

THE DEVIL IS DEAD: A HISTORICAL SURVEY AND STUDY OF THE DECLINE OF  
THE DOCTRINE OF THE DEVIL

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## ABSTRACT

The doctrine of the Devil seems to be in decline in Western Christianity: A 2009 Barna study of American Christians found that less than forty percent of Christians believe that the Devil is a real being, not merely a symbol of evil. This thesis tackles three questions related to the decline of the doctrine of the Devil: How did Western Christianity reach this point? What are the implications of this decline? How can Christians reclaim the doctrine of the Devil? To answer these questions, this thesis is divided into four parts. The first part provides a broad survey of various developments and changes within the doctrine of the Devil. The second portion of this thesis summarizes the main causes for the decline of the doctrine of the Devil. The third part explores the implications of this decline and its effects both on believers and unbelievers. Finally, the fourth portion of this thesis provides some thoughts on how the doctrine of the Devil can be reclaimed by focusing on the Biblical basis for a theology of the Devil, and the Devil's importance in theology and the Christian's life.

## INTRODUCTION

John, a deacon serving in the city of Rome around the year 500, wrote a letter to a man named Senarius, who was curious about the baptismal practices of the Roman church.<sup>1</sup> In his letter to Senarius, John describes the initiation rites that Christian converts underwent before baptism.

The catechumen receives salt “to signify that just as all flesh is kept healthy by salt, so the mind which drenched and weakened by the waves of this world is held steady by the salt of wisdom and of the preaching of the word of God.”<sup>2</sup> After receiving a blessing and speaking the Apostles’ Creed, the catechumen is anointed with oil. First, the ears are touched with oil to reflect what Paul writes in Romans, that faith comes from hearing the message, then the nostrils, to encourage the catechumen “that for as long as they draw the breath of life through their nostrils” they live with the Spirit of God. Therefore, they are to fortify their minds against the pleasures of the world.<sup>3</sup> Last of all, oil is put on the breast, the dwelling place of the heart, before the catechumen is finally baptized by immersion.

As they come out of the water, the newly baptized are dressed in white and anointed with oil again, so they may understand that in their person “a kingdom and a priestly mystery have

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<sup>1</sup> E.C. Whitaker and Maxwell E. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 208.

<sup>2</sup> Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 209.

<sup>3</sup> Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 210. It is interesting to note that most other versions of the Baptismal rite from the early church also feature anointing, but where John sees this anointing as fortifying or closing the ears and nostrils from evil influence, others quote Jesus’ words in Mark 7, “Be opened!”

met.”<sup>4</sup> These vestments are the wedding garments of Christians approaching the table of the heavenly bridegroom as new men and women.<sup>5</sup>

Having been washed and now clothed, the newly baptized are fed. They are given milk and honey to show that they have been born again. In their first birth, they were fed with the milk of corruption, but now in this second birth, they have tasted the milk and honey of the Church. They no longer belong to sin. Now they will be nourished by the sacraments, and look ahead to the land of promise, the land of resurrection, the land of everlasting bliss.<sup>6</sup>

However, John described not only the elaborate rite of baptism to Senarius; but also the rigorous preparation that the catechumen had to undergo before the day of their baptism: They were instructed, tested, hands were laid on them, and finally, they were subjected to an exorcism, which included insufflation and exsufflation (ritual acts of blowing, breathing, hissing, that would signify expulsion of the Devil).<sup>7</sup> John explained why this practice was carried out:

He receives therefore exsufflation and exorcism, in order that the devil may be put to flight and an entrance prepared for Christ our God: so that being delivered from the power of darkness he may be translated to the kingdom [Col. 1.13] of the glory of the love of God: so that a man who until recently had been a vessel of Satan becomes now a dwelling of the Saviour.<sup>8</sup>

But baptismal exorcism was not a unique practice belonging only to the church in the city of Rome. Most, if not all of the baptismal rites of the early Church contain exorcisms,

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<sup>4</sup> Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 210–211.

<sup>5</sup> Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 211.

<sup>6</sup> Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 211–212.

<sup>7</sup> Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 209.

<sup>8</sup> Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 209.

renunciations, and even exsufflations against the Devil.<sup>9</sup> Some go even further: One version of the Armenian rite calls for the catechumenate to spit on the Devil.<sup>10</sup> The ancient baptismal rite of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch calls for the priest to denounce and rebuke Satan as though he is present at the baptism.<sup>11</sup> A Spanish rite of baptism even included exsufflation and exorcism in the baptism of infants.<sup>12</sup>

Although the baptismal practices of the early Christians may sound overelaborate and even superstitious to modern ears, these rites were not created in a vacuum. The symbolism and solemnity they attached to baptism were clear reflections of their theology. For these early Christians, the rebirth found in baptism was the forceful removal of the Christian from the very real power and rule of the Devil, the transfer of citizenship from the realm of Satan to the Kingdom of Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

Although most Christian churches no longer perform exorcisms in preparation for baptism, the echoes of these practices can still be heard today. Some modern baptismal rites still speak of the Devil in the renunciation, “Do you reject the devil along with all his lies and empty promises?” “Yes, I do.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For reference, the early Armenian, Byzantine, Coptic, Spanish, and French baptismal practices contain some of the clearest examples.

<sup>10</sup> Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 80.

<sup>11</sup> Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 85.

<sup>12</sup> Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 166.

<sup>13</sup> Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 208. For an interesting sermon/presentation on this topic, a former LCMS pastor turned Catholic priest: <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2010/03/no-middle-ground>.

<sup>14</sup> *Christian Worship: Hymnal*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2021), 153. Here is a specific example within the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

However, the tide may be changing. In 2014, the Church of England chose to revise its baptismal rite by removing this renunciation of the Devil. The former version asked parents whether they will "reject the devil and all rebellion against God," "renounce the deceit and corruption of evil," and "repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbor." In the new version, they are asked only to say that they "turn away from sin" and "reject evil."<sup>15</sup>

Rev. Robert Paterson, the Bishop of Sodor and Mann, who presented the changes before the General Synod, explained the revisions, saying, "We all know that, for many people, the devil has been turned into a cartoon-like character of no particular malevolence. We have no quarrel with standing up to the devil: the problem is helping people with little doctrinal appreciation to understand what we mean by affirming that the devil is a defeated power."<sup>16</sup>

Paterson went on to explain that these changes were actually about Biblical literacy and perception, saying the current text was too "wordy and complex." He added that it is important that the devil is not given too much focus, as this may suggest the Church is in battle with the devil constantly.<sup>17</sup>

Some pushed back against the changes. Peter Stanford, writer, and author of *The Devil: A Biography*, appeared on a BBC radio program shortly after the revision and questioned the

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<sup>15</sup> "No devil in detail of Church of England's new baptism service," Andrew Brown, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/20/church-of-england-baptism-service-no-devil>.

<sup>16</sup> "Satan absent from alternate CoE Baptismal Liturgy," Kevin Kallsen, *Anglican Ink*, <https://anglican.ink/2014/07/19/satan-absent-from-alternate-coe-baptismal-liturgy/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Satan absent from alternate CoE Baptismal Liturgy," Kevin Kallsen, *Anglican Ink*.



theological implications of removing the Devil: “Are we saying that the devil is just a symbol and isn’t real and if so, where does that leave God? I think we’re in a bit of a muddle here.”<sup>18</sup>

The debate within the Church of England over the Devil is not an isolated case within Western Christianity. The 2014 debate over a baptismal liturgy is only one outgrowth of a more complicated question, one that Peter Stanford hinted at in his BBC interview: “What are we to do with the doctrine of the Devil?” But this practical question has drawn a variety of answers because it stems from a confusion over a deeper theological question, “What are we to believe about the Devil?” A 2009 Barna Group study reveals this confusion about the Prince of Darkness among American Christians:

Four out of ten Christians (40%) strongly agreed that Satan “is not a living being but is a symbol of evil.” An additional two out of ten Christians (19%) said they “agree somewhat” with that perspective. A minority of Christians indicated that they believe Satan is real by disagreeing with the statement: one-quarter (26%) disagreed strongly and about one-tenth (9%) disagreed somewhat. The remaining 8% were not sure what they believe about the existence of Satan.<sup>19</sup>

It seems that Western Christianity, not just the Church of England, is in a muddle when it comes to belief in the Devil.

This muddle extends even to those Christians who are not confused about the existence of the Devil. The answer to the question “Is Satan a living being or only a symbol of evil?” may seem clear, yet the practical implications of the Devil’s existence are not.

For instance, many Bible-believing Christians will affirm the doctrine of the Devil, but there seems to be a disconnect between belief and practice. While the Devil may be alive

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<sup>18</sup> “Church of England kicks the devil out of baptism rite,” Trevor Grundy, *Religion News Service*, <https://religionnews.com/2014/07/15/church-england-kicks-devil-baptism-rite/>. Interestingly enough, in his introduction to *The Devil: A Biography*, Stanford seems to admit that he himself does not really believe in the Devil.

<sup>19</sup> “Most American Christians Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist,” *Barna Group*, <https://www.barna.com/research/most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exist/>.

theologically, practically, he seems to be dead, removed from the experience of real life. The realm of the supernatural, the world of the Devil, angels, and demons, stands aloof and detached from physical creation, the realm of daily life.<sup>20</sup> Satan may enter the physical realm from time to time to oppress or to possess, but outside of that, he is a rare character in the “real” world.

If the Devil is practically dead, he may as well be theologically dead too. So, is the Devil dead? We can put this to the test by asking ourselves, “What is the importance of the Devil to Christian theology?” or “Why does Satan matter?” Do we have solid answers to these questions outside of simply saying, “because the Bible tells us so?”

All of this stands in stark contrast to the theologians of the past. Augustine’s works show that he took diabolology and demonology seriously.<sup>21</sup> Luther saw his life as lived in combat with the Prince of Demons.<sup>22</sup> The medieval theologians emphasized the importance of the theology of the Devil with the phrase, *Nullus diabolus, nullus redemptor*, no Devil, no Redeemer.<sup>23</sup>

So, the question must be asked: How did Christianity reach this point in the doctrine of the Devil? How did we go from exorcising the Devil to exorcising him from the liturgy? How did Western Christian belief in the Devil become muddled, and why does it matter? Finally, if we have lost our sense of the Devil, where do we, as Bible-believing Christians, go from here?

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<sup>20</sup> Jon Furgeson, “The Sword & The Mask: Toward a Confessional Lutheran Account of Spiritual Warfare,” (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary St. Louis, 2020), 64. This is an example of the “Bifurcated Approach” that will be discussed later in this paper. The physical and spiritual realms are divided or split, with the exception of a few exceptions.

<sup>21</sup> Gregory Wiebe, “Demons in the Theology of Augustine,” (PhD diss., McMaster University, 2015), 3–4.

<sup>22</sup> Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 226.

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History*, (Cornell University Press, 1995), 168–169.

To answer these questions, this paper will observe the treatment of Satan and demons in the history of the development of doctrine, offer possible explanations for any identified changes, and then offer potential implications for our mission. Finally, this paper will put forward some suggestions for how Christians can reclaim the doctrine of the Devil.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

This historical overview of the doctrine of the Devil will highlight the most significant developments and influential people from the early Christians to modern times. (Generally speaking, this study will remain focused on Western Christianity.) The following chapters are for the most part chronological, but some sections, such as the chapters focused on the Folk Devil and the Romantic Devil will overlap time periods with other chapters.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Fathers and the Dragon**

In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John described the Devil's work in vivid terms, He stands as the Adversary, who works against the Church on two fronts, from forces outside the Church and forces within. The Devil, depicted as a dragon in Revelation, raises a beast from the sea. This beast is given authority over the nations, blasphemes God, and makes war against the saints. The Dragon then raises a second beast from the earth. This beast sets out to deceive men, to perform great signs and wonders, and to make humanity worship the first beast (Rev 13). Through these two tactics: open war as well as deception, the Devil wages war against the

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<sup>24</sup> For a more comprehensive history of the Devil throughout history, consider reading Jeffrey Burton Russell's *The Prince of Darkness*.

Church, and the early Christians certainly saw John's vision as true; when they looked at the world around them, they saw an active Satan, alive and assaulting the saints.<sup>25</sup>

Polycarp (69–155), the early Christian bishop, provides an example of the early Christian worldview. Polycarp saw a sharp distinction between the community of God, and heretics, the children of Satan, “For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist; and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross, is of the devil.”<sup>26</sup>

Justin Martyr (100–165) echoed similar thoughts: The Christian community was at war with Satan and his evil angels. The Devil and his demons stood behind the persecutions the early Christians faced.<sup>27</sup> Not only was the Devil behind persecution, but he was also responsible for the work of heretics such as Marcion (85–160).<sup>28</sup> Justin also saw the Devil as actively working against unbelievers. He identified the Devil and his demons as the secret force operating behind

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<sup>25</sup> Eusebius, the church historian, is one example of this. As he reflects back on the history of the early Church writes through this lens when he describes the persecution Christians faced. He frequently speaks of persecution as well as heresy as coming from “the adversary” or “the evil one.”

<sup>26</sup> Polycarp of Smyrna, “The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 34.

<sup>27</sup> Justin Martyr, “The First Apology,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 182. “Nor can the devils persuade men that there will be no conflagration for the punishment of the wicked; as they were unable to effect that Christ should be hidden after He came. But this only can they effect, that they who live irrationally, and were brought up licentiously in wicked customs, and are prejudiced in their own opinions, should kill and hate us; whom we not only do not hate, but, as is proved, pity and endeavour to lead to repentance.”

<sup>28</sup> Justin Martyr, “The First Apology” 182. “And, as we said before, the devils put forward Marcion of Pontus, who is even now teaching men to deny that God is the maker of all things in heaven and on earth, and that the Christ predicted by the prophets is His Son, and preaches another god besides the Creator of all, and likewise another son. And this man many have believed, as if he alone knew the truth, and laugh at us, though they have no proof of what they say, but are carried away irrationally as lambs by a wolf, and become the prey of atheistical doctrines, and of devils.”

idols and pagan gods for the purpose of deceiving the Gentiles and preventing them from finding the true God.<sup>29</sup>

Irenaeus (130–202) saw the relationship between the Devil and unbelievers as more than just a deception: Those who were not Christians belonged to the Devil. However, he elaborated that they were of the Devil not by nature but by imitation.

According to nature, then—that is, according to creation, so to speak—we are all sons of God, because we have all been created by God. But with respect to obedience and doctrine we are not all the sons of God: those only are so who believe in Him and do His will. And those who do not believe, and do not obey His will, are sons and angels of the devil, because they do the works of the devil.<sup>30</sup>

These Christians also saw the Devil’s work on a personal level. Tertullian (155–220) viewed the Devil as the corrupter of nature.<sup>31</sup> His purpose is to corrupt, shame, and condemn Christians.<sup>32</sup> Even though they dwell in the spiritual realm, the Devil and his demons are able to attack the Christian physically and psychologically through ailments and temptations.<sup>33</sup> In his *Apology*, Tertullian described the subtle yet dangerous work of the demons:

Their great business is the ruin of mankind.... They inflict, accordingly, upon our bodies diseases and other grievous calamities, while by violent assaults they hurry the soul into

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<sup>29</sup> Justin Martyr, “The First Apology,” 183–4. Chapter 62

<sup>30</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenæus against Heresies,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 524–5.

<sup>31</sup> Tertullian, “On the Apparel of Women,” in *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 4, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 17. Chapter 8. “Thus they are understood to be from the devil, from the corrupter of nature: for there is no other whose they can be, if they are not God’s; because what are not God’s must necessarily be His rival’s.”

<sup>32</sup> Tertullian, “The Chaplet, or De Corona,” in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 103. Chapter 15. “Let us take note of the devices of the devil, who is wont to ape some of God’s things with no other design than, by the faithfulness of his servants, to put us to shame, and to condemn us.”

<sup>33</sup> Tertullian, “The Apology,” in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 36.

sudden and extraordinary excesses. Their marvellous subtleness and tenuity give them access to both parts of our nature. As spiritual, they can do no harm; for, invisible and intangible, we are not cognizant of their action save by its effects, as when some inexplicable, unseen poison in the breeze blights the apples and the grain while in the flower, or kills them in the bud, or destroys them when they have reached maturity; as though by the tainted atmosphere in some unknown way spreading abroad its pestilential exhalations. So, too, by an influence equally obscure, demons and angels breathe into the soul, and rouse up its corruptions with furious passions and vile excesses; or with cruel lusts accompanied by various errors, of which the worst is that by which these deities are commended to the favour of deceived and deluded human beings, that they may get their proper food of flesh-fumes and blood when that is offered up to idol-images. What is daintier food to the spirit of evil, than turning men's minds away from the true God by the illusions of a false divination?<sup>34</sup>

Tertullian's perspective, that the Devil and his were behind the many temptations of the world, can also be seen in his other writings. In his work, *The Shows*, he identified the Devil and demons as the actors behind idolatry, feasting, circus spectacles, shows, lusts, and sexual desires.<sup>35</sup> In his writing *On the Apparel of Women*, he warns Christian women against the temptation of adorning themselves in the same way unbelievers do. Although some of the practical applications Tertullian makes can be debated, his primary message is clear: Christian women should glorify God in the way that they present themselves "so that between the handmaids of God and of the devil there may be a difference."<sup>36</sup>

In writing about various topics from chastity to feasting, from circus shows to women's apparel, Tertullian calls for Christians to remain faithful in the midst of these temptations. To be faithful is to wait patiently for God and to stand firm against the Devil. To resist temptation is to

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<sup>34</sup> Tertullian, "The Apology," 36. Chapter 22.

