places in the Bible, more frequently in the New Testament than in the Old, many would agree with Tim Unsworth, "Angels, it seems, are hard to pin down."¹ Nevertheless, an examination of these created beings can bring spiritual benefit.

One reason angels are "hard to pin down" is that the theology of angels is incidental to and not the primary focus of Scripture. Angelic contexts always have God or Christ as their focal point (Isa. 6:1-3; Rev. 4:7-11). Most angelic appearances are fleeting and without provocation or prediction. Such manifestations underscore truth; they never embody it. "When they are mentioned, it is always in order to inform us further about God, what he does, and how he does it"²—as well as what He requires.

The Bible's primary emphasis then is the Savior, not the servers; the God of angels, not the angels of God. Angels may be chosen as an occasional method for revelation, but they never constitute the message. The study of angels, however, can challenge the heart as well as the head. Although angels are mentioned a number of times in both the Old and New Testaments, "they are, if we may speak abruptly, none of our business most of the time. Our business is to learn to love God and our neighbor. Charity. Sanctity. There is our whole work cut out for us."³

¹Tim Unsworth, "Angels: A Short Visit with Our Heavenly Hosts," *U.S. Catholic* 55 (March 1990): 31.

²Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 434.

³Thomas Howard, "The Parts Angels Play," *Christianity Today* 24 (12 December 1980): 20.

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The old scholastic question which doubles as an exercise in logic, i.e., How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? is actually irrelevant, for it does not transform one's character.⁴ But the study of angels can encourage Christian graces such as these:

1. Humility. Angels are beings near to God, yet they serve believers most often in unseen, sometimes unknown ways. They are pure examples of humble service, seeking only the glory of God and the good of others. They embody what the Christian's service can be.

2. Confidence, security, and a sense of calm. In times of desperation, God assigns these powerful beings to assist the weakest of believers. Because of this, tranquility and confidence can characterize our Christian living.

3. Christian responsibility. Both God and angels witness the Christian's most unholy actions (1 Cor. 4:9). What a cause for believers to behave in a worthy manner!

4. Healthy optimism. Defying the evil one himself, good angels chose—and still choose—to serve God's holy purpose. Consequently, their example makes devoted service to a perfect God in this imperfect universe plausible. In a future day angels will mediate the banishing of all who are evil (Matt. 13:41–42, 49–50). This encourages healthy optimism in the midst of all life's situations.

5. A proper Christian self-concept. Men and women are created a "little lower than the angels" (Ps. 8:5, KJV). Yet, in Christ, redeemed humanity is elevated far above these magnificent servants of God and His people (Eph. 1:3–12).

6. A reverential awe. Men like Isaiah and Peter, and women like Hannah and Mary, all "recognized holiness when it appeared in angelic form, and their reaction was appropriate."⁵

7. Participation in salvation history. God used angels in sacred history, especially Michael and Gabriel, to prepare for the Messiah. Later, angels proclaimed and worshiped the Christ in devoted service. A proper understanding of them will lead believers to do the same.

Where there is experience with angels today, however, the teaching of Scripture must interpret that experience. When

⁴Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1947), 443. Herbert Muschamp in "Angels," *Vogue* 179 (December 1989): 278, says this question may seem "the very symbol of scholastic absurdity," but to the scholastics it was a sincere question. Angels were "like protons and electrons [functioning] as a binding force of the universe."

⁵Howard, "Angels," 20.

the angel Gabriel appeared he brought a message that glorified God. But the claims of Joseph Smith with respect to the visitation of angels led directly into paths of error.⁶

The study of angel is a vital part of theology, having tangential value and implications for other teachings in the Bible; for example, the nature of God's inspired Word, since angels mediated the Law to Moses (Acts 7:38,53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2);⁷ the nature of God, since angels attend the holy God of the universe; and the nature of Christ and the end times,⁸ since angels are included in the events of both Christ's first and second comings.

THE VIEW OF ANGELS THROUGH HISTORY

In pagan traditions (some of which influenced later Jews), angels were sometimes considered divine, sometimes natural phenomena. They were beings who did good deeds for people, or they were the people themselves who did good deeds. This confusion is reflected in the fact that both the Hebrew word *mal'ak* and the Greek word *angelos* have two meanings. The basic meaning of each is "messenger," but that messenger, depending on the context, can be an ordinary human messenger or a heavenly messenger, an angel.

Some, on the basis of evolutionary philosophy, date the idea of angels to the beginning of civilization. "The concept of angels may have evolved from prehistoric times when primitive humans emerged from the cave and started looking up to the sky . . . God's voice was no longer the growl of the jungle but the roar of the sky."⁹ This supposedly developed into a view of angels serving humanity as God's mediators. True knowledge of angels, however, came only through divine revelation.

Later, Assyrians and Greeks attached wings to some semi-divine beings. Hermes had wings on his heels. Eros, "the

⁶See *The Book of Mormon; Doctrine and the Covenants; The Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, 1986), 20:10; 27:16. Supposedly an angel named Moroni appeared to Mormonism's founder, Joseph Smith, and revealed the location of gold tablets (supposedly inscribed with the Book of Mormon) beneath the hill of Cumorah. Mormonism also erroneously advocates a special "gift given to behold angels and ministering spirits," *Doctrines and Covenants*, Index, 13.

⁷Probably a reference to the "holy ones" of Deut. 33:2.

⁸Robert P. Lightner, *Evangelical Theology: A Survey and Review* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 129.

⁹Unsworth, "Angels," 30.

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fast-flying spirit of passionate love," had them affixed to his shoulders. Adding a playful notion, the Romans invented Cupid, the god of erotic love, pictured as a playful boy shooting invisible love arrows to encourage humanity's romances.¹⁰ Plato (ca. 427-347 B.C.) also spoke of helpful guardian angels.

The Hebrew Scriptures give names to only two of the angels it mentions: Gabriel, who enlightened Daniel's understanding (Dan. 9:21-27), and the archangel Michael, the protector of Israel (12:1).

Nonbiblical Jewish apocalyptic literature, such as Enoch (105-64 B.C.), also recognizes that angels assisted the giving of the Mosaic Law. The apocryphal book Tobit (200-250 B.C.), however, fabricated an archangel named Raphael who repeatedly helped Tobit in difficult situations. Actually, there is only one archangel (chief angel), Michael (Jude 9). Still later, Philo (ca. 20 B.C. to ca. A.D. 42), the Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, Egypt, depicted angels as mediators between God and humanity. Angels, subordinate creatures, lodged in the air as "the servants of God's powers. [They were] incorporeal souls ... wholly intelligent throughout ... [having] pure thoughts."¹¹

During the New Testament period Pharisees believed angels were supernatural being who often communicated God's will (Acts 23:8). However, the Sadducees, influenced by Greek philosophy, said there was "neither resurrection, angel, nor spirit" (23:8, KJV). To them, angels were little more than "good thoughts and motions" of the human heart.¹²

During the first few centuries after Christ, church fathers said little about angels. Most of their attention was given to other subjects, especially to the nature of Christ. Still, all of them believed angels existed. Ignatius of Antioch, an early church father, believed angels' salvation depended on the blood of Christ. Origen (182-251) declared their sinlessness, saying that if it were possible for an angel to fall, then it might

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹James Drummond, *Philo Judaeus: Or the Jewish Alexandrian Philosophy in Its Development and Completion*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1888), 146. For bibliography on Philo's view of angels see Roberto Radice and David T. Runia, *Philo Judaeus: Or the Jewish Alexandrian Philosophy in Its Development and Completion* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1988); and William S. Babcock, "Angels" in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, David M. Scholer, E. F. Ferguson, M. P. McHugh, eds. (New York: Garland Publishers, 1990), 38-42.

¹²Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1878, 1972), 264.

be possible for a demon to be saved. The latter was ultimately rejected by church councils.¹³

By A.D. 400 Jerome (347–420) believed guardian angels were awarded to humans at birth. Later, Peter Lombard (ca. A.D. 1100–1160) added that a solitary angel could guard many people at one time.¹⁴

Dionysius the Areopagite (ca. A.D. 500) contributed this period's most notable discussion. He pictured an angel as "an image of God, a manifestation of the unmanifested light, a pure mirror, what is most clear, without flaw, undefiled, and unstained."¹⁵ Like Irenaeus four hundred years previous (ca. 130–95), he also constructed hypotheses concerning an angelic hierarchy.¹⁶ Then Gregory the Great (A.D. 540–604) awarded angels celestial bodies.

As the thirteenth century dawned, angels became the subject of much speculation. Most significant were questions asked by the Italian theologian Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225–74). Seven of his 118 conjectures probed such areas as the following: Of what is an angel's body composed? Is there more than one species of angels? When angels assume human form do they exercise vital body functions? Do angels know if it is morning or evening? Can they understand many thoughts at one time? Do they know our secret thoughts? Can they talk one to the other?¹⁷

Most descriptive, perhaps, were portrayals by Renaissance artists who painted angels as less than "manly figures. . . . childlike harpists and horn tooters [who were] a far cry from Michael the Archangel." Daubed as "chubby, high-cholesterol

¹³E. L. Cross and E. A. Livingston, "Angels" in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 52–53.

