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Renouncing the Devil, Confessing the Christ the Centrality of Christ's Victory Over the Devil Within the Lutheran Tradition

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RENOUNCING THE DEVIL; CONFESSING THE CHRIST:
THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST'S VICTORY OVER THE DEVIL WITHIN THE
LUTHERAN TRADITION

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THE EARLY CONCEPTIONS	4
Unclean Spirits	5
Mark 5:1-13.....	6
The Prince of Devils	13
2 Corinthians 11:13-15	14
The Kingdom of God.....	19
Luke 11:14-23	19
Luke 9:1-2.....	23
James 4:7-8.....	27
The Two Cities	33
3. LUTHER'S CONCEPTION	38
The Two Kingdoms	38
The Old Satanic Foe	40
One Little Word Subdues Him	49
But Now a Champion Comes to Fight	55
The Kingdom's Ours Forever.....	63
4. CONCLUSION	67
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY	73

INTRODUCTION

In the preface to his famous satirical work, *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis writes, “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”³ Regarding human history, one can easily observe the atrocities that have been committed among humans when either of these extremes has been favored; and the Church cannot exclude itself from responsibility. The Church of the more primitively regarded past has far too often been guilty of demonizing any opposition it encountered, and through its ill-advised responses, has often become the servant of the demonic. The modern Church in the West, with its disregard for the spiritual realm in conformity with the tenets of the Enlightenment, has far too often been guilty of permitting the demonic to operate unchecked, thereby neglecting its mandate to preserve and proclaim the Kingdom of God. As a result, the Church has continuously failed to properly engage a topic which resides at the center of its tradition.

The intention of this study is to explore this topic within the framework of the Lutheran tradition, by appealing to the clear witness of Scripture, the testimonies of the early Fathers, and the conviction of Martin Luther. In the attempt to acknowledge the reality of the devil and to recognize the importance of such an acknowledgment to the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, we will draw on relevant passages from the New

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001) ix.

Testament which both speak to the role of the devil and its minions and bear witness to the subjection of these powers to the authority of Jesus Christ. Since it would seem that proper theology begins with the Word of God and moves outward from there, we will begin by exploring some key texts in order to illuminate the reality of this world view for several of the most influential theologians of the early church. Having identified the significance of this reality to the foundations of the faith, we will then shift our attention to the founder of the Lutheran tradition, Martin Luther, and acknowledge the significance of this worldview in his writings. The hope of such an endeavor will be to gain a more informed understanding of our past in order to strengthen the resolve of our ministry for the future.

One final note is that when referring to the devil throughout this study, I will attempt to avoid some of the ambiguity regarding this figure by solely using the lower-case version of this title because that is the way it appears in Scripture when it is used (in addition to the use of the proper name of *Satan*) as well as the way it predominantly appears in the writings of Luther. The capitalized title of the Devil or the proper name of Satan will only be used when quoting other writers in which they employ one of these versions, in order to maintain the authenticity of their writings. Finally, the pronoun that I shall employ when speaking of the devil will be “it,” in following with Dr. M. Scott Peck’s understanding of the devil in which he writes, “Satan is neither male nor female. There’s nothing male or female about it. Nothing sexual. Sexuality has to do with creation. The devil doesn’t create anything; it only destroys.”⁴ On the other hand, when referring to any person of the Holy Trinity, I will be using capitalized pronouns (i.e., He,

⁴ M. Scott Peck, *Glimpses of the Devil* (New York: Free Press, 2005) 82-83.

Him, etc.). This again will be done in order to follow the traditional use of these pronouns for God, with the capitalization added in order to both distinguish the Creator from the creature as well as to show respect for the divine name in any form.

CHAPTER 1

THE EARLY CONCEPTIONS

An important understanding that was shared in common by both Jesus and His disciples, as well as with the early Fathers of the church, was an undeniable acceptance of the reality of the devil and its minions. The Fathers understood Christ's role in human history according to the clear testimony of Scripture which stated, "The son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8b). Although they unanimously confessed the victory of Christ over the forces of sin, death, and the devil through His incarnation, death, and resurrection, they could nevertheless not deny the ongoing opposition that believers experienced as followers of Jesus Christ. Not only were they subjected to barbaric persecutions at the hands of external adversaries, but they were likewise challenged by internal dissention from within the Christian community. As a result, these early believers took on the role of apologists and attempted to not only instruct their communities in the true faith, but likewise to speak against the one whom they believed was responsible for inciting the opposition against them: namely, the devil.

Beginning in the second-century with Justin Martyr, who was "the first apologetic father and the first to discuss the problem of evil in theological terms,"⁵ the power of Christ began to be largely understood in response to the powers of darkness. Jeffrey Burton Russell observes, "For Justin and the other second-century fathers, as for the

⁵ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) 63.

apostolic writers, Christ and the Christian community were locked in a cosmic struggle with the devil and his followers.”⁶ Thus in the case of the early Fathers, they were not only paying significant attention to the reality of this conflict within the earthly ministry of Jesus and His apostles, but were likewise engaging in this very conflict themselves. Throughout the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ ministry, the occurrence of demons, or unclean spirits, physically inhabiting and manipulating human beings is rather commonplace. A prevalent post-Enlightenment understanding of the world, however, has oftentimes relegated these accounts to the realm of a more primitive and superstitious past. Modern sensibilities would oftentimes prefer to diagnose these accounts as classic cases of mental illness, or to ignore them altogether, rather than to face the possibility that these might indeed represent the genuine article; and even more alarming, that our modern world might not be so different after all. Either way, the fact remains that these accounts constitute a significant component of the earthly ministry of both Jesus and His disciples, and likewise have informed the understanding of God’s work for believers throughout the centuries. In this chapter we will allow Scripture to speak for itself on the topic, while providing an arena in which to honor the testimonies of the Fathers and thereby to elucidate this reality within the early church.

Unclean Spirits

The world of the opening centuries of the Common Era was understood by its inhabitants, Christians in particular, as representing a cosmic battleground between good and evil spirits with humanity caught in the middle. Adolf von Harnack writes, “The whole world and the circumambient atmosphere were filled with devils; not merely

⁶ Ibid., 63-64.

idolatry, but every phase and form of life was ruled by them. They sat on thrones, they hovered around cradles. The earth was literally a hell, though it was and continued to be a creation of God.”⁷ This reality may strike the modern reader as odd because of the ostensible incongruity of such a worldview with modern experiences of reality; and for Christians today, it may seem strange that such a reality could be possible following the victory of Jesus Christ through His death and resurrection. Nevertheless, Scripture attests to the fact that unclean spirits were operating at a high level, and the testimonies of the Fathers bear witness to the fact that the world was not much different even after Christ’s resurrection; or was it? In this section we will explore the ways in which these unclean spirits were operating both during the life of Christ and into the centuries that followed and we will consider the impact that Christ’s passion had on this reality.

My name is Legion; for we are many.

If we take seriously the Scripture accounts regarding demonic activity, it would seem as though von Harnack’s explanation may boast of more credibility than many modern readers would like to afford it. The testimonies of the four evangelists (the synoptic gospels in particular) describe a host of unclean spirits who seem to be operating freely throughout the Judean countryside and wreaking havoc in the lives of the inhabitants. Although their assaults seem to often be waged violently against their victims, on other occasions their methods appear to be more subtle. Similarly, while it generally appears that these spirits are operating independently of each other, at other times they are described as collaborating in their efforts against humanity. It would seem

⁷ Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, vol. 1, tran. and ed. James Moffatt (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1908) 131.

as though there are not only *many* unclean spirits, but that their methods are many as well. These discrepancies regarding both their association and their operation promote a great deal of confusion, which appears to be a key element of the demonic as we shall observe throughout this exploration. In recounting the understanding of Clement of Alexandria regarding demonic activity, W. E. G. Floyd offers the following explanation:

The devil is like a conjuror who indulges in magical arts which alter physical reality. He and his subjects are capable of assuming the form of beasts in human shape crawling on their bellies, after the image of their father, the voracious beast, or the form of men who emulate their activities in this earthly life. In addition to these machinations, however, the most successful gambit of the devil is to appeal to man's basic love for pleasure, thereby distorting the reasoning faculty of the human soul. Fraud, craft, and subtlety are the distinctive features by which the devil and his minions skillfully work their mischief. When this fails, the enraged 'deceiver' resorts to force and subjects his victim to a 'stormy blast'. Thus, man must undergo conflict in every conceivable form before the heinous powers relent and 'admire' the victor for his constancy.⁸

As this passage illustrates, the activity of the devil and its subjects cannot be easily recognized and resisted because it utilizes an arsenal of assaults against humanity.

Therefore it was essential for the Fathers to explore these various methods in order to expose the demonic influence. We will begin by focusing our attention on the secondary assault described by Clement, the forceful counter-offensive launched by the devil when its initial attempts are thwarted, because while this may be the more intense of the assaults, it would likewise appear to be the less common of the two.

As we investigate the more direct assaults by the unclean spirits in which they inflict physical or mental distress upon their victims, we will notice that throughout the gospels we read of Jesus encountering individuals "with an unclean spirit." The language that is employed by the evangelists seems to clearly identify these individuals as not

⁸ W. E. G. Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) 69-70.

simply being influenced by spiritual forces, but rather as being inhabited by them. Of all the accounts in the gospels, none is more striking than that of the Gerasene demoniac. St.

Mark recalls the account as follows:

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. (5:1-5)

This account illustrates the fact that the powers of darkness were at work on the earth, binding God's creatures and holding them hostage. The obvious question we might ask is what is the motivation behind such hostility towards humans? Walter Wink proposes the suggestion that the disturbed condition of the demoniac should be symbolically understood as his being both oppressed by the occupying Roman legion and expressing his opposition to his oppressors. Therefore, this man becomes the scapegoat for the rest of the townspeople, in which their hatred for their oppressors could be expressed by him, without endangering the community as a whole.⁹ Although this interpretation contains some interesting elements, it nevertheless is bound by a common modern tendency to rationalize that which is uncomfortable and which incites the greatest fear. Rather than viewing this text through the lens of a modern hermeneutic, let us instead explore the significance of such a text for the early tradition.

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, the established purity laws were such that they would determine the extent to which a person could participate in their faith, given the Hebraic belief that God could fully be encountered only within the walls

⁹ Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) 47.

of the temple. To be labeled as “unclean” did not only affect one’s relationship with other people, but likewise hindered them from fully engaging in their relationship with God. For those who were suffering from demonic possession, the inner courts of the temple would be off-limits for fear that these persons would defile the holy place with their unclean afflictions. Thus for a person to be afflicted with an unclean spirit would not only warrant their exclusion from society, as in the case of the demoniac who was living among the tombs, but would likewise be understood as their having been excluded from divine favor. In his *Apology*, Tertullian acknowledges demonic activity as being intent on destroying both the inner person and their association with their neighbors. Tertullian writes regarding demons:

Their business is the destruction of man; thus did the wickedness of spirits begin at the beginning of things with a view to the ruin of man. Therefore while it is true that they inflict on bodies both diseases and some severe accidents, they also inflict on the soul sudden and strange aberrations of violent madness. Their wonderful subtlety and fineness of texture give them access to both parts of man.¹⁰

This passage clearly illustrates that for the early tradition, an oppressive military regime was not the consummation of their fears, but rather the agent of a much more frightening and powerful enemy.

The second type of assaults that are attributed to these unclean spirits, and which seem far more plausible to the modern skeptic, are those in which they are described as leading humans away from the light through temptations, deceptions, and false teachings.

In his *Second Apology*, Justin writes regarding demons:

They enslaved the human race to themselves, partly by magical writings, and partly by fears and punishments which they occasioned, and partly by teaching them to offer sacrifices and incense and libations, which they needed after they

¹⁰ Tertullian, *Apology*, trans. Alex Souter (Cambridge: The University Press, 1917) 77.

were enslaved with lustful passions; and among people they sowed murders, wars, adulteries, intemperate deeds, and every evil.¹¹

Although these assaults were waged against individuals in a less severe form than the physical assaults previously mentioned, they were nevertheless the more dangerous of the two because they seem to have been more common and likewise less detectable. The account of the Gerasene demoniac may be so intriguing to the modern reader because it seems so foreign to a modern conception of reality which must rationalize every experience. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Jesus' encounters with unclean spirits constitute a significant part of His earthly ministry and in every case the result is the same: Christ exercises His authority over the unclean spirits with relative ease. Thus the physical power that was once exercised by these spirits over humans has been stripped of a great deal of its effectiveness on account of the authority exercised by Christ.