<sup>35</sup> Tertullian, "The Shows, or De Spectaculis," in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885). For example, 81.

<sup>36</sup> Tertullian, "On the Apparel of Women," 24.

follow in the footsteps of the saints of old, such as Stephen, who endured violence and death, or Job, who experienced evil but endured.<sup>37</sup>

The early Christians did endure. They resisted the Devil, facing persecution and struggling against heresy and temptation. Many of them proved faithful to their ideals by dying as martyrs. Yet as they suffered and endured persecution and death, they did not forget their true adversary or their Savior. The church historian Eusebius (260–339) records the reflection of some of these early Christians as they suffered:

The severity of our trials here, the unbridled fury of the heathen against God’s people, the untold sufferings of the blessed martyrs, we are incapable of describing in detail: no pen could do them justice. The adversary swooped on us with all his might, giving us now a foretaste of his advent, which undoubtedly is imminent. He left no stone unturned in his efforts to train his adherents and equip them to attack the servants of God, so that not only were we debarred from houses, baths, and the forum: they actually forbade any of us to be seen in any place whatever. But against them the grace of God put itself at our head, rescuing the weak and deploying against our enemies unshakeable pillars, able by their endurance to draw upon themselves the whole onslaught of the evil one. These charged into the fight, standing up to every kind of abuse and punishment, and made light of their heavy load as they hastened to Christ, proving beyond a doubt that the sufferings of the present time are not to be compared with the glory that is in store for us.<sup>38</sup>

As they faced persecution and struggled against heresy and temptation, these early Christians could not help but see the Dragon and his beasts at work. They could not overcome the Devil on their own, but it was not their fight to win. It was the work of Christ to defeat the Dragon.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Tertullian, “Of Patience,” in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 716. Chapter 14.

<sup>38</sup> Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, ed. Andrew Louth, trans. by G. A. Williamson (London: Penguin, 1989) 5.1 139. Here Eusebius gives the account of the Gallic martyrs in their own words.

<sup>39</sup> Justin Martyr, “The First Apology,” 178. Chapter 45.



### The Devil in the Desert

In the years that followed Constantine’s legalism of Christianity (313), perceptions of the Devil began to change. As persecution and oppression against Christianity faded, the Roman Empire was no longer seen by Christians as an instrument of the Devil. However, this did not mean that the influence of Satan waned. Instead, Christians began to meet the Devil in combat individually and to write about their personal combat with the Devil.<sup>40</sup>

In Egypt and Syria, hermits and monks withdrew to desolate places. Some sought solitude in order to escape lust and temptation, but others traveled to the desert to meet the Devil head-on. Just as Jesus went into the wilderness to face The Evil One, so too, these dedicated Christians were seeking to challenge the same Adversary. These battles with the Devil would add a rich layer of experience and detail to the personality of Satan.<sup>41</sup>

Athanasius (296–373) gives us a window into the monastic experiences of these hermits in the *Life of St. Anthony*. After the death of his parents, Anthony (251–356), at the age of eighteen or twenty, took up the monastic life after hearing Christ’s words in Matthew 19:21, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”<sup>42</sup>

According to Athanasius’s account, almost immediately, the Devil realized the promise of this young man, and he sought to intimidate and entice him. He tempted Anthony with wealth,

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<sup>40</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 82.

<sup>41</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 86.

<sup>42</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, “Life of Antony,” *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, vol. 4, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), 196. Paragraph 2. All Bible quotations are from NIV.

attacked his thoughts, and even appeared at his door in the form of a seductive woman to draw him away, but Anthony remained firm in faith, prayer, and fasting.<sup>43</sup>

Anthony became even more pious, withdrawing to a tomb to fast and pray by himself. However, the Devil would not leave Anthony in peace. That night, he sent a multitude of demons to attack him. The demons inflicted so many wounds upon Antony that the people of the nearby village took his body away, thinking he was dead.

However, that night, Anthony awoke and had an acquaintance carry him back to the tomb. Once again, the Devil began to attack, and this time the demons returned in the forms of wild beasts. As the demons closed in to torment him, Anthony looked up and saw a beam of light descending from the sky. Instantly, the demons vanished, and Anthony found himself alone, completely healed. God had rescued him from the clutches of the Devil.<sup>44</sup>

This encounter would not be Anthony's last run-in with the Devil. Throughout his life, he continued to be harassed by demons, whether in his daily work or possessed people he would meet.<sup>45</sup> The more Christlike Anthony became, the harder Satan worked to make him fall.

Athanasius's *Life of Anthony* was more than just a biography; it was a guide and inspiration to others who desired to follow the monastic path. Perhaps the greatest of those who followed Anthony was Evagrius of Pontus (345–399).<sup>46</sup> Like Anthony, he saw combat with the Devil as a personal one. In a letter to a young monk named Loukios, Evagrius explained the tactics of the Devil; the circumstances, thoughts, and anxieties demons would use to attack

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<sup>43</sup> Athanasius, "Life of Antony," 196–7.

<sup>44</sup> Athanasius, "Life of Antony," 199.

<sup>45</sup> Athanasius, "Life of Antony," 210.

<sup>46</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 90.

monks. He also offered a strategy to overcome these evil assaults: Talking back; speaking relevant Biblical passages to contradict and cut off demonic suggestions.<sup>47</sup>

For instance, a monk might feel regret or annoyance after being generous with his possessions toward the poor.<sup>48</sup> In response, the monk would use the relevant Bible verses to combat this thought. In this case, 2 Corinthians 9:7 and Proverbs 22:8–9: “Not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver, and the one who has compassion on the poor will be supported.”<sup>49</sup>

For those who wanted to follow in the footsteps of Anthony, his letters teaching the skill of “talking back,” would serve as a useful handbook and monastic guide to fighting back against the Devil.

The accounts of Antony and Evagrius help to provide a portrait of the hermits and monks who traveled into the desert.<sup>50</sup> Their experiences emphasized the threatening nearness of Satan. The Devil and his demons were present each moment, eager to attack through invading thoughts,

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<sup>47</sup> Evagrius of Pontus, *Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons*, trans. David Brakke, (Trappist: Liturgical Press, 2009), 1–2. Evagrius identifies eight separate thoughts or “demons” that might afflict a monk: Gluttony, fornication, greed, sadness, anger, listlessness, vainglory, pride.

<sup>48</sup> Evagrius, *Talking Back*, 65, Letter 1. Against the Thoughts of Gluttony. “Against the thought that arouses compassion in us, persuades us to give to the poor, and afterward makes us sad and annoyed about what we gave.”

<sup>49</sup> Evagrius, *Talking Back*, 65. Letter 1, Against the Thoughts of Gluttony. Here Evagrius is quoting 2 Cor 9:7; Prov 22:8–9.

<sup>50</sup> David Brakke, “The Making of Monastic Demonology: Three Ascetic Teachers on Withdrawal and Resistance,” *Church History* 70 (2001), 20. These two works, *The Life of St. Anthony* and *Talking Back* are often considered the base for monastic demonology, upon which all other works were based upon. This, Brakke argues, is an overstatement. While these two works certainly seem to be the most influential, we would say that these two works provide the complete portrait of belief among these desert monks.

distractions, and temptations. Through Scripture, fasting, and prayer, the Adversary could be fought off, and believers could follow in the steps of their Savior.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Devil and Atonement**

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) synthesized, developed, and refined the doctrine of the Devil in the early church fathers and set the stage for the centuries to come.<sup>52</sup> Augustine provided solutions based on Scripture to many of the questions asked by the Fathers before him.

Why did the Devil fall? Because of pride.<sup>53</sup> The mind of the Devil got in his own way: “The bad angel loved himself more than God, refused to be subject to God, swelled with pride, came short of supreme being and fell. He became less than he had been, because, in wishing to enjoy his own power rather than God’s he wished to enjoy what was less.... It is no marvel that his loss occasioned poverty, and poverty envy, which is the truly diabolical characteristic of the devil.”<sup>54</sup>

Did the Devil foresee his fall? No, as an angel enjoying the blessedness of God’s presence, he could not have.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Those interested in a psychological and cognitive analysis of how the early monks perceived temptation can learn more by reading “Demonic Machinations and Cognitive Mechanisms: Cognitive Insights into Early Monastic Demonology” by Inbar Graiver.

<sup>52</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 93.

<sup>53</sup> Wiebe, “Demons in the Theology of Augustine,” 64.

<sup>54</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *St. Augustine Of True Religion*, trans. J.H.S. Burleigh, (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1959.), xiii, 24, 26.

<sup>55</sup> Wiebe, “Demons in the Theology of Augustine,” 82. See *City of God*, Book 11.13

Could the Devil be redeemed? No, Matthew 25:41 answers the question: “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”<sup>56</sup>

Like the fathers, Augustine saw the Devil in the world around him. Heretics, pagans, and even the city of Rome were all parts of the Devil’s body, assaulting Christ and the church.<sup>57</sup> As Christ is head over the Church, so the Devil is the head of the earthly city that stands against the City of God.<sup>58</sup>

Just as Christ approaches his people through the sacraments, so too, the Devil and his demons have their own twisted version of the sacraments. The Devil and demons were working through various means, such as the spectacles of the theater, charms, and prophecies, and the work of cults.<sup>59</sup>

Through these activities, people are drawn into association with the demonic.

Now those demons take pleasure, don’t they, in idle songs, they take pleasure in the trifling spectacle, in the manifold indecencies of the theaters, in the mad frenzy of the chariot races, in the cruelties of the amphitheater, in the unrelenting rivalries of those who take up quarrels and disputes, to the point of open hostilities, on behalf of pestilential persons, on behalf of a comedian, an actor, a clown, a charioteer, a hunter. When they do these things, it’s as if they were offering incense to demons from their hearts. These spirits, given to seduction you see, rejoice in the people they have seduced, and feed on the bad morals and shameful and shocking life-style of those they have seduced and deceived.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Wiebe, “Demons in the Theology of Augustine,” 68. The view that the Devil could be redeemed has been attributed to Origen and Basil the Great. Augustine’s view can be found in his work, *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum*, Against Adversaries of the Law and the Prophets, 5.5–6.7.

<sup>57</sup> Wiebe, “Demons in the Theology of Augustine,” 184.

<sup>58</sup> Wiebe, “Demons in the Theology of Augustine,” 186.

<sup>59</sup> Wiebe, “Demons in the Theology of Augustine,” 194–5.

<sup>60</sup> Augustine of Hippo, “Sermon 198: Against the Pagans,” *Sermons, III (184–229Z)*, *On the Liturgical Seasons*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. 6, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, (New Rochelle: New City Press, 1993.), 75.

Ultimately, if a man gave in to these vices, Augustine warned that he become like the Devil. If one lives only for himself, he risks falling into the Devil's lie:

It is in fact not by the possession of flesh, which the Devil does not possess, that man has become like the Devil: it is by living by the rule of self, that is by the rule of man. For the Devil chose to live by the rule of self when he did not stand fast in the truth, so that the lie that he told was his own lie, not God's. The Devil is not only a liar; he is 'the father of lies.' He was, as we know, the first lie, and falsehood, like sin. Had its start in him. Thus, when man lives 'by the standard of man' and not 'by the standard of God', he is like the Devil.<sup>61</sup>

Like the Fathers, Augustine saw that deliverance from the Devil was found in Christ. He articulated this belief with the biblical picture of the ransom. The Devil has rights over humanity and only by Christ's ransom, has man been freed from Satan's power and abuse.<sup>62</sup>

We had stumbled, you see, upon the prince of this world, who led Adam astray and enslaved him, and was beginning to possess us as his homeborn slaves. But along came the redeemer, and conquered the deceiver. And what did our redeemer do to our captor? To pay our price, he set the mousetrap of his cross; as bait he placed there his own blood. While the devil, though, was able to shed that blood, he did not earn the right to drink it. And because he shed the blood of one who was not his debtor, he was ordered to release those who were his debtors; he shed the blood of the innocent one, he was required to withdraw from those who are by no means innocent. The Lord, indeed, shed his own blood precisely for this purpose, to cancel our sins. So the very reason for which the other held us captive was canceled by the blood of the redeemer.<sup>63</sup>

Through the crucifixion, Christ trapped the Devil to set man free. Christ's blood served as the bait, and when the Devil killed him, he was forced to release his power over man. This idea of a ransom, or "mousetrap" would remain the primary theory of redemption for centuries.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> City of God, Book 14.3–4. 1989 552.

<sup>62</sup> Wiebe, "Demons in the Theology of Augustine," 265.

<sup>63</sup> Augustine of Hippo, "Sermon 130: On the words of the gospel of John 6:5–14 where the story is told of the miracle with the five loaves and the two fishes," *Sermons, III (94A–147A), On the New Testament*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. 4, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1993.), 311.

<sup>64</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 133.

In the Middle Ages, the picture of atonement as ransom was replaced by the satisfaction theory of Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109).<sup>65</sup> For Anselm, the idea that man was held captive by the Devil, and that God would have to become man to pay a ransom was inadequate and contrary to justice. Why would a ransom need to be paid to the Devil? Couldn't God simply annihilate the Devil?<sup>66</sup>

I do not see the force of that argument...that God, in order to save men, was bound, as it were, to try a contest with the devil in justice, before he did in strength, so that, when the devil should put to death that being in whom there was nothing worthy of death, and who was God, he should justly lose his power over sinners; and that, if it were not so, God would have used undue force against the devil, since the devil had a rightful ownership of man, for the devil had not seized man with violence, but man had freely surrendered to him. It is true that this might well enough be said, if the devil or man belonged to any other being than God, or were in the power of any but God. But since neither the devil nor man belong to any but God, and neither can exist without the exertion of Divine power, what cause ought God to try with his own creature (*de suo, in suo*), or what should he do but punish his servant, who had seduced his fellow-servant to desert their common Lord and come over to himself; who, a traitor, had taken to himself a fugitive; a thief, had taken to himself a fellow-thief, with what he had stolen from his Lord. For when one was stolen from his Lord by the persuasions of the other, both were thieves. For what could be more just than for God to do this?<sup>67</sup>

Anselm offered an alternative. Medieval theology was heavily influenced by the judicial realm, and Anselm carried this lens of justice into his view of atonement as satisfaction.<sup>68</sup> His satisfaction theory can be summarized in this way:

Christ's death was necessary to satisfy for mankind's sin. Sin had taken away the honour owed to God. God, of course, could have simply forgiven and saved us; however, such a mercy would have affronted God's justice. In justice, God should either punish us for sin or have us satisfy for the honour we took from him. Such a satisfaction would have to give God something that was not already due, so as to make up for the honour that was

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<sup>65</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 131.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Swineburn, "Christ's Atoning Sacrifice." *Archivio Di Filosofia* 76 (2008), 86.

<sup>67</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, "Cur Deus Homo," *Proslogium; Monologium; An Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus Homo*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane, (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1926.), [https://ccel.org/ccel/anselm/basic\\_works/basic\\_works.i.html](https://ccel.org/ccel/anselm/basic_works/basic_works.i.html). Book 1, Chapter VII.

<sup>68</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 131.

due but never rendered. Also, such a satisfaction would have to be of infinite value, since the one offended was infinite. Christ's dying fulfilled both requirements. Christ did not have to die, since he had not sinned. By dying he gave God something that he did not already owe. By being a God-man, Jesus' gift of dying was of infinite value. So, by having Christ die to satisfy our sins, God could mercifully extend his forgiveness to us and save us, without at the same time offending his own justice.<sup>69</sup>

In comparison to the ransom theory of Augustine, Anselm's satisfaction theory placed emphasis on the changed relationship between man and God, and as a result, gave the Devil lesser role.<sup>70</sup> Christ's payment was not to the Devil, but offered to God.<sup>71</sup> Instead of holding the rights of fallen mankind, Anselm saw the Devil as part of God's plan of justice: "So also the devil is said to torment men justly, because God in justice permits this, and man in justice suffers it. But when man is said to suffer justly, it is not meant that his just suffering is inflicted by the hand of justice itself, but that he is punished by the just judgment of God."<sup>72</sup>

Anselm's satisfaction theory is significant because it signals a shift within the doctrine of the Devil. Instead of being a primary character in atonement, the Devil shifted to the periphery as a tool of justice. The fading of ransom theory meant that Satan's place in theology was also beginning to diminish.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Jerry Bracken, "Thomas Aquinas and Anselm's Satisfaction Theory," *Angelicum* 62 (1985), 501–2. It is difficult to cite Anselm directly for this point because *Cur Deus Homo* is written in the form of a discussion between Anselm and his pupil Boso. Anselm's discussion on satisfaction takes place primarily in Book 1. Chapters 6, 7, 11 and 12 may be of special interest.

<sup>70</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 133.

<sup>71</sup> Swineburn, "Christ's Atoning Sacrifice," 87.

<sup>72</sup> Anselm, "Cur Deus Homo," Book 1, Chapter 7.

<sup>73</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 133.



