

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ajet-02.php

THE DRAGON HURLED DOWN

The Victory of Christ Over the Dominion of Darkness

Keith Ferdinando

The nature and limits of Satan's power were presented in the last issue of AJET (16.1 1997) by Dr. Ferdinando. In this second installment of a biblical study of Satan and his kingdom of darkness, Dr. Ferdinando presents the New Testament teaching on the victory of Christ over Satan. He concludes his exegetical study by demonstrating how the biblical truth is indeed God's answer to the fear of evil spirits among many professing Christians today.

The fullness of the redemption accomplished by Christ is communicated in the New Testament through numerous images. Among them is the notion of Satan's defeat and the consequent liberation of his victims. The Old Testament background to this theme may be found particularly in the figure of the divine warrior redeeming his oppressed people by the conquest of their foes and being subsequently acclaimed as king (Exod. 15:1ff.).¹ Christ similarly comes as the warrior to destroy the power of Satan, liberate his captives, and establish his own reign. It is this aspect of his redemptive work that is the focus of the present article, in which four distinct 'moments' of Christ's triumphant warfare are examined.

Dr. Keith Ferdinando earned his MA in history from Oxford University and his BA and PhD in Theology from London Bible College. He is serving as the Directeur General (Principal) of Theologique de Bunia (Bunia Theological Seminary) in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

¹Cf. T. Longman, 'The Divine Warrior: the New Testament Use of an Old Testament Motif', *WTJ* 44 (1982), pp. 290-307

PLUNDERING THE STRONG MAN: CHRIST'S DELIVERANCE OF THE POSSESSED

In the synoptic gospels the expulsion of demons by Jesus identifies him as the one who brings in the kingdom of God, liberating those oppressed by Satan (Mt. 12:28-29; Mk. 3:27; Lk. 11:20-22; cf. Acts 10:38; Lk. 13:16) and bringing the oppressor's power to an end (Lk. 10:18; Matt. 4:8 & 28:18ff.). While there were certainly others at that time who also tried to deliver the possessed, it is clear that Jesus' deliverance ministry was quite exceptional.

On the one hand his technique was totally different from those of contemporary exorcists. Unlike them he expelled demons without naming a power authority, using a talisman, or even praying. He did not use complicated magic spells, or magic words; he did not name the demons in order to expel them; and he did not employ any sort of magic paraphernalia. Instead, as Matthew observes, he cast them out 'with a word' (8:16), operating by the Holy Spirit who had come upon him in unique power and identified him as the promised messiah (Mat 12:28).

At the same time he plainly had a very extensive ministry of driving out demons. Outside the synoptic gospels there are in fact few narrative accounts of exorcism in the first century and even fewer exorcistic figures, and of those known to us almost no concrete evidence about their exorcisms exists.² By contrast the detailed and considerable synoptic material on Jesus' expulsion of demons indicates the exceptional nature of this aspect of his ministry, both with respect to its volume and to its manner. Mark's reference to an exorcist using Jesus' name as a power authority, and that remarkably during his own lifetime, conveys the impression he made on contemporaries (Mk. 9:38-9). Even his enemies were unable to deny the efficacy of his ministry, which is why they tried to discredit him by attributing it to the power of Beelzebul, prince of demons (Matt. 12:22-32; Mk. 3:22-30; Lk. 11:14-23).

² J.M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 1974), p. 66; R. Kampling, 'Jesus von Nazaret - Lehrer und Exorzist', *BZ* 30 (1986), p. 240; E. Kirschner, *The Place of the Exorcism Motif in Mark's Christology with especial reference to Mark 3v22-30* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, CNAALondon Bible College, 1988), p. 29.

However, while Jesus' exorcisms like his healings showed that the kingdom had come, in that people were being freed from every sort of affliction, in none of the synoptic gospels do they constitute its substance. On the contrary, as the gospels progress the frequency of references to the deliverance of possessed people diminishes, attention being increasingly focused on Jesus' death. Nor do the synoptists seek to establish much connection between his death and the conquest of evil supernatural beings; insofar as they do explain it, as in the accounts of the Last Supper, it is as an offering for sins. Humanity's fundamental enslavement is understood as being to sin, and the narratives accordingly move from the first signs of the kingdom's coming, demonstrated in healings and exorcisms, to its culminating act in Jesus' atoning death. It is not the destruction of demonic activity by overwhelming force that Jesus has primarily come to achieve (cf. Matt. 8:29), but the liberation of Satan's victims from the real, moral source of their bondage.

THE DECISIVE VICTORY: THE CROSS, SATAN AND THE POWERS

Other New Testament writers do however indicate the existence of a relationship between Jesus' death and the conquest of evil supernatural beings, the Johannine writings and Hebrews having Satan particularly in view, the Pauline epistles and 1 Peter the 'powers' (Jn. 12:31; 16:11; Col. 2:13-15; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Pet. 3:18-22; 1 Jn. 3:8; Rev. 12:1-12). Again there are hints of the divine warrior whose victory is however paradoxically achieved by his own death, thereby also evoking the 'suffering servant' of Isaiah who divides 'the spoils with the strong' (Isa. 53:12). Moreover such passages tend to suggest that it was by virtue of his atoning death for human sins that Christ overcame supernatural evil. Three of them will be discussed here.

Colossians 2:13-15

It is the flow of Paul's argument in Colossians 2:13-15 that strongly suggests that it was by his sacrificial death for sin that Christ overcame the 'principalities and powers'. The text however contains several exegetical *crucis* which must be examined in order to understand the unit as a whole and its significance for the present discussion, although the intention here is not to give an exhaustive exegesis. First to

be considered is the subject of the action taking place in the pericope. The context indicates that God is subject of 2:13 but it has been argued that 'the description of what was accomplished on the cross (vss.14-15) more naturally implies that Christ is the subject.'³ Such an unsignalled change of subject is not impossible for Paul, but the passage can be adequately understood without it and the final words of 2:15, *εν αυτω* (*in him* or *it*), argue against it. The pronoun *αυτος* (*he, him, it*) here is normally understood to refer either to Christ or to the cross, but the former alternative is to be preferred on grounds of rhetorical consistency. It comes as the culminating point of what does 'sound like a refrain'⁴ running right through the pericope. In 2:6,7,9 and 10 *εν αυτω* (*in him*) refers to Christ; in 2:11 *εν ω* (*in whom*) has the same sense; in 2:12 *αυτω* (*with him*) refers again to Christ, and a further *εν ω* (*in whom*) probably also refers to him,⁵ and in 2:13 *συν αυτω* (*with him*) equally refers to him. The final *εν αυτω* (*in him*) therefore almost certainly refers to Christ. Accordingly if in 2:15 *εν αυτω* means 'in Christ', God must be the subject throughout the pericope.