In his previous quotation, W. E. G. Floyd acknowledged Clement's identification of subtlety as one of the distinctive features by which the devil and its subjects conduct their mischief in the world, and the reasons for this appear to be two-fold. In the first place, the demonic desires to operate under the cover of darkness so that it will not be exposed to the light of truth. John the evangelist writes, "For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (3:20). The Fathers were clearly aware of this desire by the demonic, and so they were adamant about exposing it to the light. Once again, the testimony of John speaks directly to God's act of bringing the light into the world in order to illuminate the darkness. John writes, "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness

¹¹ St. Justin Martyr, *The First and Second Apologies*, vol. 56 of the *Ancient Christian Writers*, trans. Leslie William Barnard (New York, Paulist Press, 1997) 77.

rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (3:19). By entering into the darkness, God intends to not only reveal the evil desires of those who would prefer to remain in the shadows, but likewise to bring judgment against all evildoers. Since, as St. Paul writes in Romans 3:23 “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” the light is meant to expose the evil within every human being. John writes, “The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world” (1:9). The demonic desires to remain in darkness and so it does not reveal itself and its intentions, but rather resides in the shadows of subtlety. Clement, along with the other Fathers, seems to have been determined to draw the demonic into the open and thereby to expose it to the light of Christ, which both reveals its true nature and puts it to flight. This is precisely the testimony of John when he writes, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (1:5).

The second reason for subtlety being employed by the demonic as one of its primary masks is that direct assaults are generally not required in order to turn humanity away from the light. The devil counts on the fact that the human will constantly succumb to the temptation to turn away from God and from neighbor in favor of focusing on himself/herself instead. The very essence of sin is to turn oneself inward and thereby to not fear, love, and trust God above anything else, and to neglect the needs of one’s neighbor. Thus the devil generally does not need to resort to more drastic measures, for as Floyd acknowledges in his recounting of Clement’s understanding, “The most successful gambit of the devil is to appeal to man’s basic love for pleasure, thereby distorting the reasoning faculty of the human soul.” In other words, the devil is well versed in human nature and it will not hesitate to exploit our sinful tendencies.

Despite the fact that physical assaults by the devil are far less necessary given the fact that humanity can be depended upon to succumb to more subtle assaults, we cannot disregard this reality in Scripture and in the understandings of the Fathers. When the demonic does employ physical assaults, however, it will not always resemble the Gerasene demoniac and be in the form of demonic possession. The demonic will likewise utilize humans against each other in order to accomplish its goals. Emil Schneeweis acknowledges this fact by recounting the understanding of the early Father, Lactantius:

The demons are active in the evil that men do: ‘Astrology, divination, auguries, oracles, necromancy and magical arts are their inventions and whatever else that is evil that men do either openly or in secret’. They cast a pall about their activity in order to hide their true character for if they were clearly recognized, or if Men would not turn to them, but ‘to their Lord and Father’ nor could they succeed in their purpose of destroying souls, or as Lactantius words it ‘devouring souls’ in human sacrifices.¹²

Once again we encounter the understanding of the Fathers that the demonic is intent on the destruction of human souls by turning us away from our Lord and Father, and that it accomplishes this most effectively by operating incognito.

Given the common tendency in our modern context to remove the devil from the equation, the evil actions of humans often seem so unimaginable because one cannot fathom how these inclinations could have originated within another human being. To bring the devil back into the equation is not to present a scapegoat for our sin, thereby rendering us blameless, but rather to paint a more complete picture. Could it be the case that such heinous atrocities which are committed at the hands of human beings are not intrinsically human but rather intrinsically demonic? While such an understanding would not negate human responsibility, it would nevertheless enable all human beings to be

¹² Emil Schneeweis, *Angels and Demons According to Lactantius* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, Inc., 1944) 137.

viewed as God's children who are precious in His sight; it would help us to view the problem behind the person. The demonic, however, seeks to conceal its identity by hiding behind human actions. In his gospel, Luke provides such an example by writing, "Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them" (22:3-4). The Fathers recognized this tactic by the demonic and understood the importance of removing this veil.

The Prince of Devils

Although the devil has already been included in the discussion from the previous section on unclean spirits, which is fitting given the understanding that the devil is the leader of this demonic host, it nevertheless seems necessary to delve deeper into the Fathers' understanding of the desires of the devil itself. An inherent difficulty in this discussion has been the fact that confusion has been a constant companion to the enterprise of determining the identity of the devil. Regarding this difficulty within the understanding of the first apologetic father, Russell observes, "Justin showed ambivalence about the relationship of the Devil to the demons. He does not treat the Devil dualistically as an independent principle; chief, prince, or general of the fallen angels, the Devil probably is to be considered one of them."¹³ Without engaging further into the relationship between the devil and the unclean spirits, it should be sufficient to acknowledge the fact that Scripture clearly associates the two, and the Fathers shared this understanding. Let us therefore explore the ways in which the Fathers not only attempted

¹³ Russell, *Satan*, 66.

to reveal the assaults of the demonic forces, but further to unveil their commander in chief.

Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

Given the Fathers' conception of the devil as the ruler of the unclean spirits, they logically attributed the activity of the latter to the agenda of the former. The relevant exercise, therefore, is to inquire as to what precisely is the agenda of the devil. In his *First Apology*, Justin Martyr speaks precisely to this point as he explains the sole occupation of demons:

For those who are called demons strive for nothing else than to take away people from God who made them and from Christ His First-begotten; and those who cannot raise themselves above the earth they have pinned down by [the worship of] earthly things and the works of men's hands; and they even trip up those who devote themselves to the contemplation of things divine, unless they have a wise prudence and a pure and passionless life, and drive them into ungodliness.¹⁴

This statement clearly illustrates the demonic desire to kindle the sinful nature of human beings, thereby turning the individual inward and away from God. Although this specific quotation is in reference to demons, Jesus makes the same accusation against the devil in His explanation of the "parable of the sower." In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus says, "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, that they may not believe and be saved" (8:11-12). Regardless of its motivation, the intention of the devil seems to clearly be the destruction of faith through the eradication of the Word of God. In order to fulfill this agenda, the devil will utilize whatever means necessary, whether that be through unclean spirits, unrighteous people, or its own operation.

¹⁴ Justin Martyr, 64.

However, given the desire of the devil to remain hidden, as we explored earlier, it seems to prefer using others as the means to fulfilling its end.

Having acknowledged that the primary agenda of the devil is to destroy faith in God, the step that would logically follow would be to determine the ways in which it is able to accomplish this agenda. It seems clear from the witness of Scripture and the testimonies of the Fathers that the devil is a master in the art of deception. In the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks to this defining characteristic of the devil. Jesus says to His opponents, “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (8:43-44). This understanding of the devil as a liar and a murderer from the beginning was informed by the account in Genesis 3, in which the devil was recognized as being at work in the serpent’s deceiving the first humans into doubting and disregarding the Word of God, and thus bringing sin and death into the world. In an extended quotation from his work, *Against Marcion*, Tertullian both implicated the devil for its central role in the fall of humanity, as well as provided an apology in order to exonerate God.

But if you transfer the charge of wrongdoing from the man’s account to the devil’s, because it was he who incited the man to sin, and if you hope by this means to direct the blame against the Creator, as having created the devil – for, *He maketh angels spirits* – (I answer that) that which he was made by God, namely an angel, will be the responsibility of God who made him, while that which he was not made by God, namely the devil or accuser – it follows that he must have made himself that by bringing an accusation about God, a false one at that, first that God had forbidden them to eat of every tree, and next that if they did eat they would not die, and thirdly that God had selfishly denied them divinity. What then was the origin of this malice of lying and deceit directed

against the man and women, and of the false accusation against God? Certainly it was not from God, for in common with all his works he had made that angel good.¹⁵

The Fathers understood that although humans could not fully claim to be innocent in regards to their fall, they nevertheless were not alone in their disobedience. In fact, the negligent disobedience of the first humans could even be understood as secondary to the willful defiance of the devil, given the fact that God first and foremost pronounces judgment upon the serpent for its deception. The Fathers understood this judgment as being passed upon not only the serpent, but likewise on the devil itself.

It was this interpretation of Genesis 3 by the Fathers which informed their understanding of the ways in which the devil most successfully operates in opposition to God. Although many modern scholars have attempted to absolve the devil of these charges by arguing against its involvement in the Genesis account, the Fathers could not imagine interpreting the account in any other way. As validation for their interpretation, one had only to look to Scripture itself for an answer. In the book of Revelation it is written, “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while” (20:1-3). By allowing Scripture to interpret itself, the Fathers were able to view both the deception of the devil and its inevitable punishment as the bookends to God’s story of redemption.

¹⁵ Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, books 1-3, trans. & ed. Ernest Evans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) 115.

Since the Fathers remained confident in the inevitable punishment of the devil, it is important to explore the ways in which they understood the devil to be operating in the meantime. Jeffrey Burton Russell summarizes the teaching of Tertullian as follows:

The Devil's function in the cosmos is precise. As God creates the cosmos, the Devil destroys it. As God has created things good, the Devil distorts and perverts them (the Devil cannot itself create). Thus Tertullian thought the Devil's function similar to that of the shadow of God, the destroying *mal'ak Yahweh* of the Old Testament, with the fundamental distinction that the Devil was a creature rather than a manifestation of divinity. The Devil has taken God's beautiful creation and filled it with lies. The author of all evil, he has become lord of this world, not in the sense that he controls the cosmos, but in the sense that he dominates the part of it that he has corrupted, and he is lord of that part not absolutely but only insofar as he has permission from God. The Devil is the rival and ape of God and the corrupter and perverter of God's world. God plants a field with wheat, and the Devil strews it with weeds. In every way the Devil acts as God's opposite, seeking to destroy the truth, corrupt virtue, and pollute beauty. As perverter of the cosmos, he is the foremost enemy of Christ and of humanity. All injustice comes from him.¹⁶

This understanding by Tertullian was popular among his contemporaries, and likewise found its validation in Scripture. In his second letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul writes against his opponents who are determined to invalidate his apostleship and thereby supplant the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul writes, "For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their end will match their deeds" (11:13-15). The Fathers understood that blatant attacks against the true faith would not be as effective as subtle attempts to lure believers astray, and so they took these words from St. Paul very seriously. As a result, the Fathers were especially watchful for those who would disguise themselves as believers in order to infiltrate the Christian community.

¹⁶ Russell, *Satan*, 94-95.

The most meticulous guardian against such imposters was Irenaeus, who was primarily focused on defending the faith against internal dissent, and Gnosticism in particular.

Russell acknowledges this fact by writing, “Defeated by Christ, the Devil nevertheless exerts himself vigorously, though vainly, to thwart salvation, according to Irenaeus. He encourages paganism, idolatry, sorcery, blasphemy, and especially heresy and apostasy. Heretics are members of Satan’s army, his agents in the cosmic war against Christ.”¹⁷

The fact that the devil was permitted to continue its campaign against God’s creatures despite its ongoing deception against the Creator was not an invitation for despair among the Fathers. On the contrary, they understood that just like *ha-Satan* in the prologue to the book of Job, the devil was able to operate solely with the permission of God. While they may have preferred a reality in which the devil was not active, the Fathers nevertheless recognized the sovereignty of God and they understood that they were not powerless against this adversary. In further recounting the teaching of Irenaeus on the subject, Russell once again offers a helpful explanation:

The Devil deceives our minds, darkens our hearts, and tries to persuade us to worship him rather than the true God. But his powers over us are limited, for he is only a usurper of authority that legitimately and ultimately belongs to God, and he cannot force us to sin.¹⁸

The Fathers understood that Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection represented a major shift in regards to the operation of the devil. Although the devil clearly remained active in its deceiving of the world, its powers were nevertheless limited on account of the victory that was won on the cross of Jesus Christ. We will now shift our attention to

¹⁷ Ibid., 86.

¹⁸ Ibid., 81.

exploring the ways in which Jesus Christ brought about the end of the old age, and ushered in the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God

The question had been posed at the beginning of this chapter as to whether the world of the Fathers was in fact any different than the world in which Jesus was performing His ministry. Given the fact that the devil and its minions continued to wreak havoc in human lives after the time of Jesus, as the testimonies of the Fathers clearly attest, one might easily assume that not much had changed. And yet when we look further at these testimonies, it seems clear that despite this ongoing reality, a distinct change had taken place on account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Although Jesus did not bring about the obvious, dramatic alteration of reality that people had been expecting from their Messiah, the world was changed nevertheless and believers in Jesus were therefore called to a new understanding of the Messiah. In this final section we will explore how this new understanding manifested itself, and what this meant for those who were proclaiming the Kingdom in a world that seemingly remained in bondage to the devil.

By the finger of God

In order to gain some insight into how the Fathers would have understood their reality having been drastically altered by the arrival of the Messiah, it is important for us to begin by exploring the ways in which the incarnation of Jesus the Christ brought about a new reality, and particularly in relation to those powers which had previously held humanity in bondage. In order to witness the power that Christ exercised over these oppressive forces, let us return once again to the account of the Gerasene demoniac in the

Gospel of Mark. As previously explained, one interpretation of this text has been to view the afflicted individual as representing both the oppression that was felt by the people on account of their experiences of the occupying Roman legion and their desire to express their resentment against this force. Another popular interpretation of this text has been to encounter the demoniac through a modern lens and thereby to diagnose his condition as schizophrenia. What if instead we were to first allow the text to speak for itself and then to be open to what it had to say? It would seem clear that this was the approach taken by the Fathers, so let us imagine the impact that such an approach would have had on their worldview.