### Rise of the Folk Devil

In the centuries that followed Augustine, the Devil began to leave the realm of theology and enter into the world of folklore. This development was perhaps spurred by the fantastic encounters of the monks and hermits in the desert, as well as the vivid and colorful preaching of pastors and priests frightening their congregations with stories of the demonic from the pulpit.<sup>74</sup>

As a result, the Devil and his demons were seen as frighteningly active: They could steal children or attack people. They could cause physical harm and mental illnesses. They could enter the body through orifices, primarily through the mouth and nose when yawning or sneezing. They would haunt ruins and graveyards or could take on the shapes of the dead.<sup>75</sup>

The Devil was not only active, but he could always be found close at hand. He could be summoned by his name. One could find the Devil and bargain with him.<sup>76</sup> He could take human form, to entice people or gamble with them and win card games.<sup>77</sup> He could even be found in church, observing who was gossiping or sleeping, taking notes to present to God on Judgment Day.<sup>78</sup>

One of the more important tales about the Devil that rose during this time was the legend of Theophilus of Adana (538).<sup>79</sup> Theophilus, a sixth-century deacon in the church, was appointed

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<sup>74</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 111.

<sup>75</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 115.

<sup>76</sup> Lutz Röhrich, "German Devil Tales and Devil Legends," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 7 (1970), 25.

<sup>77</sup> Röhrich, "German Devil Tales and Legends," 24.

<sup>78</sup> Röhrich, "German Devil Tales and Legends," 24. The Devil apparently also interfered with the monks as they celebrated the daily orders. He was responsible for their falling asleep when they should have been praying and for singing off-key in the balcony. For more, consult Susan Boynton's "'The Devil made me do it': demonic intervention in the medieval monastic liturgy."

<sup>79</sup> Kimberly Ball, "The Devil's Pact: Diabolic Writing and Oral Tradition." *Western Folklore* 73, (2014), 386. This is the earliest recorded account of a human being entering into a written pact with the Devil.

to be a bishop. Out of humility, he initially refused the position.<sup>80</sup> However, he came to regret his decision when the new bishop unjustly ousted him from his position as a deacon. Angry, Theophilus plotted revenge and sought out a Jewish sorcerer to help him contact Satan. In exchange for power and influence, Theophilus swore allegiance to Satan and signed a pact with the Devil with his blood in exchange for the position of bishop.<sup>81</sup>

However, after making this pact, Theophilus had a crisis of conscience and began to fear for his soul. In desperation, he prayed to the Virgin Mary. Mary chastised Theophilus before ultimately promising to intercede for him before Christ. She then descended into hell, retrieved the contract from the Devil and returned it to Theophilus, for him to destroy it.<sup>82</sup> This idea of a pact with the Devil illustrated in the story of Theophilus would become a key development in the accusation of alleged witches in later centuries.<sup>83</sup>

This story of Theophilus eventually fathered the most famous Devil legend, the story of Faust.<sup>84</sup> The legend is thought to be loosely based on a real person, Georgius Faustus of Helmstadt (1480–1541), a scholar and magician.<sup>85</sup> After his death, many fantastic stories arose, and the legend first appeared in print in 1587.<sup>86</sup> In this version of the legend, the efforts of Faust to gain knowledge lead him into the sins of pride and greed.

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<sup>80</sup> Jerry Root, *The Theophilus Legend in Medieval Text and Image*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017.), 1–2

<sup>81</sup> Root, *Theophilus Legend*, 2.

<sup>82</sup> Root, *Theophilus Legend*, 2.

<sup>83</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 118.

<sup>84</sup> Robert Lublin, “Faust and the ‘Death of Man,’” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 24, (2013), 211. The Legend of Faust has undergone some 40 versions.

<sup>85</sup> Ball, “The Devil’s Pact,” 387.

<sup>86</sup> Karl P. Wentersdorf, “Some Observations on the Historical Faust,” *Folklore* 89, (1978), 204–205.

Faust seeks out the Devil in order to learn the magical arts. He begins his search by going to a crossroads at night to summon a spirit. The spirit shifts into various forms, a dragon, a burning globe, a burning man, and finally, a friar, before revealing his name, Mephistopheles.<sup>87</sup> Mephistopheles obtains permission from Lucifer to serve Faust under the condition that Faust will give himself, body and soul, to the Devil. Faust agrees to the terms, and proceeds to deny Christ and sign a written pact in blood. In exchange for twenty-four years of power, Faust sells his soul.<sup>88</sup>

As the story progresses, Faust's original hunger for knowledge is transformed into a thirst for sin and lust. He goes to Rome, where he feasts on the foods of the pope's table.<sup>89</sup> He travels to Constantinople, where he spends time with the sultan's harem.<sup>90</sup> He uses his powers to tell the future and even to summon Helen of Troy to sleep with her.<sup>91</sup>

Finally, as his twenty-four years come to an end, Faust reveals his story to his friends and students, warning them against the temptations of the Devil.<sup>92</sup> For a moment, Faust begins to feel hope that perhaps this good work might save his soul, but in the end, he gives in to despair. That night a great wind rocks the house, and Faust's students hear a scream. The following day, they

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<sup>87</sup> Christopher Marlowe, "Faust Book," *Early English Prose Romances Volume III*, ed. William J. Thoms, (London: Nattali and Bond, 1858.)  
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.03.0001%3Achapter%3D1>. Chapter 2. identifying the monks and popes as the Devil's instruments on earth.

<sup>88</sup> Marlowe, "Faust Book," Chapters 4–6.

<sup>89</sup> Marlowe, "Faust Book," 22.

<sup>90</sup> Marlowe, "Faust Book," 22.

<sup>91</sup> Marlowe, "Faust Book," Chapter 55. In the Faust book version of this legend. Faust and Helen have a child named Justus Faustus, who had the ability to tell the future, however, when Faust died, Helen and Justus both vanished.

<sup>92</sup> Marlowe, "Faust Book," 63.

find Faust's mutilated body in a dung heap, his head twisted from front to back.<sup>93</sup> The Devil has made good on his word, he has claimed Faust's soul.

The story of Faust is intriguing because it has distinctly modern characteristics. The story is anthropocentric. Instead of the Devil waging war against a Christ or a saint, here, it is a man. Faust creates his own dilemma and is forced to solve it himself, and instead of turning to others for help (or even to the Sacrament or Confession), he is an isolated individual. Faust's story is also pessimistic. Rather than being an example of salvation like Anthony, Faust walks in the opposite direction and meets a tragic end. Finally, Faust's Devil appears more complex and three-dimensional than the theological Devil: He is humanized, showing emotion, sympathy, and even regret.<sup>94</sup>

The stories of Theophilus and Faust can be viewed as warnings against the sinister power of the Devil. However, at the same time, a seemingly opposite reaction was also happening in folklore. The Devil was beginning to be viewed more comically, taking on increasingly ridiculous appearances in art and literature. He was depicted as cold and hairy or having a face on his buttocks. He looked lame because of his fall from heaven, and his nose was oversized.<sup>95</sup>

The Devil also began to find himself on the losing side of his bargains.<sup>96</sup> For example, in one story, a smith who sold his soul outsmarts the Devil by giving him one more task to complete:

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<sup>93</sup> Marlowe, "Faust Book," Chapter 63. The description within the Faust book legend is even more gruesome. Blood sprinkles the hallway, Faust's brains are splattered against the walls, his eyes lie on the floor, his teeth are left in another corner. The Devil has torn Faust to pieces.

<sup>94</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 179.

<sup>95</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 114. The Devil also began to take the place of mythological figures: He hoards treasure like dragons, leads the hunt like Artemis, and channels nature like Pan.

<sup>96</sup> Ball, "The Devil's Pact," 388.

He demanded of the Devil that he build a dam thro middle of the lake in one night; he must carry the necessary sand there in a sack on his back, and when the rooster crowed, the dam must be finished, otherwise the Devil would lose the right to the smith's soul. The smith, however, had earlier given his helper the assignment to disturb the rooster during the night. And so she did, and before the Devil had completed the structure, the rooster let his voice ring out. Full of rage and spewing fire, the Devil flew into the air, and the smith was saved. When it has not rained for several weeks, one can still travel in one place through the middle of the lake.<sup>97</sup>

Or another story, where a man about to be taken by the Devil is rescued by his wife's ingenuity:

Now she happened to have a small burning candle in her hand, and she asked the Devil to let her husband live until the candle burned down. When the Devil gave his consent, she quickly blew out the flame. Then the Devil realized that he had been swindled, and departed from there with a fearful roaring. The little candle, however, was carefully looked after and never lit again.<sup>98</sup>

This emerging Folk Devil was an adversary who could be challenged and defeated in wrestling matches, drinking competitions, and gambling wagers.<sup>99</sup> This Devil stands in stark contrast to the Devil in the desert, who needed to be overcome with fasting and prayer. Instead, the Devil of these folktales could be humiliated and outwitted.<sup>100</sup>

The rise of the Folk Devil also extended to realm of witchcraft. By the early decades of the fourteenth century, the stereotype of witches and wizards had developed in Europe.<sup>101</sup> The reports were fantastic and terrifying: Witches were meeting at night to worship Satan, to eat the

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<sup>97</sup> Ball, "The Devil's Pact," 388–9. Translated by Kimberly Ball, from *Sagen und Erzählungen aus der Provinz Posen* by Otto Knoop. (1893:92–3)

<sup>98</sup> Ball, "The Devil's Pact," 389. Translated by Kimberly Ball from *Friesische Sagen*, by Jurgen Van der Kooi, (1994:107–8)

<sup>99</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 116.

<sup>100</sup> That is not to say that the Devil became universally viewed as the butt of jokes. As Kimberly Ball describes in the rest of her article on the motif of the Devil's pact, in many stories the Devil is still described as a being not to be toyed with.

<sup>101</sup> Nachman Ben-Yehuda, "The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist's Perspective," *American Journal of Sociology* 86 (1980), 1.

body and blood of children, and to engage in sexual orgies, sometimes even having intercourse with the Devil himself.<sup>102</sup>

The development of this stereotype seems to have come from a multitude of sources. Some of the stories sprang from paganism and legends of the Middle Ages, and conceptions of magic.<sup>103</sup> Perhaps Christian legends, like the story of Theophilus, were also influential. Another contributing factor seems to be the attitude of the church towards heresy. Like the early Christians, they saw heretics, Jews, and witches as instruments of Satan. Therefore, the sword should be used to resist and defeat these agents of the Devil.<sup>104</sup> Inquisitors and both secular and ecclesiastical courts were not afraid to wield their power to snuff out these instruments of Satan. Many were tortured and forced to give up alleged accomplices before being burned at the stake.<sup>105</sup> These incidents revealed a darker side of Christianity's view of the Devil: The demonization of others.<sup>106</sup> The casualties of the witch hunts were significant: Between the early 14<sup>th</sup> century until 1650, continental Europeans executed between 200,000 to 500,000 witches.<sup>107</sup>

Overall, however, with the Devil's rise in folklore, his function in theology declined. Through stories like Faust, the personality and emotions of the Devil became more human. The comedic and lighthearted tales of the Folk Devil created a different image of Satan; instead of calling on Christ, the Adversary could be duped by man's own wit and strength. With the

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<sup>102</sup> Ben-Yehuda, "The European Witch Craze," 4–5.

<sup>103</sup> Ben-Yehuda, "The European Witch Craze," 3.

<sup>104</sup> Ben-Yehuda, "The European Witch Craze," 9.

<sup>105</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 164–65. For a more detailed look at the rise of the witch craze in Europe, read *The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist's Perspective*.

<sup>106</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 166.

<sup>107</sup> Ben-Yehuda, "The European Witch Craze," 1

establishment of a Devil who could be humanized and tamed, the stage was set for further decline.

### **Luther, Calvin, and Trent**

Out of all the reformers, Martin Luther (1483–1546) gave the most attention to the Devil.<sup>108</sup> He saw the Devil with a vividness that sounds strange to modern ears. For Luther, the Devil was the cause of all kinds of evil, not only moral, but natural.<sup>109</sup> For instance, Luther saw the Devil’s hand at work in diseases, including his own lack of health:

I believe that in all grave illnesses the devil is present as the author and cause. First, he is the author of death. Second, Peter says in Acts that those who were oppressed by the devil were healed by Christ. Moreover, Christ cured not only the oppressed but also the paralytics, the blind, etc. Generally speaking, therefore, I think that all dangerous diseases are blows of the devil. For this, however, he employs the instruments of nature. So a thief dies by the sword, Satan corrupts the qualities and humors of the body, etc. God also employs means for the preservation of health, such as sleep, food, and drink, for he does nothing except through instruments. So the devil also injures through appropriate means. When a fence leans over a little, he knocks it all the way down to the ground.<sup>110</sup>

Likewise, the Devil could be blamed for storms and bad weather: “The devil provokes such storms, but good winds are produced by good angels. Winds are nothing but spirits, either

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<sup>108</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 169.

<sup>109</sup> Volker Leppin, “Luther on the Devil,” *Seminary Ridge Review* 16 (2016), 16. Here, referencing Table Talk found in No. 5027.

<sup>110</sup> Martin Luther, “No. 360: Medicine May Be Used to Cure Disease, Fall, 1532,” *Luther’s Works, Vol. 54: Table Talk*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 53.

good or evil. The devil sits there and snorts, and so do the angels when the winds are salubrious.”<sup>111</sup>

Even bad dreams could be attributed to the Devil: “This is where dreams come from. Man’s spirit can’t rest, for Satan is there even when a man is asleep, though angels are also present. The devil can so frighten me that sweat pours from me in my sleep.... Troubled dreams are of the devil, because everything that serves death and terror and murder and lies is the devil’s handiwork.”<sup>112</sup>

In other table talks, Luther described his encounters with the Devil: during and after his monastic life, he had heard the devil clattering around the house, or coming as a black sow, and even as a black dog. This dog was bold enough to creep into Luther’s bed at the Wartburg, so Luther took him and threw him out of the window.<sup>113</sup> There is also the famous ink stain story, where Luther mocked the Devil by hurling his inkwell at him.<sup>114</sup>

However, for Luther, the Devil did not just visit and attack him physically. He saw the work of the Devil as an assault on multiple fronts: The Devil was weakening his body through illness but also attacking his soul, plaguing him with despondency and haunting him with fear. The Devil was driving hard to push Luther to apostasy.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Martin Luther, “No. 489: Good and Evil Winds Caused by Spirits, Spring, 1533,” *Luther’s Works, Vol. 54: Table Talk*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 82.

<sup>112</sup> Martin Luther, “No. 508: One Should Not Pay Too Much Attention to Dreams, Spring 1533,” *Luther’s Works, Vol. 54: Table Talk*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 89–90.

<sup>113</sup> Leppin, “Luther on the Devil,” 16. Here, referencing Table Talk found in No. 5358.

<sup>114</sup> Leppin, “Luther on the Devil,” 13.

<sup>115</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 198.



The Devil often troubled Luther over his reforming work. Who was he to upset the peace?<sup>116</sup> Why was it, that he found himself standing alone against the pope, the bishops, and the universities of Europe?<sup>117</sup> In Luther's own words: "How often did my heart quail, punish me, and reproach me with its single strongest argument: Are you the only wise man? Can it be that all the others are in error and have erred for so long a time? What if you are mistaken and lead so many people into error who might all be eternally damned?"<sup>118</sup>

As Luther reflected on his spiritual struggles, He saw that the Devil's attacks were directed at one goal, to strip God's people of their certainty of salvation. Temptation was meant to awaken doubts within the Christian about God's goodness.<sup>119</sup> Through his two temptations of despair and uncertainty, Satan seeks to push Christians into the same sin of Adam and Eve: to go beyond revelation and try and penetrate God's nature, and to fall where the Devil himself fell, into the void. In his work of temptation, the Devil reveals his true identity as liar and murderer.<sup>120</sup>

Yet God uses these spiritual trials and tribulations, *Anfechtungen*, to draw Christians closer to himself. These spiritual trials are found everywhere: in the suffering of life, in the evils inflicted by men and the sinful flesh, in spiritual questions, uncertainty, and the apparent

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<sup>116</sup> Martin Luther, "No. 522: Counsel for a Man Overtaken by Melancholy, Spring, 1533," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 54: Table Talk, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 96. "The devil has often troubled me by saying, 'Who commanded you to teach against the monasteries?' Or again, 'Before there was glorious peace, but now you have disturbed it, and who ordered you to do so?'"

<sup>117</sup> Martin Luther, "The Misuse of the Mass," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 36: *Word and Sacrament II*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 134. "O with how much greater effort and labor, even on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, have I been barely able to justify my own conscience; so that I, one man alone, have dared to come forward against the pope, brand him as the Antichrist, the bishops as his apostles, and the universities as his brothels!"

<sup>118</sup> Martin Luther, "The Misuse of the Mass," 134.

<sup>119</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 177.

<sup>120</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 179.

contradiction of God's goodness with the problem of evil. The Christian may face denial, unbelief, and even doubt whether God is in control as the Devil wreaks havoc through his agents.<sup>121</sup> Yet the suffering of the Christian in this world is a bond that he or she shares with the saints of the past, and with their Savior.<sup>122</sup> God brings believers face-to-face with hell and death and before rescuing the believer to the glories of heaven.<sup>123</sup> The Christian is reminded that suffering does not happen by chance, and through *Anfechtungen*, God increases the depth of faith and trust in Him.<sup>124</sup>

Through spiritual struggle, the Christian comes to realize that temptation and doubt are not overcome by one's own strength, but by God's grace. Luther described the way he coped with *Anfechtung* in the darkest days of his life: "The Prince of Demons himself has taken up combat against me; so powerfully and adeptly does he handle the Scriptures that my scriptural knowledge does not suffice if I do not rely on the alien Word."<sup>125</sup> In his darkest hours, Luther found comfort in the strange, "alien" righteousness found in the Gospel, that the Christian is justified through Christ's righteousness and not his own.