Second, several possible referents have been proposed for *χειρογραφον* (*written code*).⁶ Since it is qualified as being *καθ' ημων*

³ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 107, note 81, takes this view; cf. C.F.D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp. 100ff..

⁴ P.T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Milton Keynes: Word Publishing, 1987), p. 128.

⁵ So E. Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 104, note 73, & O'Brien, 1987, pp. 118-9.

⁶ O'Brien, 1987, pp. 124f., considers three possibilities: that it is a pact of indebtedness between Adam and Satan; an indictment presented at the heavenly court; or a signed acknowledgement of indebtedness. He critiques the view of A.J. Bandstra, *The Law and the Elements of the World* (N.V. Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1964), pp. 158-63, whereby the figure is both a heavenly indictment and the body of flesh which Christ takes, as 'the term is meant to signify too many things at once'. N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), pp. 111f., considers the view that it refers to the law. W. Carr, *Angels and*

(*against us*), it is probably best understood in the context as somehow establishing human guilt, which the various proposed referents tend indeed to assume. The idea that it signifies a 'note of indebtedness' is well-attested in both Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds.⁷ In that case τα δόγματα (*regulations*) would most likely be the detailed regulations of the law,⁸ 'indicating why the bond or certificate of indebtedness has a case against us.'⁹

Third, holding to the view that God is subject throughout, a) ἀπεκδυσάμενος (*having disarmed/stripped*) must mean that he strips or disarms the powers, taking the participle as a middle voice with an active sense.¹⁰ If a change of subject is presupposed the sense would not necessarily be significantly different, except that Christ rather than God would perform the action; it would still be possible to understand the powers as the object of ἀπεκδυσάμενος. However if one assumes a subject change *and* takes the force of the middle voice seriously, the implication would be that Christ 'stripped himself' of the powers. The Greek fathers held this view but it is not altogether clear what the meaning of such a notion might be. Moule suggests that there may be a reference to Zechariah 3:1ff. where the dirty robes of the high priest, Joshua, are stripped from him, but that would only explain the source of the image, not

Principalities (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 55-8, suggests it is a stone stele on which a public confession was inscribed, which W. Wink, *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 55-6, rejects on the grounds that the idea of nailing a stele to a cross is absurd.

⁷ O'Brien, 1987, p. 124; Lohse, 1971, p. 108.

⁸ Cf. Lohse, 1971, p. 110: 'In Hellenistic Judaism the commandments of God are also called "regulations" (δόγματα).' In Eph. 2:15 the δόγματα are the individual statutes of the law (O'Brien, 1987, p. 125).

⁹ O'Brien, 1987, p. 125, who takes the dative in a causal sense rather than one of obligation or accompaniment, as does Lohse, 1971, pp. 109ff.. O'Brien and Lohse take the χειρογραφον as a bond, but δόγματα could have the same sense if it were a heavenly indictment. If χειρογραφον referred to the law the δόγματα might be taken as a dative of accompaniment but again referring to the detailed requirements of the law.

¹⁰ O'Brien, 1987, p. 127; cf. also Lohse, 1971, p. 111.

its meaning, since the high priest's dirty robe signified sin and not evil powers.¹¹ Moreover there is no suggestion in the text, nor anywhere else in the New Testament, that Christ was in fact clothed with the powers. Robinson argues that the object of ἀπεκδυσάμενος is Jesus' flesh which was for the powers 'the sole entry for attack or hope of victory' over him. In laying it aside 'Jesus, like a king, divests Himself of that flesh, the tool and medium of their power, and thereby exposes them to ridicule for their Pyrrhic victory.'¹²

The weaknesses of this view are however, firstly, that there is no mention of Christ's flesh in the immediate context and, secondly, that it seems to depend upon a confusion between the ethical and the purely physical uses of the term. After all, why should his flesh be 'the tool and medium of their power'? Bandstra answers the former criticism by arguing that χειρογραφον should be understood in part as a metaphor for Christ's flesh, but such an identification is itself suspect.¹³ Carr suggests that Christ simply stripped himself in order to put on a victor's robe in the manner of a Roman triumphator, but he fails to explain why no mention is made of the victor's robe and leaves Christ naked, which would be the fate of the captives in a triumphal procession rather than of the triumphator.¹⁴ Moreover he cites no example from Greek literature of the verb used in this absolute way: 'If he [Paul] wanted the readers to take χειρογραφον absolutely, [he] would have been careful not to leave a potential object immediately following the participle.'¹⁵

Thus despite the linguistic difficulty of using ἀπεκδυσάμενος with an active sense,¹⁶ such an interpretation gives the most plausible meaning as well as coinciding with the strong argument for identifying

¹¹ Moule, 1957, p. 102.

¹² J.A.T. Robinson, *The Body* (London: SCM Press, 1957), pp. 40f..

¹³ Bandstra, 1964, pp. 158ff. argues that the χειρογραφον is both a heavenly indictment and the body of flesh which Christ takes; O'Brien, 1987, p. 125, responds that this makes the term 'signify too many things at once'.

¹⁴ Carr, 1981, pp. 59-61; cf. Wink, 1984, p. 58.

¹⁵ C.E. Arnold, 'The "Exorcism" of Ephesians 6v12 in 'Recent Biblical Research', *JSNT* 30 (1987), pp. 79f..

¹⁶ Cf. Moule, 1957, p. 101.

