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DEMONOLOGY ACCORDING TO THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF THE KINGDOM OF
GOD
THREE IMPORTANT ASPECTS AND A LUTHERAN RESPONSE

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
George Carlos Felten
May, 2020

Approved by:	Rev. Dr. Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.	Thesis Advisor
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To Renata

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PREFACE

My parents used to watch a soap opera about Jesus and His life on a Brazilian TV channel called *TV Record*. I was not living with them anymore, but when I was visiting and watching the soap opera with them an interesting character always called my attention. Many times, a white woman with extremely clear eyes, a cold facial expression, wearing a hooded dark tunic made of dark sheep wool would appear in the background of a scene and influence negatively the other characters. It was the devil, an ever present and influential figure in the television series.

However, when I looked to my own church, the place I expected would touch on this subject, for answers to questions, I heard almost nothing about Satan, demons, demon possession or oppression at all. During my eight years of seminary, the only engagement with demonology I had was during our first systematic theology class, when I decided to write a final paper on the topic. In pastoral theology classes, nothing was said on how to deal with an oppressed or possessed person. In liturgy classes, nothing was mentioned on how to perform an exorcism, or a house blessing. In my home congregation, the devil was rarely mentioned. The only place my parents and I were exposed to what the devil is doing and could do was on *TV record*, a public access television channel owned by Edir Macedo, the founder and leader of *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, or UIRD).

Lutherans have much to offer to this conversation concerning demonology, and my thesis is an attempt to bring those contributions to the table. Since the testimony of Igreja Universal on this topic is one of the most prevalent ones in the Brazilian religious scene today, it is important to understand the differences between what the IURD teaches and what Lutherans believe. This thesis will analyze three important aspects of IURD's demonology, namely, its *dualism*, the place of *the devil's testimony* and *the humiliation of the devil by the pastor* in their services of

libertação (liberation from demonic oppression or possession). We will then provide a Lutheran response to these same aspects of IURD demonology.

In chapter one, we will introduce the reader to *Igreja Universal*, and its relevance in the Brazilian Pentecostal religious scene. We will account for the main available publications on IURD's demonology, but also acknowledge the problem of the apparent absence of formal IURD theological approaches on the topic. In the second chapter, we will place IURD in its historical and theological background, as well as provide an introduction to IURD's theology and its four pillars: sacrifice, exorcism, healing, and prosperity. We will briefly look at the origins and development of global Pentecostalism, especially as it is embodied in Brazil's version of the three waves of Pentecostalism.

The third chapter will deal with the first aspect of IURD's demonology, namely, its *dualism*. The main question is whether IURD sees the demons as equal (or similar) opponents to God, or not. Then we will hear what Lutherans have to say about the status of demons in relation to God through the lens of the difference between antagonism and dualism. The fourth chapter deals with a second unique characteristic of IURD, namely, the place of the *devil's testimony* given during the moment that precedes an exorcism, i.e., the pastor's interviewing of the demon. We will try to understand how much of this testimony is seen as trustworthy by IURD leaders and congregations. We will then present the Lutheran idea of the devil as the best teacher of theology, and how this insight gives us a different picture from what IURD believes. The final chapter will ask the question of whether the Christian's role in this warfare with the evil one is to play offense or defense. In other words, should a Christian go after the demons to defeat them and spread the kingdom of God, or stand firm on God's side (in God's Word) during spiritual attacks? IURD and Lutherans take different sides on this matter.

The thesis conclusion will sum up all the main arguments and bring closure to the flood of information presented in the previous pages. It will also warn *Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil* (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil, or IELB) about the importance of a Lutheran response to the demonology of IURD, as well as provide encouragement to IELB's pastors and members to deal with the subject of demonology in their discussions and teachings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not be possible without the help and love of many people. First of all, I would like to thank my sweet wife Renata for her support and understanding in my moments of absence as a graduate student. Her joy never let me down! I also thank my parents, Jorge and Iolanda, as well as my sister, Jaqueline, and my nephew, Pietro. They have been supporting me all these years in all possible ways! To my thesis adviser, Dr. Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., who has guided me through the deserts and oases involved in bringing this academic production to completion and helped me with his thorough revisions of this work: ¡*Gracias!* I also thank my thesis readers, Dr. Robert Kolb and Dr. Timothy Dost, for taking the time to help me refine the final product. All these scholars' thoughtful insights are very much appreciated! My thanks to Dr. Beth Hoeltke, Director of the Graduate School at Concordia Seminary, for her guidance and support. Finally, to the faculty at Concordia Seminary, who provided me with the opportunity of pursuing the dream of studying in person with scholars who I merely used to read and admire from afar. Thank you!

ABBREVIATIONS

IBGE	Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics).
IELB	Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil).
IURD	Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God).
<i>LW</i>	<i>Luther's Works</i> , American ed. 55 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986.
WA	Luther, Martin. <i>Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> . 65 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993.
WA-BR	Weimar edition of Luther's letters, <i>Briefe</i> .
WA-T	Weimar edition of Luther's table talks, <i>Tischreden</i> .

ABSTRACT

Felten, George, C. “Demonology According to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God: Three Important Aspects and a Lutheran Response.” MA Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 2020. 145pp.

Demonology should not be the center of a church’s theological center or *modus operandi*, but it should not be denied or avoided either. While the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD), a prominent neo-Pentecostal Brazilian church, makes too much of demonology, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB) seems to make too little of it. Yet this need not be the case. This thesis will analyze three aspects of IURD’s demonology, namely, its *dualism*, the place of *the devil’s testimony* and *the devil’s humiliation by the pastor* in their services of *libertação* (liberation from demonic oppression and possession), and then provide a Lutheran answer to each one of these characteristics in order to give IELB’s pastors and members a solid basis to contribute to conversations on demonology. Understanding the demonology of the influential IURD will help Lutherans in Brazil engage their teaching more confidently instead of avoiding it altogether. This investigation is of a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory nature. As our research procedure, we used bibliographical data. We also used YouTube videos of IURD services and rites of exorcism due to the scarcity on academic productions from IURD. The research’s first conclusion is that, pragmatically speaking, IURD does have a *dualistic* view of reality, in which the devil is almost more powerful than God, although theoretically they will never say that. Lutherans, on the other hand, understand that God is the Creator and sovereign Lord over all creation, including the angels. The research also concludes that the *devil’s testimony* given during the interviews that precede an exorcism in IURD’s services is considered trustworthy and desirable by its leaders and pastors, even to the point of becoming a source of true doctrine. Lutherans, on the other hand, observe that the demons never want to cooperate with humans, even though the sovereign God uses them as teachers of theology through *tentatio* (temptation, testing). Even when God does so, the devil is never to be trusted for his testimony; instead, the Christian under attack continues to put his trust in God’s trustworthy promises. The research’s third conclusion is that for IURD the role of the church consists in attacking the evil forces (going on the offensive), and the means used for this attack is challenging and making fun of the demons before effectively expelling them from the person’s body. Lutherans, on the other hand, understand that the fight against the devil is finally God’s, although He calls us to stand firm in Christ’s name in the midst of the devil’s attacks.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

C. S. Lewis' famous statement in the introduction of *The Screwtape Letters* warns: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them."¹ This excessive interest erroneously ascribes to the demons more power than they have since in Christ they have been defeated. Therefore, according to this rationale, demonology should not be the main topic of discussion in a church, but at the same time it should not be totally absent.

Brazil can be considered the world capital of Pentecostalism.² According to the last census provided by IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), almost 13.3% of Brazilians declared to be affiliated with a Pentecostal church. Of these, 7.3% attend the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (hereafter IURD or the Universal Church). In total, 1,873,243 Brazilians identified themselves as frequenters of IURD in 2010.³ But IURD's influence goes further than the numbers suggest. This church reaches Christians of all denominations through their public-access television channel in Brazil, *TV Record*, 92 radio stations in *Rede Aleluia*,⁴ temples in all 26 Brazilian states and the federal district, and churches in more than 100 countries.⁵

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), ix.

² Paul Freston, "The Future of Pentecostalism in Brazil: The Limits to Growth," in *Global Pentecostalism in the 21st Century*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 63.

³ Censo Demográfico 2010, "Características Gerais da População, Religião e Pessoas com Deficiência," IBGE, accessed November 2, 2019, <https://www.ibge.gov.br/estatisticas/sociais/populacao/9662-censo-demografico-2010.html?edicao=9749&t=resultados>.

⁴ "Sobre a Rede Aleluia," Rede aleluia: família força e fé, accessed November 1, 2019, <http://redealeluia.com.br/sobre-a-rede-3/>.

⁵ Including more than 300 temples in 33 states of the United States. "Welcome to the Universal Church in the United States!" YouTube video, 6:32, "Showdown of Faith", published in March 26, 2019, accessed in November 1, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elk2GQ54md4>.

But what is so different about this church? IURD was founded by the self-proclaimed “Bishop” Edir Macedo in 1977, and has been led by him since then, adopting a more episcopal structure.⁶ IURD’s emphasis on the power of the devil and his demons, and on their possession of human beings, has made this church to be known popularly as “the church that speaks more about the devil than about God.”⁷

The Lutheran tradition has much to offer in the analysis of the field of demonology, but Lutherans in Brazil have not attempted to understand and effectively respond to theologies like that of the IURD for the sake of offering a clear witness. This ends up leaving the members of *Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil* (hereafter IELB) dangerously exposed to the neo-Pentecostal⁸ demonology and all that comes with it—e.g., prosperity gospel and theology of glory.⁹ Two main reactions can ensue from the inability to understand and engage the danger of this exposure: *de facto* denial of the devil’s activity because of the apparent quackery in IURD’s exorcisms; or despair before the apparent power of the devil, which in IURD seems to be bigger than God’s.¹⁰

⁶ The hierarchy goes “from Macedo, to bishops, to pastors, to *obreiros* [workers].” Justin Michael Doran, “Demon-Haunted Worlds: Enchantment, Disenchantment, and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God” (Master’s thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2013), 28.

⁷ This is a traditional phrase heard around Brazil referring to the huge emphasis that IURD gives to what it calls “the ministry of liberation,” i.e., the work of exorcism. This popular phrase may not be totally true, but it is understandable if one compares this church with other mainline churches.

⁸ In this thesis, the term neo-Pentecostalism refers to a separate segment of churches *outside* traditional mainline churches. Neo-Pentecostalism here does not refer to charismatic influence *inside* mainline lines like the Renewal movement in Roman Catholicism, for instance, but rather to a different set of churches deriving from other Pentecostal traditions. Examples of these churches in Brazil would be *Igreja Internacional da Graça de Deus* (International Church of God’s Grace), *Igreja Mundial do Poder de Deus* (World Church of God’s Power), and IURD.

⁹ The lack of literature (academic articles, books or official documents) concerning demonology or neo-Pentecostalism and the absence of courses dealing with these subjects at the IELB Seminary in Brazil are evidence of the possible practical failure of this church to give witness about what it formally believes concerning the existence and the power of the devil.

¹⁰ Etiane Caloy Bovkalovski de Souza, “A Imagem do Diabo nos Livros de Edir Macedo da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus” (Master’s thesis, Universidade Federal do Paraná, 2000), 151.

Lutheran theology can contribute to the discussion raised by the demonology of IURD, but in order to do that it is first necessary to understand what IURD is saying, writing, and teaching on these matters.

The Thesis

My thesis will expose three characteristics of the demonology of IURD or the Universal Church and provide a Lutheran response to each. The three characteristics are: 1. Dualism. For this characteristic I will address the question of whether the devil is an equal opponent to God; 2. The devil as witness. For this characteristic I will address the question of whether the devil is a trustworthy witness; and 3. The challenge to or humiliation of the devil. For this characteristic I will address the question of whether the task of the church is to challenge/humiliate the devil. Lutherans, differently from IURD, do not see the devil as an equal opponent to God but posit God's omnipotence even over the devil and his demons. Lutherans do not see the devil's testimony as trustworthy, but trust God's Word alone as they deal with the devil's attacks. Finally, Lutherans note that God humiliates the devil by making him the best teacher of theology, by making the evil one work for His own purposes.

The Current Status of the Question

The Universal Church's aversion to a systematic theology makes access to primary sources, such as academic theology books from the denomination, limited.¹¹ Therefore, the researcher needs to follow the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*,¹² taking IURD's public

¹¹ In his book *A libertação da Teologia* (The Liberation of Theology), Macedo even tries to devalue the study of systematic theology. He writes: "All forms and all branches of theology are futile. They are but a tangle of ideas that say nothing to the uneducated; they confuse the simple and deceive the wise. They add nothing to the faith." Edir Macedo, *A Libertação da Teologia* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Gráfica Universal, 1993), 17–18 (translation mine).

¹² That is, "the law of what is to be prayed is the law of what is to be believed." In other words, the doctrines

worship services into account as part of his investigation. According to Oneide Bobsin, IURD has a strong oral tradition, so that when it comes to a systematic organization of its teachings their ability to produce academic theological books is scarce.¹³ This is one of the reasons that may discourage theologians to analyze this church's doctrines. Without an established and written confession, its teachings and practices may vary from congregation to congregation.¹⁴

Another problem to consider is the apparent lack of interest and even a certain disdain for this topic by Lutherans, since the doctrine of angels, and consequently of demons, is not a *primary doctrine*.¹⁵ Vilson Scholz, a Brazilian Lutheran Theologian, in an article written in 1979, believes that this lack of interest is not new, but begins after the end of Middle Ages. As the thought system was switching from the *Age of Faith* toward the *Age of Reason* of the Enlightenment, "the scientific spirit, the materialism, and the lack of existential experience with the world of angels have devalued such a study."¹⁶ There is plenty of academic production about the demonology of IURD from an anthropological, sociological, or phenomenological point of view. However, articles or books that approach this topic from a theological perspective are

or the beliefs are reflected in the public worship through the liturgy, themes, hymns, prayers, etc.

¹³ Oneide Bobsin, "Teologia da Prosperidade ou Estratégia de Sobrevivência: Estudo Exploratório," *Estudos Teológicos* 35 (1995): 21.

¹⁴ The reader may argue that there is a confession on their webpage's tab "About Us." But what I mean by "written confession" is something like *The Book of Concord* for Lutherans, or *The Heidelberg Catechism* for Calvinists. Now, IURD has a series of three booklets (around 100 pages each) written by Bishop Edir Macedo in the late 1990s and early 2000s, under the title *As Doutrinas da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (The Doctrines of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God). These three books try to organize their teaching in a systematic way (especially the two first books—the third gives the impression that another person is writing, due to the change of tone: it is explicitly less formal). But in general there is no ongoing academic production, although there are many devotionals and "practical books" put out that reflect their *modus operandi*. In this sense, the researcher needs to read more "between the lines" than usual in order to identify their pattern of doctrine. Most theologians do not take time to do that, but that is exactly what I will do in this thesis.

¹⁵ However, Francis Pieper argues that, although this doctrine is not central to the Christian faith, "when a man has become a Christian and read the Bible, he will find in it, from Genesis to Revelation, the doctrine of the angels, side by side with the central article of Christ, the Savior of sinners." Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 498.

¹⁶ Vilson Scholz, "Os Anjos e seu Ministério," *Revista Igreja Luterana* 39, no.2 (1979): 14 (translation mine).

rare.¹⁷ That is the gap this thesis seeks to fill.

The Universal Church can be classified as a church belonging to the “third wave” of Pentecostalism, a movement notorious for its emphasis on the action of the devil. This theme is so often brought up in IURD’s services that one could even say, with Bobsin, that “the fight against the ‘demons’ . . . functions for IURD as justification by grace through faith functions for the Lutheran Evangelical Church.”¹⁸ For IURD, the demons are behind the problems in one’s life.¹⁹ The logic behind that belief is quite simple: If God creates a healthy human being, then we cannot think of Him as performing diseases, failures, or poverty.²⁰ That would be a contradiction. God is accessible and ready to help through the church, but He will not do it unless the believer cooperates, committing himself to Him especially with his tithing.²¹ Exorcism, or *liberation*,²² is

¹⁷ It is difficult to find an academic work on demonology in publications of the IELB or IECLB (Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil – Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil). A quick research on “Revista Igreja Luterana,” a journal edited and published by Editora Concórdia from IELB, shows that most of the already scarce articles on the devil (or even on Pentecostalism) are reproductions or translations from other denominations’ publications. Maybe a reason for this scarcity, as Scholz points out, lies in the fact that the Bible does not pay too much attention to the angels (especially evil ones), and so “the [biblical] study of bad angels necessarily will need to be brief.” Scholz, “Os Anjos,” 14 (translation mine).

¹⁸ Bobsin, “Teologia da Prosperidade,” 32 (translation mine).

¹⁹ Although Edir Macedo mentions that “not every sick person is demon possessed, but every demon possessed person is sick,” it is hard to make this distinction in practice. The discourse in practice makes one believe that the demons are, indeed, behind every single problem of a person, which, in a sense, takes away responsibility from the person for his problems. Edir Macedo, *Orixás, Caboblos e Guias: Deuses ou Demônios?* (Rio de Janeiro: Universal Produções, 1993), 97 (translation mine).

²⁰ Macedo lists some other symptoms that can indicate a possession: Physical and mental illness, constant headache or other localized body aches (not diagnosed by medicine), insomnia, fear and phobia, desire for suicide, addictions, nervousness, depression, vision of shadows, and hearing of unexplained noises. Edir Macedo, *Doutrinas da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*, Vol. 2 (Rio de Janeiro: Universal, 1999), 63–64.

²¹ “When we pay our tithing to God, He is under the obligation (because He has promised that) to keep His Word, reprehending devouring spirits that disgrace the life of man by working in sickness, accidents, addictions, social degradation and all parts of human activity that cause man to suffer eternally.” Edir Macedo, *Vida em abundância* (Rio de Janeiro: Universal Produções, 1992), 79 (translation mine).

²² They prefer the Portuguese term *libertação*. Justin M. Doran suggests that this preference is due to their aversion to Catholicism. He also claims they are trying to link the language of *liberation theology* to deliverance from demonic action. Doran, “Demon-Haunted Worlds,” 31.

a critical component of IURD's public service, and it can be seen on a regular basis.²³ It is in fact the center of IURD's liturgy,²⁴ but although its apex is the expulsion of the evil spirit, a prior moment known as the interview is extremely important too, being even referred to frequently by the pastor during the rest of the service.²⁵ Ronaldo de Almeida highlights three main questions asked by the pastor to the possessed person: What is your name? What are you doing to this person? How did you enter in this person's life?²⁶ The conversation can be fast or even take more than fifteen minutes. It depends on how the conversation goes according to the pastor's evaluation. Liberation (hereafter *Libertação*) is the entry way to the church.²⁷ Therefore, in order to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit and, consequently, to receive unlimited prosperity from God, the person first needs to be set free from the demons.²⁸ The rite of *libertação* is, at the same time, a preparation for this baptism and, through the interview or *testimony*, a source used by the pastor to preach and teach.

In IURD, most of the teachings about the devil are taken out of experiences and are not necessarily based on Scripture. For example, the argument used by Macedo to prove that Christians may be possessed is based on the fact that he himself saw many members of other

²³ In general, IURD has services every day, but they set aside Fridays to emphasize liberation. Therefore, in every service there may be liberation, depending on the manifestation of the spirit in public, but Fridays are often called *Friday of liberation*.

²⁴ Campos, *Teatro Templo e Mercado*, 349.

²⁵ Cf. "Reunião com o Bispo Macedo direto dos EUA," YouTube vídeo, 1:08:54, "Bispo Edir Macedo," May 31, 2017, accessed November 4, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0m_KewqCE-7U&t=2103s.

²⁶ Ronaldo de Almeida, *A Igreja Universal e seus Demônios: Um Estudo Etnográfico* (São Paulo: Editora Terceiro Nome, 2009), 43.

²⁷ "Comissão Permanente de Doutrina da Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil," in: *Uma Avaliação das Principais Crenças e Práticas da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (São Paulo: Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil, 2007), 15–16.

²⁸ In their own words: "The steps a candidate for the baptism with the Spirit must take are these, in short: (1) liberation from demons present in his/her body; (...)." Edir Macedo, *Nos passos de Jesus* (Rio de Janeiro: Universal, 2004), 143 (translation mine).

churches “falling down possessed”²⁹ in front of him during liberations (exorcisms).³⁰ Also, the teaching that the demons stay in a family for generations is based on the demons’ own witness or testimonies during the services.³¹ According to Campos, the pastor wields power over the demons as a sign of God’s power in him.³² He makes the demon kneel with his hands behind his back as if he were handcuffed. He challenges the demon to do this or that. He places the demon in a corner as a punishment for his bad behavior. People yell and laugh at the devil. All this is used as “a powerful learning tool for everyone present. They saw the devil defeated, and they saw the authority of the man of God.”³³ Freston contrasts the Universal Church’s practice with classic Pentecostalism. While in traditional Pentecostalism “the demons are rather kept at a distance; in IURD, they are sought out and confronted.”³⁴ There is space for challenging, laughing at and mocking the devil, and the members participate in these activities.³⁵ They pray in a loud voice, shouting “get out!”, or, “burn him, Jesus!” and stomp the ground, metaphorically smashing the devil’s head. Finally, the pastor expels the demon through the *strong prayer of libertação*, and the service proceeds with songs and preaching. The church’s role for IURD is to

²⁹ This is an expression used by them. It demonstrates the way in which the demons manifest in their services. As soon as they are brought up on the stage, the demons kneel and put their hands back. It is from this kneeling that the expression “to fall down possessed” comes.

³⁰ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1315–22.

³¹ Cf. “Demônio descreve a aparência dele!!!!”, YouTube vídeo, 14:25, “Adilson Silva Oficial”, published in November 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXmyz41w5x4&t=6s>.

³² Leonídio Silveira Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado: Organização e Marketing de um Empreendimento Neopentecostal* (São Paulo: Editora Vozes, 1997), 345–46.

³³ David Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers: Twelve Signs of Possession or Oppression*, (Eugene: ACW Press, 2003), 132.

³⁴ Paul Freston, “Pentecostalism in Brazil: A Brief History,” *Religion* 25 (1995): 130.

³⁵ Helmut Willy Knoblauch, a Brazilian Lutheran pastor, argues that the main reason why people seek churches like IURD is the emotional appeal. According to his analysis, when people started moving from a rural to an urban environment, they felt abandoned by the church. They did not have a familiar pastor anymore. Therefore, this climate of active participation that is present in churches like IURD makes the person feel more an “insider”. They are not mere spectators, but participants. Helmut W. Knoblauch, “Apelo Emocional no Pentecostalismo e na Umbanda,” *Revista Igreja Luterana* 44, no. 3 (1984), 4.

attack the devil and defeat him in order to build God’s kingdom in the world and prosper both physically and financially. Their strategy is to anticipate his actions, to go after him and not wait.³⁶

What is missing from all the aforementioned analysis of various aspects of the practice of IURD, is a deeper exploration of the demonology of IURD from a theological perspective that does not simply describe and evade dealing with the existence of the devil, or dismiss the exorcisms as rehearsed theater or induction. A more serious theological approach assumes these manifestations must be seen at least as a spiritual reality, and seeks to understand what kind of beliefs are behind or embodied in practices dealing with them. In other words, a theological perspective asks how the Universal Church organizes its teachings based on their theological interpretation of their experiences of the world—one in which the conflict between God and the devil hold a central place. This kind of analysis will provide the possibility of an informed response to the main characteristics of IURD’s demonology from a Lutheran perspective.

The Thesis in the Context of Current Scholarship

This thesis will contribute to the field of demonology in two main ways. First, it will provide a deeper analysis of the demonology in IURD by unfolding three of its main characteristics, namely, *dualism*, *the devil’s testimony*, and *the exorciser’s humiliation of the devil*. Second, this thesis will provide a Lutheran response to these three characteristics in order to strengthen the Lutheran witness in the face of this influential church’s teachings and encourage IELB pastors and members to address this topic in their communities.

The Pentecostal movement in Brazil can be classified according to three main phases, or

³⁶ Ari Pedro Oro, “A Demonologia da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus,” *Debates do NER* 6, no. 7 (2005): 140.

waves.³⁷ All of them seems to have at least three teachings in common: the baptism with the Holy Spirit (different from the baptism with water), spiritual gifts as an external sign of the baptism with the Holy Spirit (specially the gift of tongues), and the second coming of Christ.³⁸ The first wave is established in Brazil through American missionaries influenced by the preaching of William H. Durham in the beginning of twentieth century.³⁹ One of the main characteristics of this first wave, besides its emphasis on the baptism with the Holy Spirit, is its “timidity” concerning participation in public and political life.⁴⁰ The *second wave* occurs in the 1950s and 60s, and is not the fruit of missionaries from outside the country anymore,⁴¹ but from a “nationalization of Brazilian Pentecostalism.”⁴² Brazilian Pentecostalism is not a completely new movement without outside references. Names like William Branham, Oral Roberts, John Wimber, and T. L. Osborne, for example—all healing evangelists of the *American third wave of Pentecostalism*—were still influences on Brazilian Pentecostals who started this second (and even the third) wave in Brazil.⁴³ The second wave is known for its emphasis on miraculous cures, big evangelistic campaigns or tent meetings, and their extensive use of mass media

³⁷ In Brazil, Freston uses this metaphor of waves to show three different emphases in Pentecostal churches throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Some may argue that the third wave (and in the case of Brazil, specifically, IURD) actually cannot be considered a Pentecostal movement at all, but a “post-Pentecostal” one, a totally different religion. See Paulo Siepierski, “Pós-Pentecostalismo e Política no Brasil,” *Estudos Teológicos* 37, no.1 (1997): 51. For a more complete problematization of this metaphor of *waves*, see Gerson L. Linden, “Eschatological Pneumatology as a Theological Framework for Evaluating the Pneumatology of the International Church of God’s Grace in Brazil,” (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 2017), 43–54.