The Gospel proved to be the ultimate answer to the questions of doubt within his heart: "Finally, Christ with his clear, unmistakable Word strengthened and confirmed me, so that my

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<sup>121</sup> David P. Scaer, "The Concept of *Anfechtung* in Luther's Thought," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 47 (1983), 16–17.

<sup>122</sup> Scaer, "The Concept of *Anfechtung*," 28.

<sup>123</sup> Scaer, "The Concept of *Anfechtung*," 25.

<sup>124</sup> Scaer, "The Concept of *Anfechtung*," 15.

<sup>125</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 226. This is Heiko Oberman's translation of WWABR 4.282, 6–9, Luther's letter to Nicolas Hausmann on November 17, 1527.

heart no longer quails, but resists the arguments of the papists, as a stony shore resists the waves, and laughs at their threats and storms!"<sup>126</sup>

Like Luther, John Calvin (1509–1564) saw the Devil as part of the Christian's experience. Calvin saw the doctrine of the Devil as emphasizing God's sovereignty and providence: He is entirely under God's control and cannot do any evil God does not direct him to do: "To carry out his judgments through Satan as minister of his wrath, God destines men's purposes as he pleases, arouses their wills, and strengthens their endeavors."<sup>127</sup>

Calvin also saw the Devil as the power that holds natural man captive in sin:

It is said that the will of the natural man is subject to the devil's power and is stirred up by it. This does not mean that, like unwilling slaves rightly compelled by their masters to obey, our will, although reluctant and resisting, is constrained to take orders from the devil. It means rather that the will, captivated by Satan's wiles, of necessity obediently submits to all his leading. For those whom the Lord does not make worthy to be guided by his Spirit he abandons, with just judgment, to Satan's action. For this reason the apostle says that "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers," who are destined to destruction, that they may not see the light of the gospel [2 Corinthians 4:4]; and in another place that he "is... at work in the disobedient sons" [Ephesians 2:2]. The blinding of the impious and all iniquities following from it are called "the works of Satan." Yet their cause is not to be sought outside man's will, from which the root of evil springs up, and on which rests the foundation of Satan's kingdom, that is, sin.<sup>128</sup>

Yet the Devil also serves a greater purpose. Like Luther, Calvin saw the Devil as part of the Christian's experience here on earth. He keeps Christians vigilant and humble:

As far as believers are concerned, because they are disquieted by enemies of this sort, they heed these exhortations: "Give no place to the devil" [Eph 4:27, Vg.]. "The devil your enemy goes about as a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour; resist him, be firm in your faith" [1 Peter 5:8–9 p.], and the like. Paul admits that he was not free from this sort of strife when he writes that, as a remedy to tame his pride, he was given an angel of

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<sup>126</sup> Martin Luther, "Misuse of the Mass," 134.

<sup>127</sup> Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John Thomas McNeill, John Baillie, and Van Dusen Henry P, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.), 312. Book 2, Chapter 4.3.

<sup>128</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 310. Book 2, Chapter 4.1.

Satan to humble him [2 Cor. 12:7]. Therefore his exercise is common to all the children of God.<sup>129</sup>

Although Calvin's view of the Devil was similar to Luther's, Lutherans and Calvinists came into conflict in the Late Reformation over the practice of exorcism at baptism. Luther understood that the practice was an adiaphoron but retained the practice of exorcism in his liturgies.<sup>130</sup> Martin Bucer (1491–1551), Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), and Calvin, on the other hand, repudiated exorcism as a relic of Catholicism.<sup>131</sup>

These disagreements came to a head in the 1580s and 90s. In the struggle against crypto-Calvinism, exorcism became the mark of Lutheranism orthodoxy.<sup>132</sup> Eventually, with the rise of Pietism and Rationalism, many churches left the rite behind, and by the end of the eighteenth century, most Lutheran baptismal orders had eliminated it altogether.<sup>133</sup>

Like the Reformers, the Catholic Church of the Reformation period affirmed the doctrine of the Devil, specifically at the Council of Trent (1545–1563). The Council of Trent did not contain a statement affirming the Devil's existence (likely because no one was challenging it), but Trent did define aspects of the Devil's work: He has power over humanity because of original sin, and he is blamed for the existence of heresy.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 176–7. Book 1, Chapter 17.

<sup>130</sup> Bodo Nischan, "The Exorcism Controversy and Baptism in the Late Reformation," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987), 32. Melancthon had mixed feelings on the use, while some Lutherans simply did not use it at all, likely because of their proximity to Reformed areas.

<sup>131</sup> Nischan, "Exorcism Controversies," 33.

<sup>132</sup> Nischan, "Exorcism Controversies," 34.

<sup>133</sup> Nischan, "Exorcism Controversies," 46–47.

<sup>134</sup> *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent; Original Text with English Translations*, trans. Henry Schroeder, (St. Louis, and London: B Herder Book Co., 1941.), 21. Council of Trent Session V, Decree Concerning Original Sin

### The Changing Tide

In the years following the Reformation, the assumptions of educated society became more and more secular, and Catholics and Protestants both found themselves slowly becoming conformed to the concerns of this new world. The rise of individualism and humanism led to the movement of God out of the center of life to a peripheral figure. This shift in Christianity would weaken its resistance to the coming Enlightenment.<sup>135</sup>

It was in this kind of world that John Milton (1608–1674) wrote his two epic poems, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Within these two poems, the opening scenes from *Paradise Lost* are the most famous. A recently fallen Satan broods over his defeat at the hands of Michael and assembles his fallen angels in Pandemonium, his palace in hell.<sup>136</sup> He summons his lieutenants: Mammon, Beelzebub, Belial, and Moloch, asking for ideas on how to wage war with God before finally resolving to corrupt God’s newly created world and the crown of his creation, humanity.<sup>137</sup>

Milton tells the story closely following salvation history, reflecting his stated purpose for writing these poems was to “assert Eternal Providence, And justify the wayes of God to men.”<sup>138</sup> Although Milton’s stated purpose was to focus on God and man, Satan seems to be the dramatic center of the poem. He acts as if he is the protagonist; his actions drive the plot.<sup>139</sup> It seems that

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<sup>135</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 206.

<sup>136</sup> John Milton, “Paradise Lost,” *The John Milton Reading Room*, [https://milton.host.dartmouth.edu/reading\\_room/pl/intro/text.shtml](https://milton.host.dartmouth.edu/reading_room/pl/intro/text.shtml), Book 1.

<sup>137</sup> Milton, “Paradise Lost,” Book 2.

<sup>138</sup> Milton, “Paradise Lost,” Book 1.28–29. Some take this statement at face value, such as C.S. Lewis, taking the stance that Milton really was trying to justify God and champion Christianity. Others have pointed to some of Milton’s heterodox positions as evidence that he was not the firm believer Lewis claims he is. For further reading consider C.S. Lewis’ Preface to *Paradise Lost* and John Peter Rumrich’s article, “Uninventing Milton.”

<sup>139</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 189.

Milton intentionally chose to portray Satan as magnificent so that his audience would feel the allure of evil and recognize the human tendencies to gravitate toward evil.<sup>140</sup> But the choice to portray Satan in this light appears to make him the most interesting character in the poem, something which future generations would utilize.<sup>141</sup>

However, while Christians like Milton held on to the doctrine of the Devil, the secular world was undermining Christian cosmology.<sup>142</sup> Advancements in science and technology were beginning to turn conversations about the power of God in nature into discussions of scientific phenomena. The discoveries of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries in the studies of astronomy, history, and geology set the stage for an evolutionary view of earth, society, and the cosmos.<sup>143</sup> The Christian framework of revelation and tradition (and experience) was beginning to be usurped by one driven not by God, but by the emerging empirical, rational, and scientific perspectives.<sup>144</sup>

One of the first signs of change came as the witch hunts ended in Europe. The witch crazes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had revived awareness of the Devil. From top to bottom, society had acknowledged that witches were real and that their existence was taken seriously as a grave danger for Christians.<sup>145</sup> However, the intensity of the search for witches

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<sup>140</sup> Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1971.), 12. Stanley Fish argues that this grand portrayal of Satan and the commentary that Milton provides are designed to warn readers of their own sinful desires. The reader is forced to admit that Satan's rhetoric is effective, therefore Christians must be watchful.

<sup>141</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 189.

<sup>142</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 212–213.

<sup>143</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 213.

<sup>144</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 206.

<sup>145</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 166.

eventually gave way to weariness. By the turn of the eighteenth century in Europe, the skeptical voices had prevailed.<sup>146</sup> As one scholar described the change: “By the eighteenth century, the theologian’s defense of the world of spirits was struggling to make itself heard above the philosopher’s defense of reason. And in the end, jurists were compelled to side with the latter.”<sup>147</sup>

The same story played out in America as well. The early Christian settlers in America believed that the Devil was all around them, in the woods and with the Indians.<sup>148</sup> Like the Europeans, the early colonists also sought to fight the Devil by seeking out the heretics and witches hiding in their midst. But surprisingly, the witch hunts in New England were seldom. The events of the Salem Witch Trials, which led to the deaths of eighteen women, two dogs, and one man, were in many ways the last gasp of the witch hunts.<sup>149</sup> Salem became the end of an important and bloody chapter in the history of the Devil, signaling that the Folk Devil was dying. The immanence and nearness of the Devil that monks had once felt in the desert was all but gone.

During these years, skeptics and critics of Christianity also became more vocal. David Hume (1711–1776) attacked belief in God using the laws of nature. Two arguments are worth highlighting: Hume vehemently argued against the idea of miracles, that any spiritual intervention could occur in the universe: “A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the

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<sup>146</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 186.

<sup>147</sup> Malcolm Gaskill, “The Pursuit of Reality: Recent Research into the History of Witchcraft.” *The Historical Journal* 51 (2008), 1073.

<sup>148</sup> Andrew Delbanco, *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 51.

<sup>149</sup> Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 61.

very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.”<sup>150</sup> Whatever evidence there was for a miracle or supernatural intervention, it cannot be as strong as the evidence against it.

Perhaps Hume’s most potent attack was his argument against God on the basis of evil. Echoing the Greek philosopher Epicurus, he wrote, “Is he (that is, God) willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”<sup>151</sup> The reality of evil must mean that God is not omnipotent, that God is not good, or that his goodness is entirely different from human goodness. Because human experience confirms the existence of evil, then the Christian God, who is described as omnipotent and good, must not exist.

The French philosopher Voltaire (1694–1778) came to similar conclusions as Hume. To Voltaire, Christianity was merely a superstition that belonged to the past.

When, in our ages of barbarism, there were scarcely two feudal lords who had a New Testament in their homes, it might be pardonable to press fables on the vulgar; that is to say, on these feudal lords, their weak-minded wives, and their brutal vassals. They were led to believe that St. Christopher had carried the infant Jesus across a river; they were fed with stories of sorcery and diabolical possession; they readily believed that St. Genou healed gout, and St. Claire sore eyes. The children believed in the werewolf, and their parents in the girdle of St. Francis. The number of relics was incalculable.<sup>152</sup>

Like Hume, Voltaire also took issue with the Christian God because of the problem of evil. After the devastating 1755 earthquake in Lisbon, which killed between 30,000 to 50,000 people, Christians pointed to the wrath of God: Catholics blamed the Protestant heretics, and

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<sup>150</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp, (Oxford University Press, 1999.), 173. Section X, Part I.

<sup>151</sup> David Hume, *Principal Writings on Religion Including Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and The Natural History of Religion*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin, (Oxford University Press, 1993.), 100.

<sup>152</sup> Voltaire, *Selections*, ed. Paul Edwards, (New York: Macmillan, 1989.), 117. Whether it is useful to maintain the people in superstition.



Protestants blamed the Catholics. Voltaire instead pointed to the absurdity of divine providence.<sup>153</sup>

But how conceive a God supremely good,  
 Who heaps his favours on the sons he loves,  
 Yet scatters evil with as large a hand?  
 What eye can pierce the depth of his designs?  
 From that all-perfect Being came not ill:  
 And came it from no other, for he 's lord:  
 Yet it exists. O stern and numbing truth!  
 O wondrous mingling of diversities!  
 A God came down to lift our stricken race:  
 He visited the earth, and changed it not!  
 One sophist says he had not power to change;  
 "He had," another cries, "but willed it not:  
 In time he will, no doubt." And, while they prate,  
 The hidden thunders, belched from underground,  
 Fling wide the ruins of a hundred towns  
 Across the smiling face of Portugal.<sup>154</sup>

Like Hume, Voltaire had no use for God and, therefore, no need for the Devil.

The undermining of the old Christian worldview did not come only from outside the Church but also from within. Historical criticism and questions about Biblical reliability and historical accuracy rose to the forefront. If the world was older than what the Bible seemed to indicate, should the Old Testament be considered reliable? What about the reliability of the New Testament? What should be taken literally, and what might simply be symbolic? Should the Devil be regarded simply as a concept or symbol? Are the references to the Devil and demons in Scripture simply a reflection of the superstitions of Jesus' day?<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 208.

<sup>154</sup> Voltaire, *Toleration and Other Essays*, trans. Joseph McCabe, (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912.), 249–50.

<sup>155</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 213.

The erosion that followed was swift. As Christians retreated from the beliefs of their forefathers, they abandoned what they felt was outdated or embarrassing. Original sin, redemption, and the Devil were left behind.<sup>156</sup>

The German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) is one example of the theology which rose during this time. Schleiermacher hoped to remove the embarrassing and unfashionable doctrine of the Devil by showing that Christ never intended it:

In the New Testament scriptures the Devil is, indeed, frequently mentioned, but neither Christ nor the Apostles set up a new doctrine concerning him, and still less do they associate the idea in any way with the plan of salvation; hence the only thing we can establish on the subject for the system of Christian doctrine is this: whatever is said about the Devil is subject to the condition that belief in him must by no means be put forward as a condition of faith in God or in Christ. Furthermore, there can be no question of the Devil having any influence within the Kingdom of God.<sup>157</sup>

Schleiermacher goes to great lengths to try and explain away references that Jesus makes to the Devil. The Devil mentioned in the parables of Jesus is dismissed as a Hebrew idiom.<sup>158</sup> Satan asking to sift Peter as wheat should be regarded as a proverb.<sup>159</sup> The Temptation of Jesus can be dismissed because it might not have happened.<sup>160</sup> Jesus' references to demonic possession are simply natural explanations of phenomena, which has nothing to do with doctrine.<sup>161</sup> To

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<sup>156</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 215.

<sup>157</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 3rd ed. (New York and London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016.), 163. Second Appendix 45.

<sup>158</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 164. 45. I.

<sup>159</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 165. 45. I.

<sup>160</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 165. Schleiermacher brushes over the temptation account very quickly. "The story of the Temptation is equally unsuited for the purpose. Even if we must accept it as literal fact (and there is much to be said against this), it does not give us material to construct a complete idea of the devil or to apply it in any further way." He does not elaborate.

<sup>161</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 166.

Schleiermacher, Christ and his disciples were merely drawing on the ideas and superstitions of their time:

But even if we could regard some or, indeed, all of the above quoted passages of Scripture as referring to the devil, there is still no reason for our accepting this notion as a permanent element in Christian doctrine and defining it accordingly so accurately that everything attributed to the devil could be conceived as a consistent whole. For Christ and His disciples did not hold this idea as one derived from the sacred writings of the Old Testament, or in any way acquired through Divine revelation; it was drawn from the common life of the period just as it is still present more or less in all our minds in spite of our utter ignorance as to the existence of such a being.<sup>162</sup>

If Christ and the disciples did not believe in the Devil, then modern Christians were free to move him from reality to the symbolic realm. Therefore, the Devil could simply become a reference to human evil.<sup>163</sup> By removing the Devil from his theology, Schleiermacher was providing a bridge over the widening gap between Protestant Christianity and Enlightened secular society.<sup>164</sup> Of course, the choice to remove the Devil would come with consequences.

### **The Romantic Devil**

Ironically, as society was beginning to leave the doctrine of the Devil behind, the Devil experienced a resurgence in the realm of literature. The Devil became a powerful figure used by the Romantics to express the conflict between good and evil within individuals and humanity as a whole. The Devil was detached from his original theological context as The Father of Lies and

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<sup>162</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 167. 45. II.

<sup>163</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 163. 45. II.

<sup>164</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 215.

instead twisted into a symbol of progress and freedom.<sup>165</sup> Authors like William Blake (1757–1827), George Gordon Lord Byron (1788–1824), Percy (1792–1822) and Mary Shelley (1797–1851) utilized the Devil and Luciferic themes in their writing to express various aspects of the human experience: rebellion against repression, the terrible power of evil, heroic resistance.<sup>166</sup> If the greatest enemy to traditional Christianity was Satan, then Satan became the archetype of the heroic rebel against authority, he was a figure to be emulated and praised.<sup>167</sup> The Devil was being transformed, and so were his stories.