¹⁴Unsworth, "Angels," 31. Scripture does not expressly endorse guardian angels as a special class. It speaks, rather, of angels who guard.

¹⁵Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, trans. John D. Jones (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 153.

¹⁶Unsworth, "Angels," 31.

¹⁷Thomas Aquinas, *Great Books of the World: The Summa Theologica*, Aquinas, Robert Hutchinson, ed., vol. 19 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica), 269–585. Aquinas finally loathed his theological method. After a "wonderful spiritual experience," Aquinas stopped writing forever, saying, "All I have written and taught seems but of small account to me." Alexander Whyte, *The Nature of Angels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 7. Johannes Duns Scotus (1265–1308), Albert the Great (1193–1280) and Francisco de Suarez (1548–1617) used an approach similar to that of Aquinas.

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cherubs, dressed in a few wisps of strategically placed cloth"¹⁸ these creatures were often used as decorative borders for many paintings.

Medieval Christianity assimilated the mass of speculations and consequently began including angel worship in its liturgies. This aberration continued to grow and Pope Clement X (who was pope in the years A.D. 1670–1676) declared a feast to honor angels.¹⁹

In spite of Roman Catholic excesses, Reformed Christianity continued to insist that angels help God's people. John Calvin (1509–64) believed that "angels are dispensers and administrators of God's beneficence towards us ... [T]hey keep vigil for our safety, take upon themselves our defense, direct our ways, and take care that some harm may not befall us."²⁰

Martin Luther (1483–1546) in *Tabletalk* spoke in similar terms. He remarked how these spiritual beings created by God served the Church and the *kingdom*, being very close to God and to the Christian. "They stand before the face of the Father, next to the sun, but without effort they [are able to] swiftly come to our aid."²¹

As the Age of Rationalism dawned (ca. 1800), the possibility of the supernatural was seriously doubted, and historically accepted teachings of the Church began to be questioned. Consequently, some skeptics began to label angels "impersonations of divine energies, or of good and bad principles, or of diseases and natural influences."²²

By 1918 some Jewish scholars began echoing this liberal voice, saying angels were not valid because they are not necessary. "A world of law and process does not need a living ladder to lead from the earth beyond to God on high."²³

¹⁸Unsworth, "Angels," 31. Muschamp, "Angels," 279, calls angels a "casualty of the Renaissance." For the historical presentation of angels in art and literature see Gustav Davidson, *The Dictionary of Angels, Including the Fallen* (New York: Free Press, 1971) and Theodora Ward, *Men and Angels* (New York: Viking Press, 1969).

¹⁹Unsworth, "Angels," 32.

²⁰John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill, ed., vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 166.

²¹Martin Luther, "Protective Angels and Destructive Demons, Between November 24 and December 8, 1532, no. 2829." Luther's Works: *Tabletalk*, Helmut T. Lehman, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 54:172.

²²Dabney, *Lectures*, 264.

²³Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1968), 180.

This did not shake the faith of conservative Evangelicals. They have continued to endorse the validity of angels.²⁴

THE CONSENSUS OF THE MODERN SCENE

Perhaps the liberal theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) posed the modern period's most radical view. He considered angels Platonic essences: emanations from God who desired to do more than reveal himself to humanity. He believed angels actually wanted to return to the divine essence from which they came and to again be equal with Him. Tillich's advice, then, was this: "To interpret the concept of angels in a meaningful way today, interpret them as the Platonic essences, as the powers of being, not as special beings. If you interpret them in the latter way, it all becomes crude mythology."²⁵

Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Millard Erickson (1932-), however, encouraged an opposite approach of healthful caution. Barth, father of neoorthodoxy, tagged this subject "the most remarkable and difficult of all." He recognized the interpreter's conundrum: How was one to "advance without becoming rash"; to be "both open and cautious, critical and naive, peripicuous and modest?"²⁶

Erickson, a conservative theologian, amended Barth's sentiment, adding how one might be tempted to omit or neglect the topic of angels, yet, "if we are to faithful students of the Bible, we have no choice but to speak of these beings."²⁷

In popular writings about angels, however, there has been some extremism. Interest in angels has revived, but often with dubious or unscriptural ideas. One person, for example, claims to derive immense comfort from angels, saying, "I talk to my guardian angel often. It helps me to sort things out." Others report personal visitations and protection by angels, or describe them in a way that seems to make them butlers from

²⁴Augustus H. Strong, Alexander Whyte, and Robert L. Dabney were some conservative scholars of this period.

²⁵Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 94. See also James M. Wall, "Unlearning Skepticism: An Angelic Meditation," *The Christian Century*, 28 September 1988, 827.

²⁶Karl Barth, "The Kingdom of Heaven, The Ambassadors of God and Their Opponents," *Church Dogmatics: Doctrines of Creation*, T. F. Torrance, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, eds., vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), 369.

²⁷Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 434.

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heaven who serve the Christian's whims.²⁸ Some say angels "minister in accordance [with] the Word of God. . . [and their only] limitation seems to be the deficiency of the Word in the mouth of believers to whom they are ministering."²⁹

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

"There [is] only one way to demythologize popular fantasies about angels—get back to the biblical reality."³⁰

Angels enjoy a reason for being that all volitional beings can experience. They worship God and render Him service. Their general purpose, reflected in the Hebrew and Greek words translated "angel" (*mal'akh* and *angelos*, "messenger"), is to carry the message of divine words and works.

Angels, then, primarily serve God. They also serve people as a direct result of serving God. While Scripture recognizes them as "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14), they are, nevertheless, "spirits sent" by God (Rev. 22:16).

That they are servants of God is implied also by the language of Scripture. They are designated "the angel of the LORD"

²⁸Unsworth, "Angels," 32. Roland Buck, *Angels on Assignment* (Kingwood, Tex: Hunter Books, 1979). Malcolm Godwin, *Angels: An Endangered Species* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), describes how some believe angels disguise themselves as flying saucers. For conservative testimonies about angelic visits see W. Norman Day, "Guardian Angels," *The Pentecostal Testimony*, October 1986, 34-35; Carolyn Hittenberger, "Angel on the Fender," *Pentecostal Evangel*, 5 July 1987, 10; Melvin E. Jorgenson, "Angelic Escort," *Pentecostal Evangel*, 21 December 1980, 7-8; and Ann Wedgeworth, *Magnificent Strangers* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1979). For evaluations of angelic visitations see B. Zerebesky, "What About All Those Angel Stories?" *Charisma* (December 1983), 76-78; J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 195; and id., "Comprehensive Critique of *Angels on Assignment* Including a List of Five Tests for Angelic Visitations" (published by the author). Charles and Annette Capps, *Angels!* (Tulsa: Harrison House, 1984), encouraged believers to command angels to assist them. Scripture, however, portrays angels commanding people (Matt. 1:24; 2:19-21; Acts 8:26; 10:3-5; 10:22; 11:13; 12:7-8; Rev. 11:1).

²⁹Marilyn Hickey, *Treading with Angels* (Denver: Layman's Library, 1980), 8. However, all benefits of salvation, including the protection of angels, are based on God's effort, not ours. Cf. Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983), 478, who add, "Nowhere are we instructed to pray to angels and request their help." See also Kenneth D. Barney, "Supernatural Bodyguards," *Pentecostal Evangel*, (22 February 1981): 8-9.

³⁰William Baker, "Angels: Our Chariots of Fire," *Moody Monthly*, 6 January 1986, 85.

(forty-nine times), "the angel of God" (eighteen times), and the angels of the Son of Man (seven times). God specifically calls them "my angels" (three times), and people referred to them as "His angels" (twelve times).³¹ Finally, when the term "angels" occurs by itself the context normally indicates whose they are. They belong to God!

All angels were created at one time; that is, the Bible gives no indication of a schedule of incremental creation of angels (or anything else). They were formed by and for Christ when "He commanded and they were created" (Ps. 148:5; see also Col. 1:16-17; 1 Pet. 3:22). And since angels "neither marry nor [are] given in marriage" (Matt. 22:30), they are a complete company having no need for reproduction.

As created beings they are everlasting but not eternal. God alone has no beginning and no end (1 Tim. 6:16). Angels had a beginning but will know no end, for they are present in the eternal age and in the New Jerusalem (Heb 12:22; Rev 21:9,12).

Angels have unique natures; they are superior to humans (Ps. 8:5), but inferior to the incarnate Jesus (Heb. 1:6). The Bible brings out the following seven facts concerning them:

1. Angels are real but not always visible (12:22). Although God occasionally gives them visible human form (Gen. 19:1-22), they are spirits (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7,14). In Bible times people sometimes experienced the effects of an angel's presence but saw no one (Num. 22:21-35). Sometimes they did see the angel (Gen. 19:1-22; Jud. 2:1-4; 6:11-22; 13:3-21; Matt. 1:20-25; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4-6; Acts 5:19-20).³² In addition, angels might be seen but not recognized as angels (Heb. 13:2).

