

## **Biography of the Devil: An Alternative Approach to the Cosmic Conflict**

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The intention of this article is to provide an overview of how Christian history has understood the Devil. In the process of looking at the Devil through time and across many cultures, I hope to illustrate the following. First, our understanding of evil is a developing process. Second, the way we have looked at the Devil in history can tell us something distinctive about ourselves. In this sense, our understanding of the Devil is a mirror reflecting how we interpret our experience. I hope to illustrate further that the twin character traits of the Devil in history as “the Possessor of Souls” and “the Tempter” reflect our own self-understanding as persons who are paradoxically “held in bondage” by something external to us yet simultaneously “choosing to sin” of our own accord. Until our Christian theological response to evil, in this case the Devil, addresses this paradox of “bondage and responsibility,” we are destined to have only partial success in our battles with the Prince of darkness.

I have chosen the analogy of a “biography” as my method for discussing the Devil. A biography is a written account of another person’s life from a third person perspective. In choosing this method I acknowledge certain unavoidable problems. One is attributing personality to evil by calling it “the Devil” when in fact evil is “sub-human.” We tend to grant a certain status to evil when we refer to “it” as a “he” or “the devil.” We also face the danger of focusing on the stories of personified evil while overlooking the structural components of evil all around us, such as those found in our own institutional life. A second problem is that biographies are best written at the end of a person’s life so that major changes in character can be incorporated into the subject’s story. The end of one’s life is always character-forming and identity-fixing. Thus, a sinner can always repent and change and a famous public figure can always fail morally, and in either case their biographies will change. Therefore, biographies written while a person is still alive are always subject to rewrites. The devil, however, though still alive as long as human beings rebel against God, has a fairly stable

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core of identity as the source of rebellion against God. In this sense, a biography of the Devil will probably not call for a radical rewrite in the near future—we are not anticipating his repentance.

With these problems in view, I nevertheless believe that the analogy of a biography will provide a way of approaching the very real but inhuman being we know as the Devil.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Devil's Infancy Narratives**

**The Hebrew Scriptures.** To look for clues to a Christian understanding of the Devil, we should first examine Satan and the demons in late antiquity and specifically in the Old Testament.

Before the Babylonian exile of 586 BC, Israel apparently saw little problem in ascribing everything to God: God brought about good and evil; God hardened human hearts, but in such a way that humanity was always responsible for its own sin. The ideas of tormenting spirits in the popular beliefs of neighboring lands only reached the periphery of Israel's belief in Yahweh as it is reflected in written form in the Scriptures.

In the Old Testament the words "Satan" and "Belial" are the most frequent references to the developing Hebrew understanding of the devil. In Hebrew, *šatan* clearly means "enemy" or "accuser," as in the secular sense of the work of the prosecutor in a legal dispute (Ps 109:6). By contrast, there is a great deal of argument over the etymology of "Belial." The word is connected with the kingdom of the dead. In the Old Testament, "sons of Belial" are often anti-social people. The monarchy of Israel was a social institution; therefore, the sons of Belial were considered to be those who undermined the monarchy and Belial became as it were the antithesis of the just king. These social and secular concepts were later applied to heavenly beings, angels.<sup>2</sup>

There are three specific passages in the Old Testament where "the Satan" is mentioned in connection with "heavenly circumstances."<sup>3</sup> In Zechariah he is "the Accuser" at the heavenly court of judgment who challenges the fitness of Joshua ben Jozadak to function as the high priest at the time of the restoration

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<sup>1</sup> I must acknowledge at the outset that my own understanding of evil has evolved over the years from two seeming contradictory perspectives that I now hold in tension. As a young adult I witnessed what I believe were manifestations of evil in seemingly graphic and realistic forms. The presence of the spirit world was never questioned in my Asian context. Yet, from the perspective of the post-enlightenment West, the spirit world is a mere metaphor for moral actions and responsibilities, or if literal, a form of psychosis. Thus, my understanding of evil had been shaped by both concerns for human responsibility in the structures of evil, as described by Western thinkers, and by the experience of possession, invasion, and bondage to an evil external to an individual, as demonstrated in life in an Asian context.

<sup>2</sup> Excellent resources for further study on the Devil in ancient times are: John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972); and Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> Zech 3:1–7; Job 1:6; 2:1; 1 Chron 21:1–27.

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from the Babylonian exile (Zech 3:1–7). “Satan” is not used here as a proper name but as a description of this being’s task: he is “the accuser” or “the prosecutor.” In Zech 3:1–7 the prosecutor’s case is rejected by God in the presence of the Angel of the Lord.<sup>4</sup> In this passage God acquits Joshua. Even though Joshua may be unrighteous and unworthy of serving as a high priest, God has the power to make him righteous for a future role in God’s kingdom. At this point in biblical history, “the Accuser” seems far from being a demonic counterpart of God. At worst, Satan is an overzealous prosecuting attorney who is unfamiliar with the mercy of the Judge.