In the Romantic readings of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the Devil took on the form of protagonist and hero rather than villain.<sup>168</sup> Instead of being The Prince of Darkness, he was seen as a character like Prometheus, a noble rebel who perseveres in the face of injustice. In the words of Percy Shelley, the Romantic poet:

Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments. Milton has so far violated the popular creed (if this shall be judged to be a violation) as to have alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Peter A. Schock, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: Blake's Myth of Satan and Its Cultural Matrix," *ELH* 60 (1993), 442–3

<sup>166</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 225.

<sup>167</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 221. See also, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: Blake's Myth of Satan and its Cultural Matrix," 443 "In Romanticism Milton's charismatic fallen angel survives as an ideological vehicle, a mythic standard-bearer of moral, political, and religious values."

<sup>168</sup> Schock, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: Blake's Myth of Satan and its Cultural Matrix," 450–1. "The reinterpretation of Milton's Satan in the criticism and illustration of *Paradise Lost* in the eighteenth century imaginatively grounds the Romantic myth of Satan: by envisioning Milton's fallen angel as a sublime human figure, this re-conception of Satan makes him a ready vehicle for oppositionist ideology. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, to declare Satan the hero of *Paradise Lost* and to depict him accordingly was a daring step. By the end of the century that Satan is the hero was no longer much in question."

<sup>169</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69388/a-defence-of-poetry>.

For the Romantics, it was the Devil rather than God who held the moral high ground.

Like *Paradise Lost*, the tragedy of Faust also became something new. In Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749–1832) retelling of the story, Faust became a symbol representing the noble rebellious spirit in man and the search for personal perfection. Mephistopheles, while being portrayed as intelligent and manipulative, is ultimately the loser in the story.<sup>170</sup>

Like Milton's Satan, Mephistopheles in Goethe's Faust is a complex character. He is regretful of his past yet stubbornly unrepentant. He appears in a traditional form, a black dog, but he also sheds his horns, tail, and claws, taking on the form of a gentleman.<sup>171</sup> Mephistopheles even speaks of his own historical decline. He states that he has modernized, rebranded, and taken a different name because no one believes in the Devil anymore. But even though no one believes in him anymore, society has failed to benefit. Humanity is no less evil: "True, it is almost turned to fairy-tale, and yet mankind has failed to benefit, The Evil One is banned: evils prevail."<sup>172</sup> Goethe's *Faust* begins with a scene that echoes the story of Job. Mephistopheles, standing in as Satan, makes a bet with God that he can lure Faust, a genius scholar, away from his goal of knowledge. God accepts the wager and allows Mephistopheles to tempt Faust.<sup>173</sup>

Meanwhile, Faust is laboring away in his study, despairing because even with his great intellect, the deeper secrets of the universe have eluded him.<sup>174</sup> Mephistopheles reveals himself to

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<sup>170</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 216.

<sup>171</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, trans. Philip Wayne, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951.) Faust, 116–7.

<sup>172</sup> Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, 117. Mephistopheles, referring to himself says, "True, it is almost turned to fairy-tale, and yet mankind has failed to benefit, The Evil One is banned: evils prevail."

<sup>173</sup> Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, 41–42. Prologue in Heaven.

<sup>174</sup> Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, 43.

him as a black dog, and the two make a pact. Mephistopheles will serve Faust in this life, but if he is able to grant Faust a moment of transcendence and satisfaction on earth, Faust will die and serve the Devil in hell.<sup>175</sup> Faust agrees to the deal, and signs the pact in blood.<sup>176</sup>

Mephistopheles begins his attempts to capture Faust through the beautiful maiden Margaret.<sup>177</sup> Mephistopheles helps Faust seduce her, but things take a disastrous turn. Margaret discovers that she is pregnant, and after giving birth to the child, she goes mad and drowns the infant. She is charged with murder and imprisoned, where she waits for her execution.<sup>178</sup> Faust tries to free her from prison but she refuses, instead committing her soul into God's hands. The first part of Goethe's *Faust* ends with a voice from heaven declaring that Margaret is saved, as Faust and Mephistopheles vanish.<sup>179</sup>

In the second part of Goethe's *Faust*, the previous tragedy is set aside. Faust awakens in a field and sets off on a cycle of adventures.<sup>180</sup> With the help of Mephistopheles, Faust assists the German Emperor with governing his kingdom, travels through ancient Greece, marries Helen of Troy, travels through ancient Greece, and even becomes ruler of his own nation. As Faust reflects on his successes, he has a vision of a better human future and finally has a moment of transcendent satisfaction.<sup>181</sup> Faust dies, and Mephistopheles believes that he has won the wager

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<sup>175</sup> Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, 87–8. II.

<sup>176</sup> Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, 89. III.

<sup>177</sup> Also called Gretchen.

<sup>178</sup> Margaret's tragedy goes beyond what is written here. Her mother is killed by a sleeping potion concocted by Mephistopheles, and her brother Valentine is killed by Faust in a duel.

<sup>179</sup> Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, 197.

<sup>180</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Part Two*, trans. Philip Wayne, (London: Penguin, 1959.), 23.

<sup>181</sup> Goethe, *Faust: Part Two*, 269–270. V.

and comes to collect his Faust's soul.<sup>182</sup> However, the evil intentions of Mephistopheles have been turned into good. Faust has struggled for meaning and found redemption. In the final scenes, angels come to take the soul of Faust to heaven.<sup>183</sup> The angels explain why Faust was saved:

Saved is our spirit-peer, in peace,  
 Preserved from evil scheming:  
 'For he whose strivings never cease  
 Is ours for his redeeming.'  
 If touched by the celestial love,  
 His soul has sacred leaven,  
 There comes to greet him, from above,  
 The company of heaven.<sup>184</sup>

The message of Goethe's Faust is ultimately moral, not theological. Faust is saved, not from sin, death, and the Devil, but from selfishness and sensuality. He is redeemed not by grace or Christ but by moral progress and knowledge. He is a thoroughly secular and modern hero.<sup>185</sup>

However, even as the Devil was being reduced to a mere secular symbol, there were dissenting voices. Raised as a Catholic, who abandoned the church for sensuality before ultimately returning, Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) was a poet who wrestled with the Devil and the problem of evil.<sup>186</sup> He is often associated with Romantic Satanism because his works

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<sup>182</sup> Goethe, *Faust: Part Two*, 271–3. V.

<sup>183</sup> Goethe, *Faust: Part Two*, 278. V.

<sup>184</sup> Goethe, *Faust: Part Two*, 282. V.

<sup>185</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 219. This seems to be a reflection of Goethe's own belief, as expressed in one of his very last poems, "Legacy."

<sup>186</sup> "Baudelaire, Maistre, and Original Sin," Françoise Meltzer, *Church Life Journal*, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/ baudelaire-maistre-and-original-sin/>

such as “Litanies to Satan” and *Les fleurs du Mal* (“The Flowers of Evil”) invoke demons and the Devil.<sup>187</sup>

Yet, unlike his contemporaries, Baudelaire took the Devil seriously. When George Sand wrote in the preface of one of her novels that Christians should not be required to believe in the Devil or hell, Baudelaire called her possessed: “It’s the Devil who has persuaded her to trust in her ‘good heart’ and ‘good sense.’”<sup>188</sup>

Baudelaire’s view of the Devil is perhaps most clearly reflected in his work, *Les fleurs du Mal*. Although Satan only appears in a few poems, he is given a prominent place.<sup>189</sup> In the first poem, “Au Lector” (To the Reader), the Devil is first introduced.

Our sins are stubborn, our contrition lax;  
We offer lavishly our vows of faith  
And turn back gladly to the path of filth,  
Thinking mean tears will wash away our stains.

On evil’s pillow lies the alchemist  
Satan Thrice-Great, who lulls our captive soul,  
And all the richest metal of our will  
Is vaporized by his hermetic arts.

Truly the Devil pulls on all our strings!  
In most repugnant objects we find charms;  
Each day we’re one step further into Hell,  
Content to move across the stinking pot.<sup>190</sup>

In another poem, “L’irremediable” (The Irremediable), Baudelaire echoes his statement, “the Devil pulls on all our strings,” by describing how effective the Devil is at oppressing and

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<sup>187</sup> Jonathan Culler, “Baudelaire’s ‘Satanic Verses.’” *Diacritics* 28 (1998), 86, 95–6.

<sup>188</sup> Culler, “Satanic Verses,” 87. This is Culler’s translation.

<sup>189</sup> Culler, “Satanic Verses,” 87.

<sup>190</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*. Translated by James McGowan. (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1998.), 5–7.



entrapping human beings. Like a swimmer who struggles for shore, or a man trying to escape a pit full of snakes, or an iced-in ship, imprisoned in the Artic cold, these images illustrate Satan's power and ability to lead man astray.<sup>191</sup>

Pure emblems, a perfect tableau  
Of irremediable evil,  
Which makes us think that the Devil  
Does well what he chooses to do!<sup>192</sup>

For Baudelaire, evil had to be more than just an inner struggle within individual humans. Instead, there must be some evil power to explain the violent and destructive actions of man. He was also aware that this was an unpopular position. In a letter, he wrote, "I have always been obsessed by the impossibility of accounting for some of man's sudden actions or thoughts without the hypothesis of the intervention of an evil force outside of him. Here's a scandalous avowal for which the whole nineteenth century ranged against me won't make me blush."<sup>193</sup>

Baudelaire's awareness of the fading concern of the modernizing world for the Devil and evil is also apparent in his short story, "The Generous Gambler."<sup>194</sup> In the story, the narrator meets a "mysterious being" and follows him into his underground dwelling. This mysterious host leads the narrator into a luxurious room, where he sees countless men and women, famous and beautiful, yet clearly dissatisfied and bored with life.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, 159.

<sup>192</sup> Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, 161.

<sup>193</sup> Culler, "Satanic Verses," 99. Letter to Flaubert. Translation by Culler. We should note that Baudelaire certainly understood that human action was also responsible for evil. In the seventh stanza of "Au Lector," he writes, "If slaughter, or if arson, poison, rape / Have not as yet adorned our fine designs, / The banal canvas of our woeful fates, / It's only that our spirit lacks the nerve."

<sup>194</sup> Culler, "Satanic Verses," 87.

<sup>195</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, trans. by Louise Varèse. (New York: New Directions Pub. Co., 1988.), 60.

Sitting down with his host, the narrator proceeds to enjoy various pleasures: drinking expensive wines, smoking cigars, gambling, and engaging in philosophical discussions. Soon the shroud is lifted, and it is revealed that this mysterious being is none other than the Devil. But even so, the night continues and reaches a high point. The narrator is lighthearted and full of carelessness, enjoying what the Devil has given him; wine, knowledge, and pleasure. The two play cards and the narrator casually gambles away his soul with no hint of regret in the moment. In exchange, the Devil promises to give him wealth, good fortune, and all the desires of his heart.<sup>196</sup> Like the men and women whom he saw earlier, he has gained the whole world but, in doing so, has lost something far greater, his soul.

The story underscores Baudelaire's awareness that the Devil was disappearing, not because he was no longer active, but because men were willing to forget him. "The Generous Gambler" contains Baudelaire's famous warning about the Devil: "Never forget, when you hear the progress of enlightenment praised, that the Devil's finest trick is to persuade you that he doesn't exist."<sup>197</sup>

### **The Modern Devil**

With the continued rise of secularism and materialism in the West, traditional Christianity continued to lose its influence and authority. Belief in the Devil remained strong among many Christians, but for the rest of society, the Devil was no longer a given or even given much

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<sup>196</sup> Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, 61–62.

<sup>197</sup> Culler, "Satanic Verses, 87." This reference can be found in *Paris Spleen*, 61. However, the English of Culler's translation seemed preferable.

thought at all. In the minds of many, the supernatural beliefs in the past, both God and Devil, were simply illusions.<sup>198</sup>

In the realm of psychology, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) understood the Devil to be a personification of unconscious desires. This understanding is illustrated in Freud’s 1923 paper, “A Seventeenth Century Demonological Neurosis.” In his paper, Freud examined the historical case of Christoph Haizmann (1651–1700), an Austrian painter who made two pacts with the Devil.<sup>199</sup>

Haizmann arrived at the Austrian city of Mariazell in 1677 with a letter of introduction that explained his story. He had been working on his art in the village of Pottenbrun, where he began to experience violent convulsions that were suspected to be from the Devil. After an interrogation, Haizmann admitted that nine years earlier, in a state of depression and anxiety, had made a blood pact with the Devil.<sup>200</sup>

In Mariazell, after undergoing a period of penance and prayer, the Devil appeared to Haizmann in the chapel in the form of a winged dragon and returned the pact to him.<sup>201</sup> It seems that as the clerics had been performing the exorcism on Haizmann, he tore himself away from them, rushed to a corner of the chapel where he saw the Devil, and returned with the paper in his

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<sup>198</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 240.

<sup>199</sup> David Thurn, “Fideikommißbibliothek: Freud's ‘Demonological Neurosis,’” *MLN* 108 (1993), 849.

<sup>200</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by Josef Breuer, Anna Freud, and Angela Richards, trans. James Strachey, Vol. 19, (London: Hogarth Press, 1986.), 74.

<sup>201</sup> Freud, “Demonological Neurosis,” 74.

hand.<sup>202</sup> Although the scene sounds miraculous, Freud makes note that the clerics did not report seeing the Devil, only Haizmann.<sup>203</sup>

Unfortunately, the cure did not last. After recovering his health, Haizmann moved to Vienna to live with his sister. Less than a month after the first episode, fresh attacks began, in which he experienced visions, convulsions, and even paralysis.<sup>204</sup> Haizmann again went to Mariazell, telling the clerics he had returned in order to require the Devil to give him back an earlier pact he had made, written in ink.<sup>205</sup> Once again, the clerics were able to help him obtain the pact, although the report is silent on how this exactly came about.<sup>206</sup>

In the aftermath of these events, the painter would become a monk, as Haizmann would go on to join the order of the Brothers Hospitallers. Although it seemed that Haizmann continued to be tempted by the Devil (though this only seemed to happen when he had too much to drink), he died a peaceful death in the year 1700.<sup>207</sup>

In his psychoanalysis of the case, Freud hypothesized that the Devil was a substitute for Haizmann's father:

It does indeed sound strange that the Devil should be chosen as a substitute for a loved father. But this is only so at first sight, for we know that God is a father-substitute; or more correctly, that he is an exalted father; or, yet again, that he is a copy of a father as he is seen and experienced in childhood, by individuals in their own childhood and by mankind in its prehistory as the father of the primitive horde. Later on in life the individual sees his father as something different and lesser.... Concerning the Evil Demon, we know that he is regarded as the antithesis of God and yet is very close to him

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<sup>202</sup> Freud, "Demonological Neurosis," 76.

<sup>203</sup> Freud, "Demonological Neurosis," 77.

<sup>204</sup> Freud notes that some of the visions included Mary and Christ, seemingly attacking him.

<sup>205</sup> Freud, "Demonological Neurosis," 78.

<sup>206</sup> Freud, "Demonological Neurosis," 78.

<sup>207</sup> Freud, "Demonological Neurosis," 78.

in his nature.... The evil demon of the Christian faith, the Devil of the Middle Ages, was, according to Christian mythology, himself a fallen angel and of a godlike nature. It does not need much analytic perspicacity to guess that God and the Devil were originally identical, were a single figure which was later split into two figures with opposite attributes. In the earliest ages of religion God himself still possessed all the terrifying features which were afterward combined to form a counterpart of him.<sup>208</sup>

Ultimately, Freud diagnosed Haizmann's affliction as a depression resulting from his father's death: "It is no unusual thing for a man to acquire a melancholic depression and an inhibition in his work as a result of his father's death. When this happens, we conclude that the man had been attached to his father with an especially strong love, and we remember how often a severe melancholia appears as a neurotic form of mourning."<sup>209</sup>

For Carl Jung (1903–1955), the Devil was an image to be taken seriously. Speaking on the Christian depiction of the Devil, Jung wrote:

An excellent picture, and one which exactly describes the grotesque and sinister side of the unconscious; for we have never really come to grips with it and consequently it has remained in its original savage state. Probably no one today would still be rash enough to assert that the European is a lamblike creature and not possessed by a devil. The frightful records of our age are plain for all to see, and they surpass in hideousness everything that any previous age, with its feeble instruments, could have hoped to accomplish.<sup>210</sup>

The Devil could be seen as a psychological reality, a representation of the universal collective consciousness of humanity.<sup>211</sup> At the same time, the Devil could also be used as a symbol to describe the more sinister side of the individual's unconscious state. Speaking of the modern patient, Jung writes:

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<sup>208</sup> Freud, "Demonological Neurosis," 85–86.

<sup>209</sup> Freud, "Demonological Neurosis," 87.

<sup>210</sup> C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works of Carl Jung*, ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, and William McGuire, Vol. 16., 2nd ed., (New York: Princeton University Press, 1985.), 186. Paragraph 388.

<sup>211</sup> Robert Avens, "The Image of the Devil in C.G. Jung's Psychology," *Journal of Religion and Health* 16 (1977), 197. According to Avens, Jung's idea of the archetypal shadow can manifest itself in both individuals and the human race. For Jung, one of the clearest examples of the shadow was Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*.