For starters, suppose the afflicted man in the story was not suffering from schizophrenia, but rather was in fact possessed by a legion of unclean spirits to which the text bears witness. To accept this premise, which seems to be the clear approach of the Fathers, is to understand the demoniac as not simply representing the collective oppression that was felt by the community on account of an occupying regime, but rather as an individual who had been overcome by a destructive power which was bent on bringing about his destruction. If we permit Scripture to interpret itself on this matter, we need look no further than Ephesians 6:12, in which it is written, "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." It therefore seems clear that the account of the Gerasene demoniac bears witness to the reality of humanity being shackled and tormented by the forces of evil and, in Jesus' exercising His power over these forces, He was binding the devil and plundering its house.

Jesus' displays of power over the powers that had previously held the world in bondage were, in fact, in line with the messianic expectations of the day. Although God had shown Himself to be faithful to His people throughout prior history, He nevertheless seemed to remain distant while the powers of darkness were operating directly in the midst of human life. Through the incarnation, however, God had made the move into human history, and had done so more fully than the powers of darkness could even fathom. Calvin Roetzel offers the following reflection:

In the exorcist's authority over demons, many would have seen a bold manifestation of God's sovereignty over the world. The Gospel narratives about demons, then, dealt not only with troublesome issues in the idiom of the day, these exorcisms also legitimized the title 'Lord' given to Jesus. His power to command the demons established Jesus' credentials as Messiah, offering hope and consolation to a people oppressed and promising relief from mysterious, destructive powers."¹⁹

As a result of the incarnation, the powers of darkness have begun to be overthrown by the powers of light. Although God's intention for what the Messiah would bring about appears to have been vastly different from what the Jewish people were expecting, in this case they fall in-line. Through Jesus Christ, God has completely turned the spiritual power struggle on its head and as a result, as Donald Juel points out in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark, "people are being set free."²⁰ This freedom represented not simply a reprieve from the current occupying regime, but rather a definitive stronghold against the unrelenting forces of evil. Given the fact that He had already demonstrated His power over these forces, Jesus grants assurance of this protection in the Gospel of

¹⁹ Calvin J. Roetzel, *The World that Shaped the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2002) 148.

²⁰ Donald H. Juel, *The Gospel of Mark* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999) 109.

Luke when He says, “But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (11:20).

The Fathers were clearly convinced that on account of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God had indeed come near. And yet one might inquire as to what exactly this meant for the understanding of the early church. Regarding the tension in the early church surrounding the *now* and the *not yet* in relation to the coming of the Kingdom in its fullness, Russell explains what this meant to one of the Fathers:

Christ’s power is pitted against that of the devil, and for Justin a primary function of Christ’s work is the destruction of that power. The Devil held full power in the world for a time, but Christ has broken that power through his Incarnation and Passion. Yet the diabolical power will not be fully destroyed until the second coming. The Devil’s kingdom *has been* broken and *will be* broken.²¹

Although it may strike believers as confusing and unfair that Christ has yet to fully destroy the power of the devil, thus permitting the devil and its subjects to continue their mischief in the world, there are nevertheless several reasons for rejoicing. In the first place, the power of the devil has been broken and therefore it is no longer able to operate as freely as before. Secondly, we have been given the assurance that although the devil is able to continue its operation in the world for the time being, its reign is temporary and its destruction is certain. Finally, as believers live in the meantime between the *now* and the *not yet*, we ourselves have been given power over these forces. The Gospel of Luke reads, “Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal” (9:1-2). In the next section we will explore the ways in which this power was

²¹ Russell, *Satan*, 67.

understood by the Fathers and employed within the early church, as the Kingdom of God continued to be revealed in the midst of hostile powers.

Power and authority over all demons

The lives of the early Christians were identified by a definite tension in regards to their dealings with the devil. On the one hand, believers found themselves experiencing constant attacks by the demonic, whether that was manifested in the form of direct assaults by the unclean spirits or in the form of other humans either persecuting Christians or attacking their teachings. On the other hand, they were demonstrating power over the unclean spirits and the church continued to grow. The following quotation by Tertullian helps to illuminate the seemingly contradictory reality of the early Christians.

The devil, it must be admitted, seems indeed to have power – in this case really his own – over those who do not belong to God. In relation to God the idolatrous nations are all counted as a drop in the bucket, as dust on the threshing floor, as spittle in the mouth, and so thrown open to the devil as if they were a free possession. But the devil has no power over those who belong to the household of God, and cannot treat them as if they were his own. The cases marked out in Scripture show when and for what reasons he may touch the faithful. Indeed to vindicate faith, the power of trial of a believer is sometimes temporarily granted to the devil to test and challenge faith. Or to elicit repentance the sinner may be temporarily handed over to the devil as though he were an executioner to whom belonged the inflicting of punishment, as we see in the case of Saul.²²

The devil clearly remained at work in the lives of both believers and unbelievers after the time of Christ, but in the case of the latter, their condition had changed in that the devil no longer maintained the same power over them that it had once enjoyed, and thus was functioning more as a pawn in the divine plan. This reality was likewise echoed in the words of Origen, who although writing around the same time as Tertullian, was writing in

²² Tertullian, “The Temporary Power to Test Faith,” in the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Mark*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall (Dovers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998) 65-66.

Alexandria whereas his contemporary was writing in Africa; thus witnessing to the fact that Christians throughout these early centuries, regardless of their location, were exercising power over the demonic in the name of Christ. Origen writes:

But the Christians, the real Christian who has submitted himself to God alone and His Logos, would not suffer anything at the hands of daemons, since he is superior to them. . . Let not Celsus scare us, then, by threatening that we shall be hurt by daemons if we slight them. For even if daemons are slighted, they are able to do nothing to us who are devoted to the Person that is alone able to help all those who deserve it. He does no less than set His own angels over those whose lives are devoted to him, that the opposing angels and the so-called ruler of this world who governs them may be unable to do anything against those who are dedicated to God.²³

Given this reality, let us turn our attention to the most apparent way in which Christians were demonstrating their power and authority over the devil: exorcism.

As we have already explored, a substantial component of Christ's earthly ministry was His exercising power over the unclean spirits that were afflicting humanity and thereby releasing people from their bondage. While it would seem that most modern believers are aware of this element within Jesus' ministry, it would likewise seem as though there is less familiarity with the significant role of this ministry during those centuries following the time of Christ. While exorcisms were primarily recognized in the gospels as serving to release individuals from their afflictions by overpowering the forces of darkness, it is interesting to note that exorcisms performed by Jesus specifically functioned to *establish* the Kingdom of God on earth, whereas exorcisms performed by Christians in the centuries that followed functioned to *expand* the Kingdom. Thus these deeds of power played such a significant role in the expansion of the early church that the Fathers welcomed any opportunity to demonstrate this power. Tertullian confidently

²³ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: University Press, 1953) 478-479.

writes, “Let any one be produced in this very place under your tribunals, who it is well known is under the influence of a daemon; that spirit, if ordered by any Christian to speak, will as readily confess itself a daemon, because it is true, as elsewhere a god because it is untrue.”²⁴ This passage shows that exorcisms were not only significant in that unclean spirits were cast out of individuals, but likewise that through the process, these same spirits would oftentimes even admit their lies and testify to the truth of the Christian message.

Despite the power that believers had been given over the devil and its minions, it is essential to acknowledge that this power was not attributed to the believers themselves, but rather to the One from whom power had been received: Christ Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke it is written, “The seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!’ He said to them, ‘I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven’” (10:17-20). Jesus makes it clear that one should not rejoice over their own ability to perform such an act of power, or any act of power for that matter, but rather to rejoice in their salvation which they have received through Him. The power that the Christian exercises over the demonic is not a reason for boasting in one’s own holiness, but rather serves to testify to the saving power of Christ. Tertullian bears witness to this understanding in the following statement:

Yet all this rule and power of ours over them derives its strength from the naming of Christ, and from the mention of those things which they look for as impending

²⁴ Tertullian, *Apology*, 81.

over them from God, through Christ the Judge. Fearing Christ in God and God in Christ, they are subject to the servants of God and Christ. Thus from our touch and from our breath being carried away by the thought and vision of that fire, they even leave the bodies of men at our order, unwilling and discomfited and ashamed at your presence. Believe them when they speak the truth about themselves, ye who believe them when they lie.²⁵

This understanding runs contrary to many modern-day interpretations of this power, and yet for the Fathers, who were informed by Jesus' words to His disciples, such power could only be wrought through Christ Jesus, who alone was deserving of resulting praise.

As is evident from both the ministry of Jesus and the testimonies of the Fathers, all that was required in order for an exorcism to be successful was for it to be done in the name of Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark we find the following account: "John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us'" (9:39-40). This passage make clear that it is solely by calling on the name of Jesus that one is able to demonstrate power over the demonic. The idea that specific formulas uttered by "worthy" Christians was essential for performing an exorcism was primarily rejected by the Fathers. In his argument against Celsus' assertion that Christians receive this power through the use of such formulas, Origen writes the following:

For they do not get the power which they seem to possess by any incantations but by the name of Jesus with the recital of the histories about him. For when these are pronounced they have often made daemons to be driven out of men, and especially when those who utter them speak with real sincerity and genuine belief.

²⁵ Tertullian, *Apology*, 83.

In fact the name of Jesus is so powerful against the daemons that sometimes it is effective even when pronounced by bad men.²⁶

The acknowledgment that this power will at times even be demonstrated through those who do not have faith in Jesus seems to have a two-fold significance. In the first place, performing such an act of power in Jesus' name would undoubtedly cause the perpetrator to reflect on such power, thereby providing a way for the Holy Spirit to bring the unbeliever to faith. In addition, utilizing unbelievers against the devil in order to bring about the Kingdom of God would represent a mutiny within the kingdom of Satan. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus speaking to the scribes says, "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come" (3:24-26). Thus it is evident that exorcisms performed in the name of Jesus, whether by the faithful or by those outside of the faith, functioned to overthrow the reign of the devil and to usher in the Kingdom of God.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you

In order to further our understanding of how the Fathers understood the role of the devil in relation to the work of Christ, it is essential to focus our attention on one final arena in which the power of the devil was supplanted by the work of Christ: that being in the practice of Christian baptism. Despite the fact that baptism was not formally identified as an antidemonic ritual until the beginning of the third century, to which we shall return shortly, the connections can nevertheless be found in Scripture. The Gospel of Mark opens with the appearance of John the Baptist in the wilderness (NRSV) or

²⁶ Origen, 9-10.

desert region (NIV). This location is significant because the wilderness or desert was viewed as a domain of the demonic. Such an association can be seen as early as the book of Leviticus, where in the sixteenth-chapter the ritual of the Day of Atonement describes interactions with a figure named Azazel, who has traditionally been identified as a demon residing in the wilderness. Therefore, John prophesying and proclaiming in the wilderness, as well as baptizing for the forgiveness of sins, meant that he was paving the way for the Kingdom of God in notably hostile territory. Of similar interest is the fact that only a couple centuries after the time of Christ, devoted believers known as the Desert Fathers were fleeing the commotion of the cities and retreating to the desert places, in order to do battle with the demonic forces that resided in these regions. Thus the wilderness or desert regions of the earth had been an acknowledged realm of the demonic both before and after the time of Christ, and John's prophesying in this region seems to have functioned for the purpose of a direct confrontation with these powers.

While John's ministry in the wilderness is significant, of even greater interest is the fact that Jesus' own baptism likewise takes place here. At the baptism of Jesus (1:9-11), the heavens are torn apart, and the Spirit descends upon Him like a dove. The power of the Greek word here, σχίζω (tear, split, separate) is that there no longer remains a barrier between the heavens and the earth. The verb in the text, σχιζομένου, is in the present tense, which indicates an ongoing action, and it is in passive voice, which means that the subject (the heavens) is being acted upon by something (God being assumed). To tear something apart would imply that a hole will permanently remain, as opposed to other translations which substitute "was opened," which would indicate that it could be closed again. Donald Juel notes, "The image of the tearing heavens is best taken as a sign

of an invasion rather than as an invitation to enter a sacred realm.”²⁷ Therefore, even in its Scriptural foundations, Christian baptism would seem to be rightly understood as God’s invasion of the devil’s territory, thereby destroying its claim to humanity and claiming us for Himself. Juel offers a two-fold explanation of the significance of this passage: The “great cosmic curtain that separates creation from God’s presence”²⁸ has been torn apart, thereby granting all of humanity access to God; God is no longer confined to His heavenly realm, but is rather loose on the earth. Both of these components should accompany our understanding of what is taking place in baptism, for both are attested to in the teachings of the Fathers. As the account of Jesus’ own baptism makes clear, the Spirit descends upon each and every believer in their baptism and claims them as God’s own beloved children. While this action by God should be comforting to believers, it must likewise be terrifying to those who oppose Him. Following his suggestion that through His invading activity God is now loose in the world, Juel writes, “If characters in the story find Jesus’ ministry threatening, then they may have good reason.”²⁹ There are none that should feel more threatened than the devil in this regard for the destruction of its kingdom is inevitable following such an invasion.