The passages found in the prologue of Job (chapters one and two) likewise use the definite article (the) to clearly refer to the role of accuser or prosecutor and not as a proper name for an evil being. This angel is subordinate to God and not beyond doubt a cosmic challenger. Note, however, that most English translations refer to “Satan” in the Book of Job as if it were a proper name, when in fact *ha-šatan* should be translated “the accuser” or perhaps “the prosecuting attorney.” The *satan* or accuser seems to be a member of God’s court—even if rarely present—assigned the task of monitoring God’s earth to see if there are those who violate his laws. He seems to be charged with presenting their names before God for punishment or acquittal. Admittedly out of character, however, is the dialogue between the Judge—Yahweh—and the Accuser in 1:6–12. The Accuser’s job is to report the breach of the law, not to tempt it. This is a potential turning point in the biography of Satan as understood by the Hebrew mind.

In 1 Chron 21:1–27 (a parallel account of 2 Sam 24:1–25), “Satan stood up against Israel” (Satan, without a definite article), commanding David to take a census. This same story is recounted in the earlier 2 Sam passage, but the role of the angry one there is God, not Satan. What we identify in these two passages is Israel’s realization that there is more to suffering than the punishment of God alone. The sources of suffering had been assumed to be only the punishment of God. This was orthodoxy for the Israelites. But writers like the Preacher of Ecclesiastes and the author of Job began to question this conclusion and suggested that if there was not another party involved, like Satan, then at the least the source of suffering was a mystery.

After about 180 BC, however, a number of things happened to Israel that made the orthodox solutions to the problem of evil and suffering difficult to assume. There was too much seemingly meaningless suffering to be ascribed to either punishment or testing from God. The desecration of the Temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the bloody persecutions of those who remained faithful to the Law and, somewhat later, the disillusionment which arose over the defeat of the Maccabean resistance fighters all contributed to the Jewish reevaluation of the meaning of suffering in Israel’s history. The Jews reasoned that there had to

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<sup>4</sup> “Go away from me, Satan”—A rejection taken up in Mark 8:32ff and Matt 16:22ff. These New Testament references, however, are built on a far more developed understanding of the Devil.

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be some other cause of their suffering than merely retribution from God for their wayward ways, and the most reasonable source appeared to be Satan.

In an analogical sense, Satan moves from the image of a “prosecuting attorney” to a possible source of suffering and evil as we approach the intertestamental period. During late antiquity, the concept of Satan emerges from an “age of innocence” where he was understood as a servant of Yahweh into a full-fledged “identity crisis” with evil implications for humanity.

**Satan’s Identity Crisis: Between the Testaments.** A new conception of the devil began to develop in the intertestamental writings<sup>5</sup> on the basis of various popular legends. These manuscripts introduce the “devil” in a way more familiar to us, especially in the books of Enoch, the Book of Jubilees, the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and in the Lives of Adam and Eve. All these works come from the period around 150 BC, though the first works mentioned have sections dating as late as the early Christian era. These writings were popular reading during Christianity’s early years and had a notable impact on the belief systems of those in the ancient Near East.

1 Enoch has an interesting heritage. It was a canonical book in the Christian churches of Ethiopia. Some Hebrew and Aramaic fragments have been found in Qumran. The book is quoted in the New Testament, in Jude 14ff, where there are also a number of implicit references to it as authoritative scripture (example: Jude 14–15).

An important feature of Enoch is its interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4, in which there are fallen angels who consort with beautiful earthly women, thus giving birth to a race of giants. On the one hand, this “fall” of the angels is not a feature of the biblical passage, but a popular legend from Enoch apparently used to explain how these angels were present on earth and simultaneously explaining the origin of evil as a result of fallen angels. Enoch goes on to explain that the present demons on earth are the descendants of angels who have impregnated earthly women (1 Enoch 18:13ff; 21:6ff; 86–88; 90:21).

By and large, as a systematic satanology, Enoch displays little internal consistency. The prince or leader of the evil spirits is sometimes called “Semyala” (1 Enoch 6:3; 9:7; 10:11; 69:2), but he is also called “Azezel” (8:1ff; 10:4–8; 13:1). The sin of the angels, the cause of their fall, was sometimes their consorting with earthly women, but as this became difficult to explain (angels were perceived as asexual beings), their sin became the betrayal of heavenly astral secrets and heavenly knowledge to men (1 Enoch 9:6; 16:3; the myth of Prometheus in Aeschylus is a similar type of story). Finally, Enoch contradicts itself by acknowledging that there were demons even before there were fallen angels (19:1). Chapters 37–71 of 1 Enoch speak of one or more satanic figures. These internal inconsistencies make any systematic portrayal of the devil or the demons impossible to ascertain.