³⁸ Bobsin, “Teologia da Prosperidade,” 22.

³⁹ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 70–71.

⁴⁰ Linden, “Eschatological Pneumatology,” 45–46.

⁴¹ With the notable exception of *The Foursquare Gospel Church* (Igreja do Evangelho Quadrangular).

⁴² Linden, “Eschatological Pneumatology,” 46.

⁴³ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 156.

communication like television and radio.⁴⁴

The *third wave* (or *neo-Pentecostalism*) arises around the 1970s. It is more controversial and harder to define due to its theological instability. A good example of this instability can be found in Robert McAlister's⁴⁵ own definition of third wave's theology:

Our theology is in constant flux. It is being formulated and reformulated as the Holy Spirit reveals the deepest sense of the Holy Scriptures. . . . When a theology becomes systematized, it becomes stagnant. Definitions become quarrel points. . . . This is nothing more than systematic theology . . . and the Pentecostal contribution to the Church of Jesus Christ is not in the area of systematic theology . . . [because] the Pentecostal experience, happening in the most diverse cultural situations, simply does not allow a rigid formulation of either the creed or the practice of Pentecostalism.⁴⁶

Bobsin defines this third wave as an “autonomous Pentecostalism,” i.e., one that is not necessarily attached or bound to a fixed Pentecostal tradition.⁴⁷ Macedo writes: “We have already experienced the Protestant preaching with Luther, the revivalist preaching with John Wesley, and now we have to move from a mere Pentecostal preaching to full preaching.”⁴⁸ This “full preaching,” according to him, means “to go around saying that Jesus Christ baptizes with the Holy Spirit, but also, *and first of all*, that he frees people who are oppressed by the devil and his angels”⁴⁹ (emphasis added).

It is possible, however, to see some constant themes among neo-Pentecostals. Gerson Linden identifies three main aspects, or, the “neo-Pentecostal triad”: healing, exorcism and

⁴⁴ Linden, “Eschatological Pneumatology,” 46.

⁴⁵ Pastor expelled from the “Assembleia de Deus” in the 60s, and founder of the “Igreja Nova Vida.” Edir Macedo was a member of the latter church before the foundation of IURD in 1977.

⁴⁶ Robert McAlister, *A Experiência Pentecostal* (Rio de Janeiro: Igreja Nova Vida, 1977), 63–64 (translation mine).

⁴⁷ Bobsin, “Teologia da Prosperidade,” 24.

⁴⁸ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, 25 (translation mine).

⁴⁹ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, 25 (translation mine).

prosperity.⁵⁰ Curiously enough, both healing and prosperity can only occur if exorcism occurs first. By casting out the demons that bring diseases to the body, one is healed. Also, by casting out the demons that block a person from doing the right thing—to tithe, for instance—one has free access to the blessings of God reflected mainly in an improved economic life. So even if we consider healing and prosperity as the main themes or features of third wave neo-Pentecostalism, demonology for IURD is the starting point serving as a doorway to them. Therefore, in the neo-Pentecostal mind, the world is a constant battlefield where God (and his angels) fight against the devil (and his demons) in order to conquer souls.⁵¹ As the “kingdom of God” grows through the church, the devil is being defeated.

Having located IURD in the third wave of Pentecostalism in Brazil, we now ask: Have Lutherans something to contribute to this conversation? More specifically, what do Lutherans have to say about the *dualism* between God and the devil? What about the idea of the devil giving trustworthy *witness* or *testimony*? And what about the devil’s *humiliation* by the pastor or church members? A brief entrée to these questions from the perspective of insights from selected Lutheran theologians writing on Luther and spiritual attack follows. The thesis will offer a fuller engagement with these theologians in later chapters.

For Lutherans, the Christian life can be portrayed as a tension or a “battle” between God and the devil. Sánchez recognizes this in his book *Sculptor Spirit*. He describes how the Spirit shapes Christians into the image of Christ by strengthening them through prayer and meditation in order to *resist* the devil’s attacks. Differently from IURD’s mentality, Lutherans do not understand that the role of the church is to go on the attack to defeat the devil and his forces, but

⁵⁰ Linden, “Eschatological Pneumatology,” 42.

⁵¹ Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 336–37.

rather to encourage life in Christ for the baptized as a matter of being vigilant, in guard, resistant amid the devil's attacks.⁵² This resistance happens through the Word and prayer,⁵³ the weapons God gives us to stand firm in Christ's name in the midst of these attacks. The fight against Satan is *God's* war.⁵⁴ But it is not a war between two equal opponents, since there is only one God, the Creator of everything. And this Creator is also the King over all creation, even over Satan and his demons. God is ultimately behind everything that happens, and, at the same time, He is not to be blamed for evil or the demons' actions. Theodicy is not a simple question among Lutherans as it seems to be in IURD circles. Sickness and diseases, for example, are entirely the devil's work for IURD. For Lutherans, however, God frequently uses the bad for good, i.e., God uses the devil or demons in order to fulfill His own purposes.⁵⁵ As Wingren puts it, "man cannot say which of the two contenders laid a particular tribulation on him. Both are pulling at man at the same time."⁵⁶

The devil and his demons are under God's authority, and in God's hands, they can even become teachers of theology.⁵⁷ Although it may cause some discomfort to some people, Martin Luther's notion of the devil as "the best teacher of theology" is a legitimate way to understand how God uses Satan in temptation.⁵⁸ We are in a battle, but the logic of protection is not as

⁵² John Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008), 259.

⁵³ Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., *Sculptor Spirit: Models of Sanctification from Spirit Christology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 90.

⁵⁴ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 89.

⁵⁵ Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., *Pneumatología: el Espíritu Santo y la espiritualidad de la Iglesia* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 57.

⁵⁶ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), 80.

⁵⁷ *LW* 54, 50.

⁵⁸ Sánchez adds the word "testing" to temptation, saying that although temptation and testing have different authors, they are "two sides of the same coin. While the devil tempts God's firstborn Israel to be a disobedient son, God tests his firstborn son in order to humble him in the way of obedience to his Word." Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 91.

logical as we would want it to be. To be on God's side is "the problem," i.e., what makes the devil furious causing him to attack the believer even harder. It is not an accident that *tentatio* is the last word in the famous Lutheran axiom *oratio, meditatio, tentatio faciunt theologum*.⁵⁹ When Christians pray and meditate, the devil attacks through temptation. But this attack produces a reverse outcome. As Kleinig reminds us, instead of driving the Christian away from God, the attacks leads him back to prayer and meditation.⁶⁰ Luther seems to have the public ministers in mind when he talks about this demonic plan of attack, but he would not deny that Satan targets especially new Christians, just like he attacked Jesus at the beginning of his mission, right after his baptism.⁶¹ So although God's protection indeed exists for Christians, this does not mean a life without trouble and temptation. Rather, as Sánchez stresses, God uses the devil's temptation to test his people's faith and shape them by His Spirit into the image of Christ, who stands firm against the evil one.⁶² That is how the devil ends up teaching theology, i.e., through temptation. Since God can use the devil's attacks to drive His children to the Word and prayer, we have what Sánchez calls the devil's actions or plans backfiring on him.⁶³ God uses the devil's blind wickedness to approach His creatures with love. Thus, Lutherans do not say that the devil or demons are trustworthy witnesses, since it is never their intention to help humans in any way. Instead, God is the one that turns bad into good and uses the devil's temptation to teach and test

⁵⁹ That is, "prayer, meditation and temptation produce a theologian." Although we may not see this whole sentence quoted *ipsis litteris* in Luther's writings, the idea can be observed, for example, in his "Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings." *LW* 34, 286.

⁶⁰ John Kleinig, "Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio: What Makes a Theologian?" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2002): 258.

⁶¹ Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace*, 224.

⁶² Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 91.

⁶³ Sánchez, *Pneumatología*, 57–60.

Christians.⁶⁴

This backfiring in the devil's plans mentioned above may be seen as the way in which God mocks or humiliates the devil, using his plans for His purposes. In one of Luther's "table talks" (*Tischreden*), the reformer taught his friends what to say to the devil when he comes to assault consciences at night:

When the devil comes during the night to plague me, I give him this answer: Devil, I must sleep now; for this is God's command: Work during the day, sleep at night. – If he does not stop vexing me but faces me with my sins, I reply: Dear devil, I have heard the record. But I have committed still more sins which do not even stand in your record. Put them down, too. . . . If he still does not stop accusing me as a sinner, I say to him in contempt: Holy Satan, pray for me! You never have done anything evil and alone are holy. Go to God and acquire grace for yourself. If you want to make me righteous, I tell you: Physician, heal yourself.⁶⁵

Luther's way of talking informally to the devil recalls the way in which pastors of IURD challenge and humiliate the devil in worship services. However, Luther also compares the devil to an evil chained dog, making clear that humans can never trust themselves or be overly confident against the devil or get too close to him.⁶⁶ Thus for Lutherans *God* humiliates the devil when *He* turns what Satan does into a good thing according to *His* purposes. When the devil attacks, he ends up scaring people into God's hand through prayer and meditation. We can be sure of God's favor in Christ to us, and we should never trust ourselves (our holiness, our office, our strength, etc.) when dealing with demonic forces. We should, rather, stay firm in prayer and meditation, begging and hoping for God's help as we go through temptations.

⁶⁴ Cf. Romans 8:28.

⁶⁵ Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: An Anthology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 403–04. WA-T 2, 132.

⁶⁶ "Therefore, everything depends on this that we do not feel secure but continue in the fear of God and in prayer; then the chained dog cannot harm us. But this chained dog may at least frighten him who would be secure and go ahead without caution, although he may not come close enough to be bitten. Vicious dogs, as one observes, lie in wait and do not let themselves be heard." Plass, *What Luther Says*, 402. WA 52, 296.

Methodology Employed

This research will consist of the analyses of three characteristics of IURD's understanding of demons, namely, *dualism*, the *devil's testimony*, and the *humiliation of the devil* by the exorcist, followed by a Lutheran response to each of these features. The main primary resources for the analysis are the following: the second volume of the series *Doutrinas da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (Doctrines of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God) written by Edir Macedo; *Orixás, caboclos e guias: deuses ou demônios?* (Orixás, Caboclos and Guias: gods or demons?),⁶⁷ also written by Edir Macedo; and *Possessed Believers: Twelve Signs of Possession or Oppression*, by David Higginbotham.⁶⁸ Moreover, given the relative scarcity of written theological sources, *YouTube* videos of IURD worship services will be transcribed and analyzed as primary sources.

For the first characteristic, *dualism*, the analysis will consist of a contrasting analysis of the aforementioned books and the videos, since there seems to be a discrepancy between the theory and the practice. In theory, as seen in written sources, the IURD will not say that the devil is as powerful as God. Even the rites of *libertação* claim to prove that fact, since the demons fall on the ground during the prayer and do whatever the pastor requires them to do. But the strong emphasis on the devil and his power over humans, especially as seen in videos of their services, gives the sense that the devil is more present and powerful in this world than the world's Creator. God is somewhere else and needs to be accessed by the believer's initiative, while the devil is

⁶⁷ The words *Orixás*, *Caboclos* and *Guias* refer to entities worshiped by the Afro-religions in Brazil. In this book, Edir Macedo argues that they are not good beings trying to help people, but demons who are unmasked as so innumerable times in IURD's liberation services.

⁶⁸ David Higginbotham is a son of American missionaries that learned about IURD in 1986, when his father called him to tell about an "amazing ministry from South America that performed all kinds of healings and miracles and that cast out demons!" Edir Macedo had arrived in New York City to establish the first temple of IURD in the United States. Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 14.

everywhere down here. I will provide the Lutheran response to the dualist characteristic by using mainly Sánchez's approach to theodicy in his book *Pneumatología*, as well as his second model of sanctification, the dramatic model, of his book *Sculptor Spirit*. I will demonstrate that Lutherans believe that there is a battle happening but this battle is not a contest of equals. At the same time, Lutherans believe that God is in charge of His creation, though in a hidden way. It is not the church's role to fully understand or explain this reality through theodicy.⁶⁹

For the second characteristic, the *devil's testimony*, I will focus on selected YouTube videos of interviews with demon-possessed people. In one video, the demon teaches repentance. He says that there are people who think that money is everything, but the truth is that money ends, but the soul remains; the soul is thus the most precious possession.⁷⁰ In this particular case, the demon even wishes he could have another chance with Jesus, just like those people who are being liberated from demons are having. Higginbotham argues that in IURD the demons cannot lie, since the power of God forces them to obey, kneel and confess whatever the pastor wants to know.⁷¹ For the Lutheran answer, I will use primarily Kleinig's article, "*Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio: What Makes a Theologian?*" Following his path, I will show that, for Lutherans, God also uses the devil to teach, but in a different way. It is not through a direct testimony from the devil, but through temptation that leads to reliance on God through prayer and the Word.

For the last characteristic, the *humiliation of the devil* by the exorcist, I will point out an apparent contradiction in IURD on this issue. Sometimes Macedo encourages "true Christians"

⁶⁹ God's answer to Job (Job 38:2–41:34) evidences human limitation when it comes to the knowledge of God. He is the Creator of everything, and the power behind everything. Human beings ask, but only God can decide what to do.

⁷⁰ "Você acredita NISSO?" YouTube video, 6:27, "Igreja Universal", published in September 10, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLAukxqifL4>.

⁷¹ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 68.

to challenge, rebel against, and attack the devil and his angels with no fear.⁷² At other moments, he warns his people, based on Jude 1:9, that Christians should never pronounce judgment against Satan.⁷³ In practice, pastors manipulate demons as they choose in order to demonstrate God's power at work in their churches. For the Lutheran response, I will use Sánchez's conception of "backfiring"⁷⁴ in order to argue that the devil is indeed humiliated and challenged by God (not by us) in many ways, but that the church's primary duty is to stay firm on God's side and resist the attacks of the evil one. We should limit ourselves to do what God commanded us to do. To play with the devil or the demons by humiliating and making fun of them can easily lead the believer to think that he by himself has the power to subdue the devil. This strategy of mocking the devil can be one of the resources used by the church to weaken the demons through attacks on their pride, but it needs to be used carefully, not giving the impression that humans *per se* are stronger than demons. Using Luther's analogy of the devil as a chained dog, a Lutheran response will note that God is the one with the power over all created creatures (including angelic beings), and He is thus in charge of establishing limits for the demonic powers.

⁷² "Go ahead and attack *Exus*, *Caboclos* and all demons and expel them from people's lives. . . . You can call the boss of the demons that are dominating that body, that are in the person's house, in your relatives or in anyone else, and they will have to obey you!" Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1510–14 (translation mine).

⁷³ Macedo, *Doutrinas da Igreja Universal*, 54 (translation mine).

⁷⁴ Sánchez, *Pneumatología*, 47–60.

CHAPTER TWO

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God is an institution located in time and space. Although one may argue that its understanding of Christianity is unique, this chapter will trace a historical and theological line showing the development of its doctrines. First, we will summarily present some highlights of the Pentecostal movement throughout history. After that, we will focus more on the branch (or *wave*) of Pentecostalism in which IURD is situated, namely, *neo-Pentecostalism* of the third wave in Brazil. Then, we will deal with some aspects of Edir Macedo's and IURD's history. Finally, we will propose an introduction to IURD's theology, providing elements that will help the reader see the bigger picture in which its demonology is located.

The Pentecostal Movement

We understand Pentecostalism to include those churches, or strands inside churches, that teach the baptism with the Holy Spirit with the gift of tongues as its main sign or evidence. As we will see later, this is still very general, and many differences can arise inside this giant group of churches. Besides the baptism with the Holy Spirit as a separate event from baptism with water, another possible characteristic commonly shared among Pentecostals is a tendency toward a pre-millennialist eschatology.¹ Historically, the Pentecostal movement is often dated to the beginning of the twentieth century at the famous church revival at Azusa Street, Los Angeles. However, just like IURD did not develop outside time and space, so also Azusa Street can be located in a broader history of religious movements. Many movements came before

¹ Oneide Bobsin, "Teologia da Prosperidade ou Estratégia de Sobrevivência: Estudo Exploratório," *Estudos Teológicos* 35 (1995): 22.

Pentecostalism proper and helped prepare the ground for the “fastest growing group within Christianity today.”²

A Pentecostal View of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in Church History

Allan Anderson briefly reviews how gifts of Holy Spirit were approached throughout church history. According to him, Montanism in the first centuries (with its emphasis on the prophetic gifts of the Holy Spirit) was one of the first precursors of Pentecostalism.³ The church’s repudiation of Montanism might have discouraged people to talk more openly about spiritual gifts, especially in the Western Church. Gifts were considered to be the exclusive possession of special saints or bishops. Western Christianity in general has not emphasized the spiritual gifts, while the Eastern churches remained more open to them.⁴ However, Anderson notes that theologians like Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, and Clement of Alexandria still mentioned gifts of the Spirit and emphasized their belonging to all Christians.

In the Middle Ages, Eastern monasteries had pneumatology at the center of their theology. An example was *Symeon the New Theologian* (AD 949–1022), who talked about a baptism with the Holy Spirit as a separate event after water baptism.⁵ In the west, however, the church at times understood gifts of the Spirit (like tongues) in a negative way, even linking them with signs of demon possession.⁶ The understanding of the Western Church seems to be well represented in Thomas Aquinas, who saw the gift of tongues in terms of *xenolalia*, i.e., actual human languages. Their purpose was to spread the Gospel, but now these gifts have ceased as a miracle

² Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

³ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 19–20.

⁴ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 21.

⁵ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 22.

⁶ See *Rituale Romanorum*, cited in Morton Kelsey, *Tongue Speaking: The History and Meaning of Charismatic Experience* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 46.

and given place to their acquisition by hardworking.⁷ That is to say that the gift of tongues in known languages, for example, must now be pursued through study and practice, and not received miraculously. In times of the Reformation, the enthusiasts and Anabaptists occasionally claimed special gifts of the Spirit. Luther understood the gifts of the Spirit more indirectly in terms of vocation, and not so much in terms of miraculous and direct gifts.⁸ After 1685, a revival movement arose in France known as “little prophets of Cévennes,”⁹ which started with some ecstatic experiences leading to miraculous prophesying. The movement lasted for ten years but had some influence over people who traveled from different parts of Europe to meet with them and hear their prophecies.¹⁰

The appearance of Holiness movements provides a more immediate background for Pentecostalism. This movement has origins in John Wesley’s and John Fletcher’s teachings, which in turn have roots in the Lutheran Pietist tradition of the late 17th century and its emphasis in personal experience rather than in mere “head-knowledge.”¹¹ Wesley’s understanding of a “second blessing”, or “sanctification” as a crisis experience subsequent to conversion, later led to a division within Methodism in the U.S. The group that adopted the second blessing teaching became the “Holiness Movement.” John W. Fletcher went a step further than Wesley and linked this second blessing with the baptism with the Holy Spirit.¹² The Holiness Movement became

⁷ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 22–23.

⁸ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 23.

⁹ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 24.

¹⁰ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 24.

¹¹ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 25.

¹² There are two main groups inside the “second-blessing” position. One of them, the *Wesley/Fletcher* position, says that entire sanctification (seen as a crisis experience subsequent to conversion) is the baptism with the Holy Spirit (or second blessing). The other, the *Keswick* position, understands that the second blessing is an act of sanctification that initiates a process of holiness. The baptism with the Holy Spirit then is seen as an endowment of power *for* service. See Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 26–30.

less Wesleyan and more “Fletcherian.”¹³ Inside the Holiness Movement, another branch laid the groundwork for Pentecostalism, namely, the American Revivalism of Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, and Asa Mahan. The major theme of this movement, by the end of 19th century, was the baptism with the Holy Spirit as a distinct experience of power given for service. This feature would become fundamental for Pentecostalism in the 20th century, since the “third blessing” position arose from that.¹⁴

Healing is another key dimension of Pentecostalism, which finds echoes in earlier healing movements. Founded in the 19th century by the Pietist Johann Christoph Blumhardt and his healing centers, this Healing movement basically spread the idea that cure for sicknesses was possible without means (science or medicine). Only prayers and exorcism were necessary. This concept was first brought into America by Sarah Ann Freeman Mix, an African American woman with a healing ministry in the Northeast region of the United States. However, names like Maria Woodworth-Etter, Holiness female preacher in eastern Ohio; John Alexander Dowie, preacher who proclaimed himself an apostle and founded his own small city of refuge at *Zion*, Illinois; and Frank W. Sandford, preacher who established a community (*Shiloh*) to resist the imminent Armageddon in *Durham*, Maine; influenced many precursors of Pentecostalism, including Charles Fox Parham.¹⁵

The Beginning of Pentecostalism Proper

Charles Fox Parham (1873–1929) is considered the father of the Pentecostalism. He was an

¹³ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 26.

¹⁴ The third-blessing position believes that the baptism with the fire (third blessing) is a separated blessing from Sanctification (second blessing) and Conversion (first blessing). The first American Pentecostals reframed this third blessing as the *baptism with the Holy Spirit*, evidenced by the gift of tongues. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 29.

¹⁵ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 30–33.

independent preacher (prior Methodist) who opened the Bethel Gospel School, which used only the Bible as a textbook. After intense meditation and fasting, Parham and his pupils concluded that the Book of Acts indicated the gift of tongues as the evidence of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. On December 31, 1900, they started fasting and praying, asking for this gift. In the evening of the next day, one of the students, Agnes Ozman, asked Parham to place his hands over her head and suddenly she started speaking in what they claimed to be Chinese. Xenolalia, for them, was the right understanding of the gift of tongues, which as we will see soon, would rapidly be denied by most of Pentecostals of Azusa Street.¹⁶ Parham eventually went to Houston to teach his Bible School, and one of the attendees was William Seymour.

William Joseph Seymour (1870–1922) was an African American preacher, son of freed slaves. After attending Parham’s Bible School (though not openly because of his ethnicity), he was invited to be a pastor of an African American Holiness congregation in Los Angeles, California. After some resistance to the new teachings, he moved his meetings to a house at North Bonnie Brae Street. On April 9, 1906, Edward Lee (Seymour’s host), asked Seymour to lay hands over him. When he did that, the man immediately fell on the ground and started shaking. Edward started speaking in tongues, and on that very night, at the meeting, many others had the same experience, including Seymour.¹⁷ As more people were gathering in that space, they ran out of room and had to move somewhere else. The chosen place was an old building at 312 Azusa Street.¹⁸

According to Anderson, the Azusa Street congregation was spontaneous in its worship.

¹⁶ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 34.

¹⁷ Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 67.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 39.

Singing in tongues and people falling on the ground were common events there. People from many cultures were present and felt welcomed. Seymour was a good and strategically well-connected leader. The media, however, always criticized Azusa Street movement, accusing it of being a mix of voodoo superstitions of black people and white people's insanity. Parham was one of the critics who disapproved Azusa Street experiences, saying they were nothing but a theatrical piece, just people pretending to be speaking in tongues (remember that Parham believed in *xenolalia*). But, Parham's voice was not so influential anymore, and he went soon into relative obscurity. Seymour, on the other hand, was now considered the leader of Pentecostalism.¹⁹ Later, another critic of Azusa Street's way of expressing the experiences of the Holy Spirit was Aimee Semple McPherson, the founder of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. After some bad experiences with the *holy rollers*²⁰ in Baltimore in 1919, she decided to focus on another type of audience, one less intense in their experiences of the Spirit.²¹

After some years Azusa Street seemed to succumb over many doctrinal controversies and the racism of that time. In 1931, the building was finally destroyed, but big Pentecostal churches like the *Assemblies of God* and the *Church of God in Christ* still trace their beginnings to Azusa Street.²²

Schisms in Classical Pentecostalism

William Durham (1873–1912), a former Baptist preacher and then a part of the Holiness

¹⁹ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 40.

²⁰ This term was given to Pentecostal churchgoers who, under the power of the Spirit, would dance, shake, and roll on the floor.

²¹ Later she returned to her Pentecostal audience. For more information about Aimee Semple McPherson, see "AIMEE SEMPLE MCPHERSON - American Masters (plus sermon)," YouTube video, 1:19:23, "Jon Matthew Scarborough," published in November 30, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u76D3UyDC2M>.

²² Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 42.

movement, received his baptism with the Holy Spirit in March of 1907 at Azusa Street. After returning to Chicago, he started exercising a big influence over the whole region around Azusa Street. However, there was a difference in his teaching. He taught the “finished work.” Finished work theology basically says that, instead of a three-stage experience of conversion, sanctification, and baptism with the Holy Spirit, which is present in the Holiness movement and adopted by the first Pentecostals, Christians actually pass through a two-stage experience, namely, conversion and baptism with the Holy Spirit. Sanctification is not, according to Durham’s view, a “crisis experience subsequent to conversion,” like Wesley thought it was. Actually, it is part of conversion, a “finished work” done by Jesus on the Cross.²³ As we will see later, the first Pentecostal missionaries to go to Brazil (Luigi Francescon, Daniel Berg, and Gunnar Vingren) were Durham’s followers.

Later, another schism appeared concerning the trinitarian formula of baptism. *Oneness Pentecostalism*, as it became known, taught that the baptismal formula should not be trinitarian, but only be done “in the name of Jesus.” Robert T. McAlister, a Canadian preacher, adopted this unitarian formula. He explained that “baptism was to be in the name of Jesus because Jesus was the name of God, whereas Father, Son and Holy Spirit were different titles for the singular name of Jesus Christ.”²⁴ Therefore, by 1916 there were already three main groups within classical Pentecostalism: The three-stage trinitarians; the two-stage trinitarians; and the two-stage Oneness non-Trinitarians. What began with a common experience with the Holy Spirit soon developed into separate sets of doctrines and denominations.²⁵

²³ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 46.

²⁴ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 48.

²⁵ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 60.

Three Waves in the United States

The metaphor of the waves of Pentecostalism provides a good framework for the diversity of the movement in the United States. However, the waves are not so uniform, as we could see in the last section of this paper. In any rate, we still adopt this metaphor to synthesize a general idea of how Pentecostalism looked like in America. The *First Wave* refers to the so-called *classical Pentecostalism*. As we saw in the last section, it did not start out of nothing in Azusa Street, but rather it was an intensification or a further development of already existent revivalist and holiness movements. Denominations like the Holiness Pentecostal Church (1911), Assemblies of God (1914), International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (1923), and Church of God of Prophecy (early 1900s) are considered examples of churches of the first wave of Pentecostalism in America.²⁶

The *Second Wave* refers not necessarily to Pentecostal denominations, but to Charismatic tenets inside mainline churches like Catholic, Lutheran, and Presbyterian. This movement is more intensely noted between 1950 and 1960, when whites, elite, and wealthy sectors of society all around the country begin experiencing the very same events as took place in the Azusa Street revival. The second wave brings to the table a blend of Pentecostalism with other theologies. Examples are InterVarsity fellowship students at Yale from various church backgrounds, who in the early 1960s started speaking in tongues, and the Catholic Pentecostal Conference that took place in 1968.²⁷

The *Third Wave*, or neo-Charismatic wave (sometimes called neo-Pentecostal), refers to a movement started in the 1980s mainly by mass media televangelists with excessive interest in

²⁶ Emil Bartos, "The Three Waves of Spiritual Renewal of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement," *Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu* 7, no. 1 (2015): 26.

²⁷ Bartos, "The Three Waves of Spiritual Renewal," 33.

showy displays of healings, signs or miracles, ecstatic experiences, and prophecies or predictions about the future. Here signs and miracles are not part of a bigger set of features of the religion, like in classical Pentecostalism, but rather the distinctive marks of the church. The Fuller Theological Seminary's professor C. Peter Wagner (1930–2016) was the first to coin the term “third wave,” relating it especially to John Wimber (1934–1997). A pertinent aspect of the neo-Pentecostal wave for this thesis is that most of them do “not stress the ‘initial evidence’ doctrine of tongues, but they still promoted a crisis experience subsequent to baptism or conversion.”²⁸ As we shall see later, IURD also follows this path, not emphasizing the gift of tongues, although still mentioning it in pastor's and bishop's books.²⁹

Pentecostalism in Brazil

“Brazil can claim to be the world capital of Pentecostalism.”³⁰ In fact, not many years had passed since the beginning of Pentecostalism in the United States when the first Pentecostal church was established in Brazil. In Brazil, the first Pentecostal church was founded in 1910 among Italians.³¹ Luigi Francescon (1866–1964), a pupil of William Durham and his Gospel Mission Church in Chicago (also known as North Avenue Mission) went to Brazil and preached among Italian immigrants. He first established communities in Argentina (1909), and then, in 1910, he went to São Paulo and started preaching in a Presbyterian Church. However, his teaching was of concern to the leaders of that church, and soon he was expelled from it, founding his own denomination of Italians. This mission among Italians would later become the

²⁸ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 158.

²⁹ See below, “General aspects of IURD's theology.”

³⁰ Paul Freston, “The Future of Pentecostalism in Brazil: The Limits to Growth,” in *Global Pentecostalism in the 21st Century*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 63.

³¹ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 70.

Congregação Cristã (Christian Congregation).³²

In 1911, two other missionaries came from the same Durham mission in Chicago and established in Brazil what became the *Assembleia de Deus* (Assembly of God). Daniel Berg (1884–1963) and Gunnar Vingren (1887–1933), Swedish ministers in the United States, supposedly received separately the same prophecy, which told them they should go a place called “Para.” They took a map and found that it was an actual state in the northern region of Brazil. In 1910, they had gone to *Belém do Pará* (capital city of that state) and started participating in a Baptist church pastored by another Swedish missionary. Similar to Francescon’s story, once they started teaching the Pentecostal way, they were not accepted and were expelled from that church along with a group of eighteen people. These people started a new church that was first called *Missão Apostólica da Fé* (Apostolic Mission of Faith), but in 1918 was renamed *Assembleia de Deus* (Assembly of God). Today this church continues to be one of the most traditional, strong, and large Pentecostal church in Brazil.³³

The Three Waves in Brazil

The two aforementioned churches constitute the beginning of Pentecostalism in Brazil. Paul Freston, a sociologist of the study of Pentecostalism, used the same metaphor of the waves to typify three different movements in Pentecostalism in Brazil.³⁴ The first wave consists of these two churches which opened new ground in the Brazil. These churches were founded by

³² Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 70–71.

³³ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 71–72.

³⁴ Paul Frescon, “Protestantes e Política no Brasil: da Constituinte ao Impeachment.” Phd diss., State University of Campinas, 1993, 66. However, other typologies might be useful for different purposes. An example is the dualist typology, according to which there are only *classic Pentecostalism* and *Divine Healing or late Pentecostalism*. See Leonídio Silveira Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado: Organização e Marketing de um Empreendimento Neopentecostal* (São Paulo: Editora Vozes, 1997), 51–52.

missionaries coming from the U.S., and exhibited a strong emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, premillennarian eschatology, and evangelism.³⁵ The second wave, dated to the 1950s and 1960s, consisted of a more Brazilian indigenous mission, i.e., a church not coming necessarily from outside the country.³⁶ Churches like *Brasil para Cristo* (Brazil for Christ, 1955) and *Deus é Amor* (God is Love, 1962) are examples of this movement still connected to classical Pentecostalism, “but with a special emphasis on spiritual healing.”³⁷ Large tent meetings and healing events were common in this second wave, which in contrast to the first wave, made use of mass medias (specially radio) as instruments of evangelization. In contrast to the second wave of American Pentecostalism, which mostly consisted in the presence of Pentecostal ideas in mainline churches, the second wave of Pentecostalism in Brazil consisted in many new denominations with different emphases in their theology.

The third wave of Pentecostalism in Brazil, or neo-Pentecostalism, is dated to the late 1970s, when Edir Macedo and R. R. Soares (Macedo’s brother-in-law) left *Igreja Cristã Nova Vida*, and later, along with Roberto Augusto Lopes, founded the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*. After Macedo and Soares separated, other denominations opened. For example, the *Igreja Internacional da Graça de Deus* (The international Church of God’s Grace, founded by R. R. Soares in 1980), the *Comunidade Evangélica Sara Nossa Terra* (Evangelical Community Heal our Earth, founded by Robson Brill in 1992), and the *Igreja Mundial do Poder de Deus* (World

³⁵ Linden, “Eschatological Pneumatology,” 45.

³⁶ Two important exceptions are the *Igreja Quadrangular* (Foursquare Gospel – 1951), brought from the United States to Brazil by Harold Williams; and the *Igreja Cristã Nova Vida* (New Life Christian Church – 1960), founded in Brazil by the Canadian preacher Robert McAlister, who in 1958 felt a call from God to preach in Brazil, after an evangelistic campaign. He learned Portuguese and made use of radio shows to propagate his teachings. He soon rented an auditorium and began his own church, *Igreja Cristã Nova Vida*. Another difference from classical Pentecostalism, which from the beginning prioritized work among the poor, was having the middle class as his target audience. His teaching was based on healing, material abundance, and casting out demons. This church will be important for Edir Macedo, as we will see later. Doran, “Demon-Haunted Worlds,” 10.

³⁷ Linden, “Eschatological Pneumatology,” 46.

Church of God's Power, founded by Valdemiro Santiago in 1998). Since this is the wave that concerns our object of study, we will dedicate more space to it in the next section.

Neo-Pentecostalism

There is no easy way to define the third wave of Pentecostalism, or neo-Pentecostalism. This is due to the fact that they seem not to be attached to a single tradition, borrowing aspects from many religions.³⁸ Bobsin suggests that neo-Pentecostalism in Brazil could also be called “autonomous Pentecostalism” since historically they are attached to the Pentecostal movement, even though theologically they are a patchwork of concepts and teachings.³⁹ A word from Robert McAlister can illustrate how third wave Pentecostals would think of their theology.⁴⁰

Our theology is in constant flux. It is being formulated and reformulated as the Holy Spirit reveals the deepest sense of the Holy Scriptures. . . . When a theology becomes systematized, it becomes stagnant. Definitions become quarrel points. . . . This is nothing more than systematic theology, . . . and the Pentecostal contribution to the Church of Jesus Christ is not in the area of systematic theology . . . [because] the Pentecostal experience, happening in the most diverse cultural situations, simply does not allow a rigid formulation of either the creed or the practice of Pentecostalism.⁴¹

In Brazil, Edir Macedo claims to be preaching something new, different from Protestantism, Methodism, and Pentecostalism: “The present church has to act. We have already experienced the Protestant preaching with Luther, the revivalist preaching with John Wesley, and now we have to move from a mere Pentecostal preaching to full preaching,” which consists in going “around saying that Jesus Christ baptizes with the Holy Spirit, but also, and first of all, that

³⁸ Campos identifies elements of Judaism, paganism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Spiritist, and African Religions. Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 329.

³⁹ Bobsin, “Teologia da Prosperidade”, 30.

⁴⁰ Although McAlister is considered a preacher of the second wave, we can include him in a transition between those two waves. Edir Macedo frequented his church before founding IURD and certainly was influenced by his way of thinking.

⁴¹ Robert McAlister, *A Experiência Pentecostal* (Rio de Janeiro: Igreja Nova Vida, 1977), 63–64 (translation mine).

he frees people who are oppressed by the devil and his angels.”⁴² That indicates one of the marks of the third wave of Pentecostalism, a bigger emphasis in demonology compared to classical Pentecostalism.⁴³ But, again, the intensity of this emphasis can vary from denomination to denomination. For example, in IURD, *libertação* is far more present in the public services than in *Igreja Internacional da Graça de Deus* (The international Church of God’s Grace). The demon is still acting extensively according to both denominations, but in IURD its presence becomes more direct, with very intense battles between pastor and demons.

But demonology is not the only theme that we could claim to be common among neo-Pentecostals. The *Prosperity Gospel*, and with that the matter of tithes and offerings as conditions for prosperity, are continually present among them.⁴⁴ And this has a lot to do with their main target. Since the beginning, neo-Pentecostalism targeted vulnerable people in big cities. Freston remembers that, when they established the church, Brazilians were migrating to the big urban centers, encouraged by the “economic miracle” of the decade of 1970. Apparently, it was a time when people were full of hope, but still did not reap many economic benefits. Therefore, the language of prosperity was attractive at that time. Later, when the re-democratization of Brazil and the economic crisis happened in the 1980s, maybe the only hope some people felt they still had was found in churches like IURD, which attracted crowds through radio and other mass media using their main motto, “stop suffering!”⁴⁵

⁴² Edir Macedo, *Orixás, Caboblos e Guias: Deuses ou Demônios?* (Rio de Janeiro: Universal Produções, 1993), Kindle Locations 1377–83 (translation mine).

⁴³ Paul Freston, “Pentecostalism in Brazil: A Brief History,” *Religion* 25 (1995): 130.

⁴⁴ Linden, “Eschatological Pneumatology,” 49.

⁴⁵ Paul Freston, “Protestantes e Política no Brasil: da Constituinte ao Impeachment” (PhD diss., State University of Campinas, 1993), 46.

IURD's History: A Brief Summary

It is impossible to talk about IURD's history without looking at Edir Macedo's history.⁴⁶

Edir Macedo Bezerra was born in 1945 to a Catholic family of the countryside in the state of Rio de Janeiro. In the 1960s, he and his family moved to the capital city, Rio de Janeiro, precisely when second-wave Pentecostal churches began to be established. Macedo started listening to Robert McAlister's preaching on the radio, and, since his sister, Elcy Bezerra, suffered from a severe asthmatic bronchitis, he attended the pastor's call and brought her to a service. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, she was healed, and they received their baptism with the Holy Spirit there in 1963, after a year attending the services.⁴⁷ Up to that time, Macedo had worked in the state lottery, and briefly in IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics). He attended the *Escola Nacional de Ciências Estatísticas* (National School of Statistical Sciences), and this background apparently helped him to exercise the future leadership position at Universal Church. Eventually he was ordained as a minister of McAlister's church, *Igreja Cristã Nova Vida*.⁴⁸ In 1974, however, Macedo left the church over disagreements with the leadership. There are a lot of versions of what these disagreements entailed. Some say that there were disputes over the target audience for the church's mission, others say that the struggle was part of an ongoing ambition for leadership. "Macedo himself describes the process as an amicable one, but one that

⁴⁶ A Trilogy (two parts released so far) that aims to tell Macedo's story from his own perspective is available. The film, *Nothing to Lose*, is directed by Alexandre Avancini (Paris Entretenimento, 2018).

⁴⁷ This is how Edir Macedo describes this moment: "In that exact moment, tears were running down my eyes. I ran to God because I was suffering. I was moaning in pain, hurt, begging for relief. I saw my sin and fled. I ran out. Who could save me? The Holy Spirit convinced me of my sins. I found myself lost in an endless hell. I screamed for help. Who can save me? And the same spirit, the Spirit of God, pointed me to the only One who could reach me: The Lord Jesus Christ. ... At that moment, I loved Jesus. The greatest treasure. The most prized possession. The unequalled wealth. The Holy Spirit revealed to me the Lord Jesus. I found my God." Edir Macedo, *Nada a Perder*, vol. 1 (Rio de Janeiro: Planeta do Brasil, 2012), 108 (translation mine).

⁴⁸ Macedo, *Nada a Perder*, 1: 75.

demonstrated his unique vision for the church.”⁴⁹

Macedo and his brother-in-law, R. R. Soares, left McAlister’s church and joined another Pentecostal denomination, *Casa de Bênção* (House of Blessing). After that, they founded the *Cruzada do Caminho Eterno* (Eternal Way Crusade), which offered evangelical services in old theaters in Rio de Janeiro. Then, Macedo started preaching “in a bandstand in the suburb of Rio de Janeiro, with a keyboard, a microphone and a Bible.”⁵⁰ In July 1977, Macedo, his brother-in-law, and another former pastor of *Igreja Nova Vida*, Roberto Augusto Lopes, rented an old funeral parlor and, in July 9, the first service was held there.⁵¹ *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* was founded. After three years, Edir Macedo and his brother-in-law separated, and the *Igreja Internacional da Graça de Deus* was founded. In the late 1980s, Macedo established IURD abroad through a congregation in New York and declared himself “bishop.” This new mission brought in many financial benefits and, “by 1989 the IURD had enough money to fund Macedo’s purchase of *Rede Record*, the third largest . . . television network in Brazil.”⁵² IURD was now in the spotlight, and suffered resistance and criticisms both ecclesiastically (specially from Catholics that, in turn, were directly attacked by IURD) and commercially (from the television channel *Rede Globo*, the biggest television network in Brazil). Edir Macedo was arrested in 1992 for illegal financial dealings but released soon after that.

Internally, Macedo also faced controversies. In one of them, an ex-pastor called Carlos Magno de Miranda brought to the public, through *Rede Globo*, footages of Edir Macedo during a friendly soccer match teaching other IURD’s pastors how to make people give more money by challenging

⁴⁹ Doran, “Demon-Haunted Worlds,” 14.

⁵⁰ “Universal History,” About us, Universal Church, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://web.universal.org/usa/what-is-the-universal-church-usa>.

⁵¹ Doran, “Demon-Haunted Worlds,” 16.

⁵² Doran, “Demon-Haunted Worlds,” 18.

them.⁵³ In another video, Macedo appeared on the floor of a temple in Brooklyn, New York, counting the money received in that service and laughing.⁵⁴ Another moment of tension involved a television show where IURD's pastor Servio Von Helde tapped his foot on a plaster image of *Nossa Senhora de Aparecida* (considered the patron saint of Brazil) in order to prove that this was just a piece of plaster without life, an idolatry icon. "The media firestorm that erupted afterward portrayed Von Helde as an iconoclast and an advocate of violent religious intolerance."⁵⁵ He ended up in prison, but as soon as he was released, Macedo reassigned him to a position in the United States. Many incidents and events were left aside in this short summary of IURD history, but with what we have provided, the reader can have an idea of how IURD began and navigated throughout its first years until now.

General Aspects of IURD's theology

If we consider that the baptism with the Holy Spirit signaled by the gift of tongues is the Pentecostal theological distinctive, we may conclude that IURD is not a Pentecostal church in the fullest sense. Although the baptism with the Holy Spirit with the gift of tongues is officially taught by IURD, other themes overlap with this essential feature of classical Pentecostalism.⁵⁶

Edir Macedo defines IURD's theological identity in the following way:

IURD is a Christian church - because it believes in Jesus Christ according to biblical revelation; evangelical — because it interprets the Bible according to most principles of evangelicals from the Protestant Reformation initiated by Luther in [sic.] 1917, in

⁵³ Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 102–3.

⁵⁴ The complete report is available on YouTube. "Bispo Edir Macedo ensinando como roubar os fiéis - YouTube.flv," YouTube vídeo, 8:55, "Sandro Moreira," published on February 20, 2012, accessed in March 3, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cx-ikX2JM0>.

⁵⁵ Doran, "Demon-Haunted Worlds," 22.

⁵⁶ In Chapter 20 of his book *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Macedo teaches how to get prepared to receive the Holy Spirit. To be baptized with the Holy Spirit means to be sealed, which means that no demon can possess one baptized with the Holy Spirit (although temptation is still possible). The problem is that the signs of this baptism (prophecies, tongues, good actions) can be results of demons' mimicry. We will discuss that later. Therefore, the speaking in tongues is permissible and even desirable for IURD, but it is nothing compared to how it is in other Pentecostal churches. In the services, this gift does not appear very often, and this theme is almost never touched in public speaking.

Germany; and neo-Pentecostal — because it is inspired by the Pentecostal movement that emerged in the last century, in the United States, adopting new emphases, namely: the liberation of demonic spirits, the belief in prosperity as God's will, and the autonomy of the church in relation to traditional groups.⁵⁷

It is interesting to note Macedo's terminology (Christian, Evangelical, and neo-Pentecostal), and the absence of a deeper explanation of what he means by such terminology. Important for us is his mention of Luther and the Protestant Reformation as hermeneutical sources. What these sources are and how they function is not answered by him. Moreover, neo-Pentecostalism is defined as a movement that emphasizes *libertação*, prosperity and liberty from church tradition. In his own definition, themes like the baptism with the Holy Spirit, salvation, and sanctification are also somewhat absent or less prominent.

However, I propose four pillars that constitute IURD's understanding of theology, namely, *libertação* (or exorcism), healing, prosperity, and sacrifice (most commonly expressed in tithing). These four pillars are very well articulated in IURD, and this articulation could be summarized in the following rationale: If you do your part (to tithe and not doubt), God will do His and then He will free you from the demons that are blocking your health and your prosperity in the family, at work, and in society. Therefore, the movement required for prosperity starts with human action, it passes *instrumentally* through God and the demons, and it finally ends back with human action again. Let us break the four pillars down.

⁵⁷ Edir Macedo, *Doutrinas da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*, Vol. 3 (Rio de Janeiro: Universal, 1999), 35 (translation mine).

“*Templo é dinheiro*”⁵⁸

IURD’s fame in Brazil is definitely not good among those outside the church.⁵⁹

Accusations of charlatanism, money laundering, and unethical use of offerings are constantly mentioned in any research on the web, coming from both people saying they were deluded by IURD and IURD’s former pastors who decided to reveal irregularities in the organization. But IURD does not seem to have any problem with those accusations; on the contrary, they keep asking for more money mainly because their theology is based on this principle. Malachi 3 constitutes their basis for asking the required 10 percent from all members.⁶⁰

However, Macedo makes a differentiation between the tithe and offerings. According to him, the tithe is nothing but the obligation of every Christian. The offering, however, constitutes an extra effort that can bring an extra-favor from God as well. Answering the question about the difference between tithe and an offering, whether there is a difference in the blessing given by each, Macedo says:

Yes, because tithes are the first fruits . . . of all our income and offerings are offered from the remaining ninety percent. Tithing means that God is first in the Christian's life, while the offering is a spontaneity that will depend on the offeror's love for God and His work. Just as there is a difference between tithing and an offering, there is also a difference in blessing between one and the other. A person can be faithful in tithes, forced by the law of conscience to obey the Word of God, and yet, not love Him with all their heart, with all their understanding, and with all their strength.⁶¹

Therefore, IURD’s theology on this point is based on an exchange: the more you give back to God and sacrifice of your ninety percent, the more you demonstrate that you really love God.

⁵⁸ This is a common play of words with the saying “time is money,” in Portuguese, *Tempo é Dinheiro*. If you add an “L” in the first word, you have the word *templo* (Temple). Therefore, *Time is Money* (*Tempo é Dinheiro*) is now adapted to say *Temple is Money* (*Templo é Dinheiro*).

⁵⁹ Paul Freston, “The Future of Pentecostalism in Brazil: The Limits to Growth,” in *Global Pentecostalism in the 21st Century*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 73.

⁶⁰ Campos, *Templo, Teatro e Mercado*, 105.

⁶¹ Macedo, *Doutrinas*, vol. 1, 99 (translation mine).

The practical effect of this pressure is seen in IURD's services, where people give even what they do not have in a desperate attempt to show God how much they love Him. Maybe with an extra sacrifice, they can attract God's favor and protection.⁶² The results of acquiring so many offerings can be seen in the huge and luxurious temples of IURD around the world, especially in its Temple of Solomon in São Paulo. In short, tithing and offerings are signs that the Christian is doing his part, and that God will do his part too, protecting him from the demons.

But what if it is too late to act in order to receive God's protection and the Christian is already being affected by the demons?

Libertação (Exorcism)

Libertação is the doorway to a better life, a prosperous life.⁶³ If a person did not pay the tithe and/or did not give the offering and the demons took him over, then it is time for *libertação*. This event is so important for IURD that Bobsin compares it to what justification by grace through faith represents for Lutherans.⁶⁴ In Macedo's own words, "by the work of the Holy Spirit, our Church was raised for a special work, which emphasizes the liberation of people oppressed by the evil forces."⁶⁵

However, the important thing to say here is that this theme appears all the time in IURD, from services to newspaper articles, from blogs to YouTube videos. That is why the Brazilian

⁶² "If we are faithful to the Creator of all things, He will certainly be faithful to us and will never let our livelihood run short, nor will He allow devouring spirits to act on our diva.... So, my dear reader,...1 % with Him will be worth much more than 100% without His protection. Tithing and giving means really loving the work of God and being concerned with carrying it forward." Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, 1619–23 (translation mine).

⁶³ Higginbotham even proposes an alteration in the famous phrase "love the sinner and hate the sin." For him "it should go even further and say, 'Love the sinner, hate the sin, and drive out the demon that is behind it all so that it never happens again!'" David Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers: Twelve Signs of Possession or Oppression* (Eugene: ACW Press, 2003), 84.

⁶⁴ Bobsin, "Teologia da Prosperidade," 32.

⁶⁵ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 98–99 (translation mine).

popular saying, “IURD is the church that talks more about the devil than about God” has its reason for being. While in classical Pentecostalism “the demons are rather kept at a distance; in IURD, they are sought out and confronted.”⁶⁶

However, *libertação* is seen not as an end in itself, but as the doorway, i.e., a means to achieve free access to God’s protection, blessings, and prosperity.⁶⁷ Therefore, although we can say that *libertação* is the most frequent theme in IURD, it is not the ultimate goal for Christians. Since just a little number of people achieve the goal of prosperity right away, more time has to be spent on the way there.