As previously mentioned, these antidemonic elements became established in the ritual of baptism at the beginning of the third century, and yet they did not maintain a universal form. In some cases, the catechumen was required to undergo extensive preparations for baptism, which included participation in several exorcism rituals. In

²⁷ Juel, *The Gospel of Mark*, 64.

²⁸ Donald H. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 35.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

other cases, the pre-baptismal exorcisms were excluded, with the emphasis rather being placed upon post-baptismal measures intended to preserve faith and prevent demonic attacks. Despite these variations, there was one component that was universally adopted by the church, in order to signify within baptism a clear transition for the catechumen from their previous bondage to the devil to their redemption through the grace of God: this being the renunciation within the baptismal ritual itself. In his text, *The Devil at Baptism*, Henry Ansgar Kelly states, “The renunciation, in fact, is the only universal antidemonic Christian initiation ritual.”³⁰ It therefore seems appropriate that we should briefly explore the significance of this component within the sacrament of Christian baptism.

The renunciation of the devil originated in the West in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus in Rome and in the writings of Tertullian in Carthage. Hippolytus laid out a thorough process by which the catechumen was to be prepared for baptism, which included daily examinations and exorcisms, in order to ensure the cleanliness of the catechumen and the removal of any demonic presence. For Tertullian, despite his clear acknowledgment of demonic influences in the lives of his fellow Christians, he nevertheless did not believe that additional rituals were necessary for the catechumen because he believed that the renunciation and the baptism itself were sufficient for destroying the works of the devil. In addition to the impact of his teachings on the renunciation in general, Tertullian was also responsible for drawing on St. Paul’s image of baptism as an association with the Exodus account of God delivering the Israelites (1 Cor. 10:2), and adding his own associations of the devil with Pharaoh and the

³⁰ Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1985) 94.

catechumen with the Israelites. Kelly writes, “He regarded the liberation of the Israelites from Pharaoh as a type of the rescue of Christians from the world and the devil: ‘The nations are freed from the world by means of water, and they leave behind the devil, their former ruler, who is overcome in the water.’”³¹

Despite the discrepancies operating among the various baptismal practices of the time, there seems to have been a universal conception of what baptism signified for the believer. In an extended quotation from his exploration of original sin within the Roman liturgy, G. M. Lukken offers a helpful explanation of the central role of the devil in the Fathers’ conception of fallen humanity.

In the writings of the Fathers Satan’s dominion over fallen humanity is described not only as a being enslaved to the devil but also as an indwelling of Satan. Satan thus not only rules unredeemed humanity from outside but exercises his dominion from within. This theme of the indwelling of Satan in unredeemed man occurs particularly in connection with baptism. For in Christian antiquity the relationship of the unbaptized person to Satan was represented in the same manner as the relationship of the baptized to the Holy Spirit. Just as people were convinced of a real indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the faithful, similarly they imagined a real indwelling of Satan in the unbaptized.”³²

This statement illustrates that for the Fathers it was necessary to acknowledge the reality of the devil and its role in relation to humanity, in order to thereby move beyond its power through the liberating waters of baptism. Kelly offers the following summation regarding the significance of the baptismal renunciation for the early tradition: “The many references in the writings of the Fathers to the renunciation of Satan demonstrate the great impact that the ceremony made upon the Christian community; and the varied forms in which it appeared show that the formulas and services were constantly adapted

³¹ Ibid., 107.

³² G. M. Lukken, *Original Sin in the Roman Liturgy: Research into the Theology of Original Sin in the Roman Sacramentaria and the Early Baptismal Liturgy* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973) 185.

in order to make the repudiation of the things of this world, and of the evil genius who ruled over them, more meaningful to the faithful.”³³

The renunciation was understood by the Fathers as representing not only liberation from an oppressive tyrant, but likewise a rejection of everything that could be associated with its reign. Kelly writes, “When a person turns from one form of life to embrace another, the old ways must necessarily be rejected, especially those practices most inimical to the new beliefs and style of life.”³⁴ Therefore, the act of renunciation within the baptismal ritual marked a clear delineation between the former life in bondage to the devil and the new life in relationship with Jesus Christ. The following explanation by Russell describes the power of the ritual and highlights the clear separation that was drawn between those who were baptized and those who remained unbaptized.

The voluntary renunciation of Satan remained part of the tradition, symbolizing as it did the candidate’s transition from the army of Satan to that of Christ. The oldest known renunciation formula is found in the early third-century *Apostolic Tradition* of Saint Hippolytus: “I renounce you, Satan, and your angels, and your vanities [*pompae*].” This renunciation was in most rites followed by the creed, making the conversion from Satan to Christ sharp and clear. In the fourth century the candidate commonly faced the west, the direction of sunset and death, to renounce Satan, and then turned to the east, toward the sunrise and light, to express his acceptance of Christ.³⁵

This act of renunciation and confession within baptism can be traced to Scripture, in which the letter of James exhorts, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (4:7-8a). For the early Christians, the sacrament of baptism bore much greater significance than merely

³³ Kelly, 104.

³⁴ Kelly, 94.

³⁵ Russell, *Satan*, 102-103.

representing the ceremony of Christian initiation into the community of believers; baptism was rather understood as signifying a new reality, in which the catechumen's previous ties with the devil had been severed, and he/she was ushered into a full relationship with the Redeemer.

As we have seen from our exploration of this topic within the words of Scripture, as well as within the writings of the early Fathers, the devil played an important role in our tradition's understanding of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, as well as regarding His ongoing work of reconciling the world to Himself. In order to continue our exploration of the significance of the devil within the Christian understanding of redemption through Jesus Christ, and to do so particularly from a Lutheran perspective, we shall next turn our attention to an exploration of this topic within the writings of the great reformer, Martin Luther.

The Two Cities

Before we proceed with our exploration of this topic within the writings of Luther, however, it is essential that we first consider the teachings of one of the greatest theologians in the western church, whose influence on Luther, as well as on the entire western tradition, cannot be discounted: namely, St. Augustine. Of special interest to this discussion are the ways in which Augustine conceived of reality being divided into two cities, with God ruling over the one and the devil exerting control over the other. As his biographer Peter Brown writes, "Augustine grew up in an age where men thought that they shared the physical world with malevolent demons. They felt this quite as intensely as we feel the presence of myriads of dangerous bacteria. The 'name of Christ' was

applied to the Christian like a vaccination. It was the only guarantee of safety.”³⁶

Although this understanding clearly corresponds with that of the Fathers, as we have already examined, Augustine was the first to identify a clear distinction between these opposing realities. In his magnum opus, *City of God*, Augustine draws this line of separation.

I classify the human race into two branches: the one consists of those who live by human standards, the other of those who live according to God’s will. I also call these two classes the two cities, speaking allegorically. By two cities I mean two societies of human beings, one of which is predestined to reign with God for all eternity, the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil.³⁷

Despite his belief in an omnipotent God who rules all of creation, Augustine nevertheless acknowledged the power that was exercised by the devil in the world, which was capable of drawing humans away from God. In an extended quotation, Augustine acknowledges the overwhelming influence that the devil exhibits over sinful humanity, while likewise maintaining his assurance in the ultimate victory of God.

And we ought not to be disturbed that many consent to the devil, and few follow God; for the grain, too, in comparison with the chaff, yields a much smaller amount. But as the husbandman knows what to do with the huge heap of chaff, so the multitude of sinners is nothing to God, who knows His purpose with regard to them, so that the administration of His kingdom may in no respect be disturbed or debased. Nor must we think that the devil has conquered because he has drawn away many with him only to be overcome, they with him, by a few. Thus there are two cities, one of the wicked, the other of the just, which endure from the beginning of the human race even to the end of time, which are now intermingled in body, but separated in will, and which, moreover, are to be separated in body also on the day of judgment.³⁸

³⁶ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) 41.

³⁷ St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Classics, 1984) 595.

³⁸ St. Augustine, *The First Catechetical Instruction*, in *The Ancient Christian Writers*, trans. Rev. Joseph P. Christopher (Westminster: The Newman Bookshop, 1946) 60-61.

As is evident from this quotation, it must be acknowledged that Augustine was not operating out of a framework that was dualistic by nature, as if inherent in the created order there exists an opposing force that is equal to God, for Augustine rejected such a belief. On the contrary, Augustine believed that creation had reached this divided state on account of sin, in which humans substituted love for the Creator in favor of love for themselves. The burden of responsibility for such an odious departure from grace, however, can first and foremost be attributed to the devil, for as Augustine writes, “Sin first came into existence as a result of the Devil’s pride.”³⁹

Although Augustine was unflinching in acknowledging the devil as the originator of sin, he nevertheless was not prepared to make it the scapegoat for all such disobedience of the divine will; he understood that the sinful nature of humanity likewise sets itself in opposition to God. Despite the devil’s intentions to relentlessly cultivate resentment of God among humans, Augustine placed the ultimate responsibility of concession to such temptation on the individual. Peter Brown offers a profound explanation of Augustine’s worldview:

This world was ruled by hostile ‘powers’, above all, by the ‘Lord of this world’, the Devil. The Christian, therefore, found himself committed to a wrestling-match, an *agon*. The ring was clearly defined: it was the ‘world’, the *mundus*. The enemy was specific and external to him, the Devil, his angels and their human agents. The ‘training’ provided by his church had equipped the Christian for the due reward of victory in any competition – a ‘crown’, in the next world...Augustine merely turned the Christian struggle inwards: its amphitheatre was the ‘heart’; it was an inner struggle against forces in the soul; the ‘Lord of this world’ becomes the ‘Lord of desires’ – of the desires of those who love this world, and so come to resemble demons committed to the same emotions as themselves. ‘The Devil is not to be blamed for everything: there are times when a man is his own devil.’⁴⁰

³⁹ St. Augustine, *City of God*, 447.

⁴⁰ Brown, 244-245.

Thus for Augustine, the devil was working in collaboration with the flesh in order to incite the love of humans for themselves, thereby driving a wedge between their own needs and God's overwhelming desire to provide for His creatures.

Throughout his writings, Augustine tended to focus his attention more on the sinful nature of humanity rather than on the operation of the devil; and yet this does not negate the fact that he acknowledged the reality of the devil, and understood it to be both the adversary of God and the ruler of a fallen humanity. Brown writes, "Augustine had always believed in the vast power of the Devil: God had shown His omnipotence most clearly in restraining this superhuman creature, whose aggressive force was so great that he would obliterate the whole Christian church if released. Now this Devil will cast his shadow over mankind: the human race is 'the Devil's fruit-tree, his own property, from which he may pick his fruit', it is a 'plaything of demons'."⁴¹ One cannot help but make the connection between Augustine's understanding of humans as the Devil's "fruit tree" and the account in his *Confessions* regarding his plucking pears off a tree solely for the purpose of destruction. He reflects, "I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved the self-destruction, I loved my fall, not the object for which I had fallen but my fall itself. My depraved soul leaped down from your firmament to ruin. I was seeking not to gain anything by shameful means, but shame for its own sake."⁴² Within this confession by Augustine we find both his understanding of the motivation behind Satan's fall from grace, and likewise an explanation of the devil's objectives in the world: to promote wickedness in order to

⁴¹ Ibid., 395.

⁴² St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 29.

destroy one's relationship with Creator and creation alike. While we have simply brushed the surface of Augustine's thought on these matters, this should suffice in both illustrating his worldview and identifying the influence that his teachings had on the worldview of Luther, to which we shall now turn our attention.

CHAPTER 2

LUTHER'S CONCEPTION

Despite the agenda of many modern scholars to ascribe belief in the reality of the devil solely to the antiquated period of the early church, one must acknowledge the resurgence of this figure within the writings of Martin Luther, who once again catapulted the devil to the forefront of theological inquiry. The devil seems to be a constant companion throughout Luther's life, who repeatedly finds its way into his vast collection of writings. The extent to which the devil makes an appearance in Luther's thought has led many modern critics to question his sanity, and yet it cannot be denied that he remains one of the true juggernauts in the history of theological inquiry, and arguably the most proficient interpreter of the Gospel since the apostle Paul. Therefore, two options seem to remain regarding the man and the attention which he paid to the devil: either to question all of his teachings on account of his possible delusions, or else to seriously consider his reflections on the topic given the credibility of his teachings as a whole. In this next section we shall take the latter approach and explore Luther's conception of the devil, given the influence that he has had on the Christian tradition as a whole, and particularly on the Lutheran witness.