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<sup>5</sup> Sometimes referred to as the “lost Books of the Bible.”

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In the Book of Jubilees, the prince of the evil spirits is called “Mastema,” which means the “prince of enmity.” In this book Adam’s sin has no consequences for humankind. So-called “original sin” only occurs among the angels. For the first time we have a legend—based on the exegesis of Genesis 1:2ff—where humankind is called the “image of God.” According to the legend, man was made even more beautiful than the angels. Therefore, even the angels must reverence humankind, the crown jewel of creation, as God’s image.

Michael and his followers obey God’s command, but Satan and his followers refuse to revere humankind. As a result, Satan and his followers are punished and expelled from heaven to earth. But Satan, still envious, is jealous of Adam and Eve’s happiness in Eden, and therefore he plots to make them sin so they will likewise be expelled from Eden, equivalent to the paradise from which Satan has been expelled. Hence the serpent in Genesis 3:1–7 is clearly identified with Satan in this legend. As a punishment from God, Satan, already expelled from heaven, is further expelled from the earth to hell.

This legend provides an important element in the Devil’s biography, for it is in this story that we see the Devil’s identity consciously linked to the serpent in Genesis 3. We clearly see a pre-Christian interpretation of the serpent in Genesis as identified with the Devil. We also see an explanation for the existence of rebellion against God in the world before the sin of Adam and Eve. In this sense, the possibility of temptation is established as a precondition of human existence, even if God did not create mankind knowing Adam would fall. Thus, this legend goes a long way to describe in story form what many felt: though God’s world is intended for good, there is some form of objective reality exterior to us that intends to torment humanity.

In summary to this point, we observe that the Old Testament provides us with little information on which to build an understanding of the Devil or Satan in Israel’s history apart from an angelic prosecutor. Using our analogy, Satan seems to have an innocent childhood. Yet interest in Satan, the Devil, and the demons became a major concern of popular Jewish Palestinian communities and diaspora Judaism in the pre-Christian, intertestamental times, as evidenced by the number of legends attempting to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures. From a biographical perspective, the identity of Satan as a powerful symbolic force for the expression of the supremacy of evil in the world seemed to emerge during the intertestamental period. As adolescence is sometimes understood as turbulent years, so also Satan emerged as a rebellious being, jealous of humanity, and as an important foe for both humanity and God. Satan became a useful way to explain inordinate suffering.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), for further discussion of the intertestamental period.

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### Satan Maturing

**The New Testament.** When compared with this extra biblical material, the New Testament remains very matter-of-fact concerning its demonology and satanology. “Satan,” the prince of this world, is simply taken for granted in the New Testament (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19; 2:13). There is no longer a need to explain where a personification of evil came from—the New Testament simply assumes that he is. The devil and the demons are an element of the cultural and religious consciousness of all the New Testament authors. When we list the texts that speak of the Devil, we may be amazed by how many there are.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, the New Testament takes for granted that the Devil and all the demons have been conquered by Christ. Their power has been broken even at the coming of the Kingdom of God in Jesus (Luke 10:18; 11:20). After their return from their first missionary journey, the disciples say to Jesus, “Even the devils were subject to us in your name” (Luke 10:17), but Jesus answers that he has seen Satan falling like lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18). Above all, the

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<sup>7</sup> New Testament References to the Devil or Satan: General References: Matt 12:26; 13:39; Luke 8:12; Acts 5:3; 10:38; Mark 1:13; 3:23, 26; 4:15; Luke 10:18; 13:16; 22:3; 22:31; Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor 2:11; 11:14; 12:7; 1 Thes 2:18; 2 Thes 2:9; Eph 4:27; 6:11; John 13:27; 6:70; 13:2; 1 John 3:8, 10; 1 Tim 1:20; 3:6f.; 5:15; 2 Tim 2:26; James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:8; Heb 2:14; Jude 9; Rev 2:9, 13, 24; 12:9; 20:7.

Beelzubub (or Beelzebul): Matt 10:25; 12:24, 27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15, 18ff.

The Enemy: Matt 13:39; Luke 10:19.

The Prince (Ruler—*archon*) of this world: John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19.

God of this age: 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2.

Belial (Beliar): 2 Cor 6:15.

The Tempter: 1 Thes 3:5.

The main cause of sin in the world: 1 Cor 7:5; 2 Cor 2:11; Eph 4:26ff; 1 Tim 3:6ff, John 3:19; 7:7.

The evil one: 1 John 2:13, 14; 3:12; 5:19.

A murderer and a liar from the very beginning: John 8:44; 1 John 3:8.

Anyone who does evil is therefore a child of the Devil: 1 John 3:12; John 6:70; 13:2, 27; 8:44.

Anyone who fails to love his neighbor: 1 John 3:11–18.

