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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

The Powers of Evil in the New Testament by Roy Yates

The New Testament emphasizes two facts about the dominion of evil in the world: one, that it is real and objective, and poses a mortal threat to the human race; and the other, that Christ has overcome it. Mr. Yates examines the variety of parallel expressions by which the New Testament presents the reality of evil and Christ's victory over it.

In the New Testament the powers of evil are referred to by an unexpected variety of motifs. We read of "principalities", "authorities", "powers", "dominions", "thrones", and "names". Other terms are "rulers", "princes of this world", "lords", "gods", "angels", "demons", "unclean spirits", and "the elements of this world". There is also mention of "Satan", or "the devil", who is called "Beelzebul", "Beliar", "the evil one", "the accuser", "the destroyer", "the adversary", and "the enemy". He also appears as "the prince of demons", "the prince of this world", and "the prince of the power of the air." This large number of terms for the forces of evil shows how much the Christians of the early Church were concerned with these phenomena. The link that holds them all together is that in almost every instance Christ and his followers are declared to be victorious over them, and thereby to be liberated from their influence.

97

I. THE NATURE OF THE POWERS OF EVIL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

(a) *Angels.* The word "angel" is derived from the verb "to send", and thus can be used of human messengers.¹ When used of supernatural beings there are two main functions they perform. They act as divine messengers from God to men,² and they form part of Yahweh's heavenly court, adding to the sense of his glory and majesty.³ Among the secondary functions of angels we have detected a few allusions to them as evil beings.⁴ Especially in the Pauline literature there is a tendency to

¹ Gen.32:4; Deut.2:26; Judg.6:35; Is.14:32; 44:26; Hag.1:13; Lk.9:25; Mk.1:2; Lk.7:24; Mt.11:10.

² Gen.22:11; Judg.13:3-5; 2 Kings 1:3; Lk.1:11, 13, 18f., 26, 28, 30, 34, 35, 38; 2:9, 10, 13, 15; Mt.1:20, 24; 2:13, 19; Gal.1:8; 4:14; Acts 8:26; 10:3; 11:13; 23:9; 27:23; Rev.1:1; 17:1-7; 21:9, etc.

It is interesting to notice that in the Gospels, where the majority of the N.T. references to angels are found, the angels are almost wholly confined to the birth stories and the resurrection narratives where they are meant to emphasize the intervention of the supernatural.

³ 1 En.39:12f., 61:10; 71:7; Jub.2:18; 30:18; Ber.R.78; Mt.26:53; Lk.12:8, 9; 15:10; Heb.1:14; Rev.3:5; 5:2; 17:1.

⁴ In the inter-testamental period prominence was given to fallen angels in the origin of evil, especially to popular exposition of Gen.6.

emphasize the comparative unimportance of angelology. The positive thought of the angel as the messenger of God, as found in the Gospels and Acts, is absent in Paul.⁵ Instead it is asserted that the saints shall judge angels.⁶ They are included in the list of evil potentates conquered by Christ and unable to separate us from the love of God,⁷ and they are involved in the giving of the Law⁸ in a context that warns against the bitter enslavement that necessarily follows from the misuse of the Law. Finally in his opposition to syncretistic teaching at Colossae Paul refers to an actual cult of angels.⁹ This dangerous tendency places the angels alongside the other forces that threaten men.¹⁰

However, on the whole, in the New Testament "angel" refers to good beings. Although the basic meaning of "messenger" makes the transition from "messenger of God" to "messenger of Satan" an easy one, it is surprising how few references there are to evil angels in the New Testament as compared with contemporary Jewish Apocalyptic literature. Even in those we have detected the emphasis is not on the nature and character of the evil angels, but on the right conduct to be expected from those who are followers of Christ.¹¹ Angels are never portrayed as presenting an out and out challenge to the authority of God, but the possibility of their hindering the Christian's moral progress and coming between him and the true worship of God, as in the cult of angels at Colossae, places them alongside the principalities and powers who have been subdued by Christ and deprived of their authority.

(b) *Demons*. In the Old Testament there are only a few traces of demons as we find them in New Testament times. There are the various animal forms in which the demons were thought to manifest themselves,¹² and the odd references to sacrifice to demons,¹³ but on the whole it is remarkable how little demonology there is in the Old Testament. Certainly there is no attempt to formulate a doctrine of demons such as one finds in the literature of Babylon or Persia. It is only after the period

⁵ The nearest parallel is when he likens the evangelists to "an angel from heaven" (Gal.1:8) or "an angel of God" (Gal.4:14).

⁶ 1 Cor.6:3.

⁷ Rom.8:38f.

⁸ Gal.3:19.

⁹ Col.1.18.

¹⁰ Cf. Rom.8:38f.; Col.1:13.