2. Angels worship but are not to be worshiped. "[T]hey are unique among the creatures, but they are nonetheless creatures."³³ They respond with worship and praise to God (Ps. 148:2; Isa. 6:1-3; Luke 2:13-15; Rev. 4:6-11; 5:1-14) and to Christ (Heb. 1:6). Consequently, Christians are not to exalt

³¹"My angels" occurs in Ex. 23:23; 32:34; Rev. 22:16. "His angels" in Gen. 24:40; Job 4:18; Pss. 91:11; 103:20; 148:2; Dan. 6:22; Luke 4:10; Acts 12:11; Rev. 3:5; 12:7; 22:6. The "Son of Man's" angels in Matt. 13:41; 16:27; 24:30-31; Mark 13:26-27.

³²Allan K. Jenkins, "Young Man or Angel?" *The Expository Times* 94 (May 1983): 237-40. He doubts that the "young man" of Mark 16:5 was an angel. He connects the white robe with martyrdom.

³³Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 439.

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angels (Rev. 22:8-9); unwise Christians who do so forfeit their reward (Col. 2:18).

3. Angels serve but are not to be served. God sends them as agents to help people, especially His own (Ex. 14:19; 23:23; 32:34; 33:2-3; Num. 20:16; 22:22-35; Jud. 6:11-22; 1 Kings 19:5-8; Pss. 34:7; 91:11; Isa. 63:9; Dan. 3:28; Acts 12:7-12; 27:23-25; Heb. 13:2). Angels also mediate God's judgment (Gen. 19:22; see also Gen. 19:24; Ps. 35:6; Acts 12:23) or messages (Judg. 2:1-5; Matt. 1:20-24; Luke 1:11-38).³⁴ But angels are never to be served, for angels are like Christians in one very important way: They too are "fellow servants" (Rev. 22:9).

4. Angels accompany revelation but do not replace it in whole or in part. God uses them, but they are not the goal of God's revelation (Heb. 2:2ff.). In the first century, a heresy arose that required "false humility and the worship of angels" (Col. 2:18). It involved "harsh treatment of the body" but did nothing to restrain "sensual indulgence" (2:23). Its philosophy emphasized the false ideas that (a) Christians are inferior in their ability to personally approach God; (b) angels have a superior ability to do so; and (c) worship is due them because of their intervention in our behalf.³⁵ Paul responded with a hymn glorifying Christ who is the source of our future glory (3:1-4).

5. Angels know much but not everything. Their insight is imparted by God; it is not innate or infinite. Their wisdom may be vast (2 Sam. 14:20), but their knowledge is limited: They do not know the day of our Lord's second coming (Matt. 24:36) or the full magnitude of human salvation (1 Pet. 1:12).

6. Angelic power is superior but not supreme. God simply lends His power to angels as His agents. Angels are, therefore,

³⁴Angels often mediate God's judgment (2 Sam. 24:16; 2 Kings 19:35; 1 Chron. 21:14-15; Ps. 78:49; Rev. 1:1-15; 5:2-11; 6:7-8; 8:2-13; 9:1-15; 10:1-10; 14:18-20; 15:1-8; 16:1-5,17; 17:1-17; 18:1,21; 19:17-18). They also declare God's message (Jud. 2:1-5; 3:3-22; 5:23; 2 Kings 1:3-15; Isa. 37:6; Zech. 1:9-14,19; 2:3-13; 3:1-10; 4:1-14; 5:5-11; 6:4-8; Matt. 28:5; Luke 2:9-21; John 20:12; Acts 7:53; 8:26; 10:3,7,22; 11:13; Heb. 2:2; Rev. 1:1).

³⁵Most commentators believe very little evidence supports a universal cult of angel worship by the Jews. The heresy was merely a local Colossian problem. See E. K. Simpson and E. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), 247-48. See also Peter T. O'Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians, Philemon*, David Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, eds., vol. 44 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), 142-43.

“stronger and more powerful” than people (2 Pet. 2:11). As “mighty ones who do his bidding,” (Ps. 103:20) “powerful angels” mediate God’s final judgments on sin (2 Thess. 1:7; Rev. 5:2,11; 7:1-3; 8:2-13; 9:1-15; 10:1-11; 14:6-12,15-20; 15:1-8; 16:1-12; 17:1-3,7; 18:1-2,21; 19:17-18). Angels are often used in mighty deliverance (Dan. 3:28; 6:22; Acts 12:7-11) and healings (John 5:4).³⁶ And an angel will single-handedly throw the Christian’s chief and most powerful foe into the abyss and lock him in for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-3).

7. Angels make decisions. The disobedience of one group implies an ability to choose and influence others with wickedness (1 Tim. 4:1). On the other hand, the good angel’s refusal of John’s worship (Rev. 22:8-9) implies an ability to choose and influence others with good.³⁷ Although good angels respond obediently to God’s command, they are not automatons. Rather, they choose devoted obedience with intense ardor.

The number of angels is immense, “thousands upon thousands” (Heb. 12:22), “and ten thousand times ten thousand” (Rev. 5:11).³⁸ Jesus expressed the same idea when He said, “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions³⁹ of angels?” (Matt. 26:53).

Some interpreters see a five-stage hierarchy of angels with lower-ranking angels subject to those in higher positions: “thrones,” “powers,” “rulers,” “authorities,” and “dominion” (Rom. 8:38; Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16; 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:22). Contextually, however, this is dubious. The plain emphasis of these passages is not the subjection of angels to one another, but

³⁶Zane C. Hodges, “Problem Passages in the Gospel of John, Part 5: The Angel at Bethesda—John 5:4,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January to March, 1979): 25-39. He cites strong manuscript evidence supporting the authenticity of John 5:4, thus allowing for the existence of the angel at Bethesda.

³⁷Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 445.

³⁸Duffield and Van Cleave, *Foundations*, 467, interpret Rev. 5:11 literally. Medieval scholars attempted to calculate what might be the minimum number of angels using biblical numerology, i.e., “calculating words into numbers and numbers into words.” Based on this system fourteenth-century Cabalists posited the existence of 301,655,722 angels. See Gustav Davidson, *The Dictionary of Angels*, xxi.

³⁹During the Republican conquest a Roman legion consisted of 4,200 foot soldiers and 300 cavalry. *The Complete Biblical Library*, vol. 14 (Springfield, Mo.: 1986), 38.

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the subjection of both angels and demons to Christ, the Lord of all (cf. Rom. 8:39; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:16-18; 1 Pet. 3:22).⁴⁰

Angels work for God in obedience to His dictates, never apart from them. "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Heb. 1:14). They are "sent." God commands their specific activities (Pss. 91:11; 103:20-21),⁴¹ for they are His servants (Heb. 1:7).

Although angels are sent to serve us, that service (Gk. *diakonian*) is primarily spiritual help, relief, and support; however, it may include tangible acts of love as well. The corresponding verb (*diēkonoun*) is used of angels' supernaturally caring for Jesus after Satan tempted Him (Matt. 4:11). Other examples of God's sending angels for the help or relief of believers include the angels at the tomb (28:2-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:4-7; John 20:11-13) and the angelic deliverances of apostles (Acts 5:18-20; 12:7-10; 27:23-26). An angel also gave directions to Philip because God saw the faith and desire of an Ethiopian eunuch and wanted him to become an heir of salvation (8:26). An angel brought God's message to Cornelius, too, that he might be saved (10:3-6). These were ministries sent in the providence of God.⁴² In no case, however, is there any evidence that believers can demand angelic help or command angels. God alone can and does command them.

In addition to beings specifically designated as angels, the Old Testament speaks of similar beings often classed with angels: cherubs, seraphs, and messengers ("watchers," KJV).

Cherubs and seraphs respond to God's immediate presence. Cherubs (Heb. *k'ruvim*, related to an Akkadian verb meaning "to bless, praise, adore") are always affiliated with God's holiness and the adoration His immediate presence inspires (Ex. 25:20,22; 26:31; Num. 7:89; 2 Sam. 6:2; 1 Kings 6:29,32; 7:29; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chron. 13:6; Pss. 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16; Ezek. 1:5-26; 9:3; 10:1-22; 11:22). Protecting God's

⁴⁰Irenaeus (A.D. 130-200) and Dionysius (A.D. 500) speculated regarding angelic hierarchy. Scripture expresses a simply hierarchy—angels and a chief angel (the archangel Michael; 1 Thess. 4:16; Jude 9). Meyer reminds us that any attempt to precisely establish any order "belongs to the fanciful domain of theosophy." See Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, vol. 3 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1856), 205.

⁴¹Angels are sent by God's command (Gen. 24:7; 24:40; Ex. 23:20; 23:23; 32:34; 33:2; 2 Chron. 32:21; Dan. 6:22; Matt. 13:41; 24:31; Luke 1:26; 4:10; Acts 12:11; Rev. 22:6; 22:16).

⁴²See Everitt M. Fjordbak, *An Exposition and Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Dallas: Wisdom House Publishers, 1983), 39-42.

holiness is their great concern; they prevented Adam and Eve's reentry into the Garden (Gen. 3:24).⁴³ Carved figures of gold cherubs were fastened to the atonement cover ("mercy seat," KJV) of the ark of the covenant, where their wings were a "shelter" for the ark of the covenant and a support ("chariot") for God's invisible throne (1 Chron. 28:18).