Healing

Once the demons are expelled, there is no reason for any disease to continue. It is dead, so to speak. Therefore, healing is a natural consequence after a true *libertação* has taken place. Nonetheless, maybe because of the common accusation of charlatanism against IURD, Campos points out that “miracle reports in *Folha Universal*⁶⁸ publications are always accompanied by ‘be sure to see your doctor.’”⁶⁹

In a similar fashion to *libertação*, healing depends on the person’s starting (contributing) action. If the person does his part, i.e., fulfills all the prerequisites that IURD claims God has established, then God has no other option but to heal the sick. He is obligated to do so because He promised it,⁷⁰ and thus we can and must demand this right on account of Christ’s victory over

⁶⁶ Freston, “Pentecostalism in Brazil,” 130.

⁶⁷ Roberta Campos and Eduardo Gusmão, “Celebração da Fé: Rituais de Exorcismo, Esperança e Confiança na IURD,” *Revista Antropológicas* 12, no. 19 (2008): 93.

⁶⁸ IURD weekly newspaper.

⁶⁹ Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 341 (translation mine).

⁷⁰ Edir Macedo, *Vida em abundância* (Rio de Janeiro: Universal Produções, 1992), 79.

the devil.⁷¹

Prosperity

But God's blessings are not exclusively for the body, but for all aspects of the life of a Christian. According to IURD, "God is glorified in our victory, in our joy and in our prosperity," since "a father who glorifies himself in his son's suffering can never be a loving father."⁷² This is another discontinuity between classical Pentecostalism and IURD, that is, how to relation with wealth and prosperity. While for classical Pentecostalism, suffering is not a problem per se, or something to be healed of, for the Universal Church "faith in God assumes, without subterfuge, a predominantly instrumental and utilitarian character: it constitutes a means or resource for the believer to do well in the world."⁷³ In IURD, suffering is denied, and any possibility of a pedagogical value for it is refused.⁷⁴ Suffering only comes from the devil,⁷⁵ and therefore it must be ignored, rejected, and beaten.

⁷¹ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 12, 18.

⁷² Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 355 (translation mine).

⁷³ Ricardo Mariano, "Guerra Espiritual: o Protagonismo do Diabo nos Cultos Neopentecostais," *Debates do NER* 4, no. 4 (July 2003): 22 (translation mine).

⁷⁴ Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 366.

⁷⁵ Except in some rare exceptions, like Job's for example. See Macedo, *Doutrinas*, 2:54.

CHAPTER THREE

DUALISM

Pastor: You said you carry people to hell every day. That means you carry to hell everyone who dies?

Demon-possessed person: Most of them.

P: Most of them, really?

D: Yeah, most of them [laughs]

P: Do you know how to come up with a percentage?

D: [grunt] 95.

P: 95%?

D: Yes.

P: Then, only 5% are saved.

D: Yeah!

P: And why this 5%. . . why do you not touch this 5%?

D: [screams in anger] I will not say!

P: [shouts out of microphone] What do they have?

D: [grunts] It is He.

P: He who?

D: This One that you worship.

P: All right, so, everyone here in this church – open your eyes [, demon]! – all of those here who worship Him; so, they are all ready to die, because if they die they are all with Jesus. . .

D: [laughs] No.

P: But they are in the church.

D: They are all false. They all only say it with their lips. They say what they want, but at the first opportunity they prove the opposite.¹

In this chapter we will answer the question of whether the devil is or is not seen as an equal opponent to God by IURD. But why is this important? Knowing how IURD understands the role of the devil in relation to God helps us to properly discern the role of the church in this spiritual battlefield.² If the popular saying that, “for IURD, the devil is almost more powerful than God”³

¹ “Demônio descreve a aparência dele!!!!”, YouTube vídeo, 14:25, “Adilson Silva Oficial”, published in November 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXmyz41w5x4&t=6s>.

² This subject will be more extensively approached in the last chapter of this thesis.

³ Etiane de Souza identifies two ways in which the devil is portrayed in IURD’s literature. In the first, *the erudite*, he is depicted as a terrible being that comes to steal, kill and destroy. In this way, she concludes, the devil is described as having more strength and power than God. In the second way, *the popular*, he is presented as a fragile creature bound under the power granted by God to the pastor, who assumes the role of *aggressor*. Etiane de Souza,

is right, then the strategy to be used is one of attacking the devil in order to reclaim God's power by building His kingdom on earth.⁴ If it is not, then a more defensive strategy can be used, since the battle is already won. Demonology is central for IURD due to the *intensity* with which the subject is treated. It is a recurrent *theme* in IURD, but *not* an end in itself. IURD has an unique structure of thought that sees demonology as a *doorway*⁵ or servant to its main doctrine: the prosperity gospel.

We will answer the question posed before by analyzing two main resources:⁶ A YouTube video of an interview with the chief demon in a IURD service, moments before the *libertação*⁷ takes place; and volume two of the official booklet of their doctrines, *Doutrinas da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*.⁸ I will demonstrate that the *official* discourse may be different from the confessions made by the demons in IURD services. Officially, God alone is Almighty. But the consequences of their teaching on the devil, and the devil's role as a witness in the interview, points to a different reality in which God is only reactive to the devil, and therefore, dependent

"A Imagem do Diabo Nos Livros de Edir Macedo da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus" (M.A. thesis, Federal University of Paraná, 2000), 151–53.

⁴ "There is an invisible spiritual struggle all around us, whether or not we believe it or like it. If we don't take the initiative and attack these demonic forces with faith in the name of Jesus, we'll become their next victims. By succeeding in their attacks against us, they may succeed in finding a way to force themselves into our families. It's either win or lose." David Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers: Twelve Signs of Possession or Oppression* (Eugene: ACW Press, 2003), 81.

⁵ Roberta Campos and Eduardo Gusmão, "Celebração da Fé: Rituais de Exorcismo, Esperança e Confiança na IURD," *Revista Antropológicas* 12, no. 19 (2008): 93.

⁶ However, we will use references from two other books considered the most important ones on IURD's demonology: *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias: Deuses ou Demônios*, by Edir Macedo, and *Possessed Believers: Twelve Signs of Possession or Oppression*, by David Higginbotham.

⁷ As we will see in the next chapter, the devil's testimony is considered *trustworthy* by IURD, and that is why we are considering IURD's thinking on his testimony in this thesis.

⁸ Two chapters are especially dedicated to this topic. One is on the devil (chapter 4) and the other on demons (chapter 5). These chapters are preceded by the chapter on *the Sacrifice*, which deals mainly with offerings and tithes (a recurrent theme in this series of booklets, having a whole chapter and appearing also in chapters like *The alliance with God, Faith, and the Sacrifice*), and followed by the chapter on the doctrine of *Predestination*, which is shown as a perversion of the devil.

on him.

The booklets mentioned above are different from other dogmatics. More lists, figures, and tables, instead of extensive paragraphs, demonstrate the kind of popular audience their booklets aim for. Almost no external sources are cited except the Bible. The *Bible-proof mentality* (making use of as many Bible passages as possible regardless of their context) is evident. Because of this lack of concern about context, the application of these passages may seem obscure sometimes.⁹ At other times, however, they do not quote the Bible at all, just stating facts presumably taken out of their long experience¹⁰ dealing with and listening to the demons.¹¹ IURD is not interested in remaining silent when the Bible is not clear. Therefore, when the Bible is silent, they exercise their logic and pick up another way to tell the story.¹²

⁹ For instance, when they are classifying the kinds of demons, they use Genesis 3:5-6 as proof that there is a group of demons called *Dominators* (“dominadores”). Edir Macedo, *Doutrinas da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*, vol. 2 (Rio de Janeiro: Universal, 1999), 57. Also, when talking about how the servants of the Lord have power over the devil, Macedo simply quotes Luke 10:18 as evidence: “And he said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.’” He does not mention what is happening when Jesus says that, that is, when the seventy-two return from their evangelistic trip and tell Christ that the demons were subjected to them. Therefore, even though the passage may apply to Macedo’s claims, no background or context is given to support such claims. The reader is either supposed to know or find out. Macedo, *Doutrinas*, 2: 45.

¹⁰ In fact, in the preface of his book *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Macedo is presented as *The Specialist*, a man with more than 50 years of experience in the work of deliverance, and that “knows all demonic tricks.” Edir Macedo, *Orixás, Caboblos e Guias: Deuses ou Demônios?* (São Paulo: Unipro editora, 2019), Kindle Locations 81–86.

¹¹ For instance, in the chapter on the demons, they classify a certain group of demons called *family spirits* (“Espíritos Familiares”), class of demons specialized in bringing destruction upon families. Macedo, *Doutrinas*, 2: 58–9.

¹² A good example of this is the way in which Macedo states that the “earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep” (Gen 1:2) because of the rebellion of the devil and his angels. No questions are raised about what else could “without shape” or “empty” mean in that text. “The rebellion of Satan caused this huge cataclysm in the earth, making it without shape and empty.” Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 262–65 (translation mine).

IURD's Understanding of the Devil and Demons

Who Is the Devil?

The Official Description of the Devil

A four-page list of attributes describing the devil in IURD theology is given to the reader at the beginning of chapter 4 of *Doutrinas da Igreja Universal*. The devil is a creature, a spiritual being, a cherub, the leader of the demons, a liar, a murderer, a sinner, the accuser, and so on; he has intellect, engages in cunning, has emotions, a will, responsibility, names, strength, etc. The devil is neither omniscient nor omnipotent or omnipresent, since he is just a creature.¹³ So, in order to achieve as much work on earth as he can, he organizes the demons hierarchically¹⁴ in groups or kinds that cover different locations and are specialized in some activities.¹⁵ A list of the types of demons and their occupation areas are presented in chapter 5.¹⁶ Initially, this list is based on Ephesians 6:12: there are *rulers* (Principados), *authorities* (Potestades), *cosmic powers* (Dominadores), and *spiritual forces of evil* (Forças Espirituais do mal). But then, Macedo starts presenting certain types of demons that arguably appear in the Bible *in an indirect form*. They are *deceiving spirits, family spirits, filthy spirits, demon spirits, antichrist spirit, divination*

¹³ Because of their experience existing in the earth since its beginning, the demons understand and speak every language, even though they can pretend they do not know. "I've prayed for people whose language I didn't know, but the spirits inside of them understood my prayer and had to obey. . . . At times the demons would pretend not to understand, yet because we know that they are liars and are not limited by things like language and space, as we insisted they responded to our commands. I've even heard manifesting demons speak English through the mouths of people who don't know English at all." Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 40.

¹⁴ But this hierarchy is not a pacific one. As we will see later, according to IURD, the demons fight over the leadership in a possessed person. This fight produces terrible headaches that cannot be relieved with medicines. Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 101–2.

¹⁵ Macedo, *Doutrinas*, 2: 55.

¹⁶ Luther also appear to identify kinds of manifestations of the devil. He, for example, uses the metaphor of "white" and "black" to identify *two types of appearance modes of the devil*. The *black devil* is most of the times easy to be recognized, since he induces people to commit gross sins, that are obviously against God's good will for His creation. The *white devil*, however, does not look like one. Luther relates it as the ones behind heresies saying: "No heretic comes in the name of error or Satan, nor does the devil himself come as devil, especially not the white one." Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: An Anthology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 395, WA 40, 108.

spirits, and so on.¹⁷ The kind of demon is named after the demon's expertise.

The devil is a fallen angel, a creature that rebelled because of pride against his Creator, and who, by his own fault, was expelled from heaven with his companions. As a punishment, they were sent to live on earth, as in a *death row*, waiting for hell as their final destiny.¹⁸ On earth, they act aggressively, bringing all kinds of diseases, sufferings and failures to man, and they do that out of jealousy. Macedo places the Angels' fall *before* the creation of Adam and Eve, and because of their fall, God gave humans their position. Humans, therefore, are considered almost an *accident*.¹⁹ Demons rule the earth, doing whatever they *want*, whenever they *can*.²⁰ "Demons . . . are spirits without bodies," therefore in order to manifest themselves in the physical world, they need to be embodied somewhere.²¹ Without that they can do little. Since spirits cannot touch the physical world, nor have much influence over it without a body, the target of a demon

¹⁷ This is not an exhaustive list, but the idea is clear: the acts of the demons define their group. An example of a demon outside of this list is given when Macedo criticizes traditional churches and their weakness to deal with demons. He says that they have a *demon of tradition* "that sneaks in, forcing members of the Church to pay attention only to ecclesiastical practices, customs and norms, so that spiritual weakness enters the community, and it forgets the elementary principles of the faith." Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1398–1400 (translation mine).

¹⁸ A demon manifested in one of IURD's meetings says: "*We live in war since when they threw us in this place. . . . We fell here devouring everything. . . . Until we had to divide space with you. It would be the only place where we would be alone.*" See "Demônio propõe um pacto ao bispo," YouTube vídeo, 10:52, "Bispo Adilson Silva Oficial", published in January 26, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hsrgkd0nJcs>.

¹⁹ "Thus, driven by a very great envy of human beings, who were created smaller than themselves and ended up taking their positions, the demons unleash a fierce struggle against men, wishing to take advantage of them and lead them to destruction in order to fulfill their evil intentions, which almost always implies a total departure from God, and the consequent submission to them." Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 321–24 (translation mine).

²⁰ Macedo states that the book of Job teaches that the limits of the devil and his angels are imposed by God. However, at the same time we are to delimitate the limits of the devil's actions, since it is totally up to the person to make the movement of sealing up his body through a life without sin. Therefore, once more God is an example for Christians: just like He imposes the limits of the devil, Christians ought to take God's authority and *tie*, or, establish a limit for the devil. Macedo, *Doutrinas*, 2: 48.

²¹ Only in the firsts 2 chapters of *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Macedo repeats this phrase 5 times. This usage, besides being part of a pedagogical repetition, appears to be the basis of his understanding of how to prevent the devil to act: if the human being just closes all the doors and windows, the devil can do too little, since he only can act through a body. Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations, 293–95.

is always a body.²² Thus one can conclude that, for IURD, every time a demon exercises its strength over a person, even if it is *just* temptation or oppression, such act is, by definition, a possession.²³ In other words, if there is demonic action, there are spirits somewhere in the person, and they must be expelled. Since the demons are not omnipotent, they only have as much authority over humans as humans give them. This authority is given through sins,²⁴ the doorways for the demons.²⁵ Therefore, it is up to the possessed person to defend himself, or to seal himself from the demons by living a life apart from sin,²⁶ and, if possible, apart from those who live in sin.²⁷ In order to win over the devil, the person needs to win over her sinful self.²⁸ "Every sin has

²² Although not necessarily the whole human body. Demons do not have size. Therefore, they can penetrate smaller things or parts of the body like the head, the legs, microbes, germs, vermes, cells, etc. Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 703–5. They act differently depending on where they settle: "When they are located in the mind, they make people crazy; in the legs, they cause incurable wounds or cripples; in the stomach, pain, ulcers and inflammation; and so on." Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 703–05 (translation mine).

²³ Although we will see later how a person might be sick because of a demon, and yet his/her body might not be *possessed*.

²⁴ The kind of sins that are predominant in letting demons in are: Witchcraft, Consulting Mediums, Astrology, Tarot Cards, Ouija Boards, New Age Movement, Trauma and Abuse, Unforgiveness, Addictions, Sexual Immorality, Fear, Love of Money or Power, Pride and Rebellion against authorities of God. Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 68–81.

²⁵ Interestingly enough, their understanding of *sin* is close to the Roman Catholic: it is a conscient and voluntary act. Higginbotham writes that "being oppressed by demonic spirits is . . . due to the willful, conscious sin of a person." Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 55. Also concerning sin, Macedo, talking about the impossibility of a child to sin, Macedo writes: "Even though a child has this [sinful] nature, however, he is innocent until he commits sin (Mark 9: 36–37). However, in order for him to commit sin, he must pass from the age of innocence to the age of reason. That is, the age when he reasons and possesses the ability to choose between good and evil." Macedo, *Doutrinas*, 1: 74 (translation mine). Therefore, to sin is to act against God's will in a voluntary and conscient attitude, and not a state or condition brought from birth.

²⁶ Macedo makes the distinction of *sinning* and to *live sinning*. The difference dwells in the repetition of a specific sin. "Sinner is the one who lives in sin because he is its slave (John 8:34; Titus 3:3). Yet, the servant of the Lord Jesus, although commits sins, does not live sinning" (1 John 1:8–10)" Macedo, *Doutrinas*, 1: 75 (translation mine). The baptism in the water is a turning point: from that moment on, the believer changes his character and begins to live in newness of life by being a peaceful person and an enemy of strife. If that does not occur, it means that the person did not truly repented of his sins. "The person entered in the water dry and sinful, and left it wet and sinful. Consequently, his baptism did not happen." Macedo, *Doutrinas*, 1: 85 (translation mine).

²⁷ Macedo, *Doutrinas*, 1: 71.

²⁸ In an YouTube video analyzed in this chapter, after the demon said that people know if they can be touched by him or not, bishop Adilson Silva concludes: "I'll tell you a secret now. The effort to win over the devil, actually, is in the effort to win over yourself. [points to the audience smiling] When you win over yourself, over your flesh,

a spirit of Satan, that compels the sinner to do his will;²⁹ therefore, the devil directly requires sin to be able to enter a person's life and compels his prey to sin even more. The devil is almost the only source for sin: he is so active and present in this world that he is not only behind every disease or suffering, but also directly behind all sins through his demons. However, the power of choice, *free will*, is in the person.³⁰ The fault is not the devil's only, because he "work[s] in conjunction with our own sinful behavior and our love of the things of this world."³¹ Again, it is totally up to the person to seal himself up from demonic influence by performing a life without sin.

In this IURD narrative, God seems to be somewhere else, passively waiting to be called upon by the willful choice of man.³² A Manichean semi-Pelagian mentality can be perceived in the understanding of God's relation to the world. God is outside the earthly realm and needs to be reached by believers in order for Him to get involved and help them. In a way, God is limited

and [yells] don't [goes back to regular volume] live in the unrighteousness, in the sin, you win over yourself, the pride, you dominate yourself, then you already won over the devil [places his hand over the Demon-possessed person's head]. If you lose for yourself, you already lost for the devil." See "Demônio descreve a aparência dele!!!", YouTube vídeo, 14:25, "Adilson Silva Oficial", published in November 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXmyz41w5x4&t=6s>.

²⁹ Macedo, *Doutrinas*, 1:70 (translation mine).

³⁰ "Each person has the ability to reach out for God's help and to reject the evil that's in their life, even if it's just a desire in their hearts. They may not have the strength to simply walk away from their sinful life, but they can begin to change their attitudes and cry out to God. . . . As long as we are alive on earth, we have the freedom to choose life or death, Jesus or the devil." Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 51.

³¹ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 53.

³² "Many Christians today don't understand spiritual warfare. If you pray, 'Oh Lord, please help me. Please make my boss change. Please don't let him get mad at me today,' you are going to be disappointed when you see no change. It's not because God doesn't want to help you – He wants to change the situation more than you do. But He's waiting for you to pray with real faith, to stand up and fight the spiritual battle you are in." Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 140.

by man's submission to Him.³³ Only if the person does his part,³⁴ *the initial movement*, then God also will do His.³⁵

The Devil's "Other" Characteristics

Unofficially, however, the devil can be described as having "other" characteristics. Even though demons are described repetitively as "spirits without a body" in IURD's literature, one of the demons in a church service tells the pastor that he loves to see people's faces when he comes to get them after they die. People are really scared when they see him. The demon then describes himself in this way:

Pastor: And how do you look like?

Demon-possessed person: [grunts] I am burnt, full of worms. I smell like sulfur [laughs].

P: Ok, so burnt, full of worms ,and smelling like sulfur.

D: [grunts] Yes.

P: Do they see you big?

D: *So big! [laughs] . . . They call this one [Jesus] to save [them], but it's too late [laughs].*

P: It's too late?

D: *Yes, and I even say, 'yeah, call Him more! Louder!' [laughs]*³⁶

According to the devil's own description, he has characteristics of a physical body. He is burnt,

³³ "How can someone serve another person if he does not submit himself? Therefore, demons cannot serve God. Likewise, everyone who rebels against God cannot be used by Him, because rebellion is a sin." Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 368–70 (translation mine).

³⁴ Macedo provides 10 steps that everyone who wants to be delivered from the devil must take: (1) To truly accept Jesus as their only Savior; (2) To attend the services of *libertação*; (3) To be baptized in the waters, and therefore to drop off everything sinful; (4) To seek the baptism with the Holy Spirit; (5) To have a holy behavior; (6) To read the Bible daily; (7) To avoid bad companies; (8) To attend the regular services; (9) To be faithful both in tithing and offerings; (10) To pray and vigil. Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1525–641.

³⁵ "If you do your part, you can be sure that God . . . will do His." Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1369–73 (translation mine). Also, Higginbotham writes: "Perhaps we are all born with the gift of faith lying dormant within us, waiting to be awakened. Or perhaps it is a gift given only to those who seek it. Either way, we can't accept a life without it or make excuses for why we don't have it." Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 179.

³⁶ See "Demônio descreve a aparência dele!!!!", YouTube vídeo, 14:25, "Adilson Silva Oficial", published in November 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXmyz41w5x4&t=6s>.

full of worms, stinky, and big.

Later in this same video, the chief demon inside the person reports to the pastor and the community how he had taken many souls that day who are now in hell being tormented by the demons.

Pastor: So then the person dies, goes to the cemetery, and then his suffering ends, he can rest. Everybody says that in death the person rests. . .

Demon-possessed person: [laughs] Then the suffering starts.

P: Even worse than here on earth?

D: Here we are just joking.

P: So, here it's just a joke? And when does it [suffering] start after the person dies?

D: [grunt] There in hell with all of us.

P: Where?

D: In hell.

P: And are there a lot a people there now?

D: A lot! A lot! A lot!

P: Do you carry people there?

D: [laughs] Every day!

P: What about today?

D: Yes!

P: And you carried people there who died how?

D: Car accident.

P: What else?

D: [grunts] Cancer. [grunts] Gunshot. [laughs]

P: *[Looks at the community]* Did you see from where this society is the way it is, [where society's evil] is coming from? [Did you see] who moves this thing [world] behind the scene?³⁷

The demons seem to be present in different places at the same time. The one speaking in this video, for example, had been oppressing and possessing this woman for a long time, and at the same time he was oppressing other people (at least three on that day alone), causing them to die, and carrying them to hell.

Moreover, in the same video, after the demon possessing the woman describes how he takes the souls and carries them to hell, the pastor asks the demon to look at the people in that

³⁷ See "Demônio descreve a aparência dele!!!!", YouTube vídeo, 14:25, "Adilson Silva Oficial", published in November 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXmyz41w5x4&t=6s>.

temple:

Pastor: *[smiles and looks at the audience]* Raise her head here and take a look, do you already know who you can and cannot touch?³⁸

Demon-possessed person: Yes.

P: Do not point to anyone, just look.

D: *[laughs]* Yes, and they also know!

P: Oh, they know?

D: They know.

P: So, the person is aware?

D: Yes.³⁹

Since the demons can only touch those who are not sealed by the Holy Spirit, the demons supposedly can see what Lutherans would call *the hidden (invisible) church*. Demons, therefore, can see those who are *really* Christians and those who are not, which makes them demons virtually omniscient.

Therefore, although the official literature presents the devil as a creature, and his demons as spirits without a body, neither omniscient nor omnipresent, the realities described in recorded services point in a different direction. In such services, IURD pastors endow the devil with physical characteristics, omnipresence, and omniscience.

What Does the Devil Do?

Demons Behind Everything

Demons are identified by what they do.⁴⁰ Identifying them “is the beginning of the process

³⁸ The pastor sometimes commands the demon to do something directly, as if the demon and the possessed person’s body were one entity (commands like “open your eyes”, etc.). At other times, like in this occasion, the pastor commands the demon to act *in* the possessed person’s body, as if the person and the demon were two distinct entities.

³⁹ See “Demônio descreve a aparência dele!!!!”, YouTube vídeo, 14:25, “Adilson Silva Oficial”, published in November 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXmyz41w5x4&t=6s>.