God as subject. Paul is saying that God stripped or disarmed the powers in Christ, and by the flow of the sentence suggests that this act was related to his removal of the χειρογραφον. He may indeed be implying that it was they who held the χειρογραφον, exploiting it to bring about the condemnation of humanity.¹⁷

Fourth, εδειγματισεν εν παρρησια (*he made a public spectacle of them*) speaks of God's exposing the powers' humiliating defeat to the universe.¹⁸ Elsewhere in the New Testament the verb δειγματιζω is only found in Matthew 1:19 where it conveys the idea of exposure to disgrace, as it does too in the Ascension of Isaiah 3:13.¹⁹ The participle that follows, θριαμβευσας (*triumphing*), is linked with this notion; its 'life-situation' is the 'triumphal entry of a military hero into the city of Rome'.²⁰ The most striking element of such processions was the defeated enemy 'dragged through the streets and exposed to public ridicule', who frequently therefore appear as the direct object of the verb θριαμβευω.²¹

Fifth, 'αι αρχαι και 'αι εξουσιαι (*the powers and authorities*)

¹⁷ The idea that the powers hold the χειρογραφον is quite possible regardless of its precise identity: they might equally be understood to hold a certificate of indebtedness, or a heavenly indictment, or to exploit the law to secure the condemnation of human beings.

¹⁸ Cf. O'Brien, 1987, p. 128.

¹⁹ Cited by Lohse, 1971, p. 112, note 139. Carr, 1981, p. 63, claims the word is neutral and means 'publicise', but Arnold, 1987, p. 80, notes that 'normal usage of this term demonstrates the contrary.'

²⁰ L. Williamson, 'Led in Triumph: Paul's Use of θριαμβευω, *Interpretation* 22 (1968), p. 322.

²¹ L. Williamson, 1968, p. 322. *Contra* Carr, 1981, pp. 61-3, the object of θριαμβευω is never triumphant armies but always defeated foes. Eph. 4:8, while not using θριαμβευω, conveys the same idea of vanquished foes led in procession. In 2 Cor. 2:14 Christians are paradoxical objects of θριαμβευω, overcome by God and now his slaves, always part of his victorious procession: cf. K. Dahn & H.-G. Link, 'θριαμβευω', in C. Brown (ed.), *NIDNTT*, vol. I (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1980), p. 650; G. Delling, 'θριαμβευω', in G. Kittel (ed.), *TDNT*, vol. III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 159-160; L. Williamson, 1968, p. 326.

should be seen as evil and rebellious supernatural powers associated with Satan; attempts to identify them as good angelic beings must be judged unsuccessful.²² In the Pauline epistles the very terminology, 'αἰ ἀρχαὶ καὶ αἰ ἐξουσίαι, carries connotations of rebellion against God and hostility towards the church. Moreover the immediate context implies precisely the defeat of enemies: they are stripped, exposed and led as enemies in triumphal procession, and the whole theme resembles that of other Pauline texts which exploit the imagery of Psalm 110 and in which the powers are clearly enemies to be subjugated (1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21).

Finally it is necessary to consider the pericope as a whole. In 2:13 Paul describes the Christians' condition prior to being raised with Christ as one of death 'caused by their trespasses and sinful nature'.²³ The forgiveness of sins mentioned at the end of the verse is therefore fundamentally related to being 'made alive'. In 2:14 he explains *how* sins are forgiven, namely through Christ's own death. The *χειρογράφων*, however it is understood, was nailed to his cross thereby signifying the removal of the sinners' indebtedness which enabled them to receive forgiveness. Moreover in Christ God simultaneously disarmed the powers. The close juxtaposition of the two themes clearly implies a link between the removal of the *χειρογράφων* and the stripping of the powers. There is an 'essential connection between forgiveness of sins and victory over the powers and principalities'.²⁴ Christ's death, by removing the *χειρογράφων*, the debt of sin, broke the power of the dark forces over their captives.

There is therefore much to be said for the view that it was indeed the *χειρογράφων* itself, understood as a record of human guilt, of which the powers were stripped thereby breaking their power. 'The context of Colossians 2:15 demands that we understand the removal of power or authority which the principalities exercised over the lives of men by

²² Carr, 1981, p. 52ff..

²³ O'Brien, 1987, p. 122; cf. Eph. 2:1,4.

²⁴ Lohse, 1971, p. 106f.: 'Both affirmations form an indissoluble pair: on the cross of Christ the certificate of indebtedness is erased; on the cross of Christ the powers and principalities are disempowered.'

holding the certificate of indebtedness in their grip.²⁵ Such an understanding would clearly identify the 'principalities and powers' 'as servants and subjects of Satan in the role of accusers', who parasitically exploit human guilt to maintain their tyranny.²⁶ The cross removed the grounds of accusation, the bond which symbolised 'mankind's slavery to the powers',²⁷ and thereby 'exposed and left empty-handed the satanic accusers' and provided freedom for their captives.²⁸

Revelation 12:7-11

Revelation more than any other New Testament book interprets Christ's work in terms of victory. In Revelation 5 the victory motif is prominent, but the victory is clearly paradoxical. 'ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰουδα (*the Lion of the tribe of Judah*: 5:5) is also ἀρνίον ἑστηκός ὡς εσφαγμένον (*a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain*: 5:6), whose triumph and the resulting kingdom are understood in terms of the shedding of his own blood (5:9f.) which brings freedom 'from sins' (cf. 1:5) and thus purchases 'men for God'.

Nevertheless the notion of victory over Satan is not explicitly present until Revelation 12. In 12:1-6 the dragon is defeated only, apparently, in that it fails to devour the child, but in 12:7-9 Michael drives it from heaven. It is initially surprising that 'the heavenly warriors are not led into battle by Christ',²⁹ but comprehensible in the context of the passage as a whole.³⁰ The battle scene follows immediately upon the

²⁵ O'Brien, 1987, p. 127.

²⁶ Bandstra, 1964, p. 166.

²⁷ A. Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology* (London, SPCK, 1974), p. 11.