In Ezekiel cherubs are highly symbolic creatures having human and animal characteristics, with two faces (Ezek. 41:18-20) or four (1:6; 10:14).⁴⁴ In Ezekiel's inaugural vision, God's throne is above the cherubs with their four faces. The face of the man is mentioned first as the highest of God's creation, with the face of the lion representing wild animals, that of the ox representing domestic animals, and that of the eagle representing birds; thus picturing the fact that God is over all His creation. The cherubs also have hooves (1:7), and the ox face is the actual face of the cherub (10:14). God is sometimes pictured as riding on them as "on the wings of the wind" (2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10).

The seraphs (from the Hebrew *saraph*, "to burn") are pictured in Isaiah's inaugural vision (Isa. 6:1-3) as so radiating the glory and brilliant purity of God that they seem to be on fire. They declare God's unique glory and supreme holiness.⁴⁵ Like cherubs, seraphs guard God's throne (6:6-7).⁴⁶ Some scholars believe the "living creatures" (Rev. 4:6-9) to be synonymous with seraphs and cherubs; however, the cherubs in

⁴³The presence of cherubs before the death of any human being seems to be further evidence that human beings do not become angels after death.

Middle East excavations have revealed cherublike images possessing a human face and an animal body with four legs and two wings. Such figures appear repeatedly in Near Eastern mythology and architecture. See R. K. Harrison, "Cherubim," *The New Bible Dictionary*, 2d ed., J. D. Douglas, et al., eds. (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1982), 185-86; "Cherub," *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 454-55.

⁴⁴Ibid. Harris states these four faces represent "birds, tame animals, wild animals and men in attendance before God."

⁴⁵The threefold repetition, "Holy, holy, holy," means God is "different," "unique," "set apart," and gives emphasis to God's holiness. Some see also an implication of the Trinity.

⁴⁶The seraphs' covered faces depict an "awe that dared not gaze at the glory." Their covered feet illustrates "the lowliness of their glorious service." Their hovering posture portrays a readiness to do God's errands. See W. E. Vine, *Isaiah: Prophecies, Promises, Warnings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 29. See also Harris, "Cherub," 454-55.

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Ezekiel look alike and the "living creatures" in Revelation are different from each other.⁴⁷

"Messengers" or "watchers" (Aram. *'irin*, related to the Heb. *'ur*, "be awake")⁴⁸ are mentioned only in Daniel 4:13,17,23. They are "holy ones" who are eager promoters of God's sovereign decrees and demonstrated God's sovereign lordship over Nebuchadnezzar.

Another special designation in the Old Testament is "the angel of the LORD" (*mal'akh YHWH*). In many of the sixty Old Testament occurrences of "the" angel of the LORD, he is identified with God himself (Gen. 16:11; cf. 16:13; 18:2; cf. 18:13-33; 22:11-18; 24:7; 31:11-13; 32:24-30; Ex. 3:2-6; Jud. 2:1; 6:11,14; 13:21-22). Yet this "angel of the LORD" is also distinguishable from God, for God speaks to this angel (2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Chron. 21:15), and this angel speaks to God (Zech. 1:12).⁴⁹ Thus, in the opinion of many, "the" angel of the Lord occupies a unique category. "He is not just a higher angel, or even the highest: He is the Lord appearing in angelic form." Since the angel is not mentioned in the New Testament, he probably was a manifestation of the Second Person of the Trinity.⁵⁰ Some object, saying that any preincarnate manifestation of Jesus would take away from the uniqueness of the Incarnation. However, in His incarnation, Jesus identified himself fully with humankind from birth to death and made possible our identification with Him in His death and resurrection. No temporary preincarnate manifestation could possibly detract from the uniqueness of that.

⁴⁷Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Deighton Bell and Co., 1866), 599, suggests that the living creatures are "forms compounded out of the most significant particulars of more than one Old Testament vision."

⁴⁸A. D. "Watchers," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 1023. Some believer "watchers" was a special class of angels affecting human history. See C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect and Evil* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 59. Others believe "watchers" are simply a descriptive phrase denoting the vigilance of angels. See John E. Walvoord, *Daniel: Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 102.

⁴⁹T. E. McComiskey, "Angel of the Lord," in *Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Ellwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 55.

⁵⁰Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1, 181. Williams labels these theophanies "temporary visits by the Second Person of the Trinity prior to His coming in human flesh."

THE ROLE OF ANGELS

Angels work in Christ's life. In past eternity angels worshiped Christ (Heb. 1:6). They prophesied and announced His birth (Matt. 1:20-24; Luke 1:26-28; 2:8-20), protected Him in His infancy (Matt. 2:12-23), and witnessed His incarnate life (1 Tim. 3:16). They will also accompany Him in His visible return (Matt. 24:31; 25:31; Mark 8:38; 13:27; Luke 9:26; 2 Thess. 1:7).

During His life on earth Jesus sometimes desired angelic assistance. He welcomed the aid of angels after the wilderness temptation (Matt. 4:11) and during His struggle in Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). Both His resurrection (Matt. 28:2,5; Luke 24:23; John 20:12) and ascension (Acts 1:11) were accompanied by them. Yet sometimes He declined their help. During His wilderness temptation He said no to a potential misappropriation of their protective power (Matt. 4:6) and later refused their rescue from His impending trial and crucifixion (26:53).⁵¹

Angels work in people's lives. Angels protect believers from harm, especially when such aid is necessary for the continued proclamation of the gospel (Acts 5:19-20; 12:7-17; 27:23-24; cf. 28:30-31). They assist but never replace the Holy Spirit's role in salvation and in the believer's proclamation of Christ (8:26; 10:1-8; cf. 10:44-48). Angels can help the believer's outward, physical necessities, while the Holy Spirit aids inward spiritual illumination.

Although angels escort the righteous to a place of reward (Luke 16:22), Christians, not angels, will share Christ's rule in the world to come (Heb. 2:5). Believers will also evaluate the performance of angels (1 Cor. 6:3). Until then, Christ's disciples must live and worship carefully so as not to offend these heavenly onlookers (4:9; 11:10; 1 Tim. 5:21).

Angels work in the unbeliever's life. There is joy in the angels' presence when sinners repent (Luke 15:10); but the angels will soberly mediate God's final judgments upon humans refusing Christ (Matt. 13:39-43; Rev. 8:6-13; 9:1-21; 14:6-20; 15:1,6-8; 16:1-21; 18:1-24; 19:1-21; cf. 20:2,10,14-15).

⁵¹Angels in the Gospels function like those in the Old Testament. However, "unlike the OT and other Jewish writings, the angelology of the Gospels is, like the Gospels as a whole, Christocentric." They bring direct revelation from God on two occasions only: Jesus' birth and resurrection. "In the interim he himself is the preeminent disclosure of God." M. J. Davidson, "Angels," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, eds. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 11.

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In times past, angels announced Christ's birth, altering human history forever. In the present, their protection gives us confidence. Their final exile of evil is part of our future victory. With the Father for us, Christ above us, the Spirit inside us, and angels beside us, we are encouraged to press on to the prize before us.

Repudiating The Enemy: Satan And Demons

Frank D. Macchia

In the small southern German village of Moettlingen, Pastor Johann Blumhardt found himself at sunrise on December 28, 1843, exhausted at the end of an all-night vigil of praying fervently for the deliverance of Gottlieben Dittus, a young woman severely tormented by evil spirits. Gottlieben had come to Pastor Blumhardt months earlier complaining of fainting spells and of hearing strange voices and noises in the night. He had attempted at first to help her through pastoral counseling. However, the more time he spent with her the more violent her symptoms and torment became. Investigation into Gottlieben's life revealed that at an early age she had been abused and dedicated to Satan by a wicked aunt, who had also involved her in occult worship.

Blumhardt could not tolerate watching the woman be tormented by dark forces. The burning question would not leave him, "Who is the Lord?" Blumhardt became preoccupied with the blatant contradiction between the reign of a sovereign God who sets the captives free and the needless suffering of Gottlieben Dittus. He could not merely accept this contradiction in passive resignation to the forces of darkness. Instead, he entered a "battle" (*kampf*) for Gottlieben's deliverance. After numerous prayer sessions at Gottlieben's home, she finally decided to come to Pastor Blumhardt's home for prayer, an obvious sign that she wanted deliverance for herself. Soon afterward, Pastor Blumhardt found himself at the close of the all-night prayer vigil mentioned above. Suddenly as the sun began to rise on

that December morning in 1843, a demon cried out, "Jesus is Victor!" Gottlieben was completely set free.⁵²

THE CALL FOR DISCERNMENT

In view of a Protestant liberalism's focus on inward experience, one must admire Blumhardt's courage in confronting the forces of darkness with the power of the kingdom of God to transform, not only the inward life of the believer, but the bodily and social dimensions of life as well. Such courage is sorely needed today. Evil is deeply felt in such massively destructive forces in our world as materialism, racism, sexism, and ideologies that deny both God and the value of human life. There are also destructive interpersonal relationships revealed in the mounting evils of wife and child abuse. Crime is on the rise in our urban streets, and countless homeless individuals, many of whom are mentally ill, roam our streets seeking sanctuary. The question that many have in their effort to combat such evil is why bring the devil into it? Does not demonology direct attention away from the human causes of and possible solutions to such widespread evil? As the late German biblical scholar Rudolf Bultmann maintained, does not demonology represent an escape into an outdated mythological worldview?⁵³ If social and moral problems are elevated to the realm of the church's struggle with the demonic, does the church not lose its capacity to engage in the kind of humble dialogue and wise analysis necessary for responsible moral action?