⁴⁰ Macedo gives a list of demons’ activities: they try to stop the will of God; they try to extend the authority of Satan by doing his will; cause disease; they take possession of the human body; they take possession of animals; they are opposed to the spiritual growth of the children of God; they use the Bible to confuse the children of God, creating false doctrines like Predestination, false prophecies and individual revelations. Macedo, *Doutrinas*, vol. 1, 62–3. In *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Macedo acknowledges that, because demons use prophecies and even pretend to

only difference is that unbelievers look for solutions in other entities, or *demons*,⁴⁶ while Christians seek for the help of God that is reachable if they desire it with all their heart.⁴⁷ If the person decides to search for help in other demons, it can even work for some time, since demons can imitate divine signs. For example, they can create an impression of a dead relative, levitate, do telekinesis, and even heal.⁴⁸ “Through false ‘miracles,’ demons have managed to not only attract man, but also to bind him in a way that only the power of Jesus Christ can set him free.”⁴⁹

Demons’ Goal and Means

The ultimate goal of the devil is the eternal condemnation of as much people as possible, but that is just the ultimate consequence. The real emphasis is given to the way the devil conducts the person into this life by anticipating this condemnation through suffering⁵⁰ and

⁴⁶ Like the entities of Afro-religions mentioned in the title of this book, or of ancestors. In Brazilian reality, *Spiritism* is the main religion that claims making contact with ancestors and *developed spirits*. However, in other locations like Africa, for example (continent in which IURD has a great number of churches), this seems to be common, not being restricted to one religion. In fact, Higginbotham even complains that most traditional Christian churches in Africa (he mentions Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians and Lutherans) do not combat this false teaching. “While reading a magazine put out by the World Council of Churches for Africa, I came across an article stating that ancestor worship is not in conflict with Christianity because it is ultimately a way for an African to reach out to God. As an African prays to his dead grandfather, he will speak to the spirit of his father, who will, in turn, speak to his own father, and on and on until the last one speaks to God about his descendant’s problem down on the earth. Their reasoning was that since the message eventually reaches God, praying to their dead relatives is not idolatry but legitimate prayer. . . . the power of the devil is not something to be ignored.” Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 33–34.

⁴⁷ “When a person has no willpower and does not want to be free with all his heart, then it becomes impossible for him to be snatched from the hands of Satan.” Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1065–66 (translation mine).

⁴⁸ Officially, demons are not omniscient, but they might be following the person for so long that they learn secrets and observe people that interact with the him. They do that in order to imitate behaviors, tics, accents, moves, etc. When a person goes to a medium, *a clear sign the person is possessed*, the demon leaves the original person, enters the medium, and tell him things that only he could know, or imitates dead relative or friends. The result is the deception of his prey. After that, he returns to the original person. Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 73. However, as we mentioned before, in a video, the pastor asks him to look at the church and tell if he knows who he can touch and who he cannot. The demon answers: “Yes, [I know]! And they also know. [laughs]” See “Demônio descreve a aparência dele!!!!”, YouTube vídeo, 14:25, “Adilson Silva Oficial”, published in November 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXmyz41w5x4&t=6s>.

⁴⁹ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 920–21 (translation mine).

⁵⁰ Consequently, the God’s ultimate goal is salvation, but the real emphasis is given in the victory here in this

finally death.⁵¹ This suffering affects all aspects of human existence, and includes diseases of the body and mind,⁵² spiritual diseases, family brokenness, financial failures, vices, sin and so on. Only in very rare occasions, those kinds of temporal sufferings can be allowed by God “for a beneficial purpose.”⁵³

Based on his experiences,⁵⁴ Higginbotham lists twelve signs of demonic possession.⁵⁵ The twelve signs are fits of rage, constant headaches, insomnia, incurable diseases, fear, seizures, suicidal thoughts, depression, addictions, romantic instability, voices and vision, and

world. “For many people, Jesus is the answer to finding eternal salvation, happiness, peace, a new moral code, and a church family, but they find that the other grueling details of life are just as difficult and painful as before. . . . The blood He shed for us destroyed all the power of the devil, all our sicknesses, all our sin – the punishment for all the evil in this world was paid for by His precious sacrifice. Because of that, we can find freedom from all the attacks of the devil, no matter how strong or terrible they are. But just the fact that Jesus paid the price is not enough for us to see our victory; we have to fight in His name and with His authority to destroy those demons. God has already given us every weapon we need, and, through the example of His Son and through His Word, He has taught us how to counterattack the work of the enemy. Our victory is guaranteed – as long as we remain in Him and follow in His footsteps.” Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 90.

⁵¹ In the video above mentioned, the demon tells the pastor and the community how he killed the possessed person’s grandmother: “*Demon-possessed person: Her grandmother died with a gauze in her Uterus that they forgot there.* Pastor: What do you have to do with that? *D: [laughs] I distracted him. [the doctor] P: how did you do that? . . . D: He talked to the nurse and forgot. [laughs] P: [looks at the Demon-possessed person] But how do you distract people? Do you suggest thoughts? Did you use the nurse? D: [grunts] I made him remember a meeting he had and he talked to her [the nurse] P: So, the doctor remembered a meeting he had, talked to the nurse and forgot the gauze inside her grandmother’s uterus? . . . [looks at the community] You guys see? How those things happen?” See “Demônio descreve a aparência dele!!!”, YouTube video, 14:25, “Adilson Silva Oficial”, published in November 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXmyz41w5x4&t=6s>.*

⁵² Due to their understanding that the person has the power of choice between God or the devil, and this is a rational and conscient decision, the demons use the strategy of making people insane. “Demons have driven many people to insane asylums; first, because they enjoy the destruction of human beings; second because if they act in a destroyed mind, they are safe from conscious rejection.” Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1025–27 (translation mine).

⁵³ Macedo, *Doutrinas*, 2: 54 (translation mine).

⁵⁴ “It’s something we have noticed from years of praying for people around the world.” Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 56.

⁵⁵ Macedo also call them the *tortures of the demons*. Therefore, they not only *indicate* that demons are present, but also *are* what demons do (*fruits*). Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 671–72.

involvement in witchcraft and the occult.⁵⁶ Macedo adds *nervousness*⁵⁷ and *fainting*⁵⁸ to this list, although no further explanation is given by him about what each of the signs might mean. This list is not exhaustive, but Macedo summarizes the signs of demon possession as “everything that is out of the ordinary, without a plausible cause.”⁵⁹

Such a long list of signs can make us wrongly believe that everybody is possessed according to IURD, since we all have had headaches or fear. These signs do not mean necessarily that *a person* has demons if he has *one* of these symptoms; but if one or more appear without apparent cause, and the person does not respond to medicines, they are clearly demonic.⁶⁰ “Although all diseases come from demons, not every sick person is demonized. . . . Not every sick person is demon possessed, but every demon possessed person is sick.”⁶¹

Sick, but Not Bodily Possessed

The apparent contradiction of saying that all diseases come from demons, but not every sick person is possessed is solved by IURD as follows. Demons need a body, but not necessarily

⁵⁶ It is interesting to compare this list to the one presented by Walther in his Pastoral Theology. He lists 9 main signs: 1) The knowledge of foreign language as well as arts and sciences not known by the possessed person; 2) Knowledge of hidden things which have happened elsewhere in far regions or in the future; 3) Superhuman strength; 4) The exact reproduction of animal voices, without having the necessary organs for that; 5) Obscene speech; 6) Monstrosity in gestures; 7) Horrifying screaming; 8) Blasphemy toward God and scorn for the neighbor; 9) fury and violence against the body and against the other watching. It is clear what makes IURD have rites of *libertação* in every service, and the Lutheran Church only in a few occasions, privately. C.F.W. Walther, *American Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, trans. John M. Drickamer (New Haven, MO: Lutheran News, 1995), 215.

⁵⁷ Macedo, *Doutrinas*, vol. 2, 64.

⁵⁸ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 670–74.

⁵⁹ Macedo, *Doutrinas*, vol. 2, 63 (translation mine).

⁶⁰ “Not all problems are due to demon possession. But possession itself is apparent when ordinary solutions just don’t work anymore. If a disease is beyond the help of treatments, it is more than just a disease; it has a spirit at work behind it to make it incurable.” Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 54. Also, Macedo says: “Of course, we are not claiming that all people are demonized, however, most of those who show the mentioned signs manifest a demonic spirit after the prayer of faith.” Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 682–83 (translation mine).

⁶¹ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1110–18 (translation mine).

a *human body*. Diseases are produced by living beings with a body. These diseases, like living beings or organisms, can carry a spirit or *demon*. These demons *create* the producers of the disease, making them alive through their spirit. Macedo explains his reasoning as follows:

Every disease has a cause, and that cause is always a virus, a bacillus, a germ, a bacterium, in short, a micro-organism that causes the destruction of tissues. These microscopic agents move, act, have life. We ask: where does this life come from? It cannot be from God, for He is not a destroyer. . . . For this micro-organism to move and destroy, there must be a force within it, a destructive spirit, and we cannot identify it with anything other than a demonic force. . . . The spirit of life in it [in disease] is not from God, but from Satan.⁶²

This process is what makes possible for a person to be *sick* although not necessarily *bodily possessed*. The micro-organism that dwells in the person and also produces the *disease* is the possessed entity. Since the cure of a disease is the separation between this disease and its demon-spirit, and this separation ends up *killing* the disease (just like a person dies if body and soul are separated), the demon needs to be expelled for healing to happen. The same occurs with other instances of life: financial problems, failures, and vices have demons, and in order to defeat these ailments, they need to be exorcized.⁶³ *Libertação* and *Prosperity*, therefore, are intrinsically linked. The former is a servant and doorway to the latter.

How Does the Devil Do His Work?

The devil's strategy is to deceive with lies in order to separate as many people as they can from the Lord.⁶⁴ He depicts himself as a helpful and powerful friend that can "heal, solve

⁶² Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1091–99 (translation mine).

⁶³ Oneide Bobsin, "Teologia da Prosperidade ou Estratégia de Sobrevivência: Estudo Exploratório," *Estudos Teológicos* 35, (1995): 30.

⁶⁴ IURD emphasizes that over and over again, which becomes contradictory considering the subject that we will consider in the next chapter: if by one hand they understand that the devil is the father of lies and wants to deceive human being, by the other hand they listen to the devil's answers during the ritual of *Libertação*.

problems, attract prosperity, deliver from something or someone, make a dream become true,”⁶⁵ but his final goal is death.⁶⁶

Seeking Help in the Wrong Place

In the fourth chapter of his book *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Macedo talks about how demons attract people in order to possess them. He explains that his experience has shown him that demons in Brazil always do the same thing. First they torment someone with failure, sickness, unhappiness, or other scary things like visions of shadows, hearing of voices, and so on. Then they send somebody else (a friend, relative, or even a unknown person) to suggest a solution for their problem by attending an Afro-Brazilian religion⁶⁷ or at a Spiritist center.⁶⁸

The tormented person accepts the invitation and is well received in the place. The practitioners tell the person that he has *psychic powers* from birth that need to be developed through practices like meditation, sacrifices, and rituals. The problems seem to be solved,⁶⁹ but the real sensation stirred in the person by the demons is pride. The person, now a practitioner of Spiritism or Umbanda, starts ascending in the religious hierarchy, being promoted by their superiors to higher positions inside the religious organization. The person then serves blindly the spirits that guide him, and the more the person serves the evil spirit, the more the spirit demands without giving anything in return. The demons act like a drug that gives a very good sensation in

⁶⁵ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1005–7 (translation mine).

⁶⁶ Macedo compare the devil’s strategy as a cat playing with its prey: “If someone agrees to play, they become good friends. But the man is always in his grip, and sooner or later, if the person can’t take the game anymore, the demons end up leading him to death.” Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 290–92 (translation mine).

⁶⁷ Generally, Umbanda, Quimbanda or Candomblé.

⁶⁸ Generally, Kardecism or Esoterism.

⁶⁹ There is a kind of agreement between the demons. They agree to leave a person for a while in order to give him the impression of healing, but later “they enter in his mind and in his heart, already conquered by the ‘great work’ supposedly realized.” Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Location 1014 (translation mine).

the beginning but then requires more and more to provide a similar sensation. His life becomes a disgrace.⁷⁰

Inherited Demons

Demons may act in the life of a person even if he is not directly involved with the occult. They may come through a person's family history, being passed on from parents to children for generations.⁷¹ IURD claims to base this teaching on Exodus 20:5–6 and on John Wimber's concept of *Inherited Demons*.⁷² If the person does not break the chain with a conscious rejection, the demon or the curse will continue in the family, causing failure, depression, and death for generations. The principle of the *free will* for spiritual matters is also seen here.⁷³ For IURD, the

⁷⁰ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindles Locations 391–416.

⁷¹ In a video already mentioned in this chapter, there is this dialogue: “Pastor: For how long have you been there? *Demon-possessed person*: [laughs] *I’ve always been here, . . . since her mother’s womb. . . .* P: Why are you there since her mother’s womb? D: *Because there her mother was already mine.* P: That means that when a person is yours, if she has a son or a daughter. . . ? D: *I go from generation to generation. . . .* P: For how many generations you are in this family? D: [screams] *Five.*” See “Demônio descreve a aparência dele!!!!”, YouTube vídeo, 14:25, “Adilson Silva Oficial”, published in November 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXmyz41w5x4&t=6s>.

⁷² The only external source quoted by Higginbotham in *Possessed Believers* is of the founder of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, John Wimber (1934–1997). In his book *Power Healing*, Wimber separates a whole chapter (6) to deal with demonized people. But Wimber is totally different from IURD when it comes to method. Instead of departing from the personal experience, trying to find a bible text that supports it, Wimber starts with the Bible, he continues through the church fathers and finally arrives at the human experience. He defends the existence of *inherited demons*, passed from parents to children. Quoting Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170–236) and his *Apostolic Tradition*, Wimber argues that the early church supported that idea, and that's why they baptize all new converts, infants and adults (John Wimber, *Power Healing*, San Francisco: Harperone, 1991, 117). His logic seems right, since if the infants do not have a demon, why are they being exorcized through baptism? However, no mention of *original sin* is made by him. Robert Bennett responds to that by admitting that we are under a generational curse since Adam and Eve, but it is in baptism that we find comfort. He poses four questions in order to respond a person that thinks he/she has a generational curse or possession: (1) Are you baptized? (2) Do you trust Jesus? (3) Who is more powerful: Jesus or Satan? (4) Can a person be Satan's property? The great point here is the different understanding of baptism. If the baptism is considered a human action toward God, and therefore only an external sign of a human action, then the questions will not work. Although, if baptism is considered God's action, then one can only answer that if God claimed me as His son in my baptism and he is stronger than Satan, *ergo* there is no generational curse or possession capable of changing that. Robert Bennett, *Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare in America* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2016), 154–57.

⁷³ “[God] has, however, given all His creatures free will, the ability and intelligence so that they could, of their own free will, cooperate with their Creator. Man is free to choose between serving God and serving the devil. It can be a temple of the Holy Spirit or ‘horse’, ‘donkey’, ‘device’, ‘gatekeeper’ of an *Exú*, a *Caboclo* or similar

baptism in water has little to no effect against this generational curse, especially because it is seen just as an external sign of a person's intention to leave sin behind and change his life. Only a conscious rejection can break the generational chain of the curse through *libertação*.

Misleading the Pastor

Another strategy used by the demons, and based on a revelation made by God to Macedo,⁷⁴ is to deceive pastors by possessing a person without producing the signs in the possessed person, but rather in a close friend or relative. The pastor will try to work on the person that is suffering instead of the real bearer of the problem, namely, the possessed person without symptoms.

Considering that conscious rejection is necessary in order to receive God's help, this demonic strategy makes sense. Without symptoms of possession, a person will never be aware of the devil's presence in his life, and therefore will never consciously reject the devil. It seems to be the perfect plan, but IURD understands that the devil cannot hide when a *strong prayer* is made by the pastor. Hence the importance of bringing close relatives and friends to IURD's service. If the spirit is in someone else, he either will show up or depart right the way.

Accepting Suffering as Part of Life

The devil also affects people's lives by convincing them that they need to accept suffering as part of life. Among Christians, this temptation is even stronger. According to IURD, the devil wants people to believe that they cannot thrive financially. The devil wants people to believe that the *status quo* is the best people can expect. He wants to keep people from tithing in order to

demons. You can have peace with yourself and with God, or live in a real hell with everything and everyone.” Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 349–54.

⁷⁴ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1453–60.

keep them far from God's blessings.⁷⁵ According to Higginbotham, that is how the devil speaks in the mind of a believer:

You are a good Christian, but don't take all those promises in the Bible too literally. You've been chosen to suffer here on earth because you are so good and righteous. Of course you'll be blessed. . . in heaven when you die! Just keep on going. You're a hero to endure these problems.⁷⁶

The point Higginbotham is trying to make is that, if Christians accept suffering as part of this life, as part of the *taking up the cross* (Matt. 16:24), that means they are being pride and boasting, and consequently suffering oppression from the devil. From God comes only the promises of blessings, not warnings about the reality of suffering. The devil is responsible for spreading this *fake news* about suffering in the Christian life. Again, the ultimate goal of Christians life is salvation (or condemnation), but the real emphasis in IURD is given to victory (or defeat) in this life.⁷⁷

God versus Satan

Is Satan as powerful as God? IURD officially answers this question with a resounding *no*. In their booklet of doctrines, Macedo makes it clear that the devil is a creature, and therefore does not compete in equal *status* against God. God imposes limits on the devil, as seen in the book of Job. In church services, Jesus' authority, given to the pastor, makes the devil obey him

⁷⁵ "When we pay tithing to God, He is under obligation (because he promised) to keep his Word, rebuking devouring spirits that disgrace man's life, acting on diseases, accidents, addictions, social degradation and in all sectors of human activity, making man suffer forever." Edir Macedo, *Vida com Abundância* (Rio de Janeiro: Universal, 1992), 79 (translation mine).

⁷⁶ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 126.

⁷⁷ "According to the Neopentecostal reasoning, there are two dimensions, material and spiritual, where evil forces and faith are in constant battle. The material world is under evil forces, and those forces can be dominated only by the believer's faith. Poverty and material needs are consequences of the devil's influence, in such a way that the blessings announced by prosperity theology do not always become concrete in the believer's life. Demons are acting in all human affairs, and they use pagan cults as instruments of domination of people." Linden, "Eschatological Pneumatology," 19.

all the time. The very fact that human beings can resist and attack the devil if they use the weapons that God gave them to use, is another evidence for IURD's belief concerning the devil's power (or strength).⁷⁸

But what, then, has led scholars to conclude that “the devil is the omnipresent protagonist of [IURD's] services and rituals,”⁷⁹ and “the Devil found during our readings [of Macedo's books] proved to be almost more powerful than God”?⁸⁰ Scholars have also noted that, according to IURD, “in the dispute for the dominion of humanity, the devil seems. . . always to be ahead [of God],”⁸¹ and “they almost only speak, preach, and write about it [demonology]. The great and main doctrines of Scripture are relegated to a secondary level.”⁸²

There are, it seems, two discourses in IURD concerning God's and Satan's power (or strength). *Officially* speaking, God is almighty over the whole creation, including the devil and his angels. *Pragmatically* speaking, the emphasis given to Satan's action in the world makes him at least very close to God's level. The words *officially* and *pragmatically* are not synonymous with *books* and *services*, respectively, as if the contradiction dwells in the speech delivered by the pastors in services versus the words written by Macedo or Higginbotham in their books. Despite their books and statements on the power of God, on how Satan and the demons cannot

⁷⁸ Macedo differentiates between power and strength. For him, power has to do with “authority, domain, command.” It is more of an essential property. Strength, however, “is imposed, it is the result of impetuosity, it is action, dynamism.” It is more of a feature conquered by force, not naturally. The application of this differentiation is that creatures “can resist strength, but not power. The demons have a certain strength and with it, they want to have power, but they cannot resist those who have been given true spiritual power, which is God's, through the Holy Spirit.” Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 977-80 (translation mine).

⁷⁹ Ricardo Mariano, “Guerra Espiritual: o Protagonismo do Diabo nos Cultos Neopentecostais,” *Debates do NER* 4, no. 4 (July 2003): 33 (translation mine).

⁸⁰ Souza, *A imagem do diabo*, 151 (translation mine).

⁸¹ Mariano, “Guerra Espiritual,” 24 (translation mine).

⁸² “Comissão Permanente de Doutrina da Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil,” in: *Uma Avaliação das Principais Crenças e Práticas da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (São Paulo: Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil, 2007), 19 (translation mine).

resist the authority bestowed by Jesus to his disciples and, by extension, “to those. . . who desire to give their lives completely to following Him,”⁸³ we must understand how broad the devil’s sphere of action and influence is in the IURD. Then we are led to the conclusion that there is *pragmatically* a strong dualism in IURD’s discourse, where God and the devil seem to fight on equal terms.

For instance, according to IURD, God never uses the devil or demons to act in His favor.⁸⁴ God can only use creatures that submit themselves to Him.⁸⁵ Since the devil rebels against God and does not submit to Him, God cannot use him. God seems dependent upon others’ will and permission, always *reacting* to and after the devil’s action, and rarely being the proponent of the action.⁸⁶ More evidence can be found in the understanding that all sins are caused by the devil personally or through his demons.⁸⁷ Moreover, “diseases, misery, disasters and all the problems that afflict the human being have one origin: the devil.”⁸⁸ The demons have the ability of passing on from one generation to the next, remaining in the person even if he is baptized. All this presence and action unavoidably lead us to conclude that, for IURD, the devil is even more present and active in this world than God.

⁸³ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 46.

⁸⁴ “The fact that God often takes advantage of situations in which a person is involved by evil forces to bless him does not mean that He makes use of demons. In reality, the evil was removed, and the person received God’s blessing, by His mercy.” Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 376–79 (translation mine).

⁸⁵ “How can someone serve another person if he does not submit himself? Therefore, demons cannot serve God. Likewise, everyone who rebels against God cannot be used by Him, because rebellion is a sin.” Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 368-70 (translation mine).

⁸⁶ “The main divine attribution, moreover, lies in healing, helping and blessing the victims of demonic action. So while Satan acts, God reacts. In the dispute for the dominion of humanity, the devil seems, therefore, to always be in the lead, although the Creator has already secured the final victory of this cosmic war.” Mariano, “Guerra Espiritual,” 24 (translation mine).

⁸⁷ “Every sin has a spirit, from Satan, that compels the sinner to do his will.” Macedo, *Doutrinas*, vol. 1, 70 (translation mine).

⁸⁸ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 220–21 (translation mine).

A Lutheran Response

The Theologian of the Cross

In thesis twenty-one of the Heidelberg Disputation (1518), Luther states: “The theologian of the cross says what a thing is.”⁸⁹ Therefore, one of the first characteristics of Lutheran theologians’ *modus operandi* is to stop confabulating when the Bible is silent. Lutherans do not look for something behind the cross, they do not search for the *invisible things of God*, and thus do not claim to have special revelations that go further than what the Bible says. They see God’s revelation on the cross, and with the Word of the cross they fill out the empty blanks in their lives.⁹⁰ They see things for what they are. They see reality in God’s terms. This way of functioning as a theologian means in part that one operates in the world as a humble creature under the word of the Creator.

Creator, Creation, and New Creation

As theologians of the cross, Lutherans first see themselves as creatures under God, the Creator. Genesis 1:1 tells us that the Almighty “God created the heavens and earth” *ex nihilo*, i.e., out of nothing. In this creation, angels, humans, animals, plants, and everything else is under God’s authority, power, and dominion. “And behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). But something happened. The serpent appeared as a fallen angel in order to tempt the woman with doubt:⁹¹ “Did God actually say. . . ?” (Gen. 3:1) Eve and Adam fell. Sin became part of this

⁸⁹ Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 71.

⁹⁰ “The theology of the cross liberates God’s children from having to construct falsehoods in order for life to make sense. The truth of the cross sets them free to speak the truth, no matter how bad it is, so that God’s truth in Jesus may restore the good. The word of the cross enables us to ‘call a thing what it is.’” Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology: a Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 147.

⁹¹ “Unbelief is the source of all sins; when Satan brought about this unbelief by driving out or corrupting the Word, the rest was easy for him. . . . Therefore just as from the true Word of God salvation results, so also from the

beautiful world. God's curse enters the narrative of His dealings with creation (Gen. 3:13–19).

Everything changed with the fall. Man was expelled from the garden; suffering became part of his reality, and guilt overcame the human heart. But angels, humans, animals, plants, and everything else remains still under God's authority, power, and dominion. God did not leave His creation to run by itself, or to be run by somebody else. Through His work of preservation, God is still creating by providing for His creatures through vocations every single day. In *creatio continua* God does His creative work of taking care of creation through His creatures.⁹² The Creator did not lose control over His universe. *We* lost the relationship with Him and became His enemies (Col. 1:21), and, as a consequence, we put ourselves under the devil's dictatorship.

However, this curse did not come without a promise of hope: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). This hope was fulfilled when Jesus was raised on the cross: "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:31–32).⁹³ Christ is victorious (*Christus Victor*) over the devil.⁹⁴ In Christ, there is a *new creation*. Creation is

corrupt Word of God damnation results." *LW* 1, 147.

⁹² Esko Murto, "An Iron wall on our side: Martin Luther's understanding of Christian Devotional Life as a Battleground against the Devil" in *Theology is Eminently Practical: Essays in Honor of John T. Pless*, ed. Jacob Corzine and Bryan Wolfmueller (Fort Wayne: Lutheran Legacy Press, 2012), 135.

⁹³ "Jesus crucifixion is the deciding act that exorcizes Satan from his position of power, thereby rendering Satan and his demons powerless. The power Satan wields is 'a joke, a mere façade!' The act of crucifixion has insured that our 'victory cannot fail.'" Bennett. *Afraid*, 32.