He is one who leads the believers astray: 2 Thes 2:9; 1 Tim 3:6ff; 5:15; 2 Tim 2:26; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8.

The devil of death: death as a sphere of the devil’s influence: Heb 2:14.

The cause of demonic possession: Mark 3:23–30; Luke 13:16; Acts 10:38; Heb 2:14; Rev 2:9, 10–13; 3:9, 12:9, 12ff.;

He is the dragon, who stands behind the beast which persecutes Christians: Rev 12:3ff, 9, 13, 16f.f; 16:13; 20:2; 11:7; 13:1, 4–7, 11, 12, 16f.

The fall of the angels: Only in Jude 6 (with an implicit reference to 1 Enoch).

In the New Testament, Jesus’ saving activity is depicted as a fight against the demonic powers of evil: Mark 1:23–25, 39; 4:39; Luke 13:16.

Jesus himself is portrayed as being tempted by Satan in person three times, though these attempts fail completely: Matt 4:1–11; Luke 22:3; 1 Cor 2:8ff; 15:55; Rev 12:13ff; and implicitly in Heb. 4:15.

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resurrection and exaltation of Jesus are seen as a complete victory over all heavenly beings.<sup>8</sup>

Paul sees this cosmic victory over Satan as an eschatological event still to be completed (1 Cor 15:24). In the Pauline letters the depowering of all devils is both something that has already begun because Jesus has defeated the power of the Devil by his resurrection, and a task still to be fulfilled at the end of time, when the Devil will be restrained and destroyed.

Jesus' victory (Eph 1:21; 4:8–10) does not do away with the need for Christians to fight against all the spiritual evil powers in their midst (Eph 6:11–17). In John's theology, "We know that we are from God [born of God], whereas the whole world lies under [the power of] the evil one" (1 John 2:13). In other words, the Devil is still at work in the world, but the community of faith, the church, is the place where he has already been conquered. The Devil now no longer dares to attack Christians who are born of God (1 John 5:18). There are particular persons, so-called Christians, who destroy the true Christian understanding of Jesus and who are called the Antichrist (1 John 2:18–22); however, "do not fear, since this enemy too will be overcome" (1 John 2:13ff)

In John's theology, the whole of popular belief in the Devil and demons stands under the *nenikeka* (conquest) of Christ: "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33; 1 John 2:13; 4:4; 5:4). The same is true of 1 John 5:5: the believer conquers the world of the Devil. In Revelation, the believer who overcomes is often called "the victor" (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:70). Jesus, the Lion of Judah, is also "the Lamb" (*nikesei*) who "will conquer" (Rev 17:14). Thus, the concept of *nike* is an essential element in John's theology.

The early Christian story preserved God's goodness by affirming that God recognized the condition of humankind caught in the clutches of an evil world. God entered the arena of this evil and suffering world through his Son and directly challenged the kingdom of darkness in order to establish the Kingdom of God. Christians maintain that in participation with humanity, his goodness remains intact. God's power is preserved in the act of resurrection. Resurrection is the symbol of the defeat of death, the destruction of the greatest weapon of the kingdom of darkness. When God defeats the power of death in the resurrection, he also announces the end of Satan's hold on the earth. Thus, the sting of death, the power of Satan, has been undermined. Because humankind is free to choose either the kingdom of darkness or the kingdom of God, the consequences of an evil world continue to exist. This is, however, only temporary.<sup>9</sup> It is only a matter of time before the consummation of history takes place and the Devil and his demons will be finally destroyed. Meanwhile, Christians now find meaning and adventure in life by following in the steps of their risen Lord, proclaiming the

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor 15:24; Rom 8:8; Eph 1:21; 3:10; 6:10; Col 2:10, 15; 1 Pet 3:22; Heb 1:5–14; 2:8ff; and the book of Revelation.

<sup>9</sup> See Walter Wink's series, *Naming the Powers: Unmasking the Powers and Engaging the Powers*, where he examines in depth the biblical understanding.

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in-breaking of the kingdom of God, and proclaiming the defeat of the kingdom of darkness. With this theology in mind, the early Christian found new meaning in life in the midst of suffering.

As for the Devil's character development in the New Testament, he is a worthy opponent of humanity, but he is essentially an opponent defeated by the power of God. He continues to be the source of human frustration and temptation, but his end has been sealed by the divine drama of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection. Humanity continues to struggle against the Devil, yet in this struggle, Christians are now empowered by the Holy Spirit and are no longer at the mercy of the Devil's kingdom of darkness.