¹¹ Eg. 1 Cor.6:3, "we shall judge angels" — the emphasis is on the undesirability of taking disputes between brethren to the pagan law courts. 1 Cor.11:10 is concerned more with the seemly conduct of women in public worship than with the angels referred to in that context.

¹² Eg. Lev.16:18ff.; 17:7; Deut.8:15; 32:17; 2 Chron.11:15; Is.13:21f.; 14:26; 34:14ff.

¹³ Deut.32:17; Ps.106:37f.

of Persian and Greek influence that Jewish demonology proliferates, and even then it is fallen angels rather than demons who are held responsible for the origin of evil.¹⁴ It is in Rabbinic Judaism that we find a widespread belief in the existence and operation of demons. Their main function is to do harm to life and limb; sickness and disease are attributed to their influence, and could be cured by exorcism.¹⁵ "The decisive feature in Jewish demonology is that the demons are evil spirits and that the link with the souls of the dead is broken."¹⁶ These beliefs of Rabbinic Judaism form the background to the ministry of Jesus and his work of exorcism.¹⁷ The Gospels confirm this popular belief that it was the evil spirits who brought torment, malady and misfortune to people, although they are never said to induce people to sin. It was an important part of the ministry of Jesus to release people from this bondage which fettered their bodies and minds. The acts of exorcism show that their sickness is not seen to be due to moral disorder, but as evidence of the extent to which the realm of Satan and the demonic had gained a hold on the lives of men and women.

The contribution of the Gospels to the understanding of demonology is two-fold. First there is evidence of a definite shift of emphasis from the operation of individual demons to the view that they formed part of the kingdom of Satan. The Beelzebul controversy¹⁸ and the missionary charges to the disciples¹⁹ help us to see that Jesus regarded the operation of evil through the demons as part of the activity of Satan. Thus the exorcisms are no longer to be seen as isolated victories over a series of autonomous demons, but part of Jesus' messianic assault on the powers of evil. Jesus does not have an atomistic view of the world of evil, but sees it as a unity under Satan, whose power is beginning to crumble. Secondly Jesus made his attack on the demons, and through them on the power of Satan himself, in his capacity as God's representative. The exorcisms are part of his messianic activity, although the final victory

¹⁴ See 1 En.6-36.

¹⁵ Evidence is assembled by H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Beck, 1926), Vol.IV, pp.501-35. However, not all sicknesses are attributed to demons.

¹⁶ W. Foerster, *T. W. N. T.* Vol.II, p.15.

¹⁷ In the N.T. there is a preference for the use of the word *δαίμόνιον* rather than *δαίμων* (only in Mt.8:31) because of the association of the latter with intermediaries between God and man.

¹⁸ Mk.3:20-7/Mt.12:22-32/Lk.11:14-23. See R. Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror* (London, S.P.C.K., 1954), pp.44-7.

¹⁹ Mk.6:6b-13; Lk.9:1-6; 10:1-12; Mt.9:37f.; 10:5-16. The Twelve and then the Seventy are sent out with authority to cast out demons. This leads to a further assault on the domain of Satan (Lk.10:18).

over evil is only achieved through his suffering, death, and resurrection. These points are confirmed by the Acts of the Apostles, where the disciples are portrayed as continuing the messianic activity of Jesus.²⁰

Apart from these cases of possession it is remarkable how few references to demons there are in the New Testament. In particular Paul makes very little use of the idea of demons, except as a warning that there might be a positive force of evil behind the dumb idols associated with pagan worship.²¹ He prefers to speak in terms of collective concepts of the principalities and powers, the elements, or of Satan. The physical disability that hindered Paul is not attributed to the activity of demons,²² nor are the hazards of his journeying through lonely or inhospitable territories.²³ Even the complicated demonology of the Apocalypse underlines the basic New Testament conviction that demons are not independent agencies, but are completely subject to Satan.

The question is inevitably raised as to whether the power of demons is real, or only counterfeit and illusory.²⁴ Certainly the fear of evil spirits was real enough. The Gospels give the impression that, during the ministry of Jesus, there were large numbers of people who were believed to be possessed by evil spirits, and who came to him for help. As a result of the exorcisms performed by Jesus the process of liberation from the fear of evil spirits was begun. The rest of the New Testament, apart from the Apocalypse, is comparatively free from references to demons, and thus confirms this trend which we believe goes back to Jesus himself. The possibility of evil influence through demons is still recognized, even in Paul, but it is pushed into the background, and takes second place to an insistence on living a morally good and virtuous Christian life. "In the great reduction of fear of demons . . . we are to see an effect of the N. T. faith in God as the Guardian of His people. In the light of this faith all fear of demons necessarily yields to steadfast assurance."²⁵

(c) *Chief Evil Being.* There are many names for the chief evil being, but they all relate to the personification of the powers of evil who gathers to himself all the anti-god²⁶ forces in the cosmos to set them, under his

²⁰ Acts 5:12ff.; 16:16-18; 19:12. Cf. Mt.5:27ff.; 6:56.