²⁸ Bandstra, 1964, p. 166. Bandstra emphasises the importance of the law to the accusing powers: 'It is just the law and flesh that are their instruments and that whereby they operate against us' (pp. 166-7).

²⁹ G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 201, who argues that 'this feature of the story can hardly have been instigated by a Christian writer', and attributes it to Jewish influence. However this fails to explain why the author nevertheless incorporated it in his text.

³⁰ The theme of Michael's victory has been variously understood.

reference to the child's rapture, which signifies the completion of his work and frustration of the dragon's designs. The sequence thus suggests that it is what has occurred on earth, the child's life which the dragon sought to destroy, that has somehow precipitated the dragon's expulsion from heaven. 'Satan loses his position in heaven because of Christ's incarnation and its consequences.'³¹ The words spoken subsequently by the heavenly voice (12:10ff.) confirm and clarify this understanding: εβληθη 'ο κατηγορω των αδελφων 'ημων, 'ο κατηγορων αυτους ενωπιον του θεου 'ημων 'ημερας και νυκτος (*the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down*).³² It is precisely as 'the accuser of our brothers' that the dragon is expelled, and expulsion therefore means that his power to arraign them before God has been eliminated.

Consequently the 'brothers' whom he accused have now overcome him, and they have done so δια το αιμα του αρνιου και δια τον λογον της μαρτυριας αυτων και ουκ ηγαπησαν την ψυχη αυτων αχρι θανατου (*by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death*: 12:11). The blood of the Lamb undoubtedly refers to Christ's sacrifice for sins. It is because he has removed their sins by his death that Satan can no longer accuse, the basis of accusation having been annulled: 'By virtue of the death of Christ he is unable successfully to lodge a charge against God's elect (Rom. 8:33-4).'³³ The expulsion metaphor is thus a means of describing the breaking of Satan's power over the redeemed by Christ's death, a power which was based upon

R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, vol. I (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), p. 320, argues that Satan storms heaven in pursuit of the child, but neither the text itself nor the rest of the New Testament sustain this approach.

³¹ J.M. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* (London: SPCK, 1979), p. 113

³² P. Prigent, *Apocalypse 12: Histoire de l'exégèse* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1959), p. 146, emphasises the importance of the hymn of 12:10-12 for understanding the meaning of the heavenly combat.

³³ R.H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 243; cf. W. Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1962 [1940]), p. 141.

those human sins for which Christ has now atoned. Moreover the dragon's expulsion by Michael rather than Christ is explicable from this perspective. The primary victory, liberation from sins (cf. 1:5; 5:5ff.), is won on the cross and it is Christ who wins it there. Satan's expulsion is a secondary consequence which takes place simultaneously in heaven and thus, in the terms of the narrative, while Christ is still on earth. Caird makes the point clearly:

Some commentators express surprise that it should be Michael and not Christ who is God's champion. The point is, however, that, when this victory is won in heaven, Christ is on earth, on the Cross. Because He is part of the earthly reality He is not part of the heavenly symbolism. The heavenly chorus .. explains that the victory has been achieved 'by the sacrifice of the Lamb' .. Michael, in fact, is not the field officer who does the actual fighting, but the staff officer, who is able to remove Satan's flag from the heavenly map because the real victory has been won on Calvary.³⁴

Galatians 1:4

In Galatians 1:4 Paul describes Christ as 'ο δους 'εαυτον 'υπερ των 'αμαρτιων ημων, 'οπως εξεληται 'ημας εκ του αιωνος του ενεστωτος πονηρου (*he who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age*). Implicit here is the Jewish apocalyptic notion of the two ages, the present age being evil in contrast with that which is to come.³⁵ One of the factors characterising the present age and contributing to its nature as evil, is its subordination to evil powers, especially Satan whom Paul names 'ο θεος του αιωνος τουτου (*the god of this age*: 2 Cor. 4:4; cf. Eph. 2:2; 6:12).³⁶ However Paul's approach and

³⁴ G.B. Caird, 'On Deciphering the Book of Revelation', *ExpT* 74 (1962-3), p. 13.

³⁵ Cf. F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1982), p. 76; H.D. Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 42, note 58.

³⁶ Cf. the 'Freer logion', cited by Bruce, 1982, p. 76: 'This age ('ο αιων 'ουτος) of lawlessness and unbelief is subject to Satan'; also R.Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp.

that of the New Testament in general differs from the traditional Jewish conception with the belief that, while temporally the age to come is still future, yet 'spiritually, believers in Christ have here and now been made partakers of it, because they share the risen life of Christ'.³⁷

Thus, in Galatians 1:4 believers are already delivered from 'the present evil age' and thereby also from its evil spiritual rulers, and that deliverance was accomplished by Christ's giving himself 'ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, for the expiation or forgiveness of sins'.³⁸ Relating deliverance to forgiveness in this way is clearly significant. It implies that people belong to this age because of their sins; they are not simply enslaved victims of spiritual powers but are morally responsible for their condition. Thus forgiveness is the prerequisite of deliverance. Moral culpability must be dealt with to secure emancipation from the objective spiritual slavery imposed by the powers. Christ therefore gave himself 'ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, thereby securing forgiveness and *consequently* freedom from this age and the powers that control it.

Thus, to conclude this section, since it is sin that gives Satan his dominion over humanity, it is the removal of sin which breaks that dominion. Accordingly the object of Christ's death was not primarily the defeat of Satan or of the powers, but the rescue of their victims from their own disobedience and its consequences.³⁹ He died to secure forgiveness, and the defeat of Satan and the powers by that death is thus incidental to its principal thrust. Christ's death removed the χειρογραφον by making atonement for sins, thereby disarming the 'the powers and authorities' (Col. 2:14-15) and securing the expulsion of the accuser from heaven (Rev. 12:7-11): both images mean essentially the same thing.

40f.

³⁷ Bruce, 1982, p. 76.

³⁸ Cf. Bruce, 1982, p. 75; Betz, 1979, pp. 41-42.