Naturally, in his modern naivete, he has entirely failed to notice that he is as much possessed by his pathological states as any witch or witch-hunter in the darkest Middle Ages. It is merely a difference of name. In those days they spoke of the devil, today we call it a neurosis. But it comes to the same thing, to the same age-old experience: something objectively psychic and strange to us, not under our control, is fixedly opposed to the sovereignty of our will.<sup>212</sup>

To be aware of this side of humanity is essential. The choice of modern society to dismiss the Devil showed that people were unwilling to face the reality of evil. Without this awareness and perspective, man becomes all the more susceptible to evil:

Only an infantile person can pretend that evil is not at work everywhere, and the more unconscious he is, the more the devil drives him. It is just because of this inner connection with the black side of things that it is so incredibly easy for man to commit the most appalling crimes without thinking. Only ruthless self-knowledge on the widest scale, which sees good and evil in correct perspective and can weigh up the motives of human action, offers some guarantee that the end-result will not turn out too badly.<sup>213</sup>

As important as the Devil was to Jung's understanding of humanity, the Devil ultimately remained a projection and symbol.

Within the realm of theology, the Devil was also completing his transition into the realm of symbol and myth. In a positivist and materialist society, the Devil and other spiritual entities seemed like a ridiculous proposition.<sup>214</sup>

For example, Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) approached the worldview of the New Testament as mythological. He saw the world as containing three stories: heaven, earth, and the underworld. In this world, man is at the mercy of the spiritual, man can be possessed, and Satan

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<sup>212</sup> C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works of Carl Jung*, ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler, Vol. 10., (New York: Princeton University Press, 1964.) 154–5. Paragraph 309.

<sup>213</sup> C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works of Carl Jung*, ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, and William McGuire, Vol. 9 Part II., 2nd ed. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1979.), 142. Paragraph 255. Jung certainly highlighted positive aspects of the Devil as well, most notably in his readings of the story of Job. For more information see Completed Works, Volume 11, para 639.

<sup>214</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 241–2.

can instill evil thoughts in him.<sup>215</sup> However, modern man has now outgrown this way of thinking, and it is now impossible for modern man to make use of modern technology and still believe in the miraculous and spiritual world of the New Testament.<sup>216</sup> Therefore, Scripture needed to be demythologized, to get to the real intentions and power behind the myth.<sup>217</sup>

For Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), the Devil was a useful symbol to understand man’s relationship with temptation and sin. In his Gifford Lecture titled, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: Human Destiny*, Niebuhr interpreted the Fall of Genesis 3 as myth:

In the myth of the Fall the temptation arises from the serpent’s analysis of the human situation. The serpent depicts God as jealously guarding his prerogatives against the possibility that man might have his eyes opened and become, “as God, knowing good and evil.” Man is tempted, in other words, to break and transcend the limits which God has set for him. The story of the Fall is innocent of a fully developed satanology; yet Christian theology has not been wrong in identifying the serpent with, or regarding it as an instrument or symbol of the devil. To believe that there is a devil is to believe that there is a principle or force of evil antecedent to any evil action. Before man fell the devil fell.<sup>218</sup>

In a somewhat inexact way, Niebuhr understood the Devil as a symbol of temptation, an alternative to God’s established order. The importance of the Devil, therefore, is to show how sin arises:

It is not necessary to trace the intricate relation between Old Testament satanology and its source in Babylonian and Persian myths. The importance of Biblical satanology lies in the two facts that: (1) the devil is not thought of as having created evil. Rather his evil arises from his effort to transgress the bounds set for his life, an effort which places him in rebellion against God. (2) The devil fell before man fell, which is to say that man’s rebellion against God is not an act of sheer perversity, nor does it follow inevitably from the situation in which he stands.... Perhaps the best description or definition of this

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<sup>215</sup> GMM Pelser, “Rudolf Bultmann’s Programme of Demythologising and the Resurrection Narratives in John.” *Neotestamentica* 23 (1989), 271.

<sup>216</sup> Pelser, “Rudolf Bultmann’s Programme,” 272.

<sup>217</sup> Pelser, “Rudolf Bultmann’s Programme,” 273.

<sup>218</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, (New York: Scribner, 1949.), 179–80.

mystery is the statement that sin posits itself, that there is no situation in which it is possible to say that sin is either an inevitable consequence of the situation nor yet that it is an act of sheer and perverse individual defiance of God.<sup>219</sup>

Of course, in the twentieth century, there were Christian voices that strongly affirmed the doctrine of the Devil. For example, the British writer C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) wrote about the demonic in *The Screwtape Letters* as well as *Perelandra* in the Space Trilogy.<sup>220</sup> Within Catholicism, Pope Paul VI (1897–1978) brought the Devil to the fore, when he offered a homily in 1972 reflecting his belief that the demonic had infiltrated the church.<sup>221</sup> “From some fissure the smoke of Satan has entered the temple of God.”<sup>222</sup>

Likewise, Billy Graham (1918–2018), the prominent Southern Baptist minister, was unafraid to speak of the Devil. In a New York Times op-ed, he pointed to the Devil as the source behind the Jonestown tragedy and many more inhumane acts. “But we have seen Auschwitz repeated again and again though on a vastly different scale—from the Manson murders to the Munich Olympic massacre to the Guyana mass killings and suicides. And I fear there may be more to come. As I travel throughout the world, I can feel the tremors of more diabolical earthquakes. God is at work in the hearts of millions—but so is the devil.”<sup>223</sup>

But despite the continued affirmation of the doctrine of the Devil by voices in modern Christianity, the most vocal voices seem to be in the past.

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<sup>219</sup> Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 180–1.

<sup>220</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 263.

<sup>221</sup> “IX ANNIVERSARIO DELL'INCORONAZIONE DI SUA SANTITÀ: OMELIA DI PAOLO VI,” Pope Paul VI, *Vatican Publishing House*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/homilies/1972/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_hom\\_19720629.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/homilies/1972/documents/hf_p-vi_hom_19720629.html)

<sup>222</sup> “The Smoke of Satan Returns,” William Doyno Jr. *First Things*, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/10/the-smoke-of-satan-returns>

<sup>223</sup> “Billy Graham, on Satan and Jonestown,” Billy Graham, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/12/05/archives/billy-graham-on-satan-and-jonestown.html>



## CAUSES FOR DECLINE

Based on this historical survey, the causes which led to the decline of the Devil in theology can be roughly divided into and summarized as three factors: The development of a personable Devil, the rise of secular society, and various theological emphases within the Church.

### **The Personable Devil**

The Folk Devil initially may have contributed to a fear of the Devil and demons. However, over time, the Devil shifted from boogeyman to comic relief and finally to misunderstood rebel. The Devil in the first Faust legend took on human qualities, which made him a character of sympathy. Milton's Lucifer in *Paradise Lost* displayed further depth and personality. Although Milton may not have intended to portray the Devil as the protagonist, following generations claimed Milton's Lucifer as a Romantic hero.

The shift of the Devil from the realm of theology into the literary world helped to strip away the layers of evil surrounding Satan. With time, the Devil as a folk character put him into the realm of the unbelievable. He became an old symbol in the same category as a god from ancient mythology. At the same time, the humanizing of the Devil stripped the Devil of his wickedness. In the literary Satan, people saw their own reflection, and so the Devil went from The Prince of Darkness to being misunderstood or demonized.

## A Secularized Society

Arguably, the most significant force that has impacted belief in the Devil has been the development of secular society.

In his book, *A Secular Age*, the philosopher Charles Taylor reflects on a question that runs parallel to the discussion of belief in the Devil: “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”<sup>224</sup>

Taylor lays out three distinct characteristics of the world before this shift took place.

First, people lived in an “enchanted” world.<sup>225</sup> The people of the pre-modern world lived in a world full of spirits, demons, and moral forces.<sup>226</sup> These forces could be found in the forests, the wilderness, but could also threaten and enter everyday life.<sup>227</sup> As a result, the boundaries between the mind and the world were not clearly distinguished. The mind was seen as “porous” and could be “penetrated” by spirits and spells.<sup>228</sup>

Second and closely connected, God was seen as responsible for the very existence of society. Human existence was viewed as grounded in something higher than mere human actions. Daily life was interwoven with worship and the spiritual, and God could be encountered everywhere.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018.), 25.

<sup>225</sup> Here, Taylor is using “enchanted” as antonym to “disenchanted,” as used by Max Weber in his 1917 lecture, “Science as a Vocation.”

<sup>226</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25–26.

<sup>227</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 32.

<sup>228</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 35.

<sup>229</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25–26.

Third and finally, the natural world was seen as testifying to divine purpose and action. The center and apex of the universe was God, and therefore everything extended from Him.<sup>230</sup> Storms, droughts, floods, plagues, but also flourishing and fertility, were seen as acts of God.<sup>231</sup> Man, as created being, operates a unique place in this world; He lives in the universe, but he is not included in it.<sup>232</sup>

These pre-modern beliefs were gradually worn away. The former beliefs of the cosmos were replaced by the modern, scientific, and neutral world.<sup>233</sup> The old world became “disenchanted.” Taylor describes this process of disenchantment through various causes. Three are especially relevant to this conversation:

First, humanism led to an emphasis on earthly flourishing. In the older world, human flourishing and prosperity were seen as good but not the ultimate goal. A Christian pointed to faith in God or the love of God as something greater than mere earthly prosperity. However, with the rise of modern humanism, earthly flourishing became the final goal for humanity.<sup>234</sup> It became possible for man to find meaning without the supernatural or transcendent.<sup>235</sup>

Second, as a result of the process of disenchantment, the modern self was no longer “porous” but became “buffered.” The buffered self is no longer afraid of demons or spirits because they do not exist to him.<sup>236</sup> He is secure because he is self-possessed and safe in his own

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<sup>230</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 60.

<sup>231</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

<sup>232</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 59.

<sup>233</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 29.

<sup>234</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 18.

<sup>235</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 19.

<sup>236</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 135.

inner mental realm. While those who lived in an enchanted world found it dangerous to go against God, modern man does not need to fear rejecting the divine.<sup>237</sup> He takes pride in being modern. He has been freed from the fears of the past; things (God, spirits, demons) can no longer “get to him.” He is now civilized and protected from the old supernatural fears of his ancestors.<sup>238</sup>

Finally, the way the world was imagined changed. With the scientific revolution, the old ideas of the cosmos faded. Man finds himself not just in the universe but belonging to it. Man is no longer the center of the world and universe but merely a part of it.<sup>239</sup> The former world, which seemed limited and static, has become one which feels vast and infinite and, according to science, the product of billions of years.<sup>240</sup> In a world driven by this new narrative and understanding of the universe, the Christian history of the world as created and redeemed by God has become unfathomable and bewildering.<sup>241</sup>

The philosopher Richard Rorty (1931–2007) summarizes the path from sacred to secular:

Once upon a time we felt a need to worship something which lay beyond the visible world. Beginning in the seventeenth century we tried to substitute a love of truth for a love of God, treating the world described as quasi divinity. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century we tried to substitute a love of ourselves for a love of scientific truth, a worship of our own deep spiritual or poetic nature, treated as one more quasi divinity.... (We have now arrived at) the point where we no longer worship anything, where we treat nothing as a quasi divinity, where we treat everything—our language, our conscience, our community—as a product of time and chance.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 41.

<sup>238</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 301.

<sup>239</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 60.

<sup>240</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 323.

<sup>241</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 324.

<sup>242</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.), 22.

The rise of secular society helped to drastically change the worldview of society from one in which the Devil was accepted as a given to one in which he is proudly dismissed as a remnant of the past. In a disenchanted world driven by secular time and the whims of chance, there is no need for a god or even a devil.

### **Theological Emphases**

Factors within Christianity also played a major role in the decline of the Devil. The theological attitude that rose in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was willing to jettison off those doctrines that seemed offensive or outdated, including the Devil.<sup>243</sup> The attitude of later theologians was to move the Devil into the realm of myth and symbol.<sup>244</sup>

The Christian emphasis on witchcraft also set the Devil up for decline. Initially, the witchcraft craze created a zeal and awareness against the Devil and demonic forces in society. However, this mania against the Devil was not sustainable. The result was that later generations, more Enlightened and scientific, could point to the witch hunts as a moral stain on the Church and the Devil as another example of outdated Christian superstition. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) pointed to the witch hunts and demonizing tactics of Christians as a fatal mistake that led to the decline of Christianity:

The result was that all Christianity, even when there were no witch-hunts and the like, acquired a more or less pervasive odour of demonism, becoming something which from this dark chamber seemed to spread abroad, and did actually spread abroad, menace, anxiety, melancholy, oppression, or tragic excitement. And this had the consequence that when in the light of witch-hunts a protest was made against this chamber...it necessarily led to the Enlightenment and thus to a protest against the whole Christian message. And the further consequence has been that in all subsequent discussion the view has had to be

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<sup>243</sup> Here, referencing Schleiermacher, as described in the section titled “The Changing Tide.”

<sup>244</sup> Here, referencing Bultmann and Niebuhr, as described in the section titled “The Modern Devil.”

taken into account that angelology, Christology, and Christian theology generally form a whole with a particular demonology, and that this whole has either to be accepted, rejected, or, in the process of a general demythologization in the name of the modern outlook, reduced to a definite anthropology. It was fatal that at the time of the Enlightenment the way was entered which led from a criticism of demonology to a contesting of theology generally. But it was even more fatal that orthodoxy gave good cause for following this path. And it is even more fatal still that to this day very attempts are made to champion a demonology which will only give cause to take this path again and again.<sup>245</sup>

Because the witch hunts and demonization of previous generations had done such harm to modern orthodoxy, Barth warned against a potential pitfall in the study of the Devil or demons:

It has never been good for anyone—including (and particularly) Martin Luther—to look too frequently or lengthily or seriously or systematically at demons (who for Luther were usually compressed into the single figure of the devil). It does not make the slightest impression on the demons if we do so, and there is the imminent danger that in so doing we ourselves might become just a little or more than a little demonic.<sup>246</sup>

In Barth's view, an overemphasis and unhealthy interest in demons would lead Christians to become more demonic themselves. Following his own advice, he gave the Devil a small and strange place in his theology:

I must confess that I know so little of the devil that I cannot give a definition of him. I know of the effects of his existence, but I have never met him in person as Luther did. So I find it is asking too much to give some kind of definition. Perhaps the devil is even the being who cannot be defined because of his nature, because he is the devil. He is certainly not a creature of God. He can only be, perhaps, the reason of the unreasonableness of sin. The devil is, as I like to say, the impossible possibility that cannot be defined. What is the relation between him and our sin? I am sure that I am responsible for my sin, but I also know that my sin is greater than myself, stronger than myself, and maybe this reason of sin and this force of sin may be called the devil. But, as with hell, we are not invited to make reflections on the devil! Please don't! It isn't necessary, it doesn't help, to make a picture of the devil. We can't deny him, but don't

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<sup>245</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics Vol. 3*, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, (London: T & T Clark, 2010.), 235. III. Paragraph 523.

<sup>246</sup> Barth, *Christian Dogmatics Vol 3*, 232. III. Paragraph 529.

busy yourself with him. Live with God in Christ, obedient to his Holy Spirit, and then the devil will fly away like an evil beast who can't live with you.<sup>247</sup>

Finally, the rise of satisfaction theory as the dominant view in Western Christianity contributed to the Devil's decline. In the words of Jeffrey Burton Russell:

Rejecting ransom theory, Anselm formulated an original variant of sacrifice theory known as satisfaction theory. In this story Lucifer plays a little role. Because we violated our contract unjustly, God in justice is under no obligation to save us. But his mercy and love make it fitting and proper for him to do so.... But we have nothing to offer God, because everything we have is his own gift to us. Humanity thus owes God a great debt that it has no means to pay; God has the means to pay but owes no debt. It follows that the only being who can make the appropriate sacrifice is one who is both God and man.... Legalistic though it was, satisfaction presented a coherent theory of redemption. Gradually it came to replace ransom theory completely among theologians (although not in literature or legend). As ransom theory faded, so the role of the Devil in theology diminished.<sup>248</sup>

The discussion on atonement theories does present some interesting questions for reflection. For instance, should the Devil have a place in how Christians speak about atonement?

In his book, *Christus Victor*, Gustaf Aulén (1879–1977) argues that Western Christianity has neglected the central (and traditional) theme of the atonement in favor of Anselm's satisfaction theory.<sup>249</sup> In Aulén's own words, the theme of atonement is dramatic: "Its central theme is the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ—Christus Victor— fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to himself."<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Karl Barth, *Barth in Conversation*, ed. by Eberhard Busch, Karlfried Froehlich, Darrell L. Guder, and David C. Chao, Vol. 1, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.), 77.

<sup>248</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 133.

<sup>249</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*. Translated by A.G. Herbert. (London: SPCK, 2010.), v. Summary of the Argument.

<sup>250</sup> Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 4.

Therefore, according to Aulén, the purpose of the work of Christ is first and foremost to defeat the powers or “tyrants” that hold man hostage: sin, death, and the Devil.<sup>251</sup> Through Christ’s victory over the evil powers, God is reconciled to the world. “Seen from this side, the triumph over the opposing powers is regarded as a reconciling of God Himself; He is reconciled by the very act in which He reconciles the world to Himself.”<sup>252</sup>

It has been stated that Aulén overemphasizes the theme of *Christus Victor* to the exclusion of the satisfaction and moral themes of Christ’s payment of sin and example for Christians.<sup>253</sup> However, *Christus Victor* is undoubtedly a theme found within Scripture. Aulén cites Paul’s words to the Colossians 2:15: “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”<sup>254</sup> (Other references include verses such as 1 John 3:8; John 12:31; Heb 2:14–15.)