²¹ 1 Cor.10:20. Cf. "the elements" in Gal.4:3, 9; Col.2:8, 20. There is also reference to "doctrines of demons" in 1 Tim.4:1.

²² 2 Cor.12:7.

²³ 2 Cor.11:23ff.

²⁴ See the discussion in E. Langton, *Essentials of Demonology* (London: Epworth, 1949), p.224.

²⁵ W. Foerster, *T. W. N. T.*, Vol. II, p.17.

²⁶ Including the Antichrist who reflects all Satan's characteristics but is only one of his human terrestrial instruments (1 Jn.2:18; 2 Thess.2:3-10; Rev.13). See R. Yates, "The Antichrist," *E. Q.* 46 (1974), 42-50.

leadership, over against the rule and authority of God. In the Old Testament it is possible to trace how the character of Satan evolved from an angel of Yahweh's court, concerned with the maintenance of law, to the arch-enemy of God and man.²⁷ As time went on many other features were attributed to Satan, derived from a wide variety of sources and cultures. But the general picture is of one who tries to thwart the divine plan of salvation.

"All the functions ascribed to Satan in Judaism are found again in the New Testament. But now they culminate in a single, supernatural power and dominion of Satan to which demons and the whole of this aeon are basically subject."²⁸ This centralization of the powers of evil under Satan is confirmed by the Beelzebul controversy,²⁹ where Satan is referred to as "the prince of demons,"³⁰ and at the return of the seventy disciples from their mission when their success, especially in exorcism, leads Jesus to have a vision of the fall of Satan.³¹ His hold on the world is expressed in such titles as "ruler of this world,"³² "the god of this world,"³³ and "the prince of the power of the air."³⁴ In Ephesians 6:11 the devil is brought into association with the principalities and powers and all the other hosts of evil that assail the Christian. This is the only place in the New Testament where such an association is made. Usually Satan or the devil, and the principalities and powers are used as alternative collective concepts, but in this context of spiritual warfare the emphasis is on evil *en masse*, so it is not unnatural to see them side by side.

101

In the New Testament there is an absolute antithesis between God and Satan, between the Kingdom of God represented by Jesus and the rule of Satan.³⁵ Thus we are given the picture of Satan in constant opposition to the work of Jesus and his followers. He is active in tempting Jesus to compromise in the wilderness,³⁶ and again through the mouth of Peter at Caesarea Philippi.³⁷ In the early Church the

²⁷ R. Yates, "Satan and the Failure of Nerve," *New Blackfriars* 52 (612, 1971), 223-8.

²⁸ W. Foerster *T.W.N.T.*, Vol. II, p.80.

²⁹ Mk. 3:20-7/Mt. 12:22-32/Lk. 11:14-23.

³⁰ Mk. 3:22/Mt. 12:24/Lk. 11:15.

³¹ Lk. 10:18.

³² Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11. He thus claims the honour that rightly belongs only to God. Cf. Lk. 4:6.

³³ 2 Cor. 4:4.

³⁴ Eph. 2:2.

³⁵ However, Satan is never regarded as an absolute being either in Judaism or Christianity, but as a part of God's creation, and as such responsible in the end to God.

³⁶ Mk. 1:12f.; Mt. 4:1-11/Lk. 4:1-12.

³⁷ Mk. 8:33/Mt. 16:23.

Corinthians who engaged in too rigorous a self-discipline are open to special temptation from Satan,³⁸ as are the Thessalonians as they faced opposition and persecution.³⁹ Satan's aim is to deceive,⁴⁰ and then to destroy⁴¹ all who are loyal to God and Christ, and to hinder the progress of the Gospel in any way possible.⁴² However his reign is limited and his final defeat is in sight.⁴³ In the mean-time Satan is to be resisted in the power of Christ, especially by good conduct.⁴⁴ In the Church Christ has established a Kingdom which is outside the sphere of Satan's influence and which, as it is extended, brings nearer the day of his final defeat. It is extended by missionary enterprise, by the healing of men's bodies and souls, and by a proliferation of Christian virtues, especially good conduct. It is precisely against these activities and attributes that Satan is concerned to make war.

Again we ask the question: Is his power real or only counterfeit and illusory? The battle is real enough for those engaged in the struggle against evil, and the figure of Satan serves as a useful collective concept or personification of these forces of evil. It is safe to assume also that the Christians of the first century believed in the actual existence of such a being over and above his use as a symbol. But even so his significance is considerably diminished because the Gospel of Jesus Christ has liberated men and women from the fear of such evil beings and declared that they are now under the rule of Christ.

