

## DIABOLICAL DUALISM: THE DEVIL AND THE DIVINE?

By Scott Christensen

He trusted to have equalled the most High  
If he opposed; and with ambitious aim  
Against the Throne and Monarchy of God  
Rais'd impious war in Heav'n

Milton - *Paradise Lost*

Evil is an ever present reality in the world we see and more so in the invisible world we never see. There is a cosmic battle raging unnoticed between the forces of good and evil. Who are those forces? Christian theism contends that Satan, that perennial figure of wickedness, wars against the God of Heaven. This warfare presents the thorny problem of theodicy; the idea of reconciling an apparently good and powerful God coexisting with Satanic evil in the universe. How can a benevolent God allow such evil to exist? Why doesn't a powerful God simply destroy His arch enemy the Devil?

The question becomes the concern as to whether God is capable of defeating the Devil and thus ending his reign of diabolical terror. Ever since Zarathushtra spoke in the 6th century BC, men have held that there must exist a grand dualism, a cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. In the scheme of ancient Zoroastrianism, evil, as personified in the devilish Angra Mainyu, is an independent reality that exists apart from god, the good Ahura Mazda. Endlessly do the opposite powers wrestle. This dualistic notion was adopted by the early Christian heresy of Manichaeism which also incorporated Hellenistic dualism, pitting matter and spirit against each other. Subsequent history has not escaped this ideology. The Cathars sought to protect God's goodness by limiting His power. God was seen as good, but unable to overcome evil. Some even taught that Christ and Lucifer were brothers. The troubled poet William Blake portrayed Christ and Satan as co-equal opposites, locked as it were in a perpetual dance, each reflecting equal but opposite motions. Barth's theory of nothingness out of which sprung evil, unwittingly posited the Devil, as an uncreated being, against God. He sought to rectify this by subordinating the 'nothingness' of Satan to the 'reality' of God. Process theologians hold to a bipolar god, one who unfortunately suffers the debilitating effects of an evil dimension, always in need of reform.

Dualism arises naturally out of the perplexing polarities of the multifaceted condition of life. Modern pluralism, having cast aside all its anchors, has abandoned any absolute verities. In order to avoid utter despair, modern man has maintained a reductionistic dualism; one without God or Satan, but retaining the struggle between an amorphous notion of good and evil. In the end, as in Zoroastrianism, good wins the final battle, but to what purpose? Is there really any hope that some ill-defined good will overcome evil with no compelling basis for doing so?

Dualism is diabolical, precisely because it ends in hopelessness. Evil is indeed real and powerful, but it is not an independent essence; a force of consummate substance that has invaded the world to counteract good. God did not and could not create evil. All that He created was good, including Lucifer himself. Evil is simply privation. It is not the mere absence of good. That would erroneously suggest that evil and the Devil himself is absolute. Evil is rather, an "ontological parasite" as one theologian quipped. Yet, creation

by nature is finite and therefore susceptible to corruption. Satan introduced sin and wickedness into the cosmos and mankind quickly followed suit. However, is this a threat to God? Does the introduction of the Satanic element into the universe secure the inferiority of God's creative purpose?

Satan is not an uncreated being. Neither is he equal to God. Indeed Satan has real power, but he feigns true greatness. The fact is, Satan is a first rate liar; the father of lies. He is a cunning murderer and despises all truth. The whole world lies under the spell of his deceptive wickedness. He prowls about freely devouring unsuspecting souls while waging war against the saints of God. However, God never struggles against Satan. The Devil is only an angelic creation whose nemesis is really the archangel Michael, who himself proves stronger than that Dragon of the Apocalypse.

The Prince of Darkness was a vanquished foe from the beginning. The seed of his doom was planted soon after his malignant sin tainted creation. From the seed of Eve, eventually sprung a second Adam. The second Adam was perfect in obedience to the truth; and the power of the truth, personified in His being, was the source of the Devil's demise. It was through the Christ, the incarnation of God, that victory over sin, death and the works of the evil one was accomplished. Jesus' death and resurrection "rendered powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the Devil." In fact, it is the providential purpose of God to turn all the works of the crafty serpent into extraordinary good. Milton understood God's plan. "How all his malice serv'd but to bring forth infinite goodness, grace, and mercy shown." It is yet true that men were dreadfully sinful when Christ died for them. God's benevolent good is like a large diamond; set against a velvet black backdrop, it shines more brilliantly than any lesser contrasting frame could ever demonstrate.

Jesus was clear about the destiny of the Devil, "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out." The picture of Satan's initial fall from Heaven is imaginatively painted by Dante. He is conveyed as a pathetic figure, full of emptiness and contempt, hurled to the earth and bearing horribly under the unmovable mass of darkness and sin crushing his form. The picture of Satan's final defeat is infinitely worse. Now he works frantically under borrowed time knowing it is short, but judgment is lurking perilously close in the future. The Prince of Peace shall return with an iron rod thoroughly prepared for destruction. That final day will be glorious for the saint, but dreadful for Satan and his malicious minions. He will be thrown into the lake of fire, whose flames burn bright and white hot for an eternity. It is in this terrible and dreadful dwelling that he will be tormented day and night without ceasing.