So, should the Devil have a place in the way that Christians speak about atonement? Aulén would seem to say, “Yes.” In fact, Aulén would seem to be saying that the heavy emphasis the Western Church has placed on sin and Christ’s payment for sins to reconcile God and man has come at the expense of *Christus Victor*, the rescue of man from the power of the Devil.

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<sup>251</sup> Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 19–20.

<sup>252</sup> Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 5.

<sup>253</sup> David Scaer, “Anfechtung, Prayer, and Resurrection,” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File. Released June 18, 2015. <http://essays.wls.wels.net:8080/handle/123456789/2006>, 33. Scaer points out that *Christus Victor* alarmed confessional Lutherans to the point that they pushed satisfaction views even further; vicarious satisfaction became not only the center of Christ’s atonement but synonymous with it. It should be noted that Aulén himself did not regard *Christus Victor* as an atonement theory on its own but rather a motif, along with sacrifice, satisfaction, and ransom. For more, see the foreword of *Christus Victor* as well as page 66.

<sup>254</sup> Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 69.



However, this discussion leaves more questions than answers. Is it even possible to overemphasize Christ's work of satisfaction? How much is the picture of Christ's victory over the Devil being preached on in Western Christianity? How much should it be preached on? (Is any of this measurable? How much of this is the product of a so-called guilt-innocence culture?)

## IMPLICATIONS

The decline of the doctrine of the Devil has had an influence on both the secular and sacred realms. First and foremost, Christianity remains divided on the subject, and those who believe in the Devil often disagree on what it means to believe in the Devil. Different Christians may have varying ideas of how the Devil works and operates and how the Christian should respond to his work.

Likewise, secular society has also been changed by the removal of the Devil. For an extensive period of Western history, the Devil has helped people make sense of and understand evil. The loss of the Devil has contributed to a modern culture of irony that can no longer define what is evil and what is good.

### **The State of Modern Belief**

The first and most obvious effect of the decline of the doctrine of the Devil is that it has divided Christians on the subject. Because of doctrinal emphases and secular influences, Christians have attributed varying importance and weight to the Devil, contributing to the present "muddle"

described in the introduction. Most of modern Christian belief in the Devil can be roughly divided into three camps.

The first view can be understood as dismissive or social. Christians who hold to this view have followed the approach of liberal theology and understand the Devil and demons as a myth, but they see it as a myth that needs to be deconstructed. Those who follow this social view of the demonic are dismissive of the Devil as a personal and present reality, but he stands as a symbol for human evil and societal oppression, things that the Church must face.<sup>255</sup> Satan and the demonic then are terms to express the dark side of our human natures that need to be redeemed.<sup>256</sup>

The second view is a pneumatic perspective, held by many Pentecostals and Charismatics. Christians who hold this view merge the physical and spiritual planes into one narrative.<sup>257</sup> This overarching narrative places individual Christians and the Church in direct combat with the Devil and his forces. Demons rule over portions of the earth yet to be reclaimed by the Church.<sup>258</sup> The individual Christian holds authority over the demonic through faith. The worldview that the pneumatic view presents is one of Christians waging war against the Devil and demons in various places and with various levels of strength.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Furgeson, "The Sword & The Mask," 3. Furgeson approaches the social and dismissive as two separate camps when it comes to spiritual warfare, but because this paper focuses specifically on the topic of the Devil, I have merged the social and dismissive into one. It also seems that the social view is dominant compared to a purely dismissive view of Satan.

<sup>256</sup> Furgeson, "The Sword & The Mask," 53. Here Furgeson description is based on the theology of Walter Wink, as an example of the social view of spiritual warfare.

<sup>257</sup> Furgeson, "The Sword & The Mask," 4.

<sup>258</sup> Furgeson, "The Sword & The Mask," 65. This view is espoused specifically by Peter Wagner, an American missionary and writer who focused specifically on the matters of spiritual warfare.

<sup>259</sup> Furgeson, "The Sword & The Mask," 3–4.

Finally, the third view is a bifurcated or divided approach. This is the view of most mainline Christians. This view upholds the reality of the supernatural, but the single plane that the pneumatic view presents has now been “bifurcated” or split. The spiritual plane is separated from the material plane. The bifurcated view still affirms belief in the Devil, demons, and angels as real spiritual beings, but how these truths relate to the Church, the physical world, and the individual Christian is unclear.<sup>260</sup>

There are challenges with each of these three approaches.

The dismissive/social approach is a symptom of broader issues. Those who hold this view often try to rewrite or redefine traditional doctrinal stances to be relevant in the modern age. In an effort to make the story of Jesus relevant, the Devil is not taken as “real” in a literal sense. The Devil and demons merely stand in for things such as ecological destruction, nuclear armaments, and oppressive regimes.<sup>261</sup> This means that much of the Gospel is reduced to liberation theology. The role of Christ follows the same path: Jesus is no longer King of Kings, but Myth of Myths.<sup>262</sup>

Likewise, the pneumatic view stems from a particular theological perspective. Typically, the hermeneutic used by those with a pneumatic view is focused upon experience and observation.<sup>263</sup> Although the pneumatic view takes the Devil literally and seriously, this hermeneutic also leads to challenges.

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<sup>260</sup> Furgeson, “The Sword & The Mask,” 4.

<sup>261</sup> Furgeson, “The Sword & The Mask,” 59.

<sup>262</sup> Furgeson, “The Sword & The Mask,” 60.

<sup>263</sup> Furgeson, “The Sword & The Mask,” 77.

The emphasis on experience means that there can be a dangerous tendency to go beyond Scripture. Through occult practitioners and personal observation, it is believed that Christians can learn such things as the names of demons, their motives, their organizational structure, and more.<sup>264</sup> In the same way, the emphasis on experience means that the Christian is the center of the spiritual struggle with the Devil. The Devil and demons are seen as active in the world, and Christians must fight back. Through prayer, the Spirit works through miracles to combat the forces of evil. Therefore, God's work in the world is "contingent, by His own design, on the effectiveness of believing prayer."<sup>265</sup> Man is central to God's work against the Devil.

Finally, while the social view of the Devil overemphasizes the physical world, the pneumatic view overemphasizes the spiritual. There is much to say about spiritually confronting the Devil and the power of prayer, but not much to say about the daily needs of one's neighbors or social concern for the poor or needy.<sup>266</sup>

The bifurcated approach somewhat splits the difference between the dismissive/social approach and pneumatic views. Most Christians who hold to the bifurcated understanding of the Devil limit his work to three actions: Temptation, possession, and occult activity.<sup>267</sup> However, different church bodies will approach the Devil's work differently: Some groups, such as Roman Catholicism have placed a heavy emphasis on possession. Comparatively, Lutherans have had very little to say about the Devil's activity when it comes to possession or the occult. Other Christians are hesitant to speak of possession and have reduced the Devil's work to exploiting

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<sup>264</sup> Furgeson, "The Sword & The Mask," 77.

<sup>265</sup> Furgeson, "The Sword & The Mask," 79. Here, Furgeson is quoting Peter Wagner.

<sup>266</sup> Furgeson, "The Sword & The Mask," 80.

<sup>267</sup> Furgeson, "The Sword & The Mask," 82–83.

Christian weaknesses through temptation.<sup>268</sup> Generally speaking, the bifurcated approach remains narrow in what it attributes to the Devil and is hesitant to attribute his work in the broader physical world. His place in theology remains minimized, which seems to be the bifurcated view's greatest weakness.<sup>269</sup>

### **The State of Modern Unbelief**

The removal of the Devil from the public consciousness has also impacted secular society. In his book, *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil*, author Andrew Delbanco makes the case that the loss of the Devil has contributed to the failure of modern Americans to recognize and deal with evil.

Delbanco traces the Devil back to the early settlers who came to the New World with an awareness that Devil was all around them.<sup>270</sup> The Old World beliefs these early colonists brought with them meant that they perceived the day-to-day events of life through a spiritual lens. However, the continued rise of reason and science meant that these spiritual and supernatural views were being left behind. Instead of looking to inspiration or revelation, people looked within themselves.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Furgeson, "The Sword & The Mask," 84. Some Eastern Orthodox hold to this view, *Unseen Warfare*, as well as Protestants, David Powlison's *Power Encounters*.

<sup>269</sup> Furgeson, "The Sword & The Mask," 91.

<sup>270</sup> Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 51.

<sup>271</sup> Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 79.

This removal of Satan from the common worldview set secular American society down a new path.<sup>272</sup> With the death of the Devil also came the death of original sin. The American spirit became synonymous with overthrowing the shackles of the past, through capitalism, through self-evident truths and rights, through progress.<sup>273</sup> The self became king. The original sin of pride became redefined as a virtue and ideal.

The death of Satan has also had other unintended consequences. The lack of a theology of evil meant that as Americans grappled with tragedy, suffering, and death during and after the Civil War, the providence of God was questioned and ultimately removed.

Delbanco illustrates this change with the letters of a soldier from Indiana who had two brushes with death during the war. In a letter to his wife in 1862, he reported that a spent shell had grazed him and destroyed his canteen while killing four of his fellow soldiers. After such a case of divine providence and protection, he wrote, “God will bring me safely home.”<sup>274</sup>

But something changed. Two years later, the man reported again to his wife of another brush with death. As bullets had rained down on him, he explained that he had missed being hit by less than an inch; his belt buckle had saved him. Recounting the event to his wife, this time, he voiced his fate with a different voice, “I have been very lucky.”<sup>275</sup> God and providence were gone, and luck and chance had taken his place.

Removing the Devil and original sin also had other consequences for society. The Devil has often been denounced as a tool for Christianity to demonize its opponents, but even with

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<sup>272</sup> Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 106.

<sup>273</sup> Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 104–5.

<sup>274</sup> “Civil War Letters of Amory K Allen,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 31, (1935), 360.

<sup>275</sup> “Civil War Letters,” 376.

Satan's absence, secular society continued the same practice. The problem of evil still needed to be explained. If it could not be found in the supernatural or the self, it must be found in other people. Therefore immigrants, outsiders, Blacks, Jews, and Asians all served as scapegoats.<sup>276</sup>

With the progress of science, this demonization was elevated to another level. The concept of original sin had been unpopular, but a new kind of original sin was created in biological theories of eugenics. Evil revealed itself in bodily features, such as "prominent ears... projecting cheek-bones...large lower jaws...deeply placed eyes...the shifty, animal-like gaze."<sup>277</sup>

These scientific advancements led to even darker paths. The ideas of Darwin led to the belief that man could be purified through breeding. In 1927, the sterilization of "feebleminded" people was supported by a majority decision in the Supreme Court. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. wrote in his opinion supporting the decision: "It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the fallopian tubes. Three generations of imbeciles are enough."<sup>278</sup> This idea would still remain prevalent even in 1938 when a Harvard anthropologist published a book devoted to the classification of criminals by race, skull size, lip size, and hair color.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 166.

<sup>277</sup> Eugene Talbot, *Degeneracy: Its Causes, Signs, and Results*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912.), 17.

<sup>278</sup> Carl Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.), 47.

<sup>279</sup> Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 179–80.

Finally, the death of Satan and the lack of a theology/philosophy of evil has left modern Americans to create their own morality. It is true that humanity experienced radical evil at unprecedented levels during the twentieth century, but these evils had an unexpected effect. The hellish horrors and evils committed by the Nazis or Soviets did not serve to increase the awareness of evil; instead, they dulled Western morality.<sup>280</sup> Suffering became common; the death of millions became another statistic.

It also changed the measuring stick of morality. How can the small peccadillos of individuals stand in comparison to the war crimes of nations? People became numb to suffering and even to their own devices.<sup>281</sup>

These tragedies also have created a skeptical generation dismissive of the past. The result has been a topsy-turvy, ironic society: Good has become evil, and evil becomes good. The traditional and “natural” distinctions of society have been challenged. Morality is now a matter of preference.<sup>282</sup> In fact, the lack of evil is now a defining quality of modern times. The concept of sin (and the Devil) now exists almost exclusively within a theological context.

Delbanco is not a Christian and he does not believe in the Devil, and yet he recognizes that something profound has been lost with the death of Satan. The Western world has lost its awareness of the transcendent, and with the death of the Devil, Americans have lost the religious language that allowed past generations to identify and make sense of evil.<sup>283</sup> Delbanco writes:

Modernity, in other words, has doomed us to see the world through metaphors that cannot be ratified by any appeal to transcendence....No one should underestimate the destructive effects of the theological beliefs that have fallen away....Yet, despite the monstrous uses

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<sup>280</sup> Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 192.

<sup>281</sup> Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 200.

<sup>282</sup> Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 206.

<sup>283</sup> Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 224.



to which Satan has been put, I believe that our culture is now in crisis because evil remains an inescapable experience for all of us, while we no longer have a symbolic language for describing it.<sup>284</sup>

The result of this shift has been devastating for individuals and society at large. How does a patient cope with her sudden cancer diagnosis? How can an individual react to an unforeseen tragedy? How does society cope with the horrors of shootings and bombings? How can society talk intelligently about evil when it has stripped away the religious and philosophical language of the past? It has been left groping in the dark for something it once knew, trying to grasp and seize something it once possessed but now has lost.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 224.

<sup>285</sup> Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*, 224.

## RECLAIMING THE DEVIL

Where do Bible-believing Christians go from here? If the Church is to renew its teaching of the Devil in the twenty-first century, it begins with a proper theology of the Devil. If Christians understand the work of the Devil, they can better answer the question, “Why does the Devil matter?”

The following sections will examine the doctrine of the Devil and its importance to Christian theology. In the first section, “A Theology of the Devil,” we will demonstrate how the doctrine of the Devil highlights the saving work of Christ. In the second section, “The Devil and the Christian Life,” we will examine how the Devil shapes and orients the life of a Christian. Finally, this study will briefly offer some thoughts on overcoming the obstacle of embarrassment when preaching or teaching on the subject of the Devil.

### **A Theology of the Devil**

Reclaiming the doctrine of the Devil begins with a proper theology of the Devil.

Who is the Devil? Scripture calls him by various names. He is the Father of Lies, a murderer since the beginning (John 8:44). He is The Adversary (Zech 3:1), The Tempter (Gen 3:1), and The Accuser (Rev 12:10). He is The Evil One (Eph 6:16), The God of this Age (2 Cor 4:4), The Ruler of the Kingdom of the Air, the spirit at work in the disobedient (Eph 2:2), and The Prince of this World (John 12:31). He is the Red Dragon (Rev 12:3), the Serpent (Rev 12:9), and a roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8–9).

Within these names, the Devil's work is found. He is the one who brought forth the first lie, and through that lie, he murdered the human race through Adam. He is the one who stands against Christians, both luring them into temptation and accusing them of their sin. He is the one whom the disobedient follow, the one who has blinded the eyes of the people of this world. His ultimate goal is to devour and destroy, to murder and lead astray.

Scripture also shows the means through which Satan is carrying out these tasks. Through personal temptation and deception, he sways Adam and Eve (Gen 3). By playing on David's pride, Satan incites him to take a census (1 Chron 21:1). He tests Jesus in the wilderness (Matt 4:1–11).

Through the power of possession, the Devil afflicts and oppresses people. He uses this to drive people further away from the Savior. The young daughter of a Canaanite woman suffers terribly at the hands of a demon (Matt 15:21–28). The man possessed by Legion is driven away from family, friends, and society and physically abuses himself (Mark 5:1–20). A demon robs a young boy of his speech and tries to throw him into water or fire to kill him (Mark 9:14–29).

The occult also appears on the pages of Scripture. The magicians of Pharaoh perform miracles by their secret arts (Exod 7:11; 22). Israel is warned against consulting mediums and spiritists (Isa 8:19). The sorcerer Bar-Jesus is identified as a child of the Devil and an enemy of all that is right (Acts 13:10).

However, the Devil's work is not limited to only these three areas. Christians should also be aware that the Devil's personal attacks can extend beyond the traditional boundaries of temptation and encounters with possession and the occult. The Devil described in Scripture can act against believers in very personal, tragic, and evil ways. Through acts of violence against Job and his family, the Devil tempts Job to renounce his faith. Satan asks to sift Simon Peter as

wheat (Luke 22:31). He physically stops Paul from visiting the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:18) and harasses Paul throughout his ministry with a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7).

The Devil is also active both in the world and in the Church at large. As the god of this age, he wields authority in the world. In Revelation, John describes Satan being released and set free to deceive the nations (Rev 20). Earlier in Revelation, John describes the beasts that work on behalf of Satan, one exercising earthly authority to wage war against the church, the other exercising religious authority to perform wonders and deceive (Rev 13). The Devil shown in Revelation pursues the church with fury and abandon (Rev 12:17). He persecutes and throws Christians into prison (Rev 2:10). By the Beast of the Sea, he blasphemes God and slanders the saints (Rev 12:6). He is active within the church as well. Through heresy, the Devil deceives and causes some to abandon the faith. He masquerades as an angel of light to lead men astray (2 Cor 11:14).

Christians might also consider how the Father of Lies is working beyond persecution and heresy. In his book *Live No Lies*, John Mark Comer proposes that the false ideas of this world are lies that spawn from the Devil. Latching on to Jesus's identification of the Devil as the Father of Lies, Comer compares the Devil's work to a "misinformation" campaign.<sup>286</sup> These lies work together with the outside pressure of the world and the sinful desires of the flesh to try and lead the believer astray. In Comer's own words, "The devil's primary stratagem is to drive the soul and society into ruin is *deceptive ideas that play to disordered desires, which are normalized in a sinful society.*"<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies: Recognize and Resist the Three Enemies That Sabotage Your Peace*, (London: WaterBrook, 2021.), 51, 54, 56.