**The Early Christian Tradition.** The New Testament announces that the Devil has been and is being overcome. But with the delay of the second coming of Christ, the early church found itself on the battlefield between the forces of light and darkness. It followed that if Christ had led forth into battle, then Christians should be willing to follow. The apostolic fathers did not carry this doctrine of war to its logical conclusion in violence, however. Instead, they fought the forces of evil through passive resistance and martyrdom. Later in history, though, others employed the "battle against evil" theme as a tool to justify harsh measures against heretics, Jews, pagans, Muslims, witches, and separatists. The misuse of this "battle" imagery has plagued Christianity throughout history, and thus the spirit of discernment is prized wherever this language is employed.<sup>10</sup>

As Christianity began to spread outside the strictly Jewish regions, the church was influenced more and more by Greek thought. The Platonists defined "daimons" as intermediary beings between the gods and human beings. Such beings were easily assimilated into what Christians and Jews had called angels. For the Platonists, demons were a mixture of good and evil, depending on the degree to which the irrational dominated their souls. In Homeric and early Greek thought, the distinction between a "daimon" and a "theos" (a god) was unclear: "daimons," unlike "gods," were manifestations of the divine principle itself and were considered a mixture of good and evil. Socrates' famous personal daimon was a guardian spirit whose influence was apparently good for him. By the time of the Christian era, the term daimon was frequently replaced by "daimonion," which had more negative connotations, and the Christians connected the "daimonia" with the evil angels.

Philo of Alexandria (30 BC–AD 45), the greatest of the Hellenistic Jewish thinkers, influenced the Christians more than he did his fellow rabbis. Philo equated the demons of the Greeks with the angels of the Jews. These angels/demons lived in the air, probably in the ether—the upper air heaven—but they moved back and forth between heaven and earth as intermediaries between

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<sup>10</sup> Kai Erikson elaborates the roles of "scapegoating" as a sociological pattern for forming *Wayward Puritans* (New York: Macmillan, 1966). In this study he exposes the sociological uses of evil and demonizing people.



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God and humanity. He taught that the angels/demons are arranged in twelve companies. Some are benevolent: they help and guide individuals and nations. Others are “employed by God to inflict punishment upon all who deserve it.” But Philo also indicated the existence of a third class, which he called evil angels. It is not clear whether he meant these beings existed allegorically or literally, but apparently he identified them with the Watchers who fell because of their lust for mortal women.

Justin Martyr was one of the earliest Christian theologians to discuss the problem of evil. Thus, he has had enormous influence through the centuries. According to Justin, God created and appointed a number of angels to rule the world for him, assigning each a nation, region, or person. The angels are duty bound to do God’s will: if they fail, they sin. Justin was original in combining this largely Jewish doctrine of angels of the nations with the idea of the Watcher angels who sinned through lust. For him the sinful Watchers were the angels of the nations who were derelict in their duty.<sup>11</sup>

God created angels with wills free to choose between good and evil. Some of them fell from grace as a result of misusing their free will. Apparently, Satan tempted the angels to fall, and as a result they followed Satan’s example, and their fall brought them into Satan’s kingdom. According to Justin, there are at least two categories of evil spirits other than Satan himself: the fallen angels themselves and the children they engendered with earthly women. Justin treated Satan differently from the rest of the fallen angels, for Satan sinned at a different time than these other angels and Satan is significantly more powerful. Whereas the Watchers sinned with women at the time of Noah, Satan sinned at least as early as, if not before, the time of Adam and Eve.

In this regard, Justin was the first Christian theologian to identify the serpent with Satan. Justin was also the first Christian theologian to identify the “dragon and old serpent, called the Devil” of Rev 12:7–9 with the serpent in the Gen 3 account.<sup>12</sup>

According to Justin, Satan knew from the moment of Christ’s passion on the cross that his doom was sure, but he still strives against that fate by trying to undermine Christ’s saving work in the church, the Christian community. His work is unremitting, for he is incapable of repentance. The Devil’s punishment is as certain as his defeat. He and his angels have already been cast down from heaven and doomed to final ruin, yet at present they still roam the world, and their suffering in the flames of hell is reserved for the end of time.

The Devil tempted Christ but failed to corrupt him, so his present plan is to obstruct his work by disrupting the Christian community and leading Christians into sin. The Devil plays upon our weaknesses, our irrational living, and our

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<sup>11</sup> See Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1981), for a discussion of the early Christian tradition’s understanding of Satan.

<sup>12</sup> The reference to the Devil in John 8:44 does not clearly associate the Devil with the serpent, but Justin clearly makes this connection in his *Apology* 5.

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attachment to worldly things. The chief ploy of the demons is to persuade people that the demons are gods. Justin insisted that the demons dwelt in idols and that they consumed the offerings of sacrifices offered to idols. The pagan gods were not mere illusions but actual demons, servants of the Devil devoted to blocking Christ's work on earth.