The Two Kingdoms

Martin Luther was born into a world which was both clinging to the past while likewise reaching towards the future. The world was in the process of emerging from the shadows of the Middle Ages into the light of the Age of Reason, and the church found

itself presented with the challenge of maintaining its validity and authority during this period of transition. The church of the sixteenth century was defined by the tension it experienced in both attempting to strengthen its foundations by returning to its past and to expand its influence by advancing toward the realities of the future. Thus we find an emphasis within the church of this time to embrace its Renaissance reality, particularly by attempting to establish its authority through its institutional structures. These structures were represented both externally, as was illustrated by the increased emphasis on church art and architecture, and internally, as was illustrated by the increased authority that was granted to the papacy. In both arenas, the church was attempting to reinforce the roots of its influence in a world that was ripe with its desire to blossom and thereby to produce new fruit.

Given these desires toward advancement, the seemingly superstitious notion of a personified evil seemed certain to be pruned from the tree of knowledge that was in the early stages of its cultivation. Jeffrey Burton Russell observes, “It was a period that witnessed a profound shift in the center of gravity of perceptions of evil, from the world of spirits to the world of humanity.”⁸¹ With the period of the Enlightenment just around the corner, belief in the reality of the devil seemed to be reaching its extinction; and yet it was during the period of the Reformation when the devil was once again given the immense attention it had received during the opening centuries of the Common Era. Russell writes, “Neither the scientific nor the hermetic view of the world had much room for the Devil. Yet Satan, far from being ready to retire, reached his height of power just at the moment when the intellectual structures supporting him were beginning to shake. The

⁸¹ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) 25.

theology of Luther and the rise of the witch craze both encouraged belief in the Devil.”⁸²

In the following sections we will explore the resurgence of the devil in the theology of Luther, as well as his rejection of its claims to power through his reforming of the church and recapturing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Old Satanic Foe

Like the early Fathers, Luther understood the devil to be actively operating in opposition against humanity, with its sole purpose being to destroy faith in the Word of God. Given the fact that Luther was first and foremost concerned with the church’s return to placing Christ at the center of life and regarding the Word of God as the sole authority for the operations of life, it would seem to be logical that the devil would find this a fitting time to resurface. In his biography of Luther, Heiko Oberman reflects on this very point:

According to Luther’s prediction, the Devil would not “tolerate” the rediscovery of the Gospel; he would rebel with all his might, and muster all his forces against it. God’s Reformation would be preceded by a counterreformation, and the Devil’s progress would mark the Last Days. For where God is at work – in man and in human history – the Devil, the spirit of negation, is never far away.⁸³

Therefore, Luther took the apparent resurgence of the devil’s activity very seriously, and he did not disregard this resurgence by appealing to the inherent discrepancies between such a belief and the objections of sound reason. On the contrary, Luther believed that reason was beneficial only when it served to uphold the truth of Scripture and to promote faith in Christ Jesus. Since the Biblical witness testifies to the reality of the devil, as we

⁸² Ibid., 28.

⁸³ Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New York: Image Books, 1992) 12.

have already explored, and since he continuously experienced its opposition to his faith, Luther believed that the devil was not eradicated but rather validated by reason. Oberman writes, “He understood the hellish fears of his time, then discovered in the Scriptures the true thrust and threat of Satan and experienced himself the Devil’s trials and temptations.”⁸⁴ Thus the devil became the constant adversary of Luther, and his faith was informed by this conflict. In his exposition of Luther’s theology, Steven Paulson clearly illustrates this dialectical tension by writing, “Luther could not imagine taking God seriously without also taking the devil seriously, and he could not imagine what sense you could make of God’s word without being aware of how God is ending the old world and beginning the new.”⁸⁵ Thus Luther could be properly characterized as living between two worldviews: striving to make the Gospel relevant to his parishioners, students, and colleagues, while likewise maintaining the worldview of Scripture and the early tradition. Russell writes, “The old worldview of Augustine and the scholastics was still vigorously alive in the thought of Luther, who devoted more of his theology and personal concern to the Devil than anyone had done since the desert fathers.”⁸⁶

The majority of Luther’s reflections regarding the devil can be traced not only to Scripture, but likewise echoed by his predecessors throughout the Christian tradition. Like the early tradition, Luther acknowledged the prevalent activity of the devil and its minions throughout the world, and more strenuously confessed the subjection of these powers to the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. However, despite the parallels between the

⁸⁴ Ibid., 105.

⁸⁵ Steven Paulson, *Luther for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004) 33.

⁸⁶ Russell, *Mephistopheles*, 34.

Fathers and Luther in regards to the devil, Luther seems to have been constantly making alterations to the established teachings on the ancient foe. In the following quotation, Heiko Oberman offers a powerful explanation of the significance of the devil in Luther's thought, which surpassed even the conceptions of his predecessors who were living in times when belief in the devil appears to have been more widely accepted.

Luther's world of thought is wholly distorted and apologetically misconstrued if his conception of the Devil is dismissed as a medieval phenomenon and only his faith in Christ retained as relevant or as the only decisive factor. Christ and the Devil were equally real to him: one was the perpetual intercessor for Christianity, the other a menace to mankind till the end. To argue that Luther never overcame the medieval belief in the Devil says far too little; he even intensified it and lent to it additional urgency: Christ and Satan wage a cosmic war for mastery over Church and world. No one can evade involvement in this struggle. Even for the believer there is no refuge – neither monastery nor the seclusion of the wilderness offer him a chance for escape. The Devil is the omnipresent threat, and exactly for this reason the faithful need the proper weapons for survival.⁸⁷

Within this explanation we discover several alterations which Luther made to the prevailing teachings on the devil. Therefore, let us now turn our attention to exploring some of the ways in which Luther both “intensified and lent additional urgency” to the belief in the reality of the devil.

Given our exploration of St. Augustine's teachings on the devil, it would seem fitting to begin with the influence of his two cities concept on Luther's own understanding of the world. In his famous treatise, *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther sets forth his doctrine of the two kingdoms, which clearly echoes the teachings of Augustine.

Luther writes:

For Christians know there are two kingdoms in the world, which are bitterly opposed to each other. In one of them Satan reigns, who is therefore called by Christ “the ruler of this world” [John 12:31] and by Paul “the god of this world” [II Cor. 4:4]. He holds captive to his will all who are not snatched away from him

⁸⁷ Oberman, 104.

by the Spirit of Christ, as the same Paul testifies, nor does he allow them to be snatched away by any powers other than the Spirit of God, as Christ testifies in the parable of the strong man guarding his palace in peace [Luke 11:21]. In the other Kingdom, Christ reigns, and his Kingdom ceaselessly resists and makes war on the kingdom of Satan. Into this Kingdom we are transferred, not by our own power but by the grace of God, by which we are set free from the present evil age and delivered from the dominion of darkness.⁸⁸

While this conception of the world may seem to identify an intense dualism operating within the worldviews of both Augustine and Luther, both men unflinchingly argued for the sovereignty of God over all creation. One might logically inquire as to how a benevolent God could be sovereign over all creation and yet allow a malevolent being, such as the devil, to exercise its destructive authority here on earth. In order to formulate an appropriate response, we must delve more deeply into the doctrine of the two kingdoms.

Many modern believers would object to believing in a God who would permit the devil to operate freely within the cosmos in opposition to humanity, such as in the account of Job. Such attempts at theodicy, however, are rarely adequate, with the usual result being either the diminishing of God's power or the expansion of the devil's power. Both of these options would have been inadequate for both Augustine and Luther, who were able to reconcile the sovereignty of God with the evil they experienced, without taking away from the former or granting the devil more power than it had been allotted by God. The theologies of these two great thinkers were able to accommodate such a reality because they understood the antinomies of God's wrath and God's love as being both essential to the nature of God and as being integral to the ways in which God relates to His creation. Thus we find in Luther's *Small Catechism* the repeated phrase, "We are

⁸⁸ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, vol. 33 in *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) 287.

to fear and love God,” as the premise to each of his explanations to the Ten Commandments.

Nevertheless, the question remains as to why God would continue to permit the devil to exercise authority within the earthly kingdom, if in Christ Jesus, God was indeed reconciling the world to Himself? The answer for Luther was quite clear and without contradiction. Although the devil clearly maintains its permission to operate in the world, it is nevertheless subject to God’s ultimate authority, and therefore can be resisted by those who subject themselves to God. Luther argued that although the devil is real and active in the world, its power is determined by the individual who either succumbs to temptation, thereby winning a victory for the kingdom of Satan, or perseveres in the face of temptation, thereby winning a victory for the Kingdom of God. Therefore, while the devil’s ability to operate is dependent upon the Will of God, its ability to operate *successfully* is dependent upon the will of the individual. Once again we may turn our attention to the passage in the book of James which states, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (4:7-8a). In this instruction we observe the power that has been given to the believer in order to subdue the onslaughts of the devil and thereby to further the Kingdom of God. In the following quotation Gustaf Wingren summarizes the teaching of Luther on prayer, which he defines as “a door through which God enters into vocation in transforming action against the devil.”

Prayer is a human action through which man’s entire situation is changed. When man was far from God, God gave the devil permission to work harm to man. But then man prays, in his desperation repents, and comes close to God again. Then the devil loses his right, and stands as the enemy of God and man alike. The

relationship of God and the devil, in their mutual combat for the individual, is reversed and changed when man prays.⁸⁹

The understanding by Luther that each and every individual represents the battleground between God and the devil is similar to that of Augustine and yet there is a major distinction: for Luther, the individual is ultimately powerless in this battle.

Augustine understood humans as being in a wrestling-match with the devil, in which the church prepared each individual to engage in daily conflict with the devil, and provided each person with the necessary training to emerge victorious. For Luther, on the other hand, this wrestling-match takes place between God and the devil with the individual as the prize of this conflict. Wingren explains this situation as follows:

It is for man that the struggle between God and the devil goes on, for every single individual. God wishes man to be saved from the power of sin, and the devil wants man kept in it. Out of that invisible combat, which goes on even when man does not think of it, come all the agony and anxiety that enter into human life. A creature must know suffering when two powers lay hold of it, struggling to “win and possess it.”⁹⁰

Although this understanding is offensive to human nature, which clings to its free-will as its greatest possession, Luther understood the human will to be immutably bound. As we observed in his explanation of the two kingdoms, Luther believed that humans are ultimately powerless in this struggle; thus he identifies humans as being “snatched away,” “transferred,” and “delivered,” all of which identify the individual as the passive player in this conflict. In his exploration of the two kingdoms within Luther’s thought, Hans Schwarz observes, “There is no escape from this kingdom unless Christ liberates us so that we are freed from its sphere of influence and transferred into that of the other

⁸⁹ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1957) 84.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

kingdom.”⁹¹ In order to clearly illustrate the human condition and our passivity within the kingdoms, Luther employed the powerful imagery of a beast with two riders. Luther writes, “Thus the human will is placed between the two like a beast of burden. If God rides it, it wills and goes where God wills...If Satan rides it, it wills and goes where Satan wills; nor can it choose to run to either of the two riders or to seek him out, but the riders themselves contend for the possession and control of it.”⁹²

This brings us to another point in which Luther differed from many of the Fathers: determining on whom the devil focuses its attacks. According to the patristic understanding, a lack of faith presented an easy target for the devil, and thus unbelievers were identified as the primary object of its attention. Such an understanding informed the view regarding those who had been delivered from demonic possession by exorcists, who when they did not believe in Christ following their deliverance, would open themselves up to further and more brutal attacks. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus says, “When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but not finding any, it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ When it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first” (11:24-26). On the contrary, baptized believers were believed by the Fathers to be immune from the onslaughts of the devil, and thus any post-baptismal afflictions would indicate a lapse of faith on the part of the individual. In his *Letters*, St. Cyprian offers such a perspective:

⁹¹ Hans Schwarz, *Evil: A Historical and Theological Perspective*, trans. Mark W. Worthing (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 145.

⁹² Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 65-66.