⁹⁴ According to Gustaf Aulén, the classic idea of Atonement is the one which portrays "Atonement as a divine conflict and victory; Christ—*Christus Victor*— fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself." Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 4. This position of 'tyrant' over mankind is not conquered by the devil, but in fact man's apostasy caused him to be under the devil as a consequence: since there is no *middle term*, if a person is God's enemy, he/she is devil's slave. But still, God is the one who sets limits to the devil and even makes him work according to His purposes.

redeemed and God reestablishes the lost relationship with mankind through His Son Jesus. The Christian is also a *new creature*,⁹⁵ and in all this God is still controlling everything according to His plans for creation.

Dualism versus Antagonism

Dualism

Jesus rules over the whole creation. Nothing happens in this world without, at least, God's permission.⁹⁶ Therefore, to talk about dualism in a universe created and ruled by the triune God is at least strange. There is no dualism *when it comes to divine essence*. Thus, there is only one Creator in distinction from creation. There is only one Almighty God. There is only one *in charge*. However, there is a battle going on. Man is in the middle of it, although there is no *middle* status for man. Either he is bound to God and free from the devil, i.e., bound to God's love and Satan's wrath. Or he is bound to the devil and *free* from God's love, i.e., bound to God's wrath. In both situations, nonetheless, God is behind and active in His work.

In particular, temptation is not an unexpected event in the life of the believer, and it can even be considered a good sign.⁹⁷ To be on God's side means "to sin" against the devil, which

⁹⁵ Demonology does not work only in a horizontal, or, in a *down-here* level. Demonology, or, exorcism has to do with salvation and its implications now. Angelology, or in this case demonology, is not a primary doctrine with an end in itself, but a secondary doctrine that must serve the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. "When a man has become a Christian and read the Bible, he will find in it, from Genesis to Revelation, the doctrine of the angels, side by side with the central article of Christ, the Savior of sinners." Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 1:498.

⁹⁶ "Satan does not have any power except that which has been granted to him by God. Even the very act of demoniacal possession only occurs with God's command or, at minimum, His consent." Robert H. Bennett. *I Am Not Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), 149.

⁹⁷ "To share in God's holiness is not merely to be tempted, but to receive such attacks and afflictions as God's own testing of his children. Christians are called to endure discipline (Heb 12:7), not in some masochistic way, but as a form of training so that they might grow strong and healthy to withstand further attacks, make it out alive, and finally share in God's righteousness and peace (vv. 9–13)." Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 93–94.

forces him to attack harder.⁹⁸ The Holy Spirit then leads believers under attack “to the Word of God and prayer and to discernment about one’s spiritual condition in light of the Word.”⁹⁹

Consequently, God uses the devil’s temptation as a holy testing. It is hard to define when God or Satan is acting in the midst of spiritual attacks, because temptation and testing seem to be two sides of the same coin.¹⁰⁰ In the end, however, the coin is God’s, even though it may not look like it.

Antagonism

“The devil actively opposes God’s positive work both in creation and salvation. The world is a battlefield between God and Satan.”¹⁰¹ In this battle, Satan and his instruments¹⁰²—i.e., the world and humans acting in the sinful flesh—attack human beings in order to convince them either that they do not need God, or that they cannot have God, to lead them to sinful arrogance or despair.¹⁰³ Either way, the devil does not want us to look at the cross in the midst of spiritual

⁹⁸ Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 83.

⁹⁹ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 90.

¹⁰⁰ “Man cannot say which of the two contenders [God and Satan] laid a particular tribulation on him. Both are pulling at man at the same time” Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 80.

¹⁰¹ Ingemar Öberg, *Luther and World Mission: A Historical and Systematic Study* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007), 35.

¹⁰² While for IURD, the devil is directly behind every sin and temptation, Robert Bennett remembers that “not all temptations are due to the devil directly, but the world and the flesh mediate most temptations. Satan is always the original source of these temptations but not the immediate source.” Robert Bennett, *Afraid*, 35. That would be, in a simplistic comparison, similar to say that Albert Einstein is not the immediate source of the deaths provoked by the atomic bombs during World War 2, but that he is the original source, since his famous equation $E = mc^2$ is the theoretical basis of the bombs. This is not to take out of Satan’s back the responsibility and even the possibility of his direct influence, since this same author, in his other book *I am not afraid* says that, although “temptation remains threefold (flesh, world, and devil), it is the devil who uses the first two means of temptation to his advantage.” However, to say that he is directly behind every single sin, temptation and suffering ends up making him more powerful than he actually is. Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 134.

¹⁰³ Esko Murto remembers that, for Luther, the devil’s “main objective is not to have the person fall into sin, but to make the Christian despaired and lose faith.” Murto, “An Iron on Our Side”, 138. The focus in the Lutheran theology is, therefore, the struggle in accepting the idea of a *Deus pro nobis*. In IURD, the idea is totally different: the devil main goal is the conformation with suffering, not allowing the Christian to revolt with his situation in this life. Satan enters through sin and attempts the unbeliever to look for solutions in other entities, and Christians to not

attacks, but at ourselves, at our self-made righteousness and victories, or at our problems and failures.¹⁰⁴ Satan, the world, and our sinful flesh tempt man to look upon himself in sinful arrogance or despair. *Homo incurvatus in se*.

The language of *antagonism* instead of *dualism* is preferable to describe God's identity in contrast to Satan's. It points to the rule of God as Creator over Satan as a creature, the *personal* opposition of Satan to God and His human creatures, and therefore, points neither to an *essential* equality between the two, nor a sovereign rule of Satan over creation. This amounts to a non-Manichaeian understanding of the devil.¹⁰⁵

Theodicy

God as the one ultimately in charge of creation brings dozens of problems to man's logic. The problem of suffering, or *theodicy* (the justification of God in the midst of suffering), for example, becomes impossible to solve through a Lutheran perspective. Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, for instance, argue that the "Word from the cross . . . comes as close as possible to answering the unsolvable problem of the existence of sin and evil in the world fashioned and cared for by the good and almighty God."¹⁰⁶ This answer, however, is not satisfactory to men like Edir Macedo and IURD's pastors. They believe that if someone suffers, it is the devil who is inflicting suffering upon him. If he is not healed from this suffering, he is not giving his best, or, contributing to his part of the deal, and therefore God does not do His part.

Luther, by contrast, suggests three lights through which the problem of theodicy should be

look for solutions at all. It is all about solutions to problems and not bearing suffering.

¹⁰⁴ Bennett. *Afraid*, 27.

¹⁰⁵ Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 36.

¹⁰⁶ Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, 147.

approached: the light of nature, grace, and glory. The light of nature poses the question, “how can the good suffer while the evil prosper?” The light of grace struggles with the question, “how can God condemn those who have no power to turn themselves to him?,” and “presents God’s love in its everlasting dimension.”¹⁰⁷ The light of glory, then, comes to answer the question: man does not know these things, only God knows. We can thus only trust in God’s righteousness. Although God does not always heal our pain, or even present a clear reason or purpose for it, He is still good and almighty. To put the same thought in pneumatological terms, Sánchez notes:

The Spirit of God has absolute power over every spirit and, therefore, ultimately has the priority of using any spiritual activity in the world (even the evil one) to fulfill its purposes. The faith of the church allows us to affirm that God is not responsible for the evil or the action of evil spirits in the world and at the same time say that he can use these realities for the good of his people.¹⁰⁸

Lutherans believe that “we cannot distinguish between the divine and the satanic by asking whether or not an accomplished transformation produces suffering at the present. Pain is, so to speak, normal in this world, the world of the cross.”¹⁰⁹ Neither Satan nor man has power over God or even fully understand Him.¹¹⁰ God is the only one in charge.

God Uses Satan

No creature can claim independence from its Creator.¹¹¹ That includes angels, and,

¹⁰⁷ Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 147.

¹⁰⁸ Sánchez, *Pneumatología*, 57 (translation mine).

¹⁰⁹ Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 158.

¹¹⁰ “If his righteousness were such that it could be judged to be righteous by human standards, it would clearly not be divine and would in no way differ from human righteousness. But since he is the one true God, and is wholly incomprehensible and inaccessible to human reason, it is proper and indeed necessary that his righteousness should be incomprehensible.” *LW*, 33, 290.

¹¹¹ “Not only the works of the human spirit, but also those of the angelic spirits, occur according to God’s plans.” Sánchez, *Pneumatología*, 55 (translation mine).

therefore, demons.¹¹² Even though demons rebel against God, they simply cannot help but being used by God to His purposes.¹¹³ They surely want to destroy, but God still uses them even against their own will. “For from him and through him and to him are all things” (Romans 11:36).

The fact that creatures are being used by God does not depend on their permission or submission. Most of the time, they do not even realize that they are being used by God.¹¹⁴ The book of Job is clear on that reality. While Satan thinks he is destroying the life of God’s creature, God is actually testing Job, revealing Himself as sovereign and blessing him greatly at the end of the book. Without noticing, Satan becomes God’s tool to do exactly the opposite Satan would like to do. God turns the table on Satan.

The Devil Proposes, but Only God Disposes

Satan is not independent from God. While the devil may *propose*, only God *disposes*.¹¹⁵ That is completely different from the language of a *reacting God* evident in IURD’s theology. Lutherans see God always *ahead* the devil, using or even commanding what he does according to His purposes. God does not *wait* for the devil’s actions, only dealing with their consequences, as if He did not know what Satan was about to do.

¹¹² “The devil is not a power equal and opposite to God, and in so far as he has power over men, he derives this power ultimately from God, for he stands, as it were, to execute God’s own judgment on sinful and guilty man.” Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 54.

¹¹³ We will talk more about *how God uses the Devil* in the next chapter of this thesis.

¹¹⁴ Luther, in the first of a series of sermons on Matthew 18:1–12, presents the devil as a forced servant of God. “God uses the devil and the evil angels. They of course, desire to ruin everything; but God blocks them, God allows pestilence, war, or some other plague to come, that we may humble ourselves before Him, fear Him, hold to Him, and call upon Him. When God has accomplished these purposes through the scourge, then the good angels come again to perform their office. They bid the devil stop the pestilence, war and famine. Do the devil must serve us with the very thing with which he plans to injure us; for God is such a great Master that He is able to turn even the wickedness of the devil into good.” WA, vol. 34 II, 240.

¹¹⁵ Sánchez, *Pneumatología*, 58.

Conclusion

We have found evidence that, if one follows the logical consequence of IURD's teaching on Satan and his demons, we must conclude that the devil is more present and active on the earth than God Himself. Therefore, pragmatically speaking, the devil becomes more powerful than God, being the main actor behind every sin, disease, failure, disaster, and suffering affecting humans. God is merely a reactive being dependent upon the human will to act, so that in cooperation with Him, He can then cast out Satan and bring about the opposite of what Satan brings to His creatures.

As theologians of the cross, Lutherans, on the other hand, live under God as His creatures. They see Jesus as sovereign and ruler over the whole creation. They trust in God's care even in the midst of suffering and spiritual attacks, and in their pain look to the cross for the assurance of God's love. Therefore, there is no *dualism* between God and Satan, as if they were equal beings or forces, or as if ruling the earth fell mostly under the power of Satan with only conditional interventions by God prompted by human decisions. However, there is a battle going on right now, where Satan opposes God in every possible way. There is an *antagonism* between God and Satan, but the only one in charge of creation is God, that even uses the devil against his will to fulfill His plans for His children.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DEVIL'S TESTIMONY

Pastor: But, how is it? How do you know which one is yours? For example, if a person is run over by a car there, in the street now, and dies, how do you know it is yours?

Demon-possessed person: [turns to the altar, kneels facing the roof above the altar, where the phrase Jesus Cristo é o Senhor, Jesus Christ is Lord is written] It is that name. If someone dies in it, this one will have eternal life, sir.

P: *[points to the phrase and looks at the community] If he dies in that name?*

D: *He will have eternal life.*

P: That's why you kneel before him over there?

D: *[grunts] That's what this people here do not know. They have no idea how precious is that Man.*

[Scene cuts. Now the demon-possessed person is facing the audience, but still kneeling]

P: Would you like to have a chance with that Man over there?

D: *I would give my life to be here [taps the floor with his head]*

P: Raise his head. Do you regret it?

D: *I am already condemned, sir.*

P: There is no way out?

D: *No, so I fight to take these souls [from Jesus].*

P: But what if you could [be saved]?

D: *I would give my life.*

P: To Him?

D: *To Him.*

P: See, this people *[points to the audience]* have this opportunity, but there are some people who don't want to give in to Him.

D: *But I work on their heads.*

P: You don't want them to give their lives?

D: *No! I want them groaning with me down there. . .*

P: *[interrupts]* It is like, "I will go, but not alone."

D: *[laughs]*

[Scene cuts]

P: You were an angel?

D: *[laughs]*

P: Have you lived up there?

D: *Oh, it is so beautiful! . . . They do not know what they are missing.¹*

In this chapter, we will answer the question of whether the testimony of demons in IURD's

¹ See "Você acredita NISSO?" YouTube video, 6:27, "Igreja Universal", published in September 10, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLAukxqifL4>.

teaching is trustworthy. We will examine parts of their rite of *libertação* and after that, focus on the more important aspects of the interview. We will seek to understand why it is important for IURD's pastors to interview the demons, what is the intention behind this practice, and what are the most frequent questions asked to the demons. Later on, we will offer more practical examples of things that demons say during these interviews and the implications of these speeches for understanding IURD's teaching. At the end of our discussion, we will answer the initial question and provide a Lutheran response.

We will argue that, for Lutherans, God makes the devil the best teacher of theology through spiritual attacks, that is, when the devil tries to destroy man by tempting him, God uses him to teach His children theology through struggling, suffering, and the cross. The resources that we will use for this chapter are the two main books on IURD's demonology (*Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, by Edir Macedo, and *Possessed Believers*, by David Higginbotham), and various YouTube videos of interviews of demons by IURD's pastors in the context of public services. For the Lutheran answer, we will use Luther's framework for understanding the Christian life in terms of *oratio, meditatio, tentatio* as articulated by John Kleinig's article "Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio: What Makes a Theologian?"

Parts of IURD's Rite of *libertação*

Where is *Libertação* Located in the Service?

IURD does not have a book of liturgy or, as far as this researcher could verify, any study on the topic of worship. Therefore, any attempt to identify liturgical patterns in the service must be made through observation. It is not a surprise that their services possess a more or less stabilized structure, focused more on prayer and singing than on the sermon or reading of Bible texts. Campos says that, in a regular service of ninety minutes, "no more than ten minutes are

dedicated to the sermon. The rest of the time is dedicated to singing, to prayer, tithing, rites of healing and exorcism.”²

Although the liturgy of IURD is much more flexible compared to more traditional or mainline churches, the service still generally starts with a prayer during which, for most of the time, some demons manifest themselves. If the demons appear, then the pastor starts the rite of *libertação* which in turn ends with another prayer. There is a small explanation of a Bible text, most of the time without the use of the Bible or a reading of a longer pericope, followed by a small rite of some sort, or a *campaign*³ involving some commitment and interaction from the audience. There is some sharing of testimonies by people who have benefited by a campaign and songs interweaving each of these parts.⁴

We will now focus more on the rite of *libertação*. The service proper starts with this rite, because it is only when the spirits are gone that a person can make the right choices without their influence. *Libertação* is, therefore, the doorway for the church to receive healing and prosperity, and this purpose for the rite is also evident in the order of the service.⁵ *Libertação* is at the front

² Leonídio Silveira Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado: Organização e Marketing de um Empreendimento Neopentecostal* (São Paulo: Editora Vozes, 1997), 141 (translation mine).

³ *Campaigns* are small programs realized by the church with very strong interaction with the attendants. An example is the *campanha do sal* (salt campaign), where salt, blessed by the power emanated from the Bibles placed in the altar, was being sold for 38 reais (the minimum wage at that time was 100 reais monthly). The salt should be placed at a certain place of the house in order to be more effective. The promise was that this salt would keep the evil spirits away from business, family and relationships. Oneide Bobsin, “Teologia da Prosperidade ou Estratégia de Sobrevivência: Estudo Exploratório,” *Estudos Teológicos* 35, (1995): 26. Campos affirms that IURD, through these campaigns, organizes the time in a much more effective way than more traditional churches because they use a more urban way of seeing reality. While the traditional churches organize their rites with a rural mindset guided by nature (seasons and cycles), churches like IURD regulates “the times and movements in rationally programmed rhythms and cadences, reflecting, therefore, a urban conception of time, in which measurement is in the hands of man.” Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 142 (translation mine).

⁴ Oneide Bobsin, “Teologia da Prosperidade”, 26.

⁵ It is not rare to see pastors referring to the *libertação* made in the beginning of the service multiple times during the service. Small commentaries, warnings and moral lessons based on what the demons said are some examples of this reality in IURD.

and center of IURD's liturgy.⁶

The Rite of *Libertação*

Step One: Initial Prayer

There are some ways the rite may start depending on where it is going to be performed.⁷ Most of the times, however, the rite starts with a prayer made by the pastor. Using patterns of repetition and variation of voice tone, this prayer asks God to enter everyone in order to liberate them from all satanic oppression.⁸ The prayer is addressed alternatively to God (asking for deliverance) and to the demons, giving orders like "Spirit of [name a suffering], get out right now, in the NAME of Jesus!"⁹

While that happens, assistant pastors or church workers (hereafter *obreiros*) pass through the church aisles, sometimes touching people with consecrated objects like handkerchiefs or salt, placing their hands over people's heads and praying very close to their ears. Shouts of "hallelujah!" are produced by some in attendance. Some of them are kneeling, some are

⁶ Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 349.

⁷ For example, if it is during a service, first the demons will *manifest themselves* and then they will be brought to the altar. If it is during a television show (for instance, the TV show *Obreiros em foco* transmitted by the channel *TV Universal*), there is an interview with the person in regular state first followed by a prayer, when the demons will manifest.

⁸ Most of the studies on IURD's liturgy from the human sciences' point of view, suggest that Charismatic churches may induce people to become in a trance with those kinds of patterns of repetition. Myrtles S. Langley, not talking specifically about IURD, even provides a "recipe" to induce people to a trance that can be seen as possession, that fits frighteningly IURD's services. That recipe involves progressively relaxing and exciting moments; clapping; drumming; repetitive chanting of syllables, word and phrases; stirring up of emotions of fear and anger; and so on. Myrtles S. Langley, "Spirit-Possession, Exorcism and Social Context: an anthropological perspective with theological implications," *Churchman* 94, no.3 (1980): 236. Felicitas D. Goodman interprets this Charismatic characteristic as "the latest attempt in Christianity to try and remedy what could be called 'ecstasy deprivation,' rebelling against a divine service that does not include the trance." According to him, throughout Christian history, trance was always part of the experiences, and a repression of these experiences by the naturalism could not stop the church to seek that. Felicitas D. Goodman, *How About Demons? Possession and Exorcism in the Modern World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 62.

⁹ The word "name" is capitalized because of the phonetical emphasis often given by most of IURD's pastors in the prayers.

standing. Sometimes the pastor requires people to do certain things like placing their hands in specific parts of the body (head, chest, or a hurting place) or just raising them up. The environment is one of confusion, and even Macedo agrees that “if someone arrives at the church at the moment in which people are being delivered, he can even think that he is in a [Spiritist] center, and it really looks like it.”¹⁰

Step Two: The Interview

Since this is the main focus of this chapter, we will give more attention to this part in the next section. For now, a briefer account will suffice. After the initial prayer, some demons start to manifest themselves in some of those in attendance. Most of the time, the pastors and *obreiros* take care of the situation with a more focused prayer, spoken very close to the person’s ear.¹¹ Some of them, however, are separated and, per the request of the officiant pastor, are brought to the altar.¹² Then the show starts.

When the manifested demon comes to the altar, his bodily expression is one of a prisoner. His hands are behind his back as if he were handcuffed. He hunches forward as if he were hiding his face, although the pastor can command the spirit to raise the person’s head at any time. Also, per request of the pastor, the demon may kneel, albeit reluctantly. Sometimes they kneel on their own, without any request. The demons’ voices are deep and hoarse, and most of the important sentences they speak start with what we could call a macabre laugh or a grunt. The pastor starts

¹⁰ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboblos e Guias: Deuses ou Demônios?* (São Paulo: Unipro editora, 2019), Kindle Locations 1420–21 (translation mine).

¹¹ Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 98.

¹² “In our public meetings, before thousands of people, when we pray, demonic spirits often manifest themselves in those present. We tend to take the one who manifests himself in the most daring way to make demonstrations before the people of whom that incorporated entity really is.” Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations, 603–5 (translation mine).

by calling out the *chief demon* in the person. Sometimes the first demon who speaks with the pastor is not the one in charge, but when the pastor asks for the chief on. It is common to hear other demons' reactions (mostly laughs and screams) in the back of the temple while the pastor interviews the chief demon. That does not seem to disturb anyone present. Total attention is given to the altar, the place from which the pastor may request help from the audience any time.

In the order of the rite of *libertação*, the interviewing moment is the most important, since it is pedagogical.¹³ It is the key moment when people listen to the demon's confessions and learn from the pastor's application of the demon's words. This moment can last for 2 or 3 minutes, or, if the pastor thinks it is valid to continue, for more than 15 minutes.

Step Three: Strong Prayer for *libertação*

The apex of the rite of *libertação* is when the pastor finally decides that he wants to move on with the service and cast out the demons, who are already kneeled, interrogated, and humiliated. This is done through a strong prayer. However, this prayer has a different interlocutor than the initial prayer. Instead of asking God to liberate the person from the demons, the pastor now only *commands* the demons to depart in the name of Jesus.

The pastor can call upon all possible demons that he can remember at the time,¹⁴ laying hands on the head of the possessed person, praying very loudly. The evil spirit yells all the time, shaking the person's body while the pastor prays. The audience also prays with the pastor, shouting "get out!," or "burn him, Jesus!," and stomping the ground, maybe metaphorically smashing the devil's head.

¹³ Clara Mafra, Claudia Swatowiski, and Camila Sampaio, "Edir Macedo's Pastoral Project: A Globally Integrated Pentecostal Network," In *The Diaspora of Brazilian Religions: International Studies in Religion and Society*, ed. Cristina Rocha and Manuel Arturo Vasquez (Boston: Brill, 2013), 55.

¹⁴ For instance: spirit of depression, spirit of financial failure, spirit of cancer, spirit of envy, and so on.

A pattern of repetition appears in the pastor's words again. By the end of the prayer, most of the time the pastor says, "in the name of Jesus," and then, after a dramatic pause, he shouts, "get out!" Abruptly he takes his hands off the person's head, as if he were literally extracting the demon with his hands. The possessed person finally falls on the ground, losing consciousness for a few seconds. Assistant pastors or *obreiros* at the altar help the now ex-possessed or liberated person up, and the *libertação* is over. All the noise, confusion, and heavy air experienced during the prayer now gives way to calmness, deep sighs, and some relief "hallelujahs." Sometimes a pianist starts playing a sweet melody, and the pastor starts talking in a soft and low voice. All is in order again.

Step Four: Interview with the Liberated Person and Counseling

The last part of the rite of *libertação* is the interview with the person who is now back to normal. Questions like, "how are you feeling now?" "what has just happened?" and "do you want to go back to what you were doing before?" are the most frequent. The intention is to demonstrate how the person is different after the *libertação* has occurred.¹⁵ In every case, the person reports a feeling of relief, lightness, or tranquility after the rite, although some of them do not seem to understand what just happened.

The pastor then tells the person what happened, why the demon was there and advises him with kind words what he should do in order to prevent the demons from returning even more strongly next time. The advice generally fits the already mentioned *10 steps for deliverance* given by Macedo.¹⁶ It is interesting to note that no Bible text is mentioned, read, or alluded to

¹⁵ In some cases, when the possession is related to vices, the person is offered the object of his vice and then is repulsed by it, sometimes even throwing up. Among some pastors, a common motto (dare) spoken to the possessed is, "if you can smoke this cigarette/drink this beer, I will eat the Bible."

¹⁶ See above, page 46, footnote 118.

during the rite of *libertação*. It is only a rite of prayer and interviewing of demons. Only in the rarest of cases, when the demons do not obey, pastors make use of a biblical text in order to remind the demons that they need to obey.¹⁷ Still, Macedo makes it clear that “the Bible is the Word of God and only has value when its teachings are exercised with faith. That is why Jesus did not say that the signs will follow those who have a Bible, but those who believe.”¹⁸

Interviewing the Devil

The interview with the demons is the most important part of the rite of *libertação*. It is the opportunity the church has to listen from a primary source about everything they want to know.¹⁹ They base this practice in the famous case of the *Gerasene Demoniac* registered in Luke 8 and in Mark 5, when Jesus asks for the demon’s name (v. 30), and after the demons beg Him, He gives them permission to enter a large herd of pigs nearby (v. 32). IURD’s understanding of the Christian as a follower of Christ’s examples is basic to its teaching. If it happened to Jesus, i.e., demons manifesting all around him, then, it will also happen to us and we need to do engage the demons just the way He did and taught.²⁰ “If the Lord Jesus cast out a legion of demons, I can do that too! He healed the sick, freed the oppressed, blessed the people and ordered you and me to

¹⁷ “It is rare, but sometimes it happens that a demon becomes reluctant, resisting our orders. In this case, we quote a passage from the Holy Scriptures, reminding him of the Word of God. That is how Jesus resisted the devil, with the famous ‘it is written’ (Matthew 4), and that is how we must act in such situations.” Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1521–22 (translation mine).