102

(d) *Principalities and Powers*. One of Paul's main contributions to our understanding of the powers of evil is to sum them up in the phrase "principalities and powers."⁴⁵ He uses a number of designations which are almost interchangeable: ἀρχαί, ἔξουσία, δυνάμεις κυριότητες, ὀνόματα, θρόνοι,⁴⁶ indicating that they essentially refer to one and the same phenomenon. "Fundamentally we are dealing with a single phenomenon which is diffused, and which concerns us in various manifestations."⁴⁷ It is our contention that these form an alternative collective concept for the powers of evil to that of Satan. But they are not

³⁸ 1 Cor.7:5.

³⁹ 1 Thess.3:5.

⁴⁰ 2 Cor.11:14; Acts 5:3.

⁴¹ Lk.22:31ff.; 1 Cor.5:5; 10:10; 1 Pet.5:8; 1 Tim.1:20; 3:6f.

⁴² Mt.13:19f./Mk.4:15f./Lk.8:12; Mt.13:39; 2 Cor.12:7; Eph.6:11; 1 Thess.2:18.

⁴³ Rev.20:1-3, 7-10.

⁴⁴ Acts 26:18; Rom.16:20; 2 Cor.2:11; Eph.6:11; Jas.4:7; 1 Jn.2:13f.; 3:8, 10, 12; 5:18.

⁴⁵ In the N.T. peculiar to the Pauline corpus, except for 1 Pet.3:22 and Mt.24:19.

⁴⁶ These terms, when used of supernatural powers are usually in the plural, but not always so (1 Cor.15:24).

⁴⁷ H. Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (London: Nelson, 1961) p.17.

mutually exclusive; there are references to both Satan and to the principalities and powers in the Pauline corpus.⁴⁸

These terms, used of supernatural powers have their origin at the time when such Hebrew ideas as “the angels of the nations”, “the hosts of heaven”, and the “sons of God”, met the ideas of the Greek world in the inter-testamental period, and especially in the Septuagint⁴⁹ and Philo of Alexandria.⁵⁰ The meeting of these two world-views was also the place where Gnosticism had its origin, and our terms occur in some of the Gnostic systems where they designate certain classes within the heavenly hierarchy of different stages in the scale of emanations.⁵¹ Paul takes up these “technical terms” and uses them without explanation. This suggests that they were already known by his readers.

What ideas is Paul trying to convey through his use of these terms? Obviously they are meant to represent in some way or other hostile evil powers. The forces of tyranny that hold sway over men were felt to be particularly strong at that time, as they were overshadowed by a “cosmic totalitarianism”,⁵² and by a sense of fate. Thus Paul uses the vocabulary of “principalities and powers” to lay special emphasis on the pressures which are brought to bear on the individual by the various social, religious, and political collectives in which his life is involved;⁵³ with particular emphasis on the political life of man.⁵⁴ His message is that none of these powers or pressure groups can either come between the Christian and his Lord, or bring him to God.⁵⁵ In fact they are seen to be a part of creation and therefore subject to Christ,⁵⁶ who by his cross and resurrection has shown them up for what they are,⁵⁷ and revealed their power to be counterfeit. The time of their final subjugation is in sight,⁵⁸ although for the present the conflict continues through the lives of Christians.⁵⁹

⁴⁸ However in Colossians we find no reference to Satan; only to the principalities and powers, to the elements of the world, and to the worship of angels. It is likely that this is because of the particular false teaching that Paul is dealing with at Colossae.

⁴⁹ G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), p.11

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.14f.

⁵¹ W. Foerster, *T.W.N.T.*, Vol.II, pp.571 for refs.

⁵² See E. Bevan, *Hellenism and Christianity* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1921), pp.77f.

⁵³ I.e. the sum-total of the cosmic and terrestrial powers; everything that in any way is in a position of power to influence the universe.

⁵⁴ Rom.13:1ff.; 1 Cor.2:6-8.

⁵⁵ Rom.8:38f.

⁵⁶ Col.1:16.

⁵⁷ Col.2:14f.; 2:10; Eph.1:21.

⁴⁸ Eph.3:10; 1 Cor.15:24.

⁵⁹ Eph.6:12.

There are two further observations to be made about the principalities and powers in the new Testament. First as powers of the created world⁶⁰ they share its two-fold character. "On the one side they represent the carnal side of fallen creation with the powers which seduce and enslave man. On the other, they belong to the creation which is created ἐν Χριστῷ and εἰς Χριστόν (Col.1:15f)."⁶¹ The two-fold aspect is the distinctive feature of the New Testament statements, and is not found in Judaism or Hellenism. This is but another aspect of that tension, which seems to be at the heart of every New Testament doctrine, between the "now" and the "not yet". There are some references to the principalities and powers which lead us to suppose that they have actually been subjugated to Christ and deprived of their power and influence;⁶² while there are others which indicate that the conflict goes on, or at least that the final subjugation of the powers is still in the future.⁶³ The Christian is caught up in the middle of this tension,⁶⁴ and called to act on the evidence of Christ's victory, and thereby contribute to the final defeat of the powers.