One of the chief means for continuing Christ's war against the powers of darkness in the early church was through the weapon of exorcism. The meaning of the term exorcism has never been closely defined. The word is derived from the Greek *exorkizo*, "to secure by oath" or "to ask or pray deeply," from *borkos*, "oath." In its root meaning it is a solemn, intense address to someone or something and is by no means necessarily connected with demons. Among the pagan Greeks and even the early Christians, an exorcism could be addressed to good as well as to evil powers.

By the third century the meaning of exorcism had become more precise: it was the ritual of expulsion of harmful spirits from affected persons or objects with the help of superior spiritual powers. Three kinds of exorcisms were common in early Christianity: exorcism of objects, exorcism of initiates during the scrutinies of baptism, and exorcism of demoniacs.

Underlying exorcism is the assumption that Satan retains some power over the material world as well as over the souls of fallen humans. On this point Christianity has never been consistent. The Bible states that Satan's power has been defeated, yet tradition has assumed a residue of control of the material world by Satan. For some, Satan's lordship over this world extends only to humans. For others, it affects the lower order of creatures as well, and among these are some who argue that his dominion is the result of original sin, and others who maintain that God grants Satan the power to use material objects to tempt and test fallen humanity.

A typical exorcism pattern involved the following elements: the demon was sternly admonished to acknowledge the justice of the sentence of doom passed on him, to do homage to the Trinity, and finally to depart from the person.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> An ancient example: "I accost you, damned and most impure spirit, cause of malice, essence of crimes, origin of sins, you who revel in deceit, sacrilege, adultery, and murder! I adjure you in Christ's name that, in whatsoever part of the body you are hiding, you declare yourself, that you flee the body that you are occupying and from which we drive you with spiritual whips and invisible torments. I demand that you leave this body, which has been cleansed by the Lord. Let it be enough for you that in earlier ages you dominated almost the entire world through your action on the hearts of human beings. Now day by day your kingdom is being destroyed, your arms weakening. Your punishment has been figured as of old. For you were stricken down in the plagues of Egypt, drowned with Pharaoh's warriors, torn down with Jericho, laid low with the seven tribes of Canaan, subjugated with the gentiles by Samson, slain by David in Goliath, hanged by Mordecai in the person of Haman, cast down in Bel by Daniel and punished in the person of the dragon, beheaded in Holofernes by Judith, subjugated in sinners, burned in the viper, blinded in the seer, and discountenanced by Peter in Simon Magus. Through the power of all the saints you are tormented, crushed, and sent down to eternal flames and the underworld of shadows . . . Depart, depart, wheresoever you lurk,

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By the time of Martin Luther, the story of the Devil's role in history had been distilled to a succinct plot. Lucifer was created by God as the highest of the angels, but he chose to betray the Creator. His motive was pride, which led him to presume to imitate God, claiming for himself some of God's power. It also led him to envy humankind because God chose to create man in his image rather than an angel, thus setting human nature over angelic nature. The Devil was thrust out of heaven; eager for revenge, he corrupted Adam and Eve; as a result of their original sin, God gave humanity over to him and made him lord of this world. Having humanity in his power, he daily afflicts them. He is constantly tempting humanity to sin. The first cause of evil, he is the cause of every individual sin as well, encouraging individuals to despair and nations to warfare. He assigns an individual demon to encourage each individual vice, and he and his demons can appear anywhere and in whatever form they choose, even that of Christ himself. All human sinners are servants of the Devil.

Satan's power, however, is shattered by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Before Christ's advent, Satan had been sure of his power, and when Christ came he was enraged, because he knew that Jesus Christ would destroy him. The Devil tried to stop Christ from the very beginning of his ministry, tempting him as soon as he went out into the desert after his baptism. But God made Christ an Obstructor against the Great Obstructor, and Christ struck Satan blow after telling blow: in his incarnation, in his miracles, in his preaching, and in his passion. The Devil plotted Christ's passion on the cross in unthinking rage against Christ, and God used it to overthrow the Devil, the proof being Christ's resurrection. The world, the flesh, and the Devil still remain to tempt humanity, but they have no more power. One little word—the name of the Saviour—can fell them. Christ's defeat of the Devil is renewed again and again and culminates at the last judgment. Until then, the kingdom of God consists of those who follow Christ; it is characterized by grace, revelation, devotion to the Bible, and faith. The kingdom of this world is characterized by sin, reliance upon law, and trust in reason. The invisible church, the Christian community with Christ as its head, is in the kingdom of heaven; but the visible church, with its corruptions, is in the kingdom of this world. There is no neutral ground; everyone lives in one kingdom or the other.

The Devil still has power in the world because so many choose to follow him. Some make deliberate pacts with him. Luther's best-known contribution to popular diabolology and satanology is his famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," whose main point is Christ's defeat of Satan.

In the satanology of the Middle Ages, the Devil operates in the role of the Antichrist. Folklore illustrates this best. According to popular legends in this

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and never more seek out bodies dedicated to God; let them be forbidden you for ever, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen" (Neale and Forbes, *The Ancient Liturgies of the Gallican Church*, London, 1855).