But if anyone is disturbed in this that certain of those who are baptized while ill are still tempted by unclean spirits, let him know that the wickedness of the devil remains strong all the way up to the saving water, but, in true baptism, it loses all the virus of its malice...with urgent necessity in illness those who are baptized and have gained grace are freed from the unclean spirit by which formerly they were urged on and live praiseworthy and approved in the Church and accomplish much through each day in the increase of heavenly grace through an increase in faith; and that, on the contrary, often some of those who are baptized in good health, if afterward they begin to sin, are distressed by the return of the unclean spirit; that it is manifest that the devil is excluded in baptism by faith of the believer; and that he returns afterward if faith should fail.⁹³

Although Luther likewise identified baptism as providing God's promise of salvation and identified faith as a powerful weapon against the devil, he diverged from his predecessors in regards to whom he identified as the primary target of the devil. Despite their agreement as to *why* the devil was operating in the world, Luther differed from the Fathers in regards to *who* the devil was focusing its attacks against. Luther acknowledged faith as the primary target of the devil's attacks, and therefore it was the believer who required the greatest defense. In a letter to his colleague, Jerome Weller, Luther offers the following consolation to his friend who was suffering from depression:

You must believe that this temptation of yours is of the devil, who vexes you so because you believe in Christ. You see how contented and happy he permits the worst enemies of the gospel to be. Just think of Eck, Zwingli, and others. It is necessary for all of us who are Christians to have the devil as an adversary and enemy; as Saint Peter says, "Your adversary, the devil, walketh about." Excellent Jerome, you ought to rejoice in this temptation of the devil because it is a certain sign that God is propitious and merciful to you.⁹⁴

Luther believed that the greater one's faith in Christ Jesus, the greater the attacks of the devil against that individual. Thus for Luther, such attacks did not represent an occasion

⁹³ St. Cyprian, *Letters*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 51, trans. Sister Rose Bernard Donna (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1964) 255-257.

⁹⁴ Martin Luther, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003) 84-85.

for despair, but rather an occasion for rejoicing that the adversary had identified such faith in operation.

The primary difference between Luther's understanding and those of many of his predecessors was the fact that he attributed demonic attacks to the maliciousness of the devil rather than regarding such attacks as a measure of one's faith. In Cyprian's account, it is clear that a direct connection is made between the sinfulness of humans and their susceptibility to demonic attacks. In Luther's understanding, however, since every person is rightly identified as *simul iustus et peccator* (simultaneously saint and sinner), it is clear that the devil shows no partiality when it comes to human beings. Luther identified the production of faith in Christ Jesus as the supreme occupation of the Holy Spirit, and similarly acknowledged that this same faith is that which the devil is most determined to destroy. In his explanation of Luther's theology, Lennart Pinomaa writes, "The Spirit alone can create justifying faith in us"⁹⁵; therefore it is the work of the Spirit which the devil seeks to destroy, and human beings are simply the field on which this battle is played out. This understanding by Luther makes it clear that the devil will never be saved for as it is written, "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:28-29). In order to further explore this understanding within Luther's theology, let us turn our attention to his teachings on the sacrament of baptism, in which the ongoing drama of salvation is most decisively played out.

⁹⁵ Lennart Pinomaa, *Faith Victorious: An Introduction to Luther's Theology*, trans. Walter J. Kukkonen (Lima: Academic Renewal Press, 1963) 81.

One Little Word Subdues Him

Despite his identifying humanity as the middle ground between Christ and the devil, Luther nevertheless understood the severity of the devil's attacks and acknowledged that they represent a lifelong companion for those who, by the power of the Spirit, seek to remain steadfast in the Word of God. Given his acknowledgment that it is the believer in Christ Jesus who will undergo the greatest attacks at the hand of the devil, Luther identified baptism as the point of conception for such attacks. As a result, while Luther did not include the extended exorcisms that can be found in the rituals of Hippolytus and Tertullian, he nevertheless maintained the understanding of baptism as a direct polemic against the devil. Henry Ansgar Kelly writes, "The fact that Luther included any exorcism at all suggests that he took the prebaptismal indwelling of the devil literally. He eliminated the other formulas because, presumably, one word of command was thought to be sufficient."⁹⁶ Thus in both editions of his baptismal service, the latter of which eliminated the majority of the antidemonic elements because they were viewed as nonessential, Luther included the powerful command to the devil, "Depart thou unclean spirit and make room for the Holy Spirit."⁹⁷ This straightforward command in which the believer called on the power of the Holy Spirit in order to exorcize the unclean spirit from the catechumen, thereby restricting the operation of the devil to external attacks, was viewed by Luther as being sufficient and decisive. Moreover, Luther viewed the forgiveness of sin, which is bestowed upon the believer through the waters of baptism, through the reception of the bread and wine, and through

⁹⁶ Kelly, 257.

⁹⁷ Martin Luther, *Liturgy and Hymns*, vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965) 107.

daily repentance, as the little word which subdues the devil and lays its kingdom to waste.

In Luther's time, as remains the case today, it was rather commonplace for both the meaning and the significance of baptism to be either misunderstood or taken lightly. For Luther, however, baptism represented the unconditional bestowing of God's abundant and infinite grace upon those who do not deserve such a gift. Luther writes, "God himself calls it a new birth by which we are being freed from all the devil's tyranny, loosed from sin, death, and hell, and become children of life, heirs of all the gifts of God, God's own children, and brethren of Christ."⁹⁸ Since Luther regarded baptism as the point in which the grace of God is freely given to the individual, and thereby a tangible event on which faith can cling, it is not surprising for him to identify the opposition of the devil to such an event. In a letter which he wrote to Philip Melancthon regarding the practice of infant baptism, Luther writes, "I have always expected Satan to touch this sore, but he did not will to do it by the papists. Among ourselves and between our friends he stirs up this grievous schism; but Christ will quickly tread him down under our feet."⁹⁹ Given the seriousness with which both God and the devil regard baptism, Luther therefore believed it to be essential to reevaluate exactly what is at stake in this sacrament. In his original *Order of Baptism*, which was published in 1523, Luther acknowledges the serious nature of infant baptism and likewise expresses his concerns regarding the present treatment of the sacrament.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 103.

⁹⁹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Correspondence and other Contemporary Letters (1521-1530)*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. Preserved Smith and Charles M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1918) 86.

Remember, therefore, that it is no joke to take sides against the devil and not only to drive him away from the little child, but to burden the child with such a mighty lifelong enemy. Remember, too, that it is very necessary to aid the poor child with all your heart and strong faith, earnestly to intercede for him that God, in accordance with this prayer, would not only free him from the power of the devil, but also strengthen him, so that he may nobly resist the devil in life and death. And I suspect that people turn out so badly after baptism because our concern for them has been so cold and careless; we, at their baptism, interceded for them without zeal.¹⁰⁰

As the opening line of this quotation makes clear, and as we have previously explored, Luther differed from the patristic opinion regarding the relationship between humans and the devil following baptism. The paradox exists within baptism that although the child is receiving their lifelong inheritance as a child of God, they are likewise inheriting a lifelong enemy. This may not initially seem like a good deal; yet we must remember that in Luther's understanding all people, whether Christian or non-Christian, are under the reign of the devil in this world. For the former, however, although the assaults of the devil are assuredly more intense, they have been given the promise that God will not abandon them in the face of such persecution, and that they have been set free from the immense power which the devil would otherwise be able to exercise over them. The words of St. Paul to the church in Philippi seem to express the tension that will define the reality of the believer following their baptism: "Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (2:12-13).

Given Luther's explanation of the carelessness with which the baptism of infants was being treated, we can assume that his context was probably not much different from

¹⁰⁰ Luther, *Liturgy and Hymns*, 102.

today in that regard. It seems that nowadays infants are often brought to the waters of baptism more out of a sense of necessity or compliance with the tradition rather than with the understanding that in these waters they shall be delivered from sin, death, and the devil, and become inheritors of eternal life through Christ Jesus, their Lord and Savior. In his original *Order of Baptism*, Luther continues his exhortation by explaining the significance with which the Christian community should regard the sacrament of baptism, and the ways in which the community must take seriously their calling to instruct the child in the faith and to thereby offer them lifelong protection against the adversary.

Luther writes:

See to it, therefore, that you are present in true faith, listen to God's Word, and earnestly join in prayer. For when the priest says, "Let us pray," he is exhorting you to unite with him in prayer. And all sponsors and the others present should repeat with him the words of his prayer in their hearts to God. For this reason the priest should say these prayers very clearly and slowly so that the sponsors may hear and comprehend them and also pray with him with one accord in their hearts, carrying the little child's need before God most earnestly, setting themselves against the devil with all their strength on behalf of the child, and showing that they realize this is no joke as far as the devil is concerned.¹⁰¹

These words by Luther must echo throughout the generations so that believers in every time and place will treat this sacrament with the same seriousness it is given by God and the devil.

It is certain that the Kingdom of God is indeed in our midst when the community of believers gathers around the one who is to be baptized, whether that be an infant, adolescent, or adult, and "sets themselves against the devil with all their strength" on behalf of the one who is to be baptized. In the case of the baptism of infants, the meaning of the sacrament is demonstrated most emphatically in that the grace of God is being

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 102.

bestowed upon one who has no choice but to receive it. In recounting Luther's understanding of infant baptism, Heiko Oberman explains the significance of God's external action and the power that is present within the community of faith.

The baptismal font is the reservoir of alien righteousness surrounded by alien belief. For enlightened Protestantism, which has developed faith into a rational system and eliminated the Devil from it, this belief is not alien, but alienating and peculiar. Luther, however, insists on this very alienation when faced with the menace of an intellectualization of faith: if the Devil is to be withstood, intercession is indispensable; "loners" are defenseless against his threat and subject to his tyranny. A good Christian is always an infant in his dependence upon God and in the way he is bound up with Christ and His Church.¹⁰²

Therefore, as the one who is to be baptized, or their sponsors in the case of an infant, renounce the devil, and all its works, and all its ways, every member of the community must repeat this renunciation in their hearts, thereby not only opposing the devil on behalf of the individual, but likewise subduing it within their own hearts; and such a renunciation must occur daily as every believer continuously turns from the devil and places their dependence upon God. Indeed, such a harmonious renunciation of the devil must send a tremor through the foundations of hell and hymns of praise must resound throughout the heavens.

As we have seen from our exploration of Luther thus far, he unflinchingly acknowledged the reality of both the operation of the devil within the lives of believers and the power of faith against the devil which has been bestowed upon every believer through the promise of baptism. In his usual bold manner, Luther unloads a powerful barrage against the devil, in which he firmly confesses the victory of Christ over the devil through the waters of baptism.

¹⁰² Oberman, 230.

Therefore, thou miserable devil, acknowledge thy judgment and give glory to the true and living God, give glory to his Son Jesus Christ and to the Holy Ghost, and depart from this his servant; for God and our Lord Jesus Christ has of his goodness called him to his holy grace and blessing, and to the fountain of baptism so that thou mayest never dare to disturb the sign of the holy cross which we make on his forehead; through him who cometh again to judge, etc. So hearken now, thou miserable devil, adjured by the name of the eternal God and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and depart trembling and groaning, conquered together with thy hatred, so that thou shalt have nothing to do with the servant of God who now seeks that which is heavenly and renounces thee and thy world, and shall live in blessed immortality. Give glory therefore now to the Holy Ghost who cometh and descendeth from the loftiest castle of heaven in order to destroy thy deceit and treachery, and having cleansed the heart with the divine fountain, to make it ready, a holy temple and dwelling of God, so that this servant of God, freed from all guilt of former sin, may always give thanks to the eternal God and praise his name forever and ever. Amen.¹⁰³

The battle lines have clearly been drawn: one either renounces the devil, thereby awakening to the light of the Kingdom of God, or one chooses to remain in the kingdom of the devil, thereby preferring the darkness.

Luther explains that the sign of the cross made on the forehead of the one who is baptized identifies the individual as one whom God has claimed, and the name of the One in whom we are baptized draws out the devil and puts it to flight. Consider in contrast the book of Revelation with John's description of the second beast placing a mark on all who worship it instead of the True God. It is written, "It causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name... There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the mark of its name" (13:16-17, 14:11b). In baptism, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the Cross of Christ forever. This act of "being marked" at baptism, while not visible to the neighbor we encounter on the street,

¹⁰³ Ibid., 97-98.

is visible to those demonic forces that we encounter. Our acts of love for our neighbor are to be the external mark of our faith in Christ Jesus; the mark of Christ upon us is to be the internal indicator for the devil that we belong to God. As we have acknowledged, as marked members of the body of Christ we are not freed from the attacks of the devil, but rather marked as its enemies. Our being marked internally for God does not lessen our sufferings, but rather opens us up to the onslaughts of a tyrant and its subjects who are raging ferociously against our faith. It is clear that every individual will be claimed by either Christ or by the devil, just as Luther illustrated by utilizing the image of the beast and the two riders. While it may often seem as though these powers are on equal footing, we have been given the assurance through the cross of Christ that the victory has already been won on our behalf. In this final section we will explore the biblical account of Jesus' temptation by the devil, which sets the stage for the ensuing battle that will take place for each and every individual.