104

This leads to our final observation about the principalities and powers; namely that there is a distinct difference of emphasis between Colossians and Ephesians. In Colossians Christ is declared to be superior to the powers in creation⁶⁵ and in redemption,⁶⁶ and Christians are called to live as liberated from their assumed and counterfeit power.⁶⁷ However in Ephesians the superiority of Christ over the powers and the cosmos, in virtue of his resurrection, exaltation and ascension,⁶⁸ is only partly realized (according to Eph.6:10-20 the powers are still at large to make war on Christ and his followers). This is the only place in the New Testament where this uneasy paradox is stated in explicit terms. Everywhere else⁶⁹ the principalities and powers are described as either subjugated to Christ or as having no further powers.

Just as the principalities and powers have their main point of reference in the corrupt pagan political institutions, so "the elements of the world" have their main point of reference in the religious life of mankind outside Christ. Both Judaism and pagan religion had the

⁶⁰ Rom.8:38f.; Col.1:15f.

⁶¹ W. Foerster, *T. W. N. T.*, Vol. II, p.573.

⁶² Col.1:16; 2:14f.; Eph.1:21.

⁶³ 1 Cor.15:24; Eph.6:12.

⁶⁴ Cf. Eph.1:21 and 3:10 with 6:12.

⁶⁵ Col.1:16.

⁶⁶ Col.2:14f.

⁶⁷ Col.2:20ff.

⁶⁸ Eph.1:21f.

⁶⁹ Except for 1 Cor.15:24.

capacity to enslave rather than to liberate. In Galatians⁷⁰ and Colossians⁷¹ τὰ στοιχεῖα can mean either elementary forms of religion, Jewish and Gentile, which have been superseded by Christianity; or the elemental spirits thought to be behind pre-Christian religion. Either way they are essentially evil and perverse, but because of the victory of Christ are now “weak and beggarly”⁷² and not even to be compared with the glories of Christianity. The believer has died from the sphere of influence of the elements in his baptism, and been raised with Christ to be outside their control.⁷³ Once set free from this yoke it would be ridiculous to return to bondage again by either needlessly accepting the precepts of the Jewish Law,⁷⁴ or by acknowledging the existence of anything other than illusion behind the worship of paganism, including the worship of “angels”.⁷⁵

Finally we notice that Paul never uses τὰ στοιχεῖα in conjunction with other references to the spiritual powers of evil such as the principalities and powers, Satan, or the demons. It is always used as an alternative collective concept.

II. THE DEFEAT OF THE POWERS OF EVIL

From this sketch of the different powers of evil in the New Testament it is obvious that no consistent view of these themes emerges, but together they form a patch-work showing us the different ways in which the men and women of the early Church dealt with the problem of evil. The link that holds these different elements and aspects together is the figure of Jesus Christ.

(a) *The Supremacy of Christ.* “The struggle may take on different forms, the enemies may be of different kinds, the conceptions may be more or less realistic, the aspects moral or metaphysical; . . . — anyhow, out of this complex of divergent ideas the portrait of Christ emerges: the crucified and exalted Lord, he who has conquered and by whose name we are more than conquerors.”⁷⁶

Christ is supreme in temptation. The Synoptic Gospels set the tone for the ministry of Jesus with the account of Christ’s temptation.⁷⁷ Mark especially shows Jesus as thrown into conflict with evil from the very outset. He is described as being driven by the Spirit into the wilderness,

⁷⁰ Gal. 4:3, 9.

⁷¹ Col. 2:8, 20.

⁷² Gal. 3:9.

⁷³ Col. 2:20; 3:1.

⁷⁴ Gal. 4:1-11.

⁷⁵ Col. 2:8, 18, 20.

⁷⁶ R. Leivestad, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

⁷⁷ Mk. 1:13; Mt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-13.

the traditional place of temptation and haunt of wild beasts, to face Satanic temptation. All this is a prelude to a whirlwind ministry of exorcisms, healings, and preaching — traditional messianic activity. Matthew and Luke fill out this bare outline with details of the actual temptations, which are again messianic in character. In the evangelist's interpretation Jesus is being tempted not merely as an individual, but as God's representative. He is victorious as he chooses the mission entrusted to him by God, which, although it leads through suffering and humiliation, will ultimately be vindicated by God. This victory over Satanic temptation is held up as an example to the saints in their perseverance in suffering.⁷⁸ Christians are most susceptible to temptation when their resistance is weakened by lengthy periods of sexual abstinence⁷⁹ or by persecution,⁸⁰ and they can best reflect the victory of Christ by living the morally good life, thereby giving no chance for Satan to do his subversive work.⁸¹ In any case they will not be pushed beyond breaking point in temptation.⁸²