¹⁸ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1518–20 (translation mine).

¹⁹ “To expel them, we ask what we are interested in knowing, and we give them orders in the name of Jesus, who also did this.” Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1446–48 (translation mine).

²⁰ “If He is our Lord, we as His servants need to follow in His footsteps and do all we can to be a reflection of Him in this world.” David Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers: Twelve Signs of Possession or Oppression* (Eugene: ACW, 2003), 43. Therefore, Jesus came first to give an example of how casting out demons. Jesus in the desert is not seen as representing Israel and winning against Satan when Israel failed, but only as a specialist teaching how the church should win over the devil.

do that too. It is what is stated in His Word (John 14:12).”²¹

As we mentioned above, first the pastor calls the *chief demon* in the person. In the majority of cases, there are thousands of demons oppressing someone. But since they are hierarchically organized, there is always someone who is in charge. The goal of defeating the boss first is clear. If the boss, the chief, the strongest is gone, then the rest will go with him. Almeida presents the three main questions asked by pastors: What is your name? What have you done to him? How did you get in?²² Depending on how the boss-demon answers these questions, the pastor asks for confirmations, draws conclusions from what the demons say, makes fun of him/them, challenge him/them, and asks further questions.

Why Interview Demons?

There are a couple of reasons for interviewing demons that can be identified in IURD books on demonology. Macedo, for example, justifies the interviews by saying that “God allows demons to manifest themselves so that they may be put to shame and, above all, unmasked. In this way, those who are participating in the meeting have the opportunity to repent and give their lives to the Lord Jesus who will keep them from all evil.”²³ In other words, the interviews have the role of scaring people so that, by fearing the demons, they may repent and turn their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Higginbotham acknowledges two main reasons for interviewing the demons in public.²⁴

²¹ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1478–81 (translation mine).

²² Ronaldo de Almeida, *A Igreja Universal e seus Demônios: Um Estudo Etnográfico* (São Paulo: Editora Terceiro Nome, 2009), 43.

²³ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1435–37 (translation mine).

²⁴ What justifies the preference for doing the whole rite of *libertação* in public comes from Jesus’ example. His exorcisms were “done in public – respectfully, but nonetheless in public – with the purpose of opening people’s eyes to the fact that invisible evil forces actually do exist and that those who use their faith in Him can overcome them.” Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 50.

The first has to do with showing people how the power of God is manifested among His people in IURD. In the services, the demons, who are the worst enemies of God's people, are forced to confess their plans and actions. The second is that, once the demons are subdued, they are unmasked right the way for who they really are: Afro-Religions' entities, ancestor spirits, and ghosts. When the attendants see the strong demons and other religions' gods kneeled before the pastor, obeying every single order from him and confessing who they are before him, they can choose which side they want to be on.²⁵

In summary, the reason for interviewing demons is the above mentioned *pedagogical* one. The demons are considered by IURD to be primary sources of spiritual information. The pastor points to specific things the demons confess, teaches lessons from those confessions, and makes it clear to the devotee that this information shows how things really are, ultimately endorsing the devil's testimony as trustworthy. Devotees can learn the strategies used by demons to keep someone out of the church, induce someone to sin, and persuade someone to reject God's help. With that information, they can protect themselves by rebuking the demons the right way when they experience similar thoughts.²⁶

When the Word of God alerts us to demonic activity, or even when the pastor does that, these two means do not seem to have as much power as when a demon confesses this very thing. Higginbotham admits that "witnessing through the Bible and trying to convince people to be

²⁵ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 34.

²⁶ *Libertação* has a very personal a individualistic character sometimes. Since the person has the inner power of consciously reject any demon, we can even talk about a *self-exorcism* when "we . . . use our faith to drive out whatever spirits are at work inside of us, causing whatever sort of pain or destruction." Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 105. If that did not work, the problem is either in the person's will or faith. A pastor must deliver that person from the spirit, because he has the power of faith given by Jesus to those who are true servants. But again, if the *libertação* fails, it is the victim's fault. "The Lord, however, also made a point of making it clear that God's servants have the power and authority to destroy the works of Satan." Macedo, *Doutrinas*, vol. 2, 45 (translation mine).

saved is not always enough to rescue those who are suffering from the hands of the devil.

Revealing God's power in our own lives through miracles is the best way to show the world that God is real, and His Word is true."²⁷ The demons are considered a source of content or truth more effective and powerful than the Scriptures.²⁸

The interviews with demons also provide information to the pastors, making them real specialists on the subject of demonology. Edir Macedo is one example. In the preface of his book *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias: deuses ou demônios*, he is presented as an expert in all the demonic tricks, since he has been working "almost half century in the work of deliverance."²⁹ The very content of this book, for example, was acquired mostly from interviews with demons.³⁰ The demons, therefore, are forced teachers that, through their confession or testimony, make pastors specialists in *libertação*.

We can use an army analogy to understand how the demons are seen by IURD. They are like an enemy army that causes all sorts of terrorist attacks against an apparently weaker allied army. During *libertação*, however, this enemy army is captured, and the captain is brought to the interrogation or torture room. He is the leader of the group, and therefore, the one with the most valuable information. He is tortured by the allied army captain using several instruments. After

²⁷ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 18.

²⁸ Campos notes this secondary position of the Bible in IURD service and brings up a possible reason. For him, IURD's "pastors, the Bible is much more a deposit of symbols, allegories and dramatic scenes, or even an amulet to exorcise demons and heal the sick, than the 'word of God', seen by other Protestant groups as 'single rule of faith and practice.'" Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 82 (translation mine). Officially, however, Macedo is clear when he says that the Bible at least is not an amulet for anything. To illustrate that, he tells a story of a mother that had used the Bible as amulet to exorcise her possessed daughter, who took the book from her hands and shattered it all. "The demon, of course, abused of the situation and even tore the Bible, because, being considered just a book, it has no power to expel demons." Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1517–18 (translation mine).

²⁹ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 79–91 (translation mine).

³⁰ "All these things that we are clarifying here are said, often, by the demons themselves, when we exercise our faith in Jesus Christ to make them confess." Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1017–19 (translation mine).

much screaming in pain, he is given a *truth serum* that obligates him to confess all his plans, his *modus operandi*, what and how he did what he did, and whatever other questions the interrogator might want to know. All that happens in front of the allied army, a kind of *militia Christi*, so that they may also learn from that experience. After that, the enemy captain along with his group is released unmasked and humiliated by the weaker army.

It is clear who is who in this analogy. But the interesting part is God's role in his story. He can be seen as the one who bestows authority over the allied captain, ordering the allied army to attack the terrorist army, interrogate his leader, release them after obtaining their confessions and shaming them, while not participating in anyway in the spiritual fight. God as a General is somewhere else, participating only indirectly in the interrogation by bestowing authority to the allied captain. But God is also the supply provider, in the sense that he gives the captain all the torture instruments and the *truth serum* that make the demons confess everything. In this drama, God is not the main character, but the supporting actor of the two main characters, namely, the pastor, *the good guy*, and the demon, *the bad guy*. As Mariano writes, "the devil is the omnipresent protagonist of [IURD's] services and rituals."³¹

What Do the Demons Say?

The things the demons say are innumerable. There are literally hundreds of YouTube videos with demonic interviews during IURD meetings or other TV shows. In this section, we will focus our attention on other examples of demonic activity represented in IURD settings.

³¹ Ricardo Mariano, "Guerra Espiritual: o Protagonismo do Diabo nos Cultos Neopentecostais," *Debates do NER* 4, no. 4 (July 2003): 33 (translation mine).

Inherited Demons

In a video, a man possessed by seven thousand demons is brought to the altar after a manifestation during the initial prayer. The pastor first asks how many demons are there, and when the demon answers, the pastor concludes, saying, “so, it is a legion.” The pastor then calls upon the chief demon, and asks how long they have been tormenting the man.

Pastor: And how long have you been with him?

Demon-possessed person: Since his mother’s womb.

P: Why? What does a baby have to do with that? Why do you enter in the life of a human being already in his mother’s womb?

D: [laughs] What is the most sacred thing for the Man [Jesus] up there? [dramatic pause] Isn’t it the soul? Yeah, I come to take it from the womb, so I can carry it to my kingdom.

P: That means that every time a child is born, there is a dispute already?

D: Yeah! I work with those things they cannot see. [laughs]

P: What can they not see?

D: The soul.

P: That’s what you want?

D: [with a twisted voice] That is what strengthens us, the only way to hurt the Big Man.³²

The idea of *inherited demons* was already mentioned in the last chapter, but it deserves special attention here because it is a teaching based on the demons’ testimony.³³ Higginbotham, for example, writes that most of the demons confess they have been with the family for years, and therefore “consider that family their possession.”³⁴

Higginbotham actually mentions a Bible text of when God punishes from generation to generation those who committed idolatry in Exod. 20:5–6, and then he draws the following

³² See “Você acredita NISSO?” YouTube video, 6:27, “Igreja Universal”, published in September 10, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLAukxqifL4>.

³³ For other arguments in favor of the idea of inherited demons outside IURD, see John Wimber, *Power Healing* (San Francisco: Harperone, 1991), 117.

³⁴ “Many times I have found that the person suffering from attacks is not responsible for the demons entering his life. Because a relative in the past had opened a door for the devil, demons were able to infiltrate the entire family. Unless someone stands up and takes authority over the evil spirits in the name of Jesus, they’ll continue to work in that family forever.” Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 68–69.

conclusion: “Now, as we live under the law of the Spirit, God either rewards us or disciplines us according to our own actions, but Satan . . . finds any way to enter a life to destroy it whether it be through the sins or weaknesses of individuals, or through their family line.”³⁵ Except for that rationale, no other Biblical argument is presented for this teaching. The demons’ testimony seems enough for IURD leaders.

Jesus in the gospel seems to point to another direction, however. In John 9, he was answering the question of who sinned that a blind man was born in that condition. In verse three, his answer may have sounded weird to the people’s ears: “it was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.” Apparently Jesus does not attach a condition like blindness *necessarily* to a hereditary sin, nor *necessarily* to a hereditary demon. In other words, Jesus is not very interested in the causes of someone’s condition, but he acknowledges that the condition exists and then acts. The Universal Church, on the contrary, is very interested in providing this answer for the causes, mapping down a condition, tracking down a demon. In this eagerness for an answer, IURD seems to simply accept the testimony of the demons, not giving so much attention to the silence of the Bible.

Therefore, the fact that this teaching of inherited demons is based on the testimony of the demons and not in the testimony of the Scriptures lead us to conclude that the demons’ testimony is more important in IURD’s theology and practice—indeed, more valuable than the Bible’s.

Demons Preach Salvation and Regret

In the dialogue at the beginning of this chapter, the chief demon of the seven thousand possessing the young man recognizes that he wants to take souls with him to hell. All of a

³⁵ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 69.

sudden the conversation takes on a different tone. When you almost feel pity for the demon, then one feels encouraged by his testimony to recognize how precious Jesus is that He gives us the chance for salvation not given to the demons.

Pastor: But, how is it? How do you know which one is yours? For example, if a person is run over by a car there, in the street now, and dies, how do you know it is yours?

Demon-possessed person: [turns to the altar, kneels facing the roof above the altar, where the phrase Jesus Cristo é o Senhor, Jesus Christ is Lord, is written] It is that name. If someone dies in it, this one will have eternal life, sir.

P: *[points to the phrase and looks at the community] If he dies in that name?*

D: *He will have eternal life.*

P: That's why you kneel before him over there?

D: *[grunts] That's what this people here do not know. They have no idea how precious is that Man.*

[Scene cuts. Now the demon-possessed person is facing the audience, but still kneeling]

P: Would you like to have a chance with that Man over there?

D: *I would give my life to be here [taps sadly the floor with his head]*³⁶

The dialogue reflects what Etiane Bovkalovski labels the *popular* image of the devil in IURD. In contrast to the *erudite* image, in which the devil is presented as terribly powerful, the *popular* image shows how “he is made a spectacle for the masses and his ‘fragility’ is exposed: the Devil is faced, chased away, interviewed, and ‘bound’ by the power of the Word.”³⁷

Having established this *affective* connection, now we can listen more to what the demon says. The pastor and the demon enter into a kind of partnership in which both laugh together at materialist people.

Pastor: So, the only way to hurt God is by touching the souls?

Demon-possessed person: In the. . . in His most precious good, His most precious creation.

P: But there are people who think their most precious good is the house, their car, their bank account. *[smiles]*

D: *[laughs] All of this passes away, but that remains. . . [laughs]*

P: The soul. . . ?

³⁶ See “Você acredita NISSO?” YouTube video, 6:27, “Igreja Universal”, published in September 10, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLAukxqifL4>.

³⁷ Etiane de Souza, “A Imagem do Diabo Nos Livros de Edir Macedo da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus” (M.A. Thesis, Federal University of Paraná, 2000), 151 (translation mine).

D: It remains.

[Scene cuts]

P: And have you taken many souls?

D: There are so many screaming down there for this people who don't believe.

P: So, is it down there? *[points to the ground]*

D: [laughs] Yes. Sir, let me ask you this: have you ever seen any soul screaming here?

P: So, is it down there?

D: [laughs] Here they moan with the difficulties that we put [them in]. [laughs]

P: But down there. . . ?

D: Oh, it is different. It is fire. It is fire after fire.³⁸

Although the demons are with their hands behind their back and hunched, there is no tension between the demon and the pastor in this particular case. The demon does not fight anymore, he surrenders and decides to cooperate.

In another video, the demon and the pastor also enter into a partnership. The demon, who identifies himself as “Abaddon in Hebrew and Apollyon in Greek,”³⁹ reveals that he knows which souls he can take after death based on how faithful and committed they really were in life. The souls the demon knew he could take are the souls of the ones who only fake being faithful and committed, even if they attend the services every day. In this occasion, the pastor challenges the demon to incorporate in him, and then this dialogue follows:

Pastor: Are there people who doubt us?

Demon-possessed person: [yells] In this exact moment!

P: And who do they think we are?

D: [yells] They wish you would fall!

P: And what do they think of us?

D: [whispers] A bunch of deceivers, damn it, making everybody guinea pigs, horses.

P: And who makes them think like that? *[Demon-possessed person grunts]* Where do these ideas come from?

D: First I play with them, then their point of view comes, because I will only have

³⁸ See “Você acredita NISSO?” YouTube video, 6:27, “Igreja Universal”, published in September 10, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLAukxqifL4>.

³⁹ A reference to Rev. 9:11: “They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.”

[influence] where people let me, you bastard!
P: *[looks at the audience] You understood.*⁴⁰

In this exchange, pastor and demon seem to be old friends, laughing together, knowing everything that apparently is hidden from those attending the service, completing each other's phrases and teaching lessons to the audience in the meeting. The pastor induces the demon to answer questions, proving that he is the control of the situation,⁴¹ and yet the real content or information does not come from the minister of the Lord but from the servant of Satan.

The Demon Uses the Bible to Tempt the Pastor

A totally different ambience is found in another occasion when an exciting challenge is about to happen. In the following dialogue, a more agitated demon, who identifies himself as a general of an army of a warrior demons' tribe, tries to argue that the pastor should retire. His arguments, actually, portray the pastor as a martyr: he is old, tired, sleepy, without a monthly salary, without rest, with no life, with no money at all, and so on. After some threats, the demon offers money to the pastor in exchange for his retirement. After that, an intense exchange happens:

Pastor: Look at my eyes and search for doubt.
Demon-possessed person: You are hungry! You are so hungry!

⁴⁰ See "Demônio Faz O Som Do Ranger De Dentes do Inferno – Forte!!! Compartilhe!", YouTube video, 11:14, "Bispo Adilson Silva Oficial", published in December 16, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urDHZKnryQk>.

⁴¹ The pastor has the situation so under control that, in an different video, in the middle of the interview, he decides to give consciousness back to the possessed person in order to check out some information given by the demon. He asks the demon to "step outside for a while" and give the person his consciousness back. When the person returns to consciousness, the pastor asks him to be calm, and asks for a glass of water for him. He answers all the pastor's questions and all information matches with the information given by the demon: his age, his relationship with his family, his mother's death from HIV, her pact with Satan with him in her womb, etc. The pastor asks the man not to get angry at his mother because she thought she was bringing protection to him. The pastor says: "The villain is not your mom, and you are the victim. You two were the victims in a story where the only villain is the devil." The pastor does not call the demon back, but now decides to take the demon out without any dramatic fight by just recommending him to come to all meetings of *libertação* and praying over him. See "O pacto," YouTube video, 3:10, "Bispo Edir Macedo," Published in September 18, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Qq3hTWMDbc>.

P: Look at my eyes. *[the demon-possessed person puts his face near the pastor's face while grunting]* Like that. Take your place, your position before the One who lives inside me.

D: *I am not afraid of your office.*⁴²

P: Neither am I afraid of you!

D: *You should be. . .*

P: I am not bound to the office.

D: *You should. Many would!*

P: Look at me.

D: *I could occupy your office. Give up, I can scare you!*

P: *[ironically]* I'm scared to death!

D: *[screams]* Give up!

P: Look at my eyes and search for doubt!

D: *There are times in which you lose your physical protection.*

P: Search for fear!

D: *What saves you outside this place?*

P: Search for fear in my eyes! Seek doubt inside my eyes!

D: *You are going to fall. You are going to fall! You are going to fall.*

P: And take your place before the One to whom I gave my life!

D: *I won't fall!*

P: The One who dwells in me!

D: *[among screams, he brings one arm to the front and touches the pastor's chest]* I could break your neck!

P: Before the One who dwells in me! *[the audience starts screaming in prayer]*

D: *[starts to duck]* You are only a mortal! You are old, you will be gone.

P: I am a mortal who serves Him!

D: *You will not make it! It is not going to work; your ministry is a scam! You are going to fall like the others.*

P: *[smiles]* Say more! Say more to see if I have any doubt!

D: *You will give up! You will retire! You will not make it!*

P: Try it! Try to put the seed of doubt in me!

D: *Give up! There are better churches for you! You don't need this! It is written that the grace of God is sufficient for you, you don't need to go on until the end [kneels]. The old covenant was cancelled, you don't need to go on until the end. [the audience applauds]*⁴³

As in the temptation of Jesus in the desert, the demons in IURD also use Bible texts in order to tempt the pastor. The pastor, however, differently from Jesus, does not answer with

⁴² Adilson Silva, the pastor leading this *libertação*, is actually a bishop of IURD. Therefore, when the demon-possessed person says "office," he is talking about Silva's position in IURD's hierarchy.

⁴³ See "Demônio propõe um pacto ao bispo," YouTube vídeo, 10:52, "Bispo Adilson Silva Oficial", published in January 26, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hsrgkd0nJcs>.

other Bible verses, but keeps mocking and inciting the demon speak more and to search for any doubt in his eyes. What is evident in all this is that what gives the pastor protection is more the absence of doubt than the presence of Jesus per se. If he had any doubt, even if Jesus was indeed dwelling in him, the demon would have still attacked him.

The teaching gathered from the demons, therefore, is communicated through many means in these ritual moments. Such means of communication include bodily expressions, the words of the devil, the answers of the pastor, and even hidden operations that are neither seen nor heard.

The Demon Reveals the Church He Works In

Another big neo-Pentecostal church in Brazil is the *Igreja Mundial do Poder de Deus* (World Church of God's Power), led by the self-proclaimed *Apostle* Valdemiro Santiago, an ex-pastor of IURD. There is a battle between this church and IURD, and frequently demons manifest themselves in IURD saying they have a special position in *Igreja Mundial*. In this next video, Bishop Edir Macedo interviews a demon:

Bishop: *[holding the possessed woman by her hair]* So, that means that you are acting there at *Mundial*, isn't it?

Demon-possessed person: Yes! *[laughs]*

B: And what are you doing there?

D: I am place feeling in the heart of my servant *[laughs]*.⁴⁴

B: Oh, really? Which servant?

D: *[laughs]* Valdomiro.⁴⁵

B: Oh really? Is he your servant?

D: He is my servant whom I took from here, you expelled him. He wanted to raise a servant,⁴⁶ but you did not allow it because he was in sin. All who are in there are in sin, prostituting themselves, smoking, many women in there are destroyed, with others' husbands thinking they are single. Men cheating on their wives, and their children; I disturb all of them, except the ones of this man's wretch, her daughters

⁴⁴ In this video, the demon-possessed person repeatedly uses the word *sentimento* (feeling) in Portuguese in a uncommon way. While we can suppose it is used in a negative sense, the exact meaning of this word is unclear. Some fair guesses could be "feeling of envy" or "feeling of jealousy."

⁴⁵ The actual name is "Valdemiro Santiago," with an "e" instead of an "o".

⁴⁶ Probably here, an *obreiro*.

*are of the light. . .*⁴⁷

B: *[interrupts]* Tell me something: so you are the one who has been taking the pastors, *obreiros*. . .

D: *[interrupts]* That's right, placing hurt *[in pastors' lives]*, feeling against this filthy church.

B: Oh, really?

D: Yes.

B: Humm, so. . .

D: *[interrupts, yelling]* Ah! I hate this church! I hate it!

B: Oh, and do you like it there?

D: *[laughs]*

B: How do you feel there?

D: *I feel well, in my throne. I heal everybody. . .*

B: *[interrupts]* Oh, you heal, uh?!

D: *Of course, with feelings [inaudible]*

B: But tell me, who is the main one there at Valdomiro?⁴⁸

D: *Do you really want to know?*

B: Yes.

D: *Are you sure?*

B: Tell me his name.

D: *Legion.*

B: Oh, really?

D: *Yes, he wins everyone for me.*

B: What?

D: *He wins all the souls for me. His church is full, and you do not want quantity, you want quality. . .*

B: *[looks at the audience]* That's true!

D: . . . *for the kingdom of that Man up there.*

B: That's right! *[laughs and looks at the audience]* Do you see? *[laughs while audience applauds]* So, look. The devil is a liar, he is a liar. But Jesus asked the name of the demon of Gadara, 'what is your name?,' and he answered, 'legion.' That is, Jesus asked. When we ask, he is obligated to tell the truth, but he is a liar. He is liar. And we will not base our faith on what he says, even speaking the truth. We base our faith in the Word of God, not in what he is speaking, even though what he is saying is true.

. . .

D: *[interrupts]* I show healing, transformation, *[Macedo looks at the audience, points to the demon-possessed person]* but salvation I don't preach there. . . .

⁴⁷ This demon-possessed person, as we saw earlier, speaks in unclear Portuguese. In this sentence, the demon appears to be referencing Valdemiro Santiago's wife, Franciléia Santiago (a female bishop of *Igreja Mundial do Poder de Deus*) and their daughters.

⁴⁸ Here Edir Macedo makes use of a metonymy. "Valdomiro" here means Valdemiro Santiago's church. Therefore, when Macedo asks, "who is the main one there at Valdomiro?" what he is really asking is: who really commands the *Igreja Mundial do Poder de Deus* spiritually?

*Revelation was never read there, because I don't let them . . . because everything that is there is being fulfilled.*⁴⁹

What is interesting about this dialogue is the explanation Edir Macedo gives after the demon's testimony. He says everything the demons say in those moments *is true*, even though he is a liar. Despite that, IURD claims it does not base its doctrine in the demons' confessions—a claim we contest, especially when it comes to the doctrine of the *inheritance of demons*. Again, as we argued in the last chapter, there is a difference between the *official* position of the church and the *pragmatic* consequences of what they are teaching in their public services.

Are the Demons' Testimonies Trustworthy?

After all this research and analysis, it is time to answer the central question of this chapter, namely, are the demons' testimony in IURD's meetings considered trustworthy by them? The answer is yes, and the reason, according to them, lies in the way Jesus used to do exorcisms.

In the Bible, Jesus asked demons for information and they answered in obedience. . . . I wouldn't want anyone to think that manifesting spirits are to be treated with any sort of respect, but it's a fact that when Jesus cast our demons He sometimes allowed them to talk. In the instance of the man in the region of the Gerasene Jesus asked the demon his name (see Mark 5:1-20). When the demons answered, the Bible records their answer and Jesus does not challenge it – meaning that it was indeed the name of that group of demons. Other times Jesus commanded demons to be quiet, not because they were lying, but because they were declaring the truth at a time when Jesus didn't want to advertise His real identity. In Mark it says, 'Whenever the evil spirits saw Him, they fell down before Him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' But He gave them strict orders not to tell who He was' (Mark 3:11,12). So, when I say that we've learned from experience how demons work, you should understand that in fact it is possible to gain truthful facts from evil spirits.⁵⁰

IURD acknowledges that the devil "is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). However, that does not mean that he cannot tell the truth. In fact, IURD points to biblical examples of

⁴⁹ See "Aviso aos incautos," YouTube vídeo, 10:01, "Bispo Edir Macedo", published in July 4, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ct_rBCUf5EM.

⁵⁰ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 68

demons who never lie when talking to or about Jesus. The fact that Jesus, in most of the occasions, commanded them to be quiet is explained by them as follows: It was not the time for Jesus to be revealed as the Son of God.⁵¹ According to this understanding, what Jesus really wants now is that the church use the authority given by Him to make the demons confess.