³⁹ The suggestion of J.B. Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 229, 'if the power of the Devil is dismissed, then Christ's saving mission becomes meaningless', is wrong and results from an over-emphasis on the cosmic aspect of Christ's work. That aspect is central in no New Testament interpretation of his death, which is nevertheless not to deny its importance.

Consequently by experiencing forgiveness the believer receives in practice deliverance from the 'present evil age' and from the powers that tyrannise it (Gal. 1:4; cf. Col. 1:13f.; Eph. 2:1ff.).

Such an understanding explains why Satan and the powers were not simply destroyed by *force majeure*, by overwhelming divine might. Satan could indeed have been trounced by the infinite and invincible power of God, as the New Testament affirms that he finally will be, but that would not have dealt with the fundamental human problem of sin. Satan merely attaches himself to human sin and exploits it as a parasite; the destruction of the parasite would not remove the corruption of sin upon which it feeds. Accordingly it is primarily sin that must be dealt with, and in so doing Christ simultaneously overcame Satan as a necessary, but basically secondary, consequence.

It is here moreover that the approach of Aulèn in *Christus Victor*⁴⁰ is weak in that it 'threatens to view sin and redemption in terms of a dualistic power struggle in which God in Christ simply conquers enemy territory by an invasion from heaven. In this scheme, sin is less a responsible guilt that must be forgiven than a power that must be eradicated.'⁴¹ Nor did Christ's death increase God's already absolute power over Satan, to which the Bible repeatedly testifies. Rather it removes the moral and spiritual basis of Satan's enslavement of rebellious humanity.

CHRIST'S PRESENT REIGN: ESCHATOLOGICAL TENSION AND SUPERNATURAL EVIL

In their demonology the New Testament writers demonstrate the same eschatological tension which characterises their understanding of salvation. Satan and the powers are defeated and yet remain active while they await final judgement (Rev. 20:7-10; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 15:24; Matt. 25:41), echoing somewhat postbiblical Jewish ideas of a two-stage defeat of the powers of evil.⁴² Moreover there is some suggestion that the same

⁴⁰ G. Aulèn, *Christus Victor* (London: SPCK, 1931).

⁴¹ J.C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980), p. 209.

⁴² B.J. Bamberger, *Fallen Angels* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication

Christ who triumphed over them by his death will also crush them in the climactic act of salvation and judgement (1 Cor. 15:25; Rev. 19:11ff.). Meanwhile the present period between Satan's two judgements is characterised by a tension between Christ's reign and Satan's hostility towards the church.

The assertion of the present reign of Christ is found in virtually every strand of the New Testament, frequently being affirmed through the citation of or allusions to Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:33; 1 Cor. 15:24f.; Eph. 1:20f.; Heb. 10:12-13; 1 Pet. 3:22). It echoes the archetypal expression of the divine warrior theme in Exodus 15, in which the conqueror is acclaimed as king by those whom he delivers (15:18). In Christ's case his reign is understood, for example in Matthew 28, as the precondition of the worldwide advance of the gospel, for it means that Satan can no longer hold those whom he formerly enslaved (cf. also Jn 12:31-32). Similarly in Acts 2:33-35 the coming of the Spirit, which is the precondition of the apostolic proclamation, is a direct consequence of Jesus' enthronement at the right hand of God. Accordingly, as Acts records the spread of the gospel there are the same signs of the coming of the kingdom of God as are present in the synoptic gospels, including the expulsion of evil spirits. Christ continues to be the bearer of the kingdom with all that that means for Satan's power, but now he works through the apostles and the church. Moreover, in both Ephesians and Colossians, his reign assures his people of both the security of their salvation and the availability of divine resources in their conflict against hostile powers, for it is precisely they which have been subjugated (Eph. 1:21-22 & 2:6; cf. Col. 2:15 & 3:3).⁴³

The New Testament writers thus believe Christians to have experienced a liberation from the tyranny of evil powers, which is understood in primarily spiritual terms. In the Pauline epistles it means that they need no longer be controlled by Satan's insidious and evil direction and inspiration (cf. Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4, and also 1 Jn. 5:19), nor

Society of America, 1952), p. 18; B. Noack, *Satanás und Sotería. Untersuchungen zur Neutestamentlichen Dämonologie* (Kobenhavn: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1948), p. 40

⁴³ In Revelation too references to Christ's rule in heaven interspersed with prophecies of plague and persecution, convey an impression of the ultimate certainty of salvation despite the apparent chaos and wickedness on earth.

spiritually blinded by him (2 Cor. 4:4). Most important however is the fact that guilt has been removed and thereby the basis of accusation by Satan and the powers, by which they seek to secure the judgement and consequent damnation of the accused.

Nevertheless supernatural evil beings remain active and still entrenched in the world (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Jn. 5:19; Rev. 12:12-13:18). They resist the gospel's progress (Matt. 13:19,39; 1 Thess. 2:18), and make the church their particular target (Rev. 12:12ff.; Eph. 6:10-12). Their purpose is to lure believers back into sin, so reclaiming those liberated from them precisely by the forgiveness of their sins. Consequently they tempt to moral evil as repeated New Testament warnings testify (Acts 5:3; 1 Cor. 7:5), try to introduce error into the church (2 Cor. 11:13-15; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 Jn. 4:1ff.; Rev. 16:13f.) and inspire persecution, the significance of which lies not so much in the physical suffering it causes as the danger that it may lead to apostasy (1 Pet. 5:8-9; Rev. 2:9-11).

It is not clear therefore that Christians are expected to be free from the physical aggression of evil spirits. By inspiring persecution Satan may injure, even kill, believers through human agents. Since that is so, and in the absence of any indication in the New Testament to the contrary, it seems likely that evil spirits would also have been considered able to injure believers without the intervention of human mediators, if not to possess them.