106

Christ is supreme over evil spirits. As both healer and exorcist Jesus is presented by the evangelists as operating with power and authority from God. In particular his power over evil spirits is so engrained in the tradition that, despite many later elaborations to the stories, it must go back to the fact that Jesus himself made this indelible mark on the minds of his contemporaries.⁸³ The clue to his power is given in the Beelzebul controversy.⁸⁴ It is not by the power of Beelzebul that he exorcizes, but by the finger⁸⁵ or Spirit⁸⁶ of God. Jesus is the medium through which the might of the Kingdom of God operates to destroy the power of Satan.⁸⁷ He is able to enter the strong man's house to plunder his goods.⁸⁸ Each exorcism is a further spoliation of Satan's goods, and signifies his defeat. The parable of the empty house⁸⁹ underlines the fact that exorcism by itself is not sufficient. The negative force of the evil spirit must be

⁷⁸ Heb. 2:18; 4:15.

⁷⁹ 1 Cor. 7:5.

⁸⁰ 1 Thess. 3:5.

⁸¹ Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 2:11.

⁸² 1 Cor. 10:13; Lk. 4:11; Mk. 6:13.

⁸³ Mk. 1:27; Lk. 4:36.

⁸⁴ Mk. 3:20-7; Mt. 12:22-32; Lk. 11:14-23.

⁸⁵ Lk. 11:20.

⁸⁶ Mt. 12:28.

⁸⁷ Mk. 3:23-6; Mt. 12:26; Lk. 11:18. Jesus prefers to speak in terms of Satan as the head of a kingdom of evil which includes evil spirits, rather than in terms of Beelzebul. John thinks in terms of Satan possession (Jn. 6:70; 8:44; 13:2, 27).

⁸⁸ Mk. 3:27; Mt. 12:19; Lk. 11:21f.

⁸⁹ Mt. 12:43-5; Lk. 11:24-6.

replaced by the positive force of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is also portrayed as delegating his power over evil spirits to his followers,⁹⁰ who exercise it not in their own right, but only as his representatives. The disciples continued this work in the early Church,⁹¹ although we note that there are only a few references to exorcisms in the Acts of the Apostles,⁹² and none in the Epistles of St. Paul. Despite the difficulty of determining whether material in the Gospels is earlier or later than that in the Pauline Epistles, this seems to point to the fact that by the time Paul was writing the early Church had found a more adequate way of expressing their understanding of the powers of evil than through demons and exorcisms.

Christ is supreme over Satan. Satan fails in tempting Jesus.⁹³ His kingdom is eroded by the exorcisms.⁹⁴ His sphere of operation is "this world",⁹⁵ and when the world is redeemed it is no longer the sphere of his operation, and "the ruler of this world is cast out."⁹⁶ Again when Christians find that they have an allegiance to Christ that over-rides Satan's power, he is deprived of his prey.⁹⁷ It is only in the Gospel of St. John that there is an obvious connection between the defeat of Satan and the death of Jesus.⁹⁸ Elsewhere the supremacy is assumed rather than actually stated, although there is supportive evidence by the fact that in the Epistles of St. Paul Satan is shown as operating best when there is moral disorder in the Church.⁹⁹ Wherever those Christian virtues flourish which result from dying and rising with Christ, Satan can gain no foothold.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile he is to be resisted with all the powers of goodness that the Christian has at his disposal.¹⁰¹

107

Christ is superior to the principalities and powers in creation and redemption. There are a number of references in the earlier Pauline Epistles to the principalities and powers,¹⁰² and to the elements of the world,¹⁰³ but the nature of their defeat is not specified in these

⁹⁰ Mk.3:14f.; 6:7; Mt.10:1; Lk.9:1f.; 10:1.

⁹¹ Acts 5:16.

⁹² Acts 5:16; 16:16-18; 19:11-20; 10:38.

⁹³ Mk.1:13; Mt.4:1-11; Lk.4:1-13.

⁹⁴ Mk.3:22ff.; Mt.12:24ff.; Lk.11:19ff.; 10:17ff.

⁹⁵ Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11.

⁹⁶ Jn.12:31.

⁹⁷ 2 Cor.6:15f.; Rom.16:20; 1 Jn.5:18f.

⁹⁸ Jn.12:31-3; cf. Col.2:14f.

⁹⁹ 1 Cor.5:5; 10:10; 2 Cor.2:11; 6:16; Acts 5:3.

¹⁰⁰ Jas.4:7; 1 Jn.3:8-10.