Demonology is indeed trivialized and problematic when confined to the realm of mythological fantasy involving dark and ugly little creatures with hooves and horns. Such fantasy creatures are easily dismissed by modern thinkers who share concerns such as those mentioned above. Such fantasy images of demons can also provide impetus for an unhealthy preoccupation with an abstract and self-made realm of horror far removed from the concrete evils that oppress people's lives and oppose the will of God for humanity. Consequently, C. S. Lewis was quite correct that demonology seems to provoke in a diversity of modern cultures either a simplistic rejection

⁵²*Blumhardt's Battle: A Conflict with Satan*, translated by F. S. Boshold (New York: Thomas E. Lowe, 1970). Note Frank D. Macchia, *Spirituality and Social Liberation: The Message of the Blumhardts in the Light of Wuerttemberg Pietism* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1993).

⁵³R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribner, 1959), 65.

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of the demonic or an unhealthy preoccupation with it.⁵⁴ Both errors remove believers from the real challenges of repudiating the forces of darkness where they are really confronted in the world. It is understandable that German Christians during World War II repudiated the devil and his works in their resistance of the Nazis. This repudiation was not a battle with mythological creatures abstracted from the real evils of life. It was a recognition of the fact that resistance to real evils in life has ultimate implications: God's eschatological victory over the forces of darkness, which lie at the root of all evil. Only in such a context does the battle against the devil make sense.

SATAN AND DEMONS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Scriptures are not dominated by a concern with demonic forces. The accent of the Bible is on the sovereign reign of God, the gospel of salvation, and the demands of God's grace on the lives of the redeemed. Though the Scriptures do not ignore the forces of darkness, they emphasize the power of God to redeem and to heal. By way of contrast, the people of ancient societies during the development of the Scriptures tended to advocate a rather frightening view of the world. They believed that spirits and demigods, some more evil than others, were able to intrude at will into a person's everyday life. Elaborate incantations, spiritistic forms of communication, and magical rituals developed in various cultic settings to grant the common person a degree of control in this threatening world of spirit activity. Such a frightening worldview is still shared in parts of the world today.

In contrast to this chaotic and threatening view of the world stood the Old Testament witness to Jehovah (i.e., Yahweh), the Lord: This God and Creator of all is not only the Lord of Israel, but also the Lord of hosts, who reigns supreme over the entire universe. In life and in death one contends with the Lord and the Lord alone. God alone is to be loved, feared, and worshiped (Ps. 139; Isa. 43). In Israel the spirit beings that loomed so large in the religions of other ancient peoples receded into near oblivion in the light of the sovereign Lord and divine Word to Israel. Therefore, no spiritistic communications or magical incantations or rituals were to have any place in the faith of Israel

⁵⁴C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), introduction.

(8:19-22). Demonology plays no significant role in the Old Testament.

This is not to say, however, that there is no satanic adversary in the Old Testament. The term "Satan" in Christian theology comes from the word for "adversary." One does indeed find the presence of such an adversary in the Old Testament as early as the temptation of humanity's first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1 through 3). Here the adversary, in the form of a reptile tempter, claims to speak on behalf of God, but ends up speaking falsely and tempting Adam and Eve to sin. But notice that this tempter is described as one creature among others, not as a god who can in any way compete with the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth. Adam and Eve are not faced at the beginning with a struggle between two gods, one good and one evil. To the contrary, they are made to choose between the command of the one true God and word of a creature-tempter who can thwart the will of God only through the disobedience of God's servants. In fact, the tempter actually seems to play a role in God's testing of Adam and Eve's faithfulness.

This adversary emerges again in another major Old Testament drama, in the prologue to the Book of Job. The adversary questions the Lord's assumption concerning Job's faithfulness. The adversary is then allowed to inflict suffering on Job within the boundaries set by the Lord. The entire Book of Job includes Job's search for God in the midst of his trials and ends with a dramatic appearance of the Lord to answer him (Job 38). Through a series of questions, the Lord leads Job to accept the mystery of divine sovereignty over the world and over all the affairs of life, no matter how perplexing they may seem. The adversary does not appear with the Lord. In fact, the adversary has no role to play in the Book of Job once the initial destruction depicted in the opening chapters has transpired. The Lord and His servant Job occupy center stage throughout the book. If Job wrestles, it is not with the adversary. Job wrestles with God.

Yet, Satan and his dark forces in the Old Testament do not function as tame pets in the heavenly court of the Lord or merely as tools of the Lord in the testing of humanity. In both Genesis 3 and the prologue to Job the adversary does present genuine opposition to the will of God for humanity. The Book of Daniel even depicts a battle between the "prince of the Persian kingdom" and an angelic messenger to Daniel (Dan. 10:13). Though Daniel had no part to play in the battle, the dark forces behind the Persian kingdom do provide genuine

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opposition to his reception of God's message. God is sovereign in the Old Testament but this sovereignty does not eliminate genuine opposition and conflict in the human obedience to the sovereign Word of God.

SATAN AND DEMONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In contrast to the relatively scant attention paid to the defeat of the forces of darkness in the Old Testament, upon reading the Gospels one is struck by the increased attention paid to this matter. There was already an increased interest in demonology in Jewish intertestamental literature, leading some to speculate about the possible influence of Persian dualism.⁵⁵ But, theologically, the implication is that the increased attention to the defeat of demons in the Gospels is due to the prior revelation of the fullness of truth and grace in the coming of Jesus Christ (John 1:14). Indeed, the coming of the light into the world clarified the works of darkness (3:19-21). This means that the demise of darkness can be understood only in the light of God's grace and deliverance. One does not study the forces of darkness in order to discover the riches of God's grace. To the contrary, the focus is to be on the riches of God's grace, which will then expose just how deceptive the voices of darkness really are.

Jesus confronted His audiences with the astounding assertion that the kingdom of God had broken in to clarify the conflict with the forces of darkness and to bring it to a decisive turn. He stated: "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). Jesus began His public ministry with a decisive victory over the tempter in the wilderness (4:1-11). Satan tried to tempt Jesus to prove His messianic identity in ways that were disobedient to the will of the Father, but Jesus remained faithful. The numerous accounts of Jesus' casting out demons (Mark 1:23-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29), as well as the charge from Jesus' opposition that He cast out demons by the power of Satan (Matt. 12:27-28), give strong evidence that Jesus publicly defeated demonic spirits as an aspect of His ministry.⁵⁶ Just as Jesus commanded the stormy seas to be calm by His

⁵⁵W. Foerster, "DAIMON, DAIMONION," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964), 1-10.

⁵⁶J. Ramsey Michaels, "Jesus and the Unclean Spirits," in *Demon Possession, a Medical, Historical, Anthropological, and Theological Symposium*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976), 41-57.

sovereign word in Mark 4:35–41, He commanded the legion of demons out of the Gerasene demoniac in the very next chapter (Mark 5:1–20).

Later, the apostolic proclamation made the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the fulfillment of Jesus' victory over the forces of darkness (1 Cor. 2:6–8; Col. 2:14–15; Heb. 2:14). The late Swedish Lutheran Gustav Aulen argued that God's sovereign victory over the forces of darkness represents the "classical" theory of the Atonement most basic to the proclamation of the New Testament.⁵⁷ By His death on the cross, Jesus destroyed "him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—" and set "free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Heb. 2:14–15). "Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15). The Cross, where Satan did his worst, proved to be his downfall. When Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" He was declaring the completion of His passion for our redemption and of His decisive victory to be fulfilled in the resurrection over death and the forces of darkness headed by Satan.

By the fourth century, Christ's descent into hell at His death was added to the Apostles' Creed as part of the church's confession of faith. Indeed, the New Testament does speak of a descent of Christ at His death into *hadēs* (Acts 2:27) and the abyss (*abussos*, Rom. 10:7). These ancient terms were not just symbols of death per se, but of death in relation to the plight of the lost (e.g., Rev. 20:1–3, 14). Hence, it would seem that Christ did descend into hell at His death to proclaim the victory of the Cross over the forces of darkness. It may be that Ephesians 4:9 and 1 Peter 3:18–20 refer to the same event.⁵⁸ But we must be cautious not to fantasize about

⁵⁷G. Aulen, *Christus Victor, an Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

⁵⁸In favor of viewing Eph. 4:9 as implying Christ's descent into the demonic underworld is Donald Bloesch, "Descent into Hell," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 313–15. Also supportive of this view is Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4–6, The Anchor Bible*, eds. W. F. Albright, D. N. Freedman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), 477. An example of an opposing view claiming that this text refers to the Incarnation is J. M. Robinson, "Descent into Hades," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick, et. al., vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 826–28.