<sup>287</sup> Comer, *Live No Lies*, 69–70.

While this somewhat simplifies the Devil's work in other realms, it provides a helpful framework for the Christian to identify the Devil's broader influence in the world. In observing the postmodern culture inherited by the modern age full of cynicism, sarcasm, suspicion of authority, disdain for restraints on conduct, and the undermining of any sense of natural or moral law, one cannot help but conclude that there is an active and coordinated assault on truth. The Devil's fingerprints are everywhere.<sup>288</sup>

In a sense, to view the Devil and his work is to view him in the way that the fathers saw him; everywhere. Similar to Augustine, Christians might encounter and see the Devil at work in his own twisted version of "sacraments," or to use a Lutheran term, "masks." Like Luther, the Devil should be seen as unleashed, seeking unceasingly to destroy what he hates the most, the Son of God and his work (Rev 20). If Christ is the ladder that connects heaven and the earth, then the Devil's one goal is to use whatever means and authority he is given to tear the faithful away.<sup>289</sup>

In summary, Scripture shows the Devil as a dangerous adversary, far more powerful than man is. However, that is his purpose. As the chief foe and enemy of Christians, the Devil highlights the work of Christ.

If the Devil is an adversary that man cannot overcome, then the Christian must look not to himself but to his Savior. Only Christ can come to the Christian's aid. If the Devil is the strong

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<sup>288</sup> Comer, *Live No Lies*, 69–70.

<sup>289</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26–30*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 223. "Therefore [the Devil] does not cease fighting against the ladder and this ascent and descent to draw us away from it. This he sets in motion through all sects and heresies in order that he may divert men from the knowledge of Christ, from His divinity and His humanity, and in order that he may draw the whole church and the members away from Christ."

man, then the only hope for the Christian is to look to the one stronger than the Devil (Mark 1:7). That is why the Son of God was revealed, to destroy the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8).

Jesus drives out demons and heals the oppressed. He walks through the cities and villages proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God (Matt 9:35). He resists the temptations of the Devil in the desert. Christ suffers horrifically and dies tragically to justify humanity and free Christians from spiritual despair and accusations of the Devil. Christ is the true and better Adam (Rom 5), who does not yield to the Devil in the garden, but instead crushes the serpent's head.

Christ is the only one who can save the Christian from the Devil, and in throwing his hope and trust in his Savior, the Christian finds his only true refuge.

### **The Devil and the Christian Life**

The doctrine of the Devil not only drives the Christian to cling to Christ for salvation, but it also helps to properly orient believers to the Christian journey of life. The doctrine of the Devil does this in a number of ways.

First, Christians are able to identify that there is a struggle against the Devil. This manifests itself in several ways. Broadly speaking, the Christian knows what the goal of the Devil is and how he will attack:

We understand what the Devil is trying to do, and his ultimate goal. The devil's goal is to first isolate us, then implant in our minds deceitful ideas that play to our disordered desires, which we feel comfortable with because they are normalized by the status quo of society. Specifically, he lies about who God is, who we are, and what the good life is, with an aim to undermine our trust in God's love and wisdom. His intent is to get us to seize autonomy from God and redefine good and evil ourselves, thereby leading to the ruin of our souls and society.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Comer, *Live No Lies*, 99.

The Father of Lies will use the tools at his disposal to spread lies. However, the Christian can identify these attacks.

On a personal level, when Christians are experiencing temptation, persecution, or despair, they are able to recognize what the Devil is trying to do. Through lies about God, lies about man, and temptations that resonate with our sinful nature, he is trying to bring about our destruction. Like Evagrius and the Christians in the desert (and Jesus!), believers can identify that they are being attacked and turn to their source of truth and comfort: “In the time of struggle, when the demons make war against us and hurl their arrows at us, let us answer them from the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>291</sup>

This awareness also enables the Christian to be discerning about modern cultural movements in a world that is full of lies.

Whether that be lies about how to seek happiness: “Be true to yourself. Speak the truth. Don’t let anyone tell you what to do.”<sup>292</sup> Or lies about human identity: “We can be who we want to be. We must be our authentic selves. We must be free of external authority to actualize our potential.”<sup>293</sup> Or even lies about God: “There is no God. God is a myth from the pre-scientific age and the cause of tribalism and war. Now we know better.”<sup>294</sup> Christians have the lens to identify the Devil’s lies around them.

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<sup>291</sup> Evagrius, *Talking Back*, 49–50.

<sup>292</sup> Comer, *Live No Lies*, 67.

<sup>293</sup> Comer, *Live No Lies*, 66.

<sup>294</sup> Comer, *Live No Lies*, 67.

This also applies to the church. Because heresy comes from the Devil, doctrinal steadfastness is vital. Scripture clearly warns of the dangers of false teachings. Paul warned Timothy of false teachings that would arise coming from deceitful spirits and demons, leading people to fall from the faith (1 Tim 4:1). In his second letter, Peter spoke of how false prophets, by introducing heresies, were ultimately sowing the seeds of their own destruction (2 Pet 2). He ends his letter with the same message:

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. (2 Pet 3:14–18).

The warnings cannot be ignored. Any teaching contrary to God's word, whether it be a prosperity gospel, liberation theology, or ecumenical movement, are ultimately errors and lies that can lead to destruction. Through doctrinal lies, the Devil hopes to bring the same result as his first lie did in Genesis 3: Death.<sup>295</sup>

Second, because Christians are able to identify the work of the Devil, they can see the spiritual battlefield. Paul tells the Ephesians that their struggle "is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12). The Christian may not be able to see the angels and demons around him, but he is aware of who his true enemy is. He is not afraid

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<sup>295</sup> Comer, *Live No Lies*, 70.



of those who can only kill the body; instead, the Christian is on guard against the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell (Matt 10:28).

This shapes the Christian's view of his neighbor. The Christian does not have to demonize as secular society does because he can see the larger picture. Unbelievers live under the Devil's power; they have been blinded by the God of this age. If they are held captive by sin and the Devil, they are also desperate for the liberation that Christ offers.

Likewise, this impacts the way the Christian views his life and vocation. The Christian is not called to fight the entire battle; instead, he is called to man his post.<sup>296</sup> Manning one's post means being vigilant and remaining connected to the body of Christ through the church. However, it also includes the faithful work of a Christian in his callings.

Luther's discussion on the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer is helpful here:

But this petition is especially directed also against our chief enemy, the devil. For all his thought and desire is to deprive us of all that we have from God, or to hinder it; and he is not satisfied to obstruct and destroy spiritual government in leading souls astray by his lies and bringing them under his power, but he also prevents and hinders the stability of all government and honorable, peaceable relations on earth. There he causes so much contention, murder, sedition, and war, also lightning and hail to destroy grain and cattle, to poison the air, etc. In short, he is sorry that any one has a morsel of bread from God and eats it in peace; and if it were in his power, and our prayer (next to God) did not prevent him, we would not keep a straw in the field, a farthing in the house, yea, not even our life for an hour, especially those who have the Word of God and would like to be Christians.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> John Kleinig, *Grace upon Grace: Spirituality for Today*, (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2008.), 259.

<sup>297</sup> Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," *BookOfConcord.org*, <https://bookofconcord.org/large-catechism/>. 4th Petition, Paragraphs 80–81.

The Devil would destroy and murder everything if he could. Yet God prevents him and provides protection through his established orders: The Church, family, and government.<sup>298</sup> Through these people, God holds back the chaos and evil the Devil would bring upon us.<sup>299</sup> Furthermore, just as God provides his people protection through these various masks, so also, God uses the individual Christian against Satan. The individual Christian contradicts and counteracts the Devil by simply living in the place where Christ has placed him. By being a faithful parent, spouse, child, grandparent, employee, employer, pastor, teacher, or citizen, the Christian cares for the people in his life, and in doing so, serves as God's hand in counteracting the work of the Devil.<sup>300</sup>

Third, the doctrine of the Devil enhances the Christian's view of the means of grace. If the Devil is waging war against the Christian, the Christian must find solace in the place where God is found, His Word and Sacraments. If Christ is the sinner's only hope against the assaults of the Devil, then the Gospel is both the sword that rescues unbelievers from Satan's power and keeps them protected in faith. As Paul reminded the Ephesians:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.... Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph 6:10–17).

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<sup>298</sup> For more, see Luther's Table of Duties found in his Small Catechism.

<sup>299</sup> Kleinig, *Grace upon Grace*, 268.

<sup>300</sup> Kleinig, *Grace upon Grace*, 268.

In the same way, the sacraments are vital to the Christian life. Wherever the Christian goes in life, he is marked by baptism.<sup>301</sup> Whenever the Christian communes, he is forgiven and fortified against the Devil's work of distress and persecution.<sup>302</sup> The Devil may try to tempt the Christian into subjectivity, looking inward at the heart and conscience, but God gives an objective and tangible word for the Christian to take hold of. In baptism and communion, God pledges that he is present in the fight against the Devil.<sup>303</sup>

Fourth, the doctrine of the Devil gives Christians the framework to speak about suffering and evil. Christians can rely on the language and narratives of Scripture. In the face of evil or the demonic, Christians can turn to the Scriptural truth that Christ is the strong man who casts out the powers of evil. In the face of suffering, a Christian might identify with the story of Job. The Devil is at work, and yet God is still working for his good.<sup>304</sup> When faced with weakness, a believer might cling to the Lord's promise to Paul regarding his thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

Like unbelievers, Christians do not have all the answers to the problems of evil, but Christians do have something that unbelievers do not; comfort. "Christians have their consolation even in the worst of suffering and misfortune."<sup>305</sup> Consolation in a High Priest who

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<sup>301</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 231.

<sup>302</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 254.

<sup>303</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 227.

<sup>304</sup> "Preach the Word: The Cross as Solution to the Problem of Evil," Michael Berg, *WELS*, <https://wels.net/preach-the-word-the-cross-as-solution-to-the-problem-of-evil/>.

<sup>305</sup> Martin Luther, "Sermon at Coburg on Cross and Suffering, 1530," *Luther's Works, Vol. 51: Sermons I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 201.

has gone through the most dreadful suffering, comfort in a Savior who promises that all things are for my eternal good.<sup>306</sup>

Fifth, and finally, the doctrine of the Devil drives the Christian to depend on God. His attacks and threats make the Christian run to the Savior. Just as sin drives the sinner to find forgiveness, and death has now become the gate to everlasting life, the assaults of Satan are part of the cross of the Christian life here on earth, and yet God uses the violence of the Devil to bring His people closer to Him.<sup>307</sup>

Through the Devil's attacks, the Christian learns to transform abstract theological principles into personally applied good news. Mottos such as "grace alone" and "faith alone" become real as the Christian learns that he does not stand alone but by God's grace and protection. In this way, the Devil ends up schooling Christians in faith, and God turns evil into good.<sup>308</sup> In this way, God fashions and forms His people.<sup>309</sup>

### **Overcoming Embarrassment**

Finally, if Christians hope to reclaim and renew the doctrine of the Devil, it will require teaching and preaching on the subject. In a secularized and "disenchanted" society, this will seem to be a difficult task.

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<sup>306</sup> "Preach the Word: The Cross as Solution to the Problem of Evil," Michael Berg.

<sup>307</sup> Martin Luther, "Sermon at Coburg," 206.

<sup>308</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 176.

<sup>309</sup> John Kleinig, "Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio: What Makes a Theologian?" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 66 (2002), 265.

Leszek Kołakowski (1927–2009) had a remarkable career as a historian and philosopher. He had begun as one of the leading Marxist philosophers in Poland before becoming disillusioned with and critical of the beliefs he had once championed. After his exile, he became a prominent scholar and authority on topics such as modernism and communism towards the end of the twentieth century.<sup>310</sup>

In 1987, Kołakowski gave a lecture at Harvard titled “The Devil in History.” The historian Tony Judt was present that day and described what happened:

I heard Leszek Kołakowski lecture only once. It was at Harvard in 1987 and he was a guest at the seminar on political theory taught by the late Judith Shklar. *Main Currents of Marxism* had recently been published in English and Kołakowski was at the height of his renown. So many students wanted to hear him speak that the lecture had been moved to a large public auditorium and guests were permitted to attend. I happened to be in Cambridge for a meeting and went along with some friends. The seductively suggestive title of Kołakowski’s talk was “The Devil in History.” For a while there was silence as students, faculty, and visitors listened intently. Kołakowski’s writings were well known to many of those present and his penchant for irony and close reasoning was familiar. But even so, the audience was clearly having trouble following his argument. Try as they would, they could not decode the metaphor. An air of bewildered mystification started to fall across the auditorium. And then, about a third of the way through, my neighbor—Timothy Garton Ash—leaned across. “I’ve got it,” he whispered. “He really *is* talking about the Devil.” And so he was.<sup>311</sup>

Kołakowski was considered one of the brightest intellectuals of his day. He was fluent in five languages, a celebrated historian, and an author of countless books, and yet his belief in the Devil left his audience mystified and baffled.

Perhaps this is the great fear when it comes to teaching and preaching about the Devil. The moment a pastor starts speaking about the Devil is the moment he fears that he has lost the

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<sup>310</sup> “Archbishop Chaput’s Column: Sympathy for the Devil,” Charles J. Chaput, *Archdiocese of Philadelphia*, [https://archphila.org/archbishop-chaputs-column-sympathy-for-the-devil/#\\_edn2](https://archphila.org/archbishop-chaputs-column-sympathy-for-the-devil/#_edn2).

<sup>311</sup> “Leszek Kołakowski (1927–2009),” Tony Judt, *The New York Review*, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2009/09/24/leszek-kolakowski-19272009/>.

rational thinkers, the intellectuals of his congregation. The moment a Christian brings up a serious conversation about the Devil, he or she fears what others might think, that they will be dismissed as superstitious and uneducated.

These concerns are not new. As mentioned earlier, within Christianity, some have tried to make the doctrine of the Devil more intellectually palatable through concessions, avoidance, and even removal. While these theological sacrifices are not applaudable, Bible-believing Christians can undoubtedly understand the struggle: The pressure to concede and conform to secular society is great. However, Christians can take heart and overcome the pressure and embarrassment that comes with the doctrine of the Devil by considering a few things.

First, belief in the Devil is not absurd. Western Christians may find themselves in a muddle when it comes to the Devil, but Christians in other parts of the world do not.<sup>312</sup> When the perspective is shifted from American Christianity to worldwide Christianity, the claims against the Devil and the supernatural are no longer so deafening.<sup>313</sup> Belief in the Devil makes sense. For these Christians in and from other cultures, preaching and teaching about the Devil is not an embarrassment; instead, it is their life.<sup>314</sup>

Secondly, the doctrine of the Devil is the church's inheritance. The historical survey presented earlier shows that for the vast majority of Christians throughout history, belief in the Devil was a given.<sup>315</sup> Yes, his exact place and significance in theology has been debated, but his

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<sup>312</sup> Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures*, (Timē Press, 2017.), 24.

<sup>313</sup> Georges, *The 3D Gospel*, 24–25.

<sup>314</sup> Allen Sorum, *2000 Demons No Match for My Savior: Jesus' Infinite Power over Evil*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2016.), Foreword.

<sup>315</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness*, 175. The Council of Trent contains theses affirming the work of the Devil, but no thesis explaining his existence, likely because no one was challenging it.

existence was not. In the broad sweep of Christian history, the overwhelming weight of voices are found on the side of belief rather than disbelief.

Finally, the doctrine of the Devil needs to be preached because it is of great value to the Church and the Christian. God has given the doctrine of the Devil to Christians as a benefit, not an embarrassment. Through the doctrine of the Devil, God highlights the saving work of Christ. By the attacks of the Devil, God properly orients the Christian life and draws believers closer to him. In all of this, the Christian finds comfort: Though the Devil may plot and rage, Christ has promised that the gates of hell will not overcome the Church (Matt 16:18). Though the Devil may roar like a lion, afflict us like Job or put us in his sieve, we have our Shepherd's promise: No one can snatch us from the Father's hand (John 10:28). Therefore, the doctrine of the Devil is not something we can be ashamed of; no, it is a reminder of our glory.

### **For Further Research**

When it comes to the subject of the Devil, much has been written, yet much more can be written. This study has attempted to paint a broad portrait of the history and development of the doctrine of the Devil, but there is much more that can be written about the diabolology of the early fathers, Augustine, and Luther. The scope of this paper was limited to the Devil in Western Christianity, but it would be interesting to investigate the Devil from an Eastern or perhaps even a Jewish (Ancient, intertestamental, or medieval) perspective. The exorcism controversies that followed Luther's time is also relatively unexplored.

Those who are interested in exegesis and hermeneutics may wish to pursue the interpretation of the Devil, either the Old or New Testament. Perhaps one of the more intriguing subjects would be to examine the identification of the Devil with the serpent in Genesis 3. As a

warning, anyone who ventures into this realm should also be prepared to delve into history.

Recent authors who have written on the Devil, such as Henry Ansgar Kelley, Elaine Pagels, and John Walton, rely heavily on historical research to support their arguments.

Finally, concerning practical theology, topics such as Lutheran spirituality and spiritual warfare seem relatively undeveloped, and may be worth exploring.



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