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period, heretics, Jews, and witches are among the most prominent of Satan's human helpers. Jews and heretics may at least sometimes be unaware that they are serving the Devil, but the witches enlist knowingly in his ranks, worshipping him openly and offering him sacrifices. One can summon the Devil in many ways: by whistling in the dark, by running widdershins around a church three times after dark, by writing him a note in Jew's blood and throwing it into the fire, by painting his picture, by looking into a mirror at night, or by reciting the Lord's Prayer backwards.

The most serious summoning of Satan is for the purpose of making a formal pact. The idea of the formal pact comes from the legend of Theophilus. This legend was repeated hundreds of times in a variety of forms in virtually every European language over the span of a millennium, fathering the Faust legend and indirectly influencing the Renaissance witch craze. This legend alleged that there were those who in order to seek their own power on earth now would make pacts or covenants with the Devil in exchange for their souls at death.

In Europe a decline in the belief in the Devil emerged due to a number of developments in the early modern period, including the rise of science after 1660, disgust with the religious wars of 1618–1648 on the European Continent and 1640–1660 in England, and a longing for a calm, rational view of the cosmos. Another important reason for the decline of concern over Satan was the decline of the witch craze. Witchcraft took a steep downturn in the mid-seventeenth century as people wearied of being terrified—terrified of the threatening presence of hostile spirits and terrified of prosecution. Also, the rise of medical sciences began to explain things like the black plague without resort to the Devil or the demons.

It was the philosopher David Hume, however, who turned skepticism against religion with devastating effect. He taught that the path to truth could only travel through doubt. Therefore, all claims to authority that lean upon faith and the spirit world are rendered null and void. Doubt became the new ideal in the Western scientific world. The Devil seemed to Hume quite beneath his notice. Hume thought that if the existence of God and of miracles were removed, the subsidiary teachings of Christianity would evaporate. In dismissing the likelihood of Christianity, Hume dismissed the likelihood of the Devil. His views provided a clear, rational basis for the Enlightenment's attack on Christianity and for modern skepticism and atheistic relativism.

Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade (1740–1814), lent his name to sadism (pleasure caused through inflicting pain and humiliation on another). De Sade's practices took the principles of atheistic relativism established by Hume to their logical conclusion. According to de Sade, God is merely a phantom of the human imagination. The supernatural in any event only diverts humanity from its true calling: plumbing the depths of human vice and evil. For de Sade, violations of so-called moral laws are both permissible and actually laudable, because these restraints impede the only demonstrable good: personal

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pleasure. According to de Sade, virtues and laws are fantasies; mercy, love, and kindness are perversions that impede the natural pursuit of pleasure. The greater the pleasure, the greater the value of the act.

The Marquis de Sade forces us to face the dilemma at the core of his doctrine of pleasure; that is, he pays absolutely no attention at all to other people's choices, especially those of his victims. Either there is real evil, or not. Either there are grounds of ultimate concern that judge our actions, or not. Either the cosmos has meaning, or not. De Sade's arrogance, pride, and lust for power and domination is evidence for what the pre-modern period called evil and the demonic, but in the post-Enlightenment few dared to call it the demonic. Evidently, the principles of evil usually associated with the Devil continued and flourished during the modern period, yet no one was willing to use that language, since the scientific world had supposedly eliminated the world of the spirits. No one "really believed this stuff" about the Devil during the Enlightenment period, yet all the evidence of personal evil was still there. Evil still existed, yet society found it difficult to name the Devil.

**The Devil's Shadow: He Just Won't Disappear.** The blows to Christian beliefs in the supernatural and the Devil by the modern philosophers were matched by that dealt by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Freud denied that religious experience might correspond to any reality whatever. Although Freud did not believe in metaphysical evil, he early became fascinated with the Devil as a symbol of the dark repressed depths of the unconscious.

One of the most important discoveries of depth psychology for the study of satanology is the power of negative projection. When people are unaware of the process of repression, they project the negative elements that they refuse to recognize within themselves onto others, especially onto individuals and groups that they identify as enemies or potential enemies. Since individuals cannot see themselves as cruel or greedy, the source of the cruel and greedy feelings that they sense within themselves must be other people whom they dislike. This now justifies their hostility toward others. The more powerful their repressed cruelty, the more cruel and evil they imagine the others to be. If the feelings are powerful enough, they may self-righteously judge that such cruel people are a menace to society and ought to be removed—by force, if necessary. Thus, the psychoanalyst believed he had discovered the real source of the Devil—in projection.

Among Freud's associates, the most independent and original in his approach to religion was Carl G. Jung (1875–1961). Jung took religion far more seriously and more positively than the Freudians.