With regard to 1 Pet. 3:18–20, note Bo Reicke's excellent discussion in *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude, The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), 109; 138; n. 37. According to Bo Reicke, Peter describes

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battles between Jesus and demons in hell, since Christ completed His work of redemption on the cross.⁵⁹ We should also avoid claiming the Christ won the keys of hell and death from Satan, since Jesus received all authority from the Father (Matt. 28:18). Jesus' descent into hell to proclaim the victory of the Cross is meaningful as a sign to all that there is no dimension of evil or darkness outside of the reach of the Cross.

On the Day of Pentecost, the same Spirit of God by which Jesus defeated the forces of darkness was transferred to the Church. In the power of the Spirit, the Church could continue Jesus' ministry of "doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil" (Acts 10:38). The Book of Acts contrasts the liberating power of the Spirit with the magical or superstitious acts that seek to control demonic power (e.g., 19:13-16). Discernment of spirits and healing were to be a part of the multiplicity of gifts in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:9-10) in anticipation of Christ's return (1:7). Though Christ's death and resurrection dealt a fatal blow to Satan, he is still able to prowl like a lion looking for prey (1 Pet. 5:8). The

Christ's proclamation in the underworld to the evil rulers from the time of Noah as an example to the Church. If Christ proclaimed His victory even to the rebellious rulers of this the most wicked generation, how much more should the Church preach to ruling authorities of its day who may yet repent. The phrase "through whom" of 1 Pet. 3:19 (*en bō*) should be translated "on which occasion," associating the preaching to the spirits in prison with the time of Christ's death. But there is no implication here that such a proclamation actually grants those in hell a chance to repent, leading to the possibility of universalism.

In the early centuries there was some disagreement as to whether *badēs* into which Christ descended was the realm where lost souls were held captive by the forces of darkness or, on the basis of an interpretation of Luke 16, "Abraham's bosom" (KJV). Similarly, many Catholics formerly taught that Christ descended into the *limbus partum*, a resting place for Old Testament saints, to proclaim His work of redemption. This view is no longer held by the Catholic Church. At any rate, *badēs* and *abussos* imply connections with the realm of darkness as noted above. See J. B. Russell, *Satan, the Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 117.

⁵⁹Also to be avoided is the teaching of E. W. Kenyon, who took the fact that "God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21) to mean Jesus became a sinner and had to be born again in hell to save us. But 2 Corinthians 5:21 surely refers to Christ's substitutionary death for us on the cross. Jesus, who knew no sin, became a sin offering for our redemption (the Hebrew word for sin may mean "sin offering"). Even Calvin's view that the descent into hell completed the work of Atonement must be rejected. Jesus' work of redemption on the cross was complete even without the descent into hell, which was only to proclaim the victory of the cross. Jesus died with the cry "It is finished!" (John 19:30).

devil hindered Paul's missionary work (2 Cor. 12:7; 1 Thess. 2:18). He blinds the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor. 4:4) and throws "flaming arrows" against the redeemed in their efforts to serve God (Eph. 6:16).

One's defense and victory is in submitting to God and resisting the deception of the enemy (James 2:19). Notice that the victory comes first by submitting to God or by focusing on the riches of God's grace and the demands of obedience that this grace implies. There can be no resistance to the enemy without this. In this way alone, God's people can be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph. 6:10, KJV) and wear the whole armor of God (truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, prayer, and the Word of God), using the shield of faith to extinguish those "flaming arrows" (6:11-17). The empty tomb and the witness of the Holy Spirit are guarantees that final victory belongs to God. Though Satan will try to make a final stand against God, the attempt will be futile (2 Thess. 1:9-12; Rev. 19:7-10). The final victory belongs to God!

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND DENYING THE ENEMY

How could God, as the sovereign Lord, permit such satanic opposition to exist? Why must the final defeat of satanic forces be delayed until God's sovereign lordship can conquer them through the triumph of Christ and a Church empowered by the Spirit? One cannot answer such questions by stating that God is powerless to do anything more than wait, as though God is caught in a dualistic battle with the god of evil and has no hope of victory without our help.⁶⁰ As noted above, this dualism would contradict what the Scriptures maintain about the absolute sovereignty of God. Neither can we answer such questions by stating that the satanic opposition and destruction are part of God's will for humanity, as though all of reality were a monism determined exclusively by God and without any sense of genuine conflict by opposing forces

⁶⁰Dualism came from Persian Zoroastrianism and was present in the East and the West through such heresies as Manichaeism. The latter influenced St. Augustine (354-430) early in life. He came to resist dualism however, with an accent on the sovereignty of God and with the belief that evil is "privation," or the lack of good. Since evil is also a destructive force, St. Augustine went too far in merely making it the lack of good in his effort to avoid dualism.

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of evil.⁶¹ This monism would contradict what has been noted about the genuine opposition between the forces of darkness and the sovereign Lord's love and redemptive purposes for humanity. Such questions have to do with "theodicy" (justifying God in the face of evil and suffering). It is not possible to introduce the complexities of this problem in the context of this chapter, but a few words of explanation are in order.⁶²

Historically, the Church has stressed two related points relevant to a biblical orientation for dealing with the above questions. The first is the fact that God has created humanity with the freedom to rebel and become vulnerable to satanic opposition. God has allowed satanic opposition to exist to test humanity's free response to God. Second, God wills to triumph over satanic opposition, not only for believers, but also through them. Therefore, the triumph of God's grace has a history and a development. This triumph is not dependent primarily on human cooperation for its progress and accomplishment, but in its strategic fulfillment it does include the history of humanity's faithful response to God.

In the strategic accomplishment of redemption in history, God's allowance of satanic opposition is provisional and is not part of God's redemptive will for humanity. To the contrary, God's redemptive will is determined to triumph over all satanic opposition. God is not secretly behind the works of Satan, though God may use such to accomplish redemption. But there is no common ground between Satan and God. Satan has no continuity with God's redemptive will for humanity. God is clearly on the side of liberation and redemption from all that destroys and oppresses. This does not answer all questions about the how's and why's of evil and suffering in the world. The difficulty with philosophical solutions such as dualism and monism is that they seek to grant a final intellectual answer to the problem of evil. Ultimately, however, there is no such answer to the question of evil. But the gospel does grant a person hope and assurance of final redemption in Christ, and grants also the call to courageously battle by the grace of God toward its fulfillment.

⁶¹Monism was held, for example, by the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646–1716), who argued that all of reality is ultimately one: God. Evil is only shadows that accent God's artistic tapestry of creation, the mere consequence of the necessary limitation of finite reality.

⁶²Note, J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Collins World, Fount, 1977), and P. S. Shilling, *God and Human Anguish* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977).

DEMONOLOGY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

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In a dualistic worldview, as noted above, God is not sovereign, nor is there any guarantee in such a philosophy that God will have the final victory. Such a worldview also eliminates human freedom and responsibility. This is so because, in a dualistic understanding, people become mere pawns in the battle between the gods of good and evil. Everything that happens in human life is due to one absolute power (good) or the other (evil) manipulating human events in their war with each other. Human decisions play no role in the fate of humanity. Hence, dualistic religions tend to be overly preoccupied with demonology.⁶⁵

The sovereignty of God over the forces of evil actually serves to free humanity from such insignificance, so that people play a decisive role in human fate. In the Genesis account of the creation and fall (Gen. 1 through 3), the tempter could thwart God's will only to the degree that Adam and Eve freely chose to cooperate. This was so because God and not the tempter was the sovereign Lord. Hence, sin and death became the indirect result of Satan's work, but they were the direct result of human actions. Adam and Eve, not Satan, brought sin and death upon the world. Sin and death are aspects of human bondage, the human condition apart from God. It is human disobedience that has created this condition and it is human disobedience that maintains it. Satan is indeed the tempter (1 Thess. 3:5), but each person is tempted when, "by his own evil desires, he is dragged away and enticed" (James 1:14). Satan is the liar (John 8:44), the accuser (Rev. 12:10), the thief, and the murderer (John 10:10). Yet, he can fulfill none of these acts in creation without human participation, even initiative. A heavy accent on the role of demons in our view of what opposes God tends to evade human responsibility and to denigrate the sovereignty of God. One must correct this emphasis in order to give human responsibility the weight it should have in one's understanding of evil.

Note that the New Testament places sin and death as enemies in their own right alongside the forces of darkness (Rom. 8:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Rev. 1:18). It is indeed interesting that Paul makes death, not Satan, the final enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:24-26). It is also worth noting that the Bible does not view the opposition to God solely in the context

⁶⁵This was the case, for example, with Persian Zoroastrianism.

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of demonology. Jesus claimed that the human opposition to His ministry fulfilled the works of the devil (John 8:44). Later, Paul would say that the "ruler of the kingdom of the air" is at work through "those who are disobedient" (Eph. 2:2). This does not mean that all disobedience to God is a response to direct demonic temptation. But it does mean that the kingdom of darkness is served, and its purposes are accomplished, through human disobedience. Hence, such disobedience and bondage to sin and death should receive proper attention in any discussion of what opposes God's will.