In fact the New Testament says nothing about the possibility of Christians being possessed. In that the agent of possession belongs to Satan's kingdom (cf. Lk. 11:18, par.), it is Satan who controls the demoniac. From this perspective his state may be seen as an extreme form of the situation of anybody unredeemed from 'the dominion of darkness'; the difference lies in the fact that Satan's control is no longer unobtrusive, exercised through the individual's own will, but overt and direct. Consequently it does seem unlikely that the New Testament writers would have believed that an individual redeemed from Satan might nevertheless still be enslaved to the most extreme expression of his tyranny. Moreover, although there are frequent allusions to Christians laid low by illness, nowhere does the New Testament consider the situation of a believer possessed by a spirit, which might have been

expected were it a real pastoral problem.⁴⁴

However that may be, in the face of possible *physical* attack by evil powers there are significant differences in the believers' situation. First, they have access through Christ to divine resources which enable them both to resist and to endure attacks made upon them (cf. 2 Cor. 12:8-10; Rev 2:10). Second, death itself no longer has the same dread for them. While the undoubtedly unpleasant experience of dying remains, it is robbed of its horror as the enduring spiritual penalty for sin. For Paul its 'sting' is removed (1 Cor. 15:55f.), and it gives access to the presence of Christ himself (Phil. 1:21). Similarly in Revelation 2:10f. it is not death that is the real danger for the believer but unfaithfulness, death being in fact the means of victory. Physical suffering thus loses its absolute importance for the believer. And thirdly, the notion of Christ's exaltation and reign implies that it is he who sovereignly permits and limits whatever Satan, powers and demons might do to his people.

This does not mean that Christ will necessarily always veto their physical aggression, any more than he vetoes their inspiration of persecution. However, it suggests that believers are delivered from the futile arbitrariness of demonic malevolence. A persistent New Testament theme is that the believer's sufferings take on positive value (Rom. 5:3f.; 8:28-39; Jas. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7); from this perspective the identity of the immediate source of affliction is *relatively* unimportant. It becomes clear in the New Testament, and supremely in references to the devil's inspiration of Judas to betray Jesus, that even in the climactic moment of his wickedness Satan advances the Father's will and, in so doing, brings about his own destruction (Lk. 22:3-4,53; Jn. 13:2,27f.; 14:31; Rev. 12:4-5). This is the final truth about his hostility towards the church, that it is futile and self-defeating. Not only do the New Testament writers suggest that God will accomplish his good purposes for the church and for individual believers despite what Satan, powers and demons may attempt to do against them, but that he will accomplish those purposes even through their malevolent operations.

⁴⁴ Cf. the varying views of F.S. Leahy, *Satan Cast Out: A Study in Biblical Demonology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), pp. 95f.; D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Healing and Medicine* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1987), pp. 162f.; M.F. Unger, *What Demons Can Do To Saints* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977).

SATAN'S FINAL JUDGEMENT

In the Old Testament Isaiah 24:21-23 and 27:1 both look forward to the final defeat of every enemy of God, including supernatural foes. The reference to the slaughter of Leviathan in 27:1, 'the gliding serpent .. the coiling serpent .. the monster of the sea', evokes the great supernatural adversary of God elsewhere identified as Satan,⁴⁵ and it is implied in 24:21 that human kings are allied with 'the powers in the heavens above' in a conspiracy against God which will finally be crushed. The New Testament writers take up the same theme in texts such as Matthew 25:41, Romans 16:20 and Revelation 20:7-10, and similarly anticipate the ultimate destruction of Satan's power and that of all the forces that are subject to him.

In 1 Corinthians 15:24f. Paul refers to this final decisive judgement of the powers: εἶτα τὸ τέλος ... ὅταν καταργησῇ πᾶσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ πᾶσαν ἐξουσίαν καὶ δύναμιν (*then the end will come .. when he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power*). However Berkhof argues that the verb, καταργεῶ, refers to their 'dethronement' rather than their destruction, which is consistent with his view that they are part of creation and have the positive purpose of undergirding it. Hence according to his interpretation Paul is describing the restoration of the powers to their proper function within Christ's lordship.⁴⁶ However καταργεῶ always has a negative sense and never refers to the restoration of something to its proper function, and in 15:26 death is also the object of καταργεῶ.⁴⁷ Although Berkhof claims that this means that death loses its power as *an enemy*, for Paul death is τὰ ... ὄψωνιά της

⁴⁵ In Ancient Near Eastern mythology the sea was seen as a primal force of chaos and evil: Mounce, 1977, p. 249.

⁴⁶ H. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1962), pp. 32-4. J.G. Gibbs, *Creation and Redemption: a Study in Pauline Theology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), p. 146, also argues that καταργεῶ refers only to their dethronement, implying they have a role in the age to come.

⁴⁷ Cf. W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt & F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 418; J.I. Packer, 'καταργεῶ', in Brown (ed.), vol. I, 1980, p. 73.

‘αμαρτίας (*the wages of sin*: Rom. 6:23), as it is throughout the Bible. To speak of it losing its power as an enemy is totally incongruous, for it exists only as an enemy. Thus, if καταργεω implies destruction when used of death, it must be understood to have the same force when used of the ‘other’ powers.

The words δι’ αυτου [i.e. Christ] αποκαταλλαξαι τα παντα εις αυτον (*through him to reconcile all things to himself*) in Colossians 1:20 might nevertheless be understood to envisage an ultimate universal salvation, to include not only people but also powers.⁴⁸ Such an interpretation however encounters several difficulties. In the Pauline epistles the concept of reconciliation normally refers to ‘God’s laying aside of his wrath and judgement against mankind’.⁴⁹ It is thus concerned with a change in God’s disposition towards humanity which occurs independently of any human response. God himself is the subject and Christ’s atoning death the means, while the realisation for human beings ‘depends on acceptance of the gospel and faith’.⁵⁰ The terms in which reconciliation is described in Colossians 1:20ff. are largely consistent with this understanding. It is God who makes reconciliation through Christ’s death, and 1:22-23 indicates that the believers’ ultimate appropriation of its benefits depends upon their perseverance in faith. Thus, with respect to the human race alone, αποκαταλλαξαι τα παντα (*to reconcile all things*) does not necessarily entail the actual salvation of every human being.