Jung accepted the Devil as a symbol rather than as a metaphysical entity in the Christian sense. His term "Shadow" is not entirely congruent with the Christian Devil. The shadow is a force of the unconscious, a primitive psychological element lacking moral control. It is primarily part of the personal unconscious, consisting of repressed material. Since what is repressed varies with the individual, the individual shadow does not necessarily correspond with the social, the

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collective, or the metaphysical view of evil. However, the more the Shadow is repressed and isolated, the more violent and destructive it becomes, often expressing itself in negative projections.

Many psychologists in the modern period have dismissed the concept of evil as an abstraction, preferring to work with other abstractions, such as the social concept of violence or the more strictly psychological view of aggression.

Recently, however, some psychologists have begun to think that a concept akin to the concept of evil is necessary in order to describe the phenomena they encounter. In their long psychiatric practice with criminals, Yochelson and Samenow observed that certain personalities are so completely founded upon lies and self-deception that traditional sociological and psychological remedies have no effect. A substantial number of criminals are people who freely choose a life of crime, and the criminal's behavior is "caused" by the way he or she thinks and not by his or her environmental circumstances, such as family, peers, or neighborhood. The criminal is a "victimizer, a molder of his environment, rather than a mere product of that mold."<sup>14</sup>

### **Conclusion**

A biography should show development and consistency of character in a person's life. In the case of the Devil, we observe that the biblical discussion of the Devil begins with the problem of suffering. This appears to be the dominant chord that resounds over and over again throughout the Devil's story. Wherever inordinate suffering exists, that is, suffering that appears to be beyond the necessary level of punishment by God, the Devil appears as its author. For Israel and the Old Testament, the problem of evil, suffering, and divine justice has plagued the tradition since the Babylonian exile.

In early Israel it was assumed that evil was a punishment for sin, and it was in this light that the prophets explained the downfall of the nation. This formula was known as "divine earthly retribution." But this neat orthodoxy was simply not adequate to cover the extent to which the Israelites suffered. The Book of Job makes this point perfectly clear.

As the Jews wrestled with the problem, responsibility was laid at the feet of Satan and his legions. By the first century BC the Jews began to accept a view of the Devil as the source of inordinate evil and suffering.

During the early Christian period the world appeared to be engulfed in a fear of evil spirits. People seemed to be at the mercy of powers and principalities oppressing them without logical reason. In the absence of a clear explanation, many deduced that it was the work of evil spirits. Into this environment Jesus

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Yochelson & Stanton E. Samenow, *The Criminal Personality: A Profile for Change* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1995), 1:104; Stanton E. Samenow, *Inside the Criminal Mind* (New York: Times Books, 1984). Along these same lines see M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983); Dorothy Rowe, *The Construction of Life and Death*, (Somerset, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1982).

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Christ as the Son of God entered and destroyed the power of those spirits that plague the earth, especially the power of the Devil. Death itself is vanquished by the resurrection. Jesus Christ released a new power in the world, the power of resurrection that conquers the fear of death.

In the post-resurrection Christian community, while waiting for Christ's second coming, the work of the Devil and his legions was constantly acknowledged wherever inordinate suffering appeared, even throughout the Middle Ages, as evidenced by sickness and wars. Christians, following the path of their master, fought the Devil through exorcisms and prayer. But with the rise of the modern period and the medical sciences, much discussion of the Devil was abandoned and replaced by the scientific method. Discussion of the Devil seemed to vanish, yet the modern world's atheistic relativism seemed to pave the way for a hellish abandonment of morals like those of the Marquis de Sade and Adolf Hitler. Only in recent times have even the social scientists begun re-examining the need for taking the concept of evil seriously again. And wherever a discussion of personal evil emerges, there follows a discussion of the Devil.

The irony of a biography of the Devil is that in studying the Devil we come to know more about ourselves, for the study of the Devil reveals the complexities of our human will and our bondage to sin. In the early Christian debate between Pelagius and Augustine, Pelagius said "God grants grace to those who help themselves by resisting sin and the Devil." On the other hand, Augustine said the opposite, claiming that God helps those out of sin who "cannot help themselves and admit their bondage by confessing their sin and repenting." In both cases, Pelagius and Augustine tried to come to terms with a human dilemma: that sin is like an addiction. Addicts may freely choose to take their drugs, but it does not follow that they have the power to stop. Thus, the history of the Devil reveals two poles in his character that must be held in tension. The first pole reveals that the Devil is foremost the "tempter" who entices us to sin, but the actual sinning is ours alone. Thus, we are responsible for our actions. From the other pole, the Devil is the "master and slaveholder" of the sinner. Once we give adherence to the ways of sin, we are the Devil's slaves, apart from the grace of God. It is only by the grace of God through Jesus Christ that sinners may begin again. If this tension is acknowledged, then we will be better able to engage in spiritual warfare with our most ancient of foes.

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