But Now a Champion Comes to Fight

Seeing as how Luther shared the understanding of the Fathers that only on account of the protection of Christ is one able to withstand the assaults of the enemy, it would seem essential to explore Luther's interpretation of the sole passage in Scripture where Christ and the devil face-off against one another directly: Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. In a Lenten sermon, Luther describes this altercation between Christ and the devil which is meant to offer an example for believers when faced with the wiles of the evil one. The temptation accounts are central to Luther's theology as a whole because they both frighten the believer by attesting to the reality of the devil and its deceptions, as well as provide comfort for the believer by offering the assurance that Christ has taken

His place between humanity and its enemy, thereby taking upon Himself the bulk of the devil's fury. In an extended quotation, Oberman offers a profound statement regarding the centrality of this understanding to Luther's theology:

There is no way to grasp Luther's milieu of experience and faith unless one has an acute sense of his view of Christian existence between God and the Devil: without a recognition of Satan's power, belief in Christ is reduced to an idea about Christ – and Luther's faith becomes a confused delusion in keeping with the tenor of his time. Attempts are made to offer excuses for Luther by pointing out that he never doubted the omnipotence of God and thus determined only narrow limits for the Devil's activities. Luther himself would have been outraged at this view: the *omnipotent* God is indeed real, but *as such* hidden from us. Faith reaches not for God hidden but for God revealed, who, incarnate in Christ, laid Himself open to the Devil's fury. At Christmas God divested Himself of His omnipotence – the sign given the shepherds was a child “wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2.12). To Luther Christmas was the central feast: “God for us.” But that directly implies “the Devil against us.” This new belief in the Devil is such an integral part of the Reformation discovery that if the reality of the powers inimical to God is not grasped, the incarnation of Christ, as well as the justification and temptation of the sinner are reduced to ideas of the mind rather than experiences of faith. That is what Luther's battle against the Devil meant to convey...To make light of the Devil is to distort faith.”¹⁰⁴

Throughout his writings we are able to observe the significance of this battle for Luther, who is constantly contending against the “old satanic foe.” His sermon for the first Sunday in Lent provides a profound glimpse into this battle, and offers important insights into this significant component of Luther's theology.

Although the account of the temptation of Christ appears in both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and in a slightly different order in both cases, Luther chooses to focus on the Matthew text. However, he also acknowledges the account of Luke as being preferred for preaching because of the logic of its order. As Luther points out, since there is, in fact, no logical order by which the devil attacks, the orders depicted by the Gospel

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 104-105.

accounts are insignificant.¹⁰⁵ Instead, the significance exists in the temptations themselves, which signify the means by which the devil attacks all the children of God. Luther continues his sermon by exploring the three temptations endured by Christ, each of which provides the Christian with a powerful example, and yet one that only Christ was entirely capable of enduring. Luther begins his sermon by underscoring the point that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, as opposed to Jesus choosing to go into the wilderness of His own accord. What follows is Luther's warning against tempting God by seeking out temptations in order to demonstrate one's holiness; for as we shall see, to put God to the test is one of the very temptations of the devil.

The temptations begin by Christ being led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, which is the same in both Gospel accounts. Luther observes that the wilderness represented a place where Christ was abandoned and forsaken by all, including God.¹⁰⁶ This represents the prime location for the devil's attacks because it desires to draw its prey into isolation, whereby the individual will lack the defenses of the community of faith. We find this testified by Paul who writes to the church in Thessalonica, "For we wanted to come to you – certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again – but Satan blocked our way" (1 Thess. 2:18). The devil abhors Christian communities because Christ has promised to be present in these gatherings with the intention of instilling faith in those who are gathered. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ offers this assurance by saying, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (18:20). Thus it would follow that the devil seeks our isolation

¹⁰⁵ J.N. Lenker, *Luther's Church Postil on the Gospels: Epiphany, Lent and Easter Sermons* (Minneapolis: Lutherans in All Lands Co., 1906) 146.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

where we will be separated from the body of believers, and thereby face the temptations of the devil on our own.

The Desert Fathers represent devoted believers who attempted to imitate Christ by fleeing the commotion of the cities in favor of the solitude of the desert, thereby intending to do battle against the devil and its minions on their turf. While this may have seemed a worthy Christian endeavor, for these ascetics indeed testify to undergoing demonic assaults, their motivation seems to have been their own spiritual enhancement rather than devoting their efforts to serving their neighbors within the cities. Luther often spoke against such practices, such as the cloistered life of monasticism, for exactly this reason. Gustaf Wingren writes, “To seek such a station in life is to try to escape the common trials of mankind, to ‘avoid looking up to heaven, expecting daily bread from God, and trusting God to provide sustenance.’”¹⁰⁷ As we shall see, such was the first temptation of the devil when it encountered Christ in the desert.

The observation of Christ’s abandonment by God is especially interesting when viewed with the foreknowledge of the Crucifixion. On the cross, Christ experienced abandonment in its fullness as He cried out, “My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?” Erich Vogelsang argues that no one has understood the idea of Christ’s rejection by God as well as Luther, who identified hell as complete separation from and rejection by God. Therefore, for Luther, the cry that is uttered by Christ on the cross signifies His descent into hell.¹⁰⁸ This foreknowledge of the cross provides a greater understanding of what Christ endured in the wilderness. Only Christ could resist the temptation of the devil

¹⁰⁷ Wingren, 32.

¹⁰⁸ Pinomaa, 47.

under these conditions, which is precisely why only Christ could go to the cross to redeem humanity. Luther likewise emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the fact that, although being God Himself, Christ fully experienced the temptation of the devil, just as believers experience these temptations. The fact that the devil assails even Christ with its temptations seems to undermine the apparent patristic understanding that the devil focuses its attention on the sinner rather than on the righteous, for Christ was without sin and yet the devil was relentless in its assaults against Him. To be sure, Christ has not left us to engage in battle against the devil by ourselves, but rather has proven that He has taken His place by our side against our mutual enemy, and has promised to never abandon those who call on Him in time of need.

In regards to the means by which the devil attempts to lure humanity, Luther exalts the example of Christ in that He was able to recognize the lies of the devil for what they truly are, as opposed to seeing them for what the devil would have Him believe them to be. Throughout his writings, Luther often echoes Tertullian by referring to the devil as “God’s ape and the counterfeiter of all God’s work.”¹⁰⁹ It is the devil’s ability to manipulate the Word of God which makes it especially dangerous. In the case of Christ’s temptation, however, these manipulations were quickly exposed because the devil was dealing with the Word made flesh. Oberman writes, “It is not as a poltergeist that the Devil discloses his true nature, but as the adversary who thwarts the Word of God; only then is he really to be feared. He seeks to capture the conscience, can quote the Scriptures without fault, and is more pious than God – that is satanical.”¹¹⁰ It is important to

¹⁰⁹ Martin Luther, *The 1529 Holy Week and Easter Sermons*, trans. Irving L. Sandberg (Saint Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1999) 38.

¹¹⁰ Oberman, 105.

remember, as Luther echoes from the words of St. Paul, “Satan surely does not bear the form of the devil, for he desires to be beautiful when he lies and deceives.”¹¹¹ Therefore, in order to recognize the counterfeits of the devil, which will undoubtedly appear to be appealing, believers must hold fast to the Word and measure everything against its truth; for the Word both unmask the devil and reveals the Christ.

In the first temptation, the approach of the devil is to appeal to the very basic needs of humans, and to call into question the faithfulness of God in providing His creatures with the necessities of life. In the *Small Catechism*, Luther defines these basic needs as “daily bread,” which includes food and clothing, home and property, work and income, a devoted family, an orderly community, good government, favorable weather, peace and health, a good name, and true friends and neighbors.¹¹² Therefore, the devil not only tempts us with the food we require for survival, but with every aspect of life which we hold so dear. This temptation threatens our most cherished possessions in this world and yet, as the text teaches us, it is not these things that ultimately sustain us in this life, but the Word of God. Therefore, if we but cling to the Word when faced with this temptation, we will realize that God provides us with all of life’s basic needs. Once we have proven to the devil that we will trust in God for our “daily bread,” its next approach is to attack our faith in God.

In Matthew’s Gospel, the second temptation describes Jesus being taken into the Holy City by the devil and being placed upon the pinnacle of the temple. In the first temptation Jesus was led into the wilderness where He would experience separation from

¹¹¹ Lenker, 147.

¹¹² Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979) 20.

God; in the second temptation He is led into the Holy City to the top of the temple, thus signifying the work of the devil in the midst of God's presence. This clearly shows that we need not seek out the devil on its own turf in order to have our faith tested; the devil, which operates in every arena of life, will surely find us. Luther makes the observation, "The first temptation arose from a lack of life's necessities, the second from the very abundance of God's promises."¹¹³ In his sermon, Luther points to the fact that the devil attempts to entice Jesus by having Him put God to the test, even though there was no reason for Jesus to do so. Luther observes, "Thus you see here that Satan held before Christ want and need where there was neither want nor need."¹¹⁴ To add to his treachery, the devil quotes Scripture by stating that God will send His angels to bear Christ up, so that He will not be harmed. Once again, Luther counters by stating that it is only when we walk in the ways of God that His angels will care for us; but when we act in ways that are meant to test God in order to validate our faith, as the devil would have us believe we should do, we choose to reside outside of God's protection.¹¹⁵

While the second temptation in the Gospel of Matthew focuses on one's faith in God, the third temptation returns the focus to earthly possessions. For this reason, Luke's Gospel reverses the order of the second and third temptations, in order to provide a more logical order. In the third temptation, the devil offers Jesus temporal honor and power in this old world, in the attempt to trick Christ into forfeiting the birthright that already belongs to Him. As Luther observes, "For whom the devil cannot overcome with poverty,

¹¹³ Martin Luther, *Meditations on the Gospels*, trans. Roland H. Bainton (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962) 42.

¹¹⁴ Lenker, 142.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

want, need and misery, he attacks with riches, favor, honor, pleasure, power and the like, and contends on both sides against us.”¹¹⁶ The deception of the devil knows no discrimination, for all are his prey and he will attack on all fronts. When we feel abandoned by God, the devil can lure us by simply offering the necessities of life; when we achieve temporal power and success, the devil would have us believe that we no longer require God’s assistance in acquiring our “daily bread”; when we feel close to God and protected from temptation, the devil attacks our faith by calling it into question, as we can observe from the serpent’s deception of Eve. Luther defines the success of the devil in our lives by asserting, “If we have nothing, then we doubt God and believe not; if we have abundance, then we become tired of it and wish to have something different, and again we fail to believe.”¹¹⁷

Towards the end of his sermon, Luther provides a summary of the three temptations from Matthew’s Gospel, and offers a warning regarding the severity of each.

The first is the temptation of misfortune, by which man is stirred to anger, impatience and unbelief; the third and last, the temptation of prosperity, by which man is enticed to lust, honor, joy, and whatever is high. The second or middle temptation is spiritual and deals with the blind tricks and errors that mislead reason from faith.”¹¹⁸

Although Luther acknowledges that all three temptations are employed by the devil in order to undermine our relationship with God, he gives precedence to the second temptation because it directly attacks the faith.

Now these three temptations taken together are heavy and hard; but the middle one is the greatest; for it attacks the doctrine of faith itself in the soul, and is

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 145.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 144.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 145.

spiritual in spiritual matters. The other two attack faith in outward things, in fortune and misfortune, in pleasure and pain etc., although both severely try us.”¹¹⁹

Through these words of Luther, we as believers must understand that the closer we come to God, the stronger the devil will rage in its attempts to attack our faith. In order to resist these temptations, which we cannot overcome through power of our own, we must cling even more tightly to the promise that we have received in baptism. Oberman drives this point home by quoting Luther himself who wrote, “The only way to drive away the Devil is through faith in Christ, by saying: ‘I have been baptized, I am a Christian.’”¹²⁰

The Kingdom’s Ours Forever

Given our exploration of the prevalence of the devil throughout Luther’s theology, we may be inclined to inquire as to why he affords such great attention to a being which seems to desire us to focus our attention on it rather than on Christ. In response to such an inquiry, Oberman offers the following reflection:

Luther’s purpose is not to spread fear but to strengthen the resistance of the faithful. Like Christ, the Devil is omnipresent. He acts and reacts, is drawn and challenged by anything that smacks of Christ and true faith. Here is found a radical deviation from the medieval concept of the Devil, according to which the evil one is drawn by the smell of sin, the sin of worldly concern. In Luther’s view, it is not a life dedicated to secular tasks and worldly business that attracts and is targeted by the Devil. On the contrary, where Christ is present, the adversary is never far away: “When the Devil harasses us, then we know ourselves to be in good shape!”¹²¹

The Gospel of Luke concludes the account of Jesus’ temptation as follows: “And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time”

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 146.

¹²⁰ Oberman, 105.

¹²¹ Ibid., 106.