¹⁰¹ Eph.6:11, 16; 1 Pet.5:8; Jas.4:7; 1 Jn.2:14; 3:8.

¹⁰² Rom.8:38f.; 13:1ff.; 1 Cor.2:6-8; 15:24.

¹⁰³ Gal.4:3, 9.

documents. For that we have to look to the Epistle to the Colossians. Here, as a result of the apostle's dealing with the false teaching current at Colossae we are directed to what he considers to be the two-fold victory of Christ over the powers of evil. First Christ is declared to be superior to the powers of evil because of his agency in their creation. He is infinitely superior to the host of lesser mediators in whom the Colossians were tempted to trust, not only in degree, but also in nature.¹⁰⁴ Secondly he is superior to them in his work of redemption.¹⁰⁵ By his death and resurrection he has exposed their authority as counterfeit and as self-designated.¹⁰⁶ Now there is no reason whatever for Christians to continue to live as though they were still subject to them. They have died and been raised with Christ¹⁰⁷ out of the sphere of influence of the powers, and can now live with the freedom of the Christian man.

108

Christ is supreme by his exaltation and ascension. For the author of Ephesians, unlike Colossians, it is not because of his agency in their creation or because of the redemptive aspect of the cross that Christ is superior to the powers of evil, but because of his resurrection, exaltation and ascension. He has always been superior to them, but his exaltation is offered as proof of it,¹⁰⁸ as is the granting of spiritual gifts to the Church following his exaltation.¹⁰⁹ The Church is the place where this Lordship of Christ is fully realized, where Christians are subject to no other power than that of their Lord, and from which they are to extend the influence of Christ until it becomes synonymous with the cosmos.¹¹⁰ It is through the Church that this mystery is proclaimed to the powers¹¹¹ and that spiritual warfare against all the anti-God forces in the cosmos continues.¹¹²

Christ is supreme because he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In the Apocalypse the "Lamb that was slain"¹¹³ is also the rider on the

¹⁰⁴ Col. 1:15-20.

¹⁰⁵ Col. 1:20; 2:14f. Despite the suggestion of Col. 1:16 and 1:20 we conclude that it is not envisaged that the powers of evil are reconciled or redeemed in the same sense that men and women are; rather they are brought into subjection to Christ. If Paul did envisage their redemption, "he did so only out of the corner of his eye: the redemption of mankind held the centre of his field of vision." D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964), p.31. Cf. 1 Cor. 2:6-8.

¹⁰⁶ Col. 2:15.

¹⁰⁷ Col. 2:20; 3:1ff.

¹⁰⁸ Eph. 1:20-3; 4:7-11. Cf. 1 Pet. 3:19, 22.

¹⁰⁹ Eph. 4:11f.

¹¹⁰ Eph. 1:22f.

¹¹² Eph. 6:10-17.

¹¹³ Rev. 17:14.

white horse¹¹⁴ who is the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” and who rides out conquering and to conquer. It is in this divine capacity that he smashes the Satanic hosts.

In each case the supremacy of Christ over the powers of evil is given as fact, and the Christians are called to recognize the fact and live accordingly. The signs of the victory are given in temptations, and in the messianic activity of casting out demons, healing the sick, and preaching the gospel to the poor. Some of the New Testament writers connect this victory with Christ’s death on the cross, others with his exaltation, or his pre-existence and agency in creation. Despite the diversity of approach, of language, and of theology, in every case it is Jesus Christ, Son of Man and God, who has the amazing effect of being able to set men and women free from the powers of evil that threatened them.

(b) *The New Community.* We find that the victory of Christ over evil is not realized in individual Christians in isolation, but only in the community of believers. The early Christians and disciples became conscious of an identification with Jesus and his work that was so close that they could conceive of him carrying on his work through their own hands. “Christians from the beginning found themselves driven to an estimate of Jesus in more than merely individual terms.”¹¹⁵ In their work of exorcisms the Twelve¹¹⁶ and then the Seventy¹¹⁷ actually extended the ministry of Jesus, and brought nearer the final fall of Satan.¹¹⁸ St. Paul makes use of a number of metaphors to give expression to this relationship. In particular he refers to Christians as “the Body of Christ,”¹¹⁹ which in Colossians¹²⁰ and Ephesians¹²¹ is identified with the church over which Christ is “the Head”. He uses the formula ἐν Χριστῷ¹²² and the metaphor of “dying and rising with Christ”¹²³ to describe the incorporation of believers into this relationship of solidarity with Christ and the new community of the Church. The decisive moment is that of Baptism, when the new loyalty to Christ over-

¹¹⁴ Rev. 19:11-16.

¹¹⁵ C. F. D. Moule, *The Phenomenon of the New Testament* (London: S.C.M., 1967), p.21.

¹¹⁶ Mk. 6:6ff.; Lk. 9:1ff.; Mt. 10:1ff.