Equally therefore it does not imply the universal salvation of the powers, even if it were argued that it makes possible the salvation of some of them. However there is no indication in the New Testament, that the option of a saving response to Christ is even available to the powers. On the contrary, it is they *from whom* people are saved, and who continue indeed to attack the church. Moreover whenever Christ’s death and resurrection are specifically related to the powers, it is in terms of their subjugation. As Bruce observes, ‘It is contrary to the analogy of Scripture

⁴⁸ This is the view of J.Y. Lee, ‘Interpreting the Demonic Powers in Pauline Thought’, *NovT* 12 (1970), p. 66. Cf. too N.T. Wright, 1986, p. 77.

⁴⁹ I.H. Marshall, *Jesus the Saviour: Studies in New Testament Theology* (London: SPCK, 1990), p. 271, cf. pp. 258ff..

⁵⁰ I.H. Marshall., 1990, p. 268.

to apply the idea of reconciliation in the ordinary sense to fallen angels.⁵¹

The notion of the universal reconciliation referred to here is therefore best understood in the light of Paul's description of the powers' defeat in Colossians 2:14-15. The cancellation of the χειρογραφον *through Christ's death* broke their authority over humanity whom they can no longer hold enslaved, and so neutralised them.⁵² It is in this sense that even the powers are reconciled δια του 'αιματος του σταυρου αυτου (*through the blood of his cross*: 1:20). It is not that Christ's death saves them, but that by atoning for the sins of human beings it breaks down their rebellious domain, disarming them and thus terminating their defiance of divine sovereignty. 'The universe has been reconciled in that heaven and earth have been brought back into their divinely created and determined order .. the universe is again under its head and .. cosmic peace has returned.'⁵³

The notion in Ephesians 1:10 of uniting all things in Christ may be similarly understood: ανακεφαλαιωσασθαι τα παντα εν τω Χριστω, τα επι τοις ουρανοις και τα επι της γης εν αυτω (*to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ*). The verb ανακεφαλαιω means 'to sum up', as in Romans 13:9, and thus here 'Christ is the one .. in whom he [God] restores the harmony of the cosmos.'⁵⁴ No more than in Colossians 1:20 does this imply the final salvation of the powers, but only that they are brought under Christ's dominion: 'No hostile heavenly power can thwart God's purpose in Christ.'⁵⁵

These interpretations of Colossians 1:20 and Ephesians 1:10 are

⁵¹ Bruce, 1984, p. 75.

⁵² R.P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981), p. 54; cf. Bruce, 1984, p. 75.

⁵³ Lohse, 1971, p. 59.

⁵⁴ A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1990), pp. 33-34. Lightfoot, quoted by C. Brown, 'Head', in Brown (ed.), vol. II, 1976, p. 163, refers to 'the entire harmony of the universe, which shall no longer contain alien and discordant elements, but of which all the parts shall find their centre and bond of union in Christ.'

⁵⁵ Lincoln, 1990, p. 34.

consistent both with the anticipation of the powers' destruction in 1 Corinthians 15:24ff., and with that of the 'crushing' of Satan in Romans 16:20. Significantly in the latter text it is the 'God of peace' who 'will soon crush Satan under your feet'. Peace is accomplished not by Satan's redemption but his defeat; the reconciliation or summing up of all things similarly does not mean the powers' salvation but their subjugation to Christ's rule.

Finally two references in Revelation confirm the conclusiveness of God's final triumph. In 20:14 death encounters the same fate as the devil when it is 'thrown into the lake of fire'. Although the consequence of sin, death is also the instrument of Satan as destroyer (Rev. 9:11) and accuser (Rev. 12:10). Throwing death into the lake of fire therefore emphasises the definitive termination of his tyranny and all that it involves. Second, the new heaven and new earth contain no sea (Rev. 21:1). In Ancient Near Eastern mythology the sea was seen as a primal force of chaos and evil, and such ideas are sometimes exploited in the Old Testament as they are also in Revelation (12:17-13:1). Hence the affirmation, 'ἡ θάλασσα οὐκ ἐστὶν ἐτι (*and there was no longer any sea*), means that every conceivable evil or source of evil is definitively banished from the new creation: the Lamb's victory is complete.⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

Certain implications for the preaching of the gospel in Africa may finally be drawn from the above. First, as was noted in the preceding article, the gospel is always first and foremost a message of deliverance from sin. It is *primarily* about forgiveness of sins rather than deliverance from Satan and evil spirits, and it confronts people initially as sinners rather than victims. This is not to deny that other dimensions of the New Testament message should also be emphasised according to the hearers' circumstances and concerns. In Colossians and Ephesians greater prominence is given to the theme of Christ's triumph and exaltation over the powers than is the case elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, presumably because the addressees' situation required it; however even in those epistles redemption from sin is still identified as the core of the gospel.

Similarly, in an African context it is certainly necessary to proclaim

⁵⁶ Caird, 1962-3, p. 104.

the relevance of Christ's death with respect to supernatural powers, and more so than might perhaps be the case in a western milieu. However, if the proclamation is to reflect New Testament priorities, it would still be necessary to concentrate on Christ's death 'for sins', since it is through salvation from sins that deliverance from Satan, demons and powers takes place.

It is significant that in the primitive Christian creed which Paul had communicated to the Corinthian believers and which in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 he drew again to their attention, what was 'of first importance' (εν πρωτοις) was the death of Christ *for sins* ('υπερ των 'αμαρτιων), his burial and his resurrection; however no mention is made of the powers. Paul introduces the powers where there are particular pastoral reasons for doing so; otherwise the relationship of Christ and his work to them is not mentioned, or mentioned only incidentally as in 1 Corinthians 15:24ff.. The gospel is essentially about sins rather than about Satan.

It has however been suggested that in the African context a message of deliverance from supernatural powers might be substituted for that of salvation from sins:

Each culture perceives Jesus Christ through the spectacles of its own needs. Western cultures, for example, tend to be guilt ridden and so are greatly attracted to Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. ... another culture which focuses more on enhancing life forces because of fear of being overcome by evil powers will perceive that same Jesus as a long sought after protective shield.⁵⁷

It is indeed of fundamental importance to address the existential concerns of the hearers if they are to appreciate the relevance and sufficiency of the gospel. However if *felt* needs determine the heart of the proclamation the result is a pluralistic relativisation of the gospel. It was by nailing the χειρογραφον to the cross that the powers were disarmed (Col. 2:14-15), and through the blood of the Lamb that the accuser was overcome (Rev. 12:9-11). Without salvation from sin there is no salvation

⁵⁷ D. Jacobs, commenting on C.R. Taber, 'Is there more than one way to do theology?', *Gospel in Context* 1.1 (1978), p. 24.

from 'evil powers' either.