All of the above implies that there is an essentially human dimension to our personal and social ills and that human, scientific solutions must be allowed to play a legitimate role in the healing process. It must be admitted that the sciences have led to an understanding of the genuinely human dimension of individual and social problems, as well as the kinds of strategies that may be used to solve them. There is nothing necessarily contrary to the Scriptures in much of this, since the Bible, as we have noted, recognizes our fallen condition as a legitimately human condition apart from any consideration of direct demonic influence. In the Church one must be open to modern medical, psychiatric, and sociological insights in one's efforts to represent a healing and liberating force in the world. God heals and delivers through both extraordinary and ordinary means, or both miraculously and providentially. One dare not label all problems as demonic and advocate the illusion that they may all be solved by casting out demons!

Furthermore, many of the symptoms described by the Bible as demonic do parallel symptoms that have been isolated today as pathological and human. This makes distinguishing between demonic possession and pathological conditions among tormented individuals a delicate and complex task. But the Bible does distinguish between illness and demonic possession (Mark 3:10-12). So today, one must distinguish between psychiatric cases and possible demonic possession. This distinction is important, since, as Catholic theologian Karl Rahner pointed out, exorcisms of pathological patients may actually aggravate their delusions and make their condition more acute.⁶⁴ When possible, prayerful and scientific

⁶⁴Rahner's view is discussed in J. P. Newport, "Satan and Demons: A Theological Perspective," in *Demon Possession, a Medical, Historical, Anthropological, and Theological Symposium*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976), 342.

discernment of the utmost care by qualified persons should be utilized in ministry to tormented individuals. Even cases that involve demonic influences may also require psychiatric attention.

The simplistic denial of the demonic as merely mythological, however, leaves one completely unable to explain or to cope with the depth of despair implied in human madness and evil, even where no direct demonic influence is involved. There is indeed a depth of despair implied in such distorted human behavior that transcends scientific or rational definitions. The scientific mind wishes that it can so neatly define this distortion that one can be done with it once and for all. But pathological behavior continues to plague humanity again and again, mystifying everyone. Even with the most descriptive disease categories, what more does one have but labels under which to cluster related symptoms? As helpful as these categories may be, do they solve the riddle of human existence that pathology seems to expose so forcefully? As the late German-American theologian Paul Tillich has noted, the category of the demonic serves to remind one of the depth and mystery involved in human distortion.⁶⁵

Demonology in the light of the gospel of Christ Jesus can grant us the key to the mystery of evil mentioned above. As we noted above, the victory of Christ in His life, death, and resurrection clarified the conflict between God's redemptive will and the forces of darkness at the origin of evil. Yet Paul still used the term "mystery" to characterize the power of lawlessness at work in the world (2 Thess. 2:7). What is important to note is that the full disclosure of this depth of evil, termed "the demonic," is eschatological. Paul implies that the very last days of this age will include an increase in the disclosure of evil in the world through the appearance of the "lawless one...whom the Lord will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). This Antichrist figure will lead an emergence of evil in the latter days. God's final eschatological judgment over evil in the lake of fire will fully disclose the forces of darkness at the root of evil in the world (Rev. 20:10). At that time, the devil, death and *badēs* will fall prey to the eschatological judgment of God (Rev. 20:10,14). Though this lake of fire is

⁶⁵Though Tillich did not believe in demons as literal beings, he did understand the category of the demonic and its significance for theology. Note P. Tillich, *The Interpretation of History*, trans. R. A. Rasetzki, E. L. Talmey (New York: Scribner, 1936).

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understandably feared by people, it is actually meant by God to be a friend to humanity, i.e., the final destroyer of humankind's worst and ultimate enemies.

Only in God's final, eschatological judgment will the nature of the demonic and its connection with death and *badēs* be fully disclosed. At that time, the mystery of iniquity will be revealed in the full depth of its resistance to God and God's redemptive will. Only then will the opposition and conflict be fully clarified. If the first coming of Christ brought the conflict with evil to clarity, it was only a penultimate clarity for ultimate clarity must await His second coming. In this present age, to discern evil and suffering aright requires spiritual discernment in the light of the scriptural witness as well as careful scientific evaluation. At the final triumph of God over the devil, however, the ultimate root and nature of evil will be obvious, stripped naked of all of its disguises by the final judgment of God. This judgment has already been initiated by the cross and resurrection of Christ. It will be fulfilled in the final triumph of Christ in the *eschaton*.

The eschatological nature of the final disclosure and judgment of evil implies that the repudiation of Satan and his works is not a mythological "demonization" of human personal and social ills and a consequent flight from the careful discernment required to isolate and cure such problems. Eschatological, especially apocalyptic, movements that focus on the final judgment of God over the forces of darkness are tempted to reduce all present struggles with human evils to a struggle with the demonic. If complex and ambiguous human realities that seem threatening or alien to us are demonized in this way, then an arrogant ethical dualism is created, whereby we are in total light and others are in total darkness.

Demonology, properly conceived, will not cause one to deny the present human dimensions of evil and its effects, with all of their ambiguities and complexities. We will often be capable of discovering in ourselves elements of the evil that we resist and we will often find elements of the desired good in others whom we are tempted to regard as enemies. We cannot simply reduce our struggle against human forces of evil and oppression to a struggle against demons. But our repudiation of Satan and his works in our struggles against godlessness and social oppression does set these struggles against the horizon of God's ultimate victory over the forces of darkness when the kingdom of God is fulfilled at the final end of all things. Repudiating the devil in our resistance to human evil and oppression implies that there is something

deeper and more profound at stake than simply personal or social reform. At stake is the eschatological breaking in of the kingdom of God to undermine this present world's systems and to introduce by the Spirit of God a world-to-come patterned after the love of God revealed in Christ.

THE PLACE OF SATAN AND DEMONS IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Is there a legitimate place for demonology in Christian theology? Is there a legitimate basis for including a reference to the demonic in the Church's confession of faith? Certainly to "believe in" the devil is not appropriate language for the Christian's creed. In the Christian creed, one's belief is in *God* and one's *repudiation* is of the devil and of all human forces of oppression that serve the cause of evil. But what kind of emphasis does one give this repudiation of Satan in Christian confession?

The poet Howard Nemerov stated, "I should be very chary in talking about the Devil, lest I be thought to be invoking him."⁶⁶ Karl Barth stated that he would give only a quick, sharp "glance" to the area of demonology. The glance must be "quick," lest he grant more weight and attention than is absolute necessary to the demonic.⁶⁷ Theology for Barth was to be dominated by the grace of God revealed in Christ. But the glance must be "sharp," because the demonic is not to be taken lightly. Unfortunately, in Pentecostal and charismatic movements spiritual warfare and deliverance ministries abound, giving deliberate attention to the realm of the demonic. Many advocates of such ministries clearly transgress the legitimate place that the biblical message gives to the demonic. There seems to be a certain fascination with the realm of the demonic in such ministries, resulting in far more attention being paid to the demonic than the Bible supports.

Indeed, a certain glory and legitimacy are granted to the devil in such ministries. The devil is often referred to as the exclusive or, at least, dominant element in all opposition

⁶⁶Quoted in D. G. Kehl, "The Cosmocrats: The Diabolism in Modern Literature," in *Demon Possession, a Medical, Historical, Anthropological, and Theological Symposium*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976), 111.

⁶⁷Note Barth's discussion in *Church Dogmatics*, 3:2: 599; 3:3: 519; 4:3: 168-71. The only difficulty is in his reference to the demonic as "nothingness," which seems contrary to his overall insistence that demonic forces represent genuine opposition to God's work of redemption.

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to God's redemptive purpose for humanity. God's whole redemptive activity is narrowed to destroying the devil, so that soteriology, Christology, pneumatology, and all other areas of theology, are discussed almost exclusively in the light of fighting demons! Without the devil, such preaching and theologizing would be left an empty shell! In such a context, demonology competes quite well with God and all other areas of theology, demanding and achieving equal or even greater attention. R. Gruelich maintains that novelist Frank Peretti has granted artistic support for such a theological distortion by viewing the world and human destiny as dominated by the results of warfare with demons.⁶⁸

In such a context, demonology is granted a glory and theological significance beyond biblical boundaries. In such a vision of reality, it is believed that the horizon of the Christian's world is filled with dangers of demonic attack and conquest at every turn. The grotesque form of this belief is found in the assumption that demons can possess and dominate Christians who are disobedient or in greater need of deliverance. To harmonize this assumption with the clear biblical teaching that Christians belong to Christ and are directed in life primarily by God's Spirit (e.g., Rom. 8:9-17), an unbiblical dichotomy is made between body and soul, allowing God to possess the soul, while demons control the body.⁶⁹ But the Bible teaches that a loyalty so radically divided is an impossibility for the person of true faith (Matt. 7:15-20; 1 Cor. 10:21; James 3:11-12; 1 John 4:19-20).