¹¹⁷ Lk. 10:1ff.

¹¹⁸ Lk. 10:18.

¹¹⁹ Rom. 7:4; 1 Cor. 6:15; 10:17; 12:27.

¹²⁰ Col. 1:18, 24.

¹²¹ Eph. 1:22f.; 4:12, 16; 5:25.

¹²² Rom. 8:1; 16:7; 1 Cor. 15:22; Phil. 3:8f.

¹²³ Rom. 6:1-11; 7:4f.; 8:8-11; 2 Cor. 4:11; 5:14f.; Gal. 2:19f.; Col. 2:11-12; 3:1-5.

rides all other allegiances.¹²⁴ G. B. Caird¹²⁵ draws attention to a distinction between a solidarity of nature and a solidarity of grace. The former is natural and involuntary and is represented by Adam;¹²⁶ the latter is voluntary and is represented by Christ.¹²⁷ All this seems to be pointing to a “new organic unity over which evil has no power.”¹²⁸ Because of this identification with Christ in baptism, the Christian passes from the sphere where the principalities and powers still hold sway into the community of the Church, the Kingdom of Christ,¹²⁹ where they have no jurisdiction.¹³⁰ This is why St. Paul is so concerned to preserve in the Church a society which no longer fosters the parasitic growth of the powers of evil, and which is pure and free from corruption.¹³¹ As always there is the tension between the “now” and the “not yet”, but the possibility of such a new community immune from the influence of the powers of evil is there, if only the implications of baptism and of being a Christian could be taken seriously. The message is simply “Become what you are”. This leads on to the new way of life. (c) *The New Way of Life*. Almost every reference to the powers of evil in the New Testament has ethical implications. Very often the main concern of the contexts where these references are found is with the good life to be lived by Christians, and with the reputation of the Church in the eye of outsiders.

110

First there is the example of Jesus. He was “tempted as we are, yet without sinning.”¹³² He overcame the tempter to accept God’s will for him, and “became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.”¹³³ This obedience is to be reflected in the lives of his followers.¹³⁴ The example of our Lord’s ministry of healing the sick, casting out devils, and preaching the Gospel to the poor is one of care for the whole man: body, mind and spirit.

The unique insight we are given into the everyday problems of young churches in St. Paul’s Epistles shows that there was a constant temptation to fall back into some of the old pagan ways that they were supposed to have left behind, or to accept additional religious obligations

¹²⁴ Rom.6:3f.; Col.2:12.

¹²⁵ *Op. cit.*, pp. 89f.

¹²⁶ Rom.5:14; 1 Cor.15:45ff.

¹²⁷ Rom.5:15ff; 1 Cor.15:45ff.

¹²⁸ G. B. Caird, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

¹²⁹ Col.1:13; cf. Eph.5:5.

¹³⁰ Col.2:20; 3:1.

¹³¹ 1 Cor.5:5; 6:7; 10:20; 2 Cor.2:11.

¹³² Heb.4:15; cf. Heb.2:18; Mk.1:13; Mt.4:1-10; Lk.4:1-11.

¹³³ Phil.2:8; also Rom.5:19; Heb.12:2.

¹³⁴ Mt.11:29; Mk.8:34; Jn.13:15, 34; 1 Pet.2:21-3; 1 Jn.3:2f.

that were superfluous to the Christian faith as they had received it from the apostles. These temptations are connected, according to St. Paul, with the subtle operations of the powers of evil in their various forms. His concern is not so much to expound the significance of the principalities and powers, but to urge his people to live a life worthy of Christ, and to preserve a good reputation for the Church in the eyes of unbelievers.¹³⁵

The pattern of the new way of life, especially as far as personal relationships are concerned, is spelled out in Colossians¹³⁶ and Ephesians.¹³⁷ The new community is the place where the Christian virtues of love, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience flourish, and where there is no place for immorality, impurity, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk. There is to be a new deal for women, children, and slaves in the fellowship of the church and in the Christian household. Those in positions of authority and power are to recognize their responsibilities. The fellowship is to become the place where reconciliation is to take place, and where the work of Christ is realized and made fact in human lives. This new community with its new way of life provides a formidable and impregnable defence against the powers of evil. The principalities and powers are neutralized and made obsolete when no opportunity is given to them to tempt or destroy. Thus the new way of life is the ultimate weapon in spiritual warfare.

111

Thus the Christian has the assurance throughout every difficulty and discouragement that there is no form of evil to which there is no answer. Christ has conquered and has heralded the defeat of them all.

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¹³⁵ 1 Cor.5:5; 6:7; 7:5; 10:20; 11:10; 2 Cor.2:11; 6:14f.; 1 Thess.3:5.

¹³⁶ Col.3:12-4:6.

¹³⁷ Eph.4-6.