Moreover putting the accent on deliverance from spiritual powers means that those to whom such a message is brought are identified as victims rather than guilty sinners, their condition being caused by forces over which they have no control rather than by their 'own deliberate fault'. In moral terms the dimension of human responsibility for sins and consequent guilt is undermined, the consistent New Testament stress on repentance becoming irrelevant. It would moreover be to move towards a cosmological dualism, if not necessarily entailing it. Supernatural evil would assume a much greater significance than the Bible grants it, in that redemption would be concerned not primarily with the human moral condition but with a great cosmic adversary which has somehow enslaved humanity. Of course, as soon as that enslavement is understood as a consequence of human sins, the relatively secondary importance of Satan, demons and powers and their fundamentally parasitic nature are conceded.

Second, much attention has been given in recent years to the supposed importance of 'power encounters' in the propagation of the good news. However in New Testament practice it is always the proclamation that is primary in evangelism. Insofar as that provoked what was understood as supernatural opposition, such opposition was in various ways confronted and overcome (cf. Acts 8:9-24; 13:4-12; 19:13-20). However, in that Satan, powers and demons tyrannise humanity in consequence of human sin, the preaching of the gospel of forgiveness of sins itself constitutes the supreme encounter with those powers without directly addressing them at all, and response to that gospel means their defeat.

Recently certain missiologists have also been drawing particular attention to the alleged role of what they term *territorial spirits*, which supposedly dominate specific geographical areas and prevent their inhabitants from responding to the gospel. On this view a necessary preliminary to the proclamation of the gospel is the *binding* of the powers in question, which may initially entail establishing their identity and numbers.⁵⁸ However there is no indication in the New Testament that

⁵⁸ Cf., for example, C.P. Wagner, 'Territorial Spirits', in C.P. Wagner and F.D. Pennoyer (eds.), *Wrestling with Dark Angels* (Eastbourne:

evangelism was preceded by some sort of preliminary occult research followed by skirmishes with the demons thus identified, with a view to expelling them from the particular territories they held. While Satan's power must not be underestimated nor should he be given *more* importance than the New Testament accords him. It is again of vital importance to maintain and affirm the priority of proclamation in the mission of the church. In Revelation 12:11, along with the blood of the lamb and the willingness to endure death, it was by 'the word of their testimony' that Satan was overcome. To allow the primacy of word to be superseded by other concerns is to exchange the gospel for something less.

Finally, in the light of Satan's continuing animosity towards the church, the New Testament calls upon believers to arm themselves in order to resist him. In view of the preoccupation in some quarters with novel and exotic approaches to 'spiritual warfare', it is important to recognise that for the New Testament writers such warfare was *primarily* understood as resisting Satan's attempts at moral and spiritual seduction by which he sought to re-establish his tyranny, a tyranny always dependent upon human sin. Thus when in Ephesians 6:10-20 Paul specifically discusses the struggle against the forces of darkness, the context suggests that it is above all else a moral conflict. The passage concludes a lengthy section of moral exhortation of which it is the summary or climax: 'The *tau loipou* linking phrase in 6:10 .. joins a parenthetic summary to previous parenthesis.'⁵⁹ Thus the exhortation to put on the divine armour serves to explain how the Christian might carry out the injunctions of the preceding verses in the face of diabolical temptation to the contrary:

The fight with the powers was understood by the author of Ephesians as intimately involved with such things as working with one's hands (4:28), avoidance of evil talk of various sorts (4:29-30), and concern for the due relationships of the human

Monarch, 1990); J. Dawson, *Taking our Cities for God: How to break spiritual strongholds* (Lake Mary, Florida: Creation House, 1989).

⁵⁹ R.A. Wild, 'The Warrior and the Prisoner: Some Reflections on Ephesians 6:10-20', *CBQ* 46 (1984), p. 298. Cf. C.E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 103; Lincoln, 1990, p. 438.

household (5:22-6:9). .. The individual who engages in productive work or who speaks the truth or who loves his wife is successfully resisting and standing his ground in the fight against the powers.⁶⁰

Moreover, the weaponry itself 'is in part specified in terms of certain virtues: truth, justice, faith, etc..⁶¹ This does not mean that the readers are simply being told in moralistic fashion to improve themselves, for the armour is God's, both that which he gives as well as that which is 'in some sense his own' and which he wears as divine warrior (cf. Isa. 11:4-5; 59:17).⁶² Rather they are being exhorted to take up truth, righteousness and so forth as God's gift to them: 'The believers are only able to prevail through the protection and power of God himself.'⁶³ However with that protection they do stand, even on the 'day of evil'.

The New Testament proclaims that Christ has already decisively overcome all the forces of darkness through the full and perfect redemption he accomplished on the cross. Because of her union with Christ his victory belongs also to the Church: in Christ she is seated even now 'in the heavenly realms' (Eph. 2:6), and so finds herself also far above 'all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given' (Eph. 1:21). Nevertheless she must face the hostility of Satan and his forces and wage warfare against them as she seeks to live in a way that pleases Christ and to bring the gospel of salvation to every nation. What is vital is that she should have a proper biblical estimation of the nature of the threat that Satan presents and of the character of the warfare in which she is engaged. It is on that basis that she will engage in appropriate combat, taking up the weapons made available to her, and triumphantly stand her ground (Eph. 6:14-18).

⁶⁰ Wild, 1984, p. 298.

⁶¹ Wild, 1984, p. 297.

⁶² Cf. Lincoln, 1990, pp. 436, 442.

⁶³ Lincoln, 1990, p. 442; R. Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), p. 272.