The glorification of demons in the Christian world is paralleled by a similar tendency in culture. Humanity has always had a certain fascination with the sinister and the demonic. Maximilian Rudwin stated, for example, that the figure of Satan "looms large in literature." He adds, "Sorry, indeed, would the plight of literature be without the Devil."⁷⁰ The history of occult practices has fed on the fascination of humanity with the realm of the demonic. Indeed, the rise of modern

⁶⁸R. Gruelich, "Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul, and Peretti," *Pneuma*, 13:1 (Spring 1991): 33-64.

⁶⁹Arguing that demons can possess the body of a Christian is, for example, Derek Prince, *Expelling Demons* (Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Derek Prince Pub., n.d.). For an opposing view, note Opal Reddin, ed., *Power Encounter: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, Mo.: Central Bible College Press, 1989), 269-77.

⁷⁰M. Rudwin, *The Devil in Legend and Literature*, 272-73, cited in D. G. Kehl, "The Cosmocrats," 109.

scientific thinking has had little effect on this fascination. The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed a resurgence of interest in the demonic and the occult. The horror movie industry has grown even more outlandish in its demonic imagery than in its financial profits. Movies such as *The Exorcist*, *Poltergeist*, and *The Omen* series are early examples of a number of films that have attempted to reveal the inability of science and the Church to understand or cope with evil spirits. They present stories in which the demonic elements, often confused with the souls of departed persons, dominate the flow of events. The grace of God is absent or weak at best. Even the "happy" endings come as more of a surprise than the demonic victories that preceded them.

Surely such a fascination with the demonic is not healthy or biblical. The fascination of Jesus' disciples with their authority over demons was countered by Jesus' admonition not to rejoice in power over demons but to rejoice rather in God's calling the disciples by name (Luke 10:17-20). The opposition of Satan to the gospel can be understood only in the prior light of that gospel itself. The real depth of evil can be understood only in the light of the depth of God's grace that evil opposes and seeks to destroy. The real tragedy of darkness can be understood only in the context of the glories of God's light. The accent of the New Testament is on the glory of God and life with God, not on the attempts of the enemy to oppose them.

Among Christians, the tendency to emphasize the role of Satan has even led at times to a willingness to legitimize his position and role over against God, as though Satan had a rightful claim to persons or governments, as though his position as "god of this age" should be respected by people, even by God! Contrary to what some might think, there is in Jude 9 no respect for Satan in the angelic hesitation to bring a slanderous accusation against him. The angel Michael held back any accusation based on his own authority in order to say, "The Lord rebuke you!" This means that any rejection of Satan's deceptive claims can come only from God's authority and God's grace, not from one's own self-generated wisdom or authority.

Actually, a notion of satanic rights was supported by the ransom theory of the Atonement advocated by certain early and medieval Latin theologians of the West and by Origen in the East. This theory assumed that Satan had a right to govern and oppress humanity because of human rebellion against

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God. Christ was sent to pay Satan a ransom for the release of humanity. This ransom theory, however, eliminates from the beginning any real opposition between God and Satan. Assumed is God's acceptance of Satan's position and role and God's willingness to deal with Satan on Satan's terms. Satan is allowed to have his own legitimate place apart from God's redemptive purpose, a place that God must respect in God's effort to redeem humanity!

Over against this ransom theory is the biblical teaching that Satan's position and role are based on a lie (John 8:44). They have no legitimacy that God must recognize and to which God must conform! The triumph of God's grace over the forces of darkness grants no respectful and legitimate place to their role and claims. Satan, as "god of this age," has an illegitimate position granted to him by humanity's own spiritual blindness and rebellion (2 Cor. 4:4). A "payment" was indeed made by Christ on the cross, not to Satan, but to God on humanity's behalf.⁷¹

Our wisest response to the false, deceptive claims of Satan is to deny them, and to do so only through the quick, sharp "glance" that the theologian Karl Barth gave them in the greater light of God's truth and grace. But there seems to be a hidden assumption by many in the deliverance ministries that Satan is really defeated by those who know him best. In other words, the more mystery one can remove about demons, the more one can control and defeat them. Deliverance is understood here as the result of a secret knowledge (*gnōsis*) that others outside the deliverance movement do not share. Elaborate speculations are offered about the organization and characteristics of demons and how they relate to human governments and individual lives. Elaborate practices of "binding" the demonic powers are practices once their true positions and functions in the world have been understood.

Yet, one is struck when reading the Bible by the total absence of such speculations and practices. The Bible encourages withstanding and resisting the deceptive forces of darkness, not studying and binding them.⁷² There is no effort in the Bible to make us better acquainted with the devil. The sole focus is on getting better acquainted with God and the

⁷¹A few who advocate the ransom theory even implied that God "tricked" the devil into accepting the ransom that would destroy him and his demons. In other words, the devil's right to the world is upheld while God wins the world back through a deceptive move! One might be amused by this theology, but it is hardly to be taken seriously from a biblical standpoint.

⁷²Note R. Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare," 59.

concomitant resistance to any of Satan's clamoring for our attention. Submitting to God and resisting the devil is the counsel from James (see James 4:7).

We are certainly not to ignore the devil. But any attention we grant to him must be in our denial of his claims and his works in the light of our focus on God's claims and God's works. The Bible does not speculate, or give much information, on Satan and demons. There is not much there to satisfy our curiosities. There are hints of a fall of Satan and demons from heaven (Jude 6; Rev. 12:7-9). Some have speculated that the Old Testament describes this fall in Isaiah 14:12-20, but the meaning of this passage is unclear, being perhaps no more than a poetic rebuke to the "king of Babylon" (14:4). The when and how of this fall are nowhere explicitly defined. The fact is that the Bible's purpose in dealing with Satan and demons is redemptive, not speculative. The focus is on affirming God's redemptive purpose and the power therefrom to deny the works and claims of Satan. The accent is not on gaining insight into Satan for the purpose of defeating him from the well of such knowledge!

Much discernment is needed in detecting what serves the kingdom of darkness and what does not, since Satan can mask himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). His purposes are not only served where one expects (for example, in severe and utterly inexplicable cases of evil or torment), but often in what some may consider the most noble and religious aspirations. Pride, idolatry, prejudice, and the most harmful phobias can surface in religiosity and patriotism and be defended by what may appear on the surface to be noble doctrines and practices. Slavery and racism, for example, have been defended by persons claiming to support the most noble religious and patriotic causes. Such sins only support the kingdom of darkness. Constant soul searching is necessary if the Church is to deny the works of the devil and affirm the renewal of the Spirit in and through the Church.

The scriptural witness provides us with definite sources of guidance for discerning the forces of evil and oppression. There is a Christological criterion and a basis in the Spirit of God for discerning evil. For example, if God created humanity in the divine image and laid claim to humanity in the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, then any attempt to dehumanize anyone for any reason contradicts God's love for humanity and serves the forces of darkness. If the Spirit anointed Christ to preach good news to the poor, the blind,

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and the imprisoned (Luke 4:18), then those structures and forces that encourage poverty, sickness, and crime serve the forces of darkness. If Satan blinds the minds of the ungodly to the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4), then those things that discourage our gospel witness, both word and deed, to the needy also serve the forces of darkness.

The element of the demonic helps us to realize that human resistance to God has ultimate significance. Set against the horizon of the ultimate, eschatological victory of God's kingdom over the forces of darkness, present human obedience and disobedience to God are serious matters indeed. With each decision of the Christian life, believers must choose for God's kingdom and against the kingdom of darkness. Seeking first the kingdom of God and its righteousness constantly challenges the Christian. The choices may seem difficult and ambiguous at times. But the seriousness of the choice of obedience and the need for the comfort and forgiveness of God in all our choices must never be underestimated. The role the demonic plays in Christian theology and witness points to the seriousness of our choices.

STUDY QUESTIONS

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1. Does demonology remove us from the real problems and evils of life? Explain how it could. Why is it meaningful to repudiate the devil and his works when resisting the forces of evil in life?

2. How is the Old Testament approach to demonology different from ancient pagan views of evil spirits? Discuss this in relation to God's sovereignty. In particular, does divine sovereignty mean that there is no real opposition between God and Satan in the Old Testament?

3. What truth can be found in the fact that the defeat of the forces of darkness was revealed in the New Testament only after the revelation of Christ at the incarnation of grace and truth?

4. Describe Christ's victory over the forces of darkness. Does this truth play any role in the apostolic proclamation of the gospel? Explain.

5. Describe the problems with philosophical dualism and monism. What is the biblical balance between God's sovereignty and the opposition of Satan to the purposes of God?

6. Does demonology eliminate human responsibility? Why or why not?

7. Can Christians be possessed by demons? Why or why not?

8. Are Satan's claims and accusations legitimate? Is he to be granted a legitimate right as god of this age? How has the ransom theory of the Atonement wrongly affirmed satanic claims and rights? What is wrong with such affirmations of satanic rights?

9. Do human and scientific insights into our problems have any legitimate place among believers? Why or why not?

10. Is there a certain fascination with the demonic in the Church and in culture? What is wrong with this? What is the real place of demonology in Christian theology?