How Do We Know When Demons Speak the Truth?

The inevitable question is, how to know when the demons are speaking the truth or lying? Higginbotham's explanation lies in the gift of discernment given to those who were baptized with the Holy Spirit: "As a rule, whenever manifesting spirits speak we need to use the gift of discernment to distinguish what is the truth and what is a lie."⁵² The baptism with the Holy Spirit is a prerequisite to become a IURD pastor. Therefore, the pastor is the most adequate person to define whether what the demons say is true or false.

Nevertheless, the occasions in which the pastor explicitly denounces a lie coming from the demons are rare. In fact, most of the time the lies are only implicitly denounced through ironies and sarcasms. Therefore, the question of whether the practitioner understood that what the demons said is a truth or a lie does not seem relevant. The point is what the situation shows: the power of God manifesting through the authority given to the pastor subduing the power of the demons. "We are sure that the Holy Spirit has guided us, which is why we are bruising Satan's head. In our deliverance meetings, demons are required to show who they really are, proving that the Lord is with us."⁵³

⁵¹ This argument becomes weak when we see the exorcisms in the book of Acts. Here the explicit order was to spread Jesus' Word, and the disciples keep silencing the demons just like Jesus did, even though the demons were not necessarily bringing false news in their speech. See, for example, Acts 16:16–21.

⁵² Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 68.

⁵³ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1405–6 (translation mine).

A Lutheran Response

I did not learn my theology all at once, but had to search constantly deeper and deeper for it. My temptations did that for me, for no one can understand Holy Scripture without practice and temptations. This is what the enthusiasts and sects lack. They don't have the right critic, *the devil, who is the best teacher of theology*. If we don't have that kind of devil, then we become nothing but speculative theologians, who do nothing but walk around in our own thoughts and speculate with our reason alone as to whether things should be like this, or like that.⁵⁴

An Unwilling Teacher

Lutherans see the devil as “the best teacher of theology,” but in a very different way that has to do with *spiritual attacks* (Ger. *Anfechtung*).⁵⁵ Far from the dichotomy between *study* and *practice*, Luther values the formation of the theologian through study, meditation, and prayer, but he adds another element that shocks people in our day and age, namely, the devil. Satan “turns students of theology into proper theologians by giving them a hard time in the church. Theological training therefore involves spiritual warfare, the battle between Christ and Satan in the church. Conflict in the church is the context for learning theology.”⁵⁶ *Anfechtung* is the way chosen by God to teach theology through the devil.

Lutherans see the devil teaching theology *indirectly*, in the sense that he is not even aware of what he is doing. Satan's intention is never to surrender; therefore, God humiliates the devil by making him fool⁵⁷ in producing exactly what the devil does not want to, namely, more theologians.⁵⁸ When he tries to scare Christians away from God with threats and oppressions,

⁵⁴ LW 54, 50 (emphasis added).

⁵⁵ Roland H. Bainton explains that this German word is not limited to the idea of seducing someone to sin, but even goes further to include “all the doubts, turmoil, pang, tremor, pains, despair, desolation, and desperation which invade the spirit of man.” Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1952), 42. Cited in Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 101.

⁵⁶ Kleinig, “Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio,” 257.

⁵⁷ Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace*, 233.

⁵⁸ “But paradoxically these attacks are counter-productive. Luther says: ‘For as soon as God's word shoots up and spreads through you, the devil persecutes you. He makes you a real teacher (of theology); by his attacks

God turns the table and makes people run towards Himself. Without knowing it, the devil is scaring people toward God.

Luther especially has in mind public ministers when he talks about this demonic plan of attack,⁵⁹ but he would not deny that Satan targets especially new Christians, just like he attacked Jesus right after the beginning of his mission at his baptism.⁶⁰ So although God's protection indeed exists for Christians, this does not mean a life without trouble and temptation. Rather, as Sánchez stresses, God uses the devil's temptation to test his people's faith and shape them by His Spirit into the image of Christ, who stands firm against the evil one.⁶¹ That is how the devil ends up teaching theology, i.e., through *temptation*. Since God can use the devil's attacks to drive His children to the Word and prayer, we have what Sánchez calls the devil's actions backfiring on him.⁶² God uses the devil's blind wickedness to approach His creatures with love, to reestablish in Christ the conversation between Creator and creature.

In contrast to IURD, Lutherans do not conclude that the devil or demons are trustworthy witnesses since it is never their intention to help humans in any way. Instead, God is the one who turns bad into good and uses the devil's temptation to teach and test Christians.⁶³ The inevitable and unanswerable question must nevertheless be asked again: *cur alii, alii non?* That is, why some and not others? To put it in terms of the struggle against the devil, why are some ultimately saved from demonic influence and others are not? The theologian of the cross does not pretend

(temptations) he teaches you to seek and love God's word.' Thus the attack of the devil on the student of theology serves to strengthen his faith because it drives him back to God's word as the only basis for his work in the church." Kleinig, "Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio," 265.

⁵⁹ Kleinig, "Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio," 264.

⁶⁰ Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace*, 224.

⁶¹ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 91.

⁶² Sánchez, *Pneumatología*, 57–60.

⁶³ See Rom. 8:28.

he knows how to properly and satisfactorily respond to this question. He can point those under attack to those things God's revealed narrative says, but he does not claim to see *the invisible things of God*. When someone is saved, it is all by God's action.⁶⁴ When someone is condemned, God is not to be considered unjust.⁶⁵

The Example of the Lutheran Church in Madagascar

In his book *I Am Not Afraid*, Robert H. Bennett reports that manifestations of demons are common in Madagascar, being a constant presence in church services of the Lutheran Church. As the reader turns the book's pages, he gets the impression that the author is describing a IURD's meeting. For example, when the general prayer of exorcism is not enough to expel all demons in the crowd, the manifested demons are brought to the altar and the pastors "will speak to the demonized person whenever a moment of calmness presents itself. This is done in an attempt to determine how or why the demon came to possess the person."⁶⁶

A few pages later, however, Bennet recognizes that some modern exorcist will consider necessary to interrogate demons in order to learn their name and their reasons for action, "but such questioning is foreign to the Gospels. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus speaks very little to the demons. He does not question the demons; He simply tells them to depart. . . . to suggest that others . . . are required to perform such questioning of the demons is overreaching the bounds of the text."⁶⁷ Therefore, although the Lutheran Church of Madagascar uses the same *technique* of interrogating the demons before the exorcism, this should not be seen as a rule, especially in virtue of Satan's cunning. C.F.W. Walther warns pastors that Satan can pretend to leave the

⁶⁴ See, for example, Matt. 19:25–26; Gal. 3:10–14; Eph. 2:8–9.

⁶⁵ See, for instance, Ps 14; Rom. 7:15–24; 10:13–21; Matt. 5:19.

⁶⁶ Bennett. *I Am Not Afraid*, 51.

⁶⁷ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 110.

possessed body, and go back into his sufferings, or to torment another person, in order to distract people from God so that “later, through such a sham, he might possess the people in another way, namely spiritually, and strengthen them in their superstition.”⁶⁸

Should We Trust the Demons’ Testimony?

Lutherans will answer this question with a “no.” Bennet answers:

Some charismatic Christians and Roman Catholics claim that because they have ‘bound the spirit’ with the Word of God, it can no longer lie to them. To be clear, there is no biblical precedence for such things. Yet, in spite of the danger, they go on to interrogate the spirit or spirits about the spirit world. They ask questions regarding the hidden workings of life, death, ghosts, curses, and other occult topics. Such conversations are harmful to the Christian faith. As a result of such conversations, Christians have begun to heed the words of demons over the clear revealed Word of God.⁶⁹

Satan still is the father of lies. Even though we acknowledge that God uses the devil for His purposes, this does not mean that we should hear what the devil says. On the contrary, we need to keep in mind that the devil never wants to help us in any way. His main strategy is deceiving, and the less we let him talk, the lesser the risk we take. Because of that, Lutherans consider what is true or what is false not according to what demons say, but according to what the Scriptures say. The Word, Jesus Christ himself, to whom the written, spoken, and sacramental forms of the Word point, continues to be the *measuring rod* (canon) that judges all things.⁷⁰

In contrast to IURD’s pastors who ask demons to “say more,” Lutherans follow Jesus when He says: “Be silent and come out of him!” (Luke 4:35). When Jesus commanded the seventy two to depart and spread His good news, he did not tell them to make of the exorcism a show. He

⁶⁸ C.F.W. Walther, *American Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, trans. John M. Drickamer (New Haven, MO: Lutheran News, 1995), 217.

⁶⁹ Bennett, *Afraid*, 154.

⁷⁰ For a more extensive account of Luther’s Christological approach to the Word, see David W. Lotz, “The Proclamation of the Word in Luther’s Thought,” *Word & World* 3 (1983): 344–54; and “*Sola Scriptura*: Luther on Biblical Authority,” *Interpretation* 35 (1981): 258–73.

even warned them to “not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). The work given by Jesus to the church lies in making disciples by baptizing and teaching,⁷¹ and the exorcism must be a servant of this divine tasks.

Conclusion

We have found evidence to conclude that, according to IURD’s reasoning, the testimony of Satan and the demons is deemed trustworthy. This is due to the fact that the pastor has authority bestowed by Jesus over the demons, and the gift of discernment of spirit given by the Holy Spirit. In the event of a satanic lie, the pastor is responsible for accusing the devil of lying. The chief demon possessing the person is like a tortured captain that is forced, through pain and suffering, to confess all his plans, which in turn makes him a primary source for information about the spiritual realm. Sometimes the devil teaches, sometimes the pastor teaches through what the devil says, and sometimes they team up in order to teach the church about how things really are.

Lutherans, on the other hand, believe that God makes Satan into the *best teacher of theology* through spiritual attacks in a way that the devil’s plans backfire on himself. In his blind fury, the devil tries to scare people *away* from God. God, however, ends up turning the tables in a way that makes the devil scare people *towards* God in prayer and by receiving His Word. Through the devil, God makes the theologian realize that he cannot make theology by himself, but needs desperately God’s grace in Jesus Christ in the midst of suffering and the cross. In the journey through the wilderness, Satan and his demons—and their testimonies or words—cannot be trusted under any circumstances. Instead, God’s Word, i.e. Jesus Christ himself, eternal and

⁷¹ See Matt. 28:18–20.

unchangeable in His love, comes to us in the midst of *tentatio* in a written way as Scripture (*principio materialis*) and in a spoken way as the Gospel promise (*principio formalis*). In the wilderness, Christ alone remains the church's source of teaching (*sola scriptura*) and Gospel comfort (*sola gratia, sola fide*). By contrast, IURD makes experience and prosperity, respectively, its material and formal principles. The material principle draws heavily from the demons as sources of truth, and liberation from these demons serves the ultimate goal of prosperity.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHALLENGING THE DEVIL

Pastor: [looking at the audience] Let's do a test?

Audience: Yes!

P: [*directs an obreiro*] Take that armchair that was here and bring it back. [*turns to the demon-possessed person*] I am placing this throne here, this chair, under this name [above the altar, the words *Jesus Cristo é o Senhor* – Jesus Christ is Lord, are written] If... pay attention demon If this place here [*points to the ground*], the Universal Church, is Satan's throne, as he is saying the other church is, they will manage to sit here [*pastor sits in the chair*] in this place, under the name that is above here [above the altar].

Demon-possessed person: [*yells*]

P: [*Looks at the audience*] You got it? Yes or no?

A: Yes!

P: Because if they manage to sit here without receiving any fire [i.e., being burned by the Spirit's fire], then who dominates, who reigns, who directs the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, who is inside bishop Macedo? Are the demons? [*points to the demon-possessed persons who are kneeling and grunting*]. We will see: Holy Spirit, let's do like this. My Father, if these demons manage to sit here in this place now that is the throne, and manage to sit without being roasted, burned by You, it's because they direct the Universal Church, [then] it's the devil, it's Satan who directs the church.

D: [*starts screaming louder*]

P: But if [*yells*] Your Spirit [*speaks normally*] is inside the bishop, and directs the Universal Church, then, when they [the demons] sit here, if they manage to sit here, there will be so much fire that I don't even know what is going to happen to them.¹

Challenging the devil is a way in which the pastor shows his audience how courageous and trustworthy he is. In fact, in every single part of IURD's *libertação*, the pastor presents himself as the one in charge of the situation: he can make the demons speak and command them to kneel; he can ask them whatever he wants, and can challenge God's people's worst and most powerful enemies by mocking them.

In this chapter, we will see how this feature of IURD's *libertação* influences the Christian attitude in the drama of life where God and Satan fight for people's souls. We will ask, is the

¹ See "Teste da Verdade / Bispo Sergio Desafia Demônio", YouTube vídeo, 4:20, "FJU Regente Feijó", published in February 24, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQPTRsu9E7Q>.

Christian's role to go after the devil and attack him in order to win, or is it to remain in guard and resist his attacks? In order to answer this question, we will hear/read from Macedo² and Higginbotham³ about their strategy to win over the devil and show the audience that God's power dwells in IURD. After that, we will contrast IURD's strategy with the Lutheran understanding, especially focusing on facing the demons with *prayer and meditation*, as presented by Leopoldo Sánchez in his book *Sculptor Spirit*.

IURD: A Church of Revolt

"IURD is a religion of provocation and challenges,"⁴ and this is one of the most important features of a Christian for IURD. The *revolta santa* (holy revolt) is against everything that does not fit the perfect and prosper life pictured in IURD's worldview. This revolt has to do with asserting the *Christian's rights*. However, it has interesting targets. Besides the most obvious target, i.e., *Satan* and all that he brings through his demons, the holy revolt is also directed at God, although *never* at IURD.

The Revolt against the Devil

This type of target for the revolt is the easiest to understand. If the devil is the enemy and attacks us so aggressively, Christians who gave their lives to Jesus need to be even more aggressive and unrelenting against the demons.⁵ Higginbotham gives an example of this revolt against the devil:

² Edir Macedo, *Orixás, Caboblos e Guias: Deuses ou Demônios?* (São Paulo: Unipro editora, 2019).

³ David Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers: Twelve Signs of Possession or Oppression* (Eugene: ACW Press, 2003).

⁴ Leonídio Silveira Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado: Organização e Marketing de um Empreendimento Neopentecostal* (São Paulo: Editora Vozes, 1997), 153 (translation mine).

⁵ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 81.

In your prayers, you have to get angry—not at your boss, but at the demonic forces at work in him that are trying to destroy your life. You have to speak directly to the evil spirits attacking you and command them to get away from you, ordering them to be bound up by the power of the Lord Jesus. As you pray with conviction in your heart, God will give you the words to say. . . . By hating the devil, we love God; by fighting against the spirits of darkness at work in your boss (or anyone else in your life who is oppressing you), you are doing a kindness to him that can eventually set him free.⁶

Theology (or what IURD understands by theology) is seen as an instrument in Satan’s hands, and therefore, becomes a target of holy revolt. According to IURD’s understanding, theology is far too intellectualized and theoretical, being “a tangle of ideas that says nothing to the uneducated; confuses the simple and deceives the wise. It adds nothing to faith,”⁷ and this rhetorical move speaks to their target public, who because of the overintellectualized language present especially in traditional churches, often feel like outsiders in them, not understanding what is being said. “Theology” does not make sense of people’s lives anymore. Macedo links theology as non-understandable language with the devil’s depriving the poor and uneducated from receiving the gospel of prosperity, which ends up perpetuating their condition of poverty forever. Traditional churches are under the devil’s captivity, or his *theology captivity*, and therefore must be abandoned by true revolt believers who want to receive God’s blessings.⁸

The Revolt against God

The most interesting and surprising target of the holy revolt is God. However, the *holy revolt* is to be separated from the *sinful revolt*, in which demons and unbelievers participate.⁹

⁶ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 140.

⁷ Edir Macedo, *A Libertação da Teologia*, (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Gráfica Universal, 1993), 17–18 (translation mine).

⁸ “As long as you . . . are satisfied with the historical tradition of your church, with its rituals and ceremonies, with its liturgy and with its acceptance of things as they are, you will not be anointed by the Holy Spirit. . . there is a demon called *Exu-tradition*, which sneaks in, forcing Church members to pay attention only to ecclesiastical practices, customs and norms.” Macedo, *A libertação da Teologia*, 164 (translation mine).

⁹ Campos also speaks of *good* and *bad* violence in the rite of *libertação*. “Neo-Pentecostal exorcism places

They use term revolt in two different ways: the good revolt is called *holy*, the bad one is called *rebellion*. While pride and desire for *being more* or greater than what God intends for us to be is at the center of rebellion, *holy revolt* has to do with Christians' rights of *getting more* from God. God "is under obligation (because he promised) to keep his Word, rebuking devouring spirits that disgrace man's life by acting through diseases, accidents, addictions, social degradation and all sectors of human activity, making man suffer forever."¹⁰ To get prosperity from God is seen by IURD as nothing more than requiring Christians to claim their own rights before God,¹¹ rights that were acquired through the person's commitment to tithing. It is like a contract, or a society in which "if you do your part, you can be sure that God . . . will do His."¹²

God even expects this attitude from Christians. He tests them to see if they really want what they are asking for.¹³ According to Higginbotham, Christians need to stop waiting for God. "God is waiting for us to make the same radical decisions of faith that those men of the past [Gideon, Joshua, Moses and Abraham] did—to sacrifice all, to lose our life for the sake of Christ in order to gain great victories for God's glory."¹⁴

This revolt can be seen through the attitudes of the pastors and bishops, but especially in

before the audience someone who personifies violence, experienced in daily life, and who, after being publicly denounced and interiorized by the possessed, is excluded by the 'good violence' of the actor-exorcist. Thus, on the stage, a kind of 'symbolic lynching' of the sacrificial victim is practiced, an event that falls within the group's need for catharsis." Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 347 (translation mine). Campos is not analyzing IURD through a theological perspective, but the point that he makes is that IURD's concerns are not so much the *violence* or *revolt*, but the source of it, or, the side of the agent making use of the violence. He is either on God's (IURD's) side or on the devil's.

¹⁰ Edir Macedo, *Vida com Abundância* (Rio de Janeiro: Universal, 1992), 79 (translation mine).

¹¹ "Charge from God what he himself promised. Live a victorious and abundant life, never accept defeat or disgrace (Hebrews 2:14)." Edir Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1810–11 (translation mine).

¹² Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1369–73 (translation mine).

¹³ "[Worshippers] are challenged, in the name of God and, at the same time, must learn to challenge God with a definite decision and appropriate contributions." Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 153 (translation mine).

¹⁴ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 18.

Edir Macedo's rhetoric. When Higginbotham met Edir Macedo, in December of 1986, one of his first impressions was that Edir Macedo was not afraid to put even God to the test:

He would say things like, "Either God exists, or He doesn't. Stop trying to be an in-between Christian, claiming to believe in God, but never taking the risk to see His power at work in your life." . . . Bishop Macedo loved challenges. He loved challenging himself, and he loves challenging others to put their faith into practice. One thing that struck me about everything he taught was that he was so sure the Word of God was true that he has no fear of putting it on the line. . . . He had no qualm about telling people that it was God's will for them to succeed or be healed or blessed in all they did, as long as they put Him first in their lives.¹⁵

In his books and public speeches, Macedo employs an aggressive and grandiose language, transmitting the idea of indignation towards the current state of the world.¹⁶ Pastors, consequently, replicate this rhetoric at the temples, portraying an unpleasant image to outsiders. They fear no one, not the devil, not even God, and therefore, they must be feared. To insiders, however, this image of super-pastors with no fear is seen as proof of the pastor's legitimacy. They fear no one, and therefore they must be telling the truth.

Revolting against IURD

The attitude of *holy revolt* is promoted by the pastors, but only when it is directed to God and/or the devil. Any revolt directed against the God's direct authorities in the church, i.e., the pastors and bishops, is considered *rebellion*.

Rebellion against those whom God has placed in authority over us goes hand in hand with the love of power and position. It is the action that Lucifer took to rise up against God in heaven and what determined his banishment for eternity. . . . When . . . a

¹⁵ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 18.

¹⁶ IURD involvement in politics is notable compared with churches of other *waves* of Pentecostalism in Brazil. Macedo's theological reason for that, as Oneide Bobsin identifies, dwells in the fact that, for IURD, demons can possess entire nations through their leaders. Therefore, without true Christians in politics, there is no way for the nation to prosper. Oneide Bobsin, "Teologia da Prosperidade ou Estratégia de Sobrevivência: Estudo Exploratório," *Estudos Teológicos*, 35, no.1 (1995): 31.

church member rebels against the leadership of his church. . . [he is] showing hostility toward God. Rebellion against God reveals an alliance with the devil.¹⁷

Moreover, any revolt and insubordination of pastors toward their bishops, or anyone's insubordination against Edir Macedo, is immediately related to Satan's revolt against God and fought by the high-ranking leaders of IURD.¹⁸ Mário Justino, an ex-pastor of IURD, wrote a book that claims to tell how things really were behind the scenes of IURD in Bahia, a state located on the Atlantic coast in the northeastern part of Brazil. He relates how pastors were evaluated by their offering revenues and, when their results did not achieve superior returns, they were simply expelled out of the ministry.

The first meetings with the pastors . . . were basically a barrage of threats. . . . The message was clear: The pastor who did not reach the goal of offering what he [the bishop] had set would be kicked in the ass (I prefer to use this word). Knowing about our humble origins, he promised to return each of us to the old hard life of stonemasons, street sweepers, and bakers, if we did not raise the money he wanted . . . so in order not to pass on that image of people who only think in money, he resorted to a Machiavellian plan: during the meetings, he read anonymous letters of dubious truth, in which someone reported the misconduct of that pastor. . . . After the letters had been read, a vote was taken, on the basis of a "raise your hand," in order to decide the poor guy's luck . . . cowardly we raised our hands . . . many did not agree . . . but for the sake of their jobs, they did not have the courage to speak up.¹⁹

According to Justino's denouncement, bishops can even forge letters, in which pastors are allegedly denounced by someone, when things are not how they want them to be. Any kind of

¹⁷ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 80.

¹⁸ Justin Doran demonstrates that reality by pointing to the strategy used by Macedo in 1992 in order to keep IURD under his control. At that time, he explains, Renato Suhett was promoted by Macedo as "bishop of Brazil", and under his leadership, the church grew impressively. His charisma was proportionally growing, and he was known as "the bishop of love." Macedo did not like that and decided to separate the episcopal jurisdictions of Brazil into regions headed by bishops. This action resulted in a college of bishops, chosen by Macedo, that now controlled Brazil's church. Renato's position was, therefore, extinct and he was transferred to California in 1993 and became a pastor at a new church in an old movie theater on Broadway, in downtown Los Angeles. In 1995, he left IURD because he disagreed with "IURD's growing emphasis on campaigns of financial sacrifice." Doran, "Demon-Haunted Worlds," 19–20.

¹⁹ Mário Justino, *Nos Bastidores do Reino: A Vida Secreta na Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (São Paulo: Geração editorial, 1995), 59–61 (translation mine).

insubordination is treated with extreme severity. It is not a surprise that the pastoral rotation in the churches is constant.²⁰

Hostility against Outsiders

A climate of fear is established in IURD's temples. No pastor is authorized to talk to the press or give interviews to anyone.²¹ When someone is identified as a journalist or a researcher, for example, it is not rare for the pastor to encourage people to *revolt* against him/her, causing them to expel the person from the temple under threats. In one of these occasions, a journalist of a newspaper, *Folha de S. Paulo*, was harassed and expelled by a multitude incited by the pastor during a IURD service. He reported the situation in the following way:

Burn him! Burn him! Burn him! When I heard the crowd's inquisitorial shout, I thought, "I'm not gonna get out alive." Fear made my arms go numb and my knees almost buckled. . . dozens of *obreiros* surrounded me. . . the pastor, more and more excited, ordered: "Let's expel him from the temple" . . . I thought they were going to lynch me . . . I asked an *obreiro* to protect me. He hugged me and, walking slowly, begging the crowd to calm down, managed to get me out of there.²²

The pastors have dominion over everything in the church: over God, because He is bound to His promises; over the devil, because he is under God's authority given to the pastors; over the *obreiros* and the audience, because they either trust the pastor's strong leadership, or fear church discipline. The bishops have control over the pastors, and bishop Macedo leads this intimidating hierarchical chain of command.²³

²⁰ Campos gives the benefit of the doubt to IURD saying that this can also be interpreted as IURD's desire of not letting people be attached to a single pastor. In any case, this is also a way to maintain dominion over the institution: if any pastor *rebels* against the institution, he will be weaker without a community to support him. Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 57.

²¹ Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 56–57.

²² Armando Antenore, "O dia em que escapei da fogueira," *Folha de S. Paulo*, September 17, 1995, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/1995/9/17/brasil/27.html> (translation mine).

²³ Doran, "Demon-Haunted Worlds," 26–28.

Facing Demons like a Winner

IURD main doctrine is the *prosperity of the faithful*, which portrays life as a run or