(4:13). In the case of Christ, the “opportune time” seems to be clearly identified as the point when Satan enters into Judas called Iscariot (22:3), thereby setting into motion the events that would lead to the crucifixion. Those who believe in Christ Jesus, and confess Him to be their Lord and Savior, must believe, as Luther did, that even when the devil appears to have conceded to the resolve of faith, it is simply awaiting the “opportune time” when we are enticed by sin, besieged by death, or overwhelmed by doubts. Thus Luther exhorts all believers, regardless of their learnedness, to daily immerse themselves in the Word and to become like children who are eager to learn the basics of the faith, for such is the only sure defense against an enemy who will strike ferociously and without warning. In the preface to his *Large Catechism*, Luther writes the following:

Nothing is so powerfully effective against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thoughts as to occupy one’s self with God’s Word, to speak about it and meditate upon it, in the way that Psalm 1 [:2] calls those blessed who “meditate on God’s law day and night.” Without doubt, you will offer up no more powerful incense or savor against the devil than to occupy yourself with God’s commandments and words and to speak, sing, or think about them. Indeed, this is the true holy water and sign that drives away the devil and puts him to flight. For this reason alone you should gladly read, recite, ponder, and practice the catechism, even if the only advantage and benefit you obtain from it is to drive away the devil and evil thoughts. For he cannot bear to hear God’s Word. And God’s Word is not like some idle tale...but, as St. Paul says in Romans 1 [:16], it is “the power of God,” indeed, the power of God that burns the devil’s house down and gives us immeasurable strength, comfort, and help.¹²²

We must understand that we are called to both believe in the reality of the devil while simultaneously renouncing its claim to our life by placing our trust in Jesus Christ and residing in His Word. When we cling to His Word and persist in our faith despite the raging of sin, death, and the devil, the Kingdom of God gains further ground in hostile territory; whereas when we fail to heed Luther’s warning and “neglect His Word and the

¹²² Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism in The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 381.

preaching of it,”¹²³ we set ourselves outside of God’s protection and open ourselves up to the attacks of the devil. Therefore, we are not dealing with a matter of faith in the devil, but rather of fortification by faith in Christ against a very real and menacing enemy; yet on account of Christ’s victory over the devil, we have been given the assurance that we too have become conquerors of our enemy. Thus in his text on the *Temptation*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “Because Satan could not bring about the fall of the Son of God, he pursues him now with all temptations in his members. But these last temptations are only the off-shoots of the temptation of Jesus on earth; for the power of temptation is broken in the temptation of Jesus. His disciples are to let themselves be found in this temptation, and then the kingdom is assured to them.”¹²⁴ Let us conclude this section by exalting Luther’s powerful hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, in which he clearly acknowledges the reality and rascality of the devil, the plight of humanity and its need for redemption, and the victory that has been won through Christ Jesus.

A mighty fortress is our God, a sword and shield victorious;
 He breaks the cruel oppressor’s rod and wins salvation glorious.
 The old satanic foe has sworn to work us woe!
 With craft and dreadful might he arms himself to fight.
 On earth he has no equal.

No strength of ours can match his might! We would be lost, rejected.
 But now a champion comes to fight, whom God himself elected.
 You ask who this may be? The Lord of hosts is he!
 Christ Jesus, mighty Lord, God’s only Son, adored.
 He holds the field victorious.

Though hordes of devils fill the land all threatening to devour us,
 We tremble not, unmoved we stand; they cannot overpower us.
 Let this world’s tyrant rage; in battle we’ll engage!

¹²³ Luther, *The Small Catechism*, 4.

¹²⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall/Temptation: Two Biblical Studies* (New York: Touchstone, 1997) 122-123.

His might is doomed to fail; God's judgment must prevail!
One little word subdues him.

God's Word forever shall abide, no thanks to foes, who fear it;
For God himself fights by our side with weapons of the Spirit.
Were they to take our house, goods, honor, child, or spouse,
Though life be wrenched away, they cannot win the day.
The Kingdom's ours forever.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Martin Luther, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, trans. Catherine Winkworth (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978) 229.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

Having explored this topic within the framework of the Lutheran tradition, and having established its centrality to the Christian witness, we might inquire as to how such an understanding should continue to inform our faith. In the first place, we may consider the implications of continuing to treat this topic with the seriousness it deserves. In regards to ecumenical dialogue, such an acceptance could open-the-door to enhanced relations between Lutherans and the rapidly expanding Pentecostal tradition, given the latter's emphasis on spiritual warfare. In regards to global missions, such an acceptance could impact the spread of the Gospel among cultures that understand their lives to be determined by spiritual powers. Despite these opportunities for unity, the danger remains that in granting the devil its rightful place in reality, the Church may once again find itself advancing the kingdom of the devil. In his monumental article on the demonic, Paul Tillich identifies this susceptibility within the Church:

It is beyond any human effort, even the Christian, to escape from the demonic control of everything real. Therefore even the Church has again and again succumbed to demonry. This is true of the sacramental hierarchy of the Catholic Church with its reconstruction of numerous demonries once overcome in earliest Christianity. It is true, despite its fundamentally antidemonic tendency, of the Protestant orthodoxy with its demonry of the pure doctrine. It is true of the total development of Christianity and of the development of every individual in it. And yet the Christian confession contains the certainty that the demonic has been overcome, that there exists the possibility of approaching the God who is truly God. Everything further in this relation is a subject of Christian dogmatics, which in the future, much more than heretofore, must work with the consciousness of

being engaged in the battle between the divine and the demonic and therefore of serving the one or the other with every decision which it makes.¹²⁶

Intermingled with Tillich's words of warning, one can clearly detect the influence of Luther's two kingdoms doctrine and his imagery of the bound will. Despite Tillich's recognition of demonic infiltration into the ecclesiastical arena, which bears a striking resemblance to Luther's own identification of a demonic coup d'état within the papacy, both men could nevertheless maintain the victory of Christ. Thus when flawed institutions may warrant our despair, Tillich is able to confidently assert the ongoing dominion of the Divine by writing, "Demonry breaks down only before divinity, the possessed state before the state of grace, the destructive before redeeming fate."¹²⁷ In response to such conviction, the world seems to contend that either the devil is a figment of a primitive imagination or else that it may very well be the supreme being in the universe, given the prevalence of evil. Given the Lutheran conviction of the ongoing truth of the Bible, how then is our tradition to respond to such assumptions?

In the first place, it must be acknowledged that the devil has been removed from certain modern conceptions of reality based on the assertion that the ancient understanding of reality no longer coalesces with modern rationalities. In response to such claims of modernity, Carl Braaten offers the helpful explanation, "The demonic – chameleon-like – changes its colors according to the circumstances."¹²⁸ Such a suggestion should elicit our exploration of the possibility that the devil may have simply

¹²⁶ Paul Tillich, "The Demonic," in *The Interpretation of History*, trans. N.A. Rasetzki (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936) 106-107.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹²⁸ Carl E. Braaten, "Powers in Conflict: Christ and the Devil," in *Sin, Death, & the Devil*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000) 102.

adapted itself to our modern culture, and thus would manifest itself differently in order to be effective in our specific context. In other words, what if the devil is, in fact, contextual in its tyranny? Since this would represent the appropriate understanding for those who maintain a belief in the ongoing validity of Scripture, it would seem appropriate to take a repeated look at the great deceiver in order to penetrate its modern mask.

Given our previous acknowledgment of the devil as a master of disguise, it would seem as though the devil has simply camouflaged itself in our modern perversions. While we may readily perceive its involvement in the destructiveness of war, abuse, and genocide, we may overlook its influence in deviations such as financial manipulation, sexual exploitation, and racial discrimination. To an extent, these propensities have gained acceptance in modern societies to the point where although they may still be regarded as dubious, they are nevertheless tolerated. These subtle exploitations of humankind have become so commonplace that we not only pay them little attention, but we likewise find ourselves engaged in active participation. Of all the devil's machinations, however, there is one which continues to remain both its most subtle and its most destructive: invoking doubt in the Word of God. In a powerful statement of faith, Gerhard Forde acknowledges this work of the devil, and upholds the Christian's calling in the world:

To believe, to have hope in the world to come, and thus to see this world, and to take up one's vocation in it is to enter into the battle against Satan. It is to take up the cause of God's will on earth. This means that God's earthly kingdom is not something that can be taken for granted. It must be fought for. That is the reason for all Luther's talk about the devil. He realized quite clearly that the earthly kingdom was not a static or neutral kingdom which could simply be left to itself. It is a kingdom which has been usurped by Satan and thus one in which one must constantly fight and be on his guard. Modern Protestantism has rejected all talk of the devil and has fostered the myth that the earthly and political realm is one that is more or less neutral and must be left alone to run itself. Luther had much too

healthy and realistic a fear of the devil and his wiles to commit that mistake! The devil and his kingdom was always a third factor that had to be taken into account. This means that the relationship between God's two kingdoms was never a matter of static indifference. Believing, hoping in the kingdom of grace means entering the battle against Satan in this world. It is a case of dynamic interaction.¹²⁹

As acknowledged in Forde's statement, the wily devil has employed an ingenious method of promoting doubt in the Word by inciting our rationalistic tendencies in opposition to our faith. The devil is well aware of our reluctance to affirm its existence if we are unable to experience it for ourselves, and so it removes itself from our perceptions in order to promote doubt in its reality. Given the fact that the devil is Biblical, it is not surprising that once we begin to doubt its existence, we will undoubtedly begin to question every aspect of Scripture that is not compliant with human reason. Thus the devil tempts us to substitute our own rationalities in place of the Word of God, and once again we ashamedly find ourselves naked in the garden with a piece of fruit as our prize.

Therefore, if we are to remain faithful to the Word of God, we must accept the reality of the devil along with our conviction of the Divine reality. In his article in *First Things*, Walter Sundberg acknowledges the seriousness of this issue:

To expurgate the Devil from the core of faith is to cut ourselves off from the nerve of biblical religion concerning the teaching of evil. It is to ignore both the Christian tradition and crucial aspects of contemporary reality. The old dogmatists warned, "*sive diabolus, nullus redemptor*" – without the Devil, there is no Redeemer. Only by grasping the depth of the Evil One can the full extent of the love of God be known.¹³⁰

Once we have accepted the reality of the devil, we will begin to recognize its deceptions. The fact that the devil prefers to conceal itself from our perceptions rather than to reveal

¹²⁹ Gerhard O. Forde, *Where God Meets Man: Luther's Down to Earth Approach to the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972) 103.

¹³⁰ Walter Sundberg, "A Primer on the Devil," *First Things*, January 1993, 16.

its intentions, should place us on guard against all of life's indulgences. For the devil seeks not to promote our welfare but rather our wretchedness; God, on the other hand, has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and seeks in every way to promote abundant life for all His creatures. As such, we are called not to believe *in* the devil, but rather to believe *against* it. In the following statement, Carl Braaten identifies a common question that is presented to believers in regards to the devil, and he offers a thoughtful and appropriate response:

When asked, "Do you believe in the Devil?" the answer must be "No." Believing means to trust, to have confidence in someone. We do not believe in the Devil; we do not believe his lies. But we do believe that we all enter a world bent out of shape, and that the Devil is the source of a magnetic pull toward evil deeply embedded in every individual and the societies in which they live. He works behind our backs drawing us toward evil without our being aware of it.¹³¹

Deception has been identified as the devil's greatest weapon, and yet we must not forget that the devil cannot resist its inclination towards pride; now and again it cannot help but remove its mask and take credit for its deeds. Thus C.S. Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*, "It was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind."¹³² Therefore, when the devil succumbs to its prideful impulse and is drawn from the shadows in order to take up a direct attack against Christ and His Kingdom, we as believers have been given the power to rebuke the devil with Christ's words, "Get behind me, Satan!"

Nevertheless, we may often feel outmatched and overwhelmed by such deception, and yet we must remember that God has given us His Word which reveals His truth and calls His people to trust in Him. The Word of God unmask the devil and reveals the

¹³¹ Braaten, 103.

¹³² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001) 122.

Christ; and in response we are called to renounce the devil and to confess the Christ. To trust in the Word of God is to fortify ourselves against the attacks of the devil. In his exhortation against the temptations of the devil, Bonhoeffer employs Ephesians 6:10-20 as his defense:

Believers suffer the hour of temptation without defense. Jesus Christ is their shield. And only when it is quite clearly understood that temptation must befall the Godforsaken, then the word can at last be uttered which the Bible speaks about the Christian's struggle. From heaven the Lord gives to the defenseless the heavenly armor before which, though men's eyes do not see it, Satan flees. *He* clothes us with the armor of God, *he* gives into our hand the shield of faith, *he* sets upon our brow the helmet of salvation, *he* gives us the sword of the spirit in the right hand. It is the garment of Christ, the robe of his victory, that he puts upon his struggling community.¹³³

God has promised in His Word that He will “protect us in time of danger and guard us from every evil.”¹³⁴ Therefore, in order to remain faithful to the Word of God and the teachings of our tradition, we must acknowledge the reality of the devil in the present-tense, in which it remains a powerful adversary to the Gospel by seeking to destroy faith in Christ Jesus. And yet, despite its ongoing malevolence against Christ and His Kingdom, it is certain that the devil will not prevail in such an endeavor against those who cling to the promise which God has bestowed in baptism. Let us therefore confess with our whole tradition that the Church is built on the rock of Christ Jesus, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

¹³³ Bonhoeffer, 144.

¹³⁴ Luther, *The Small Catechism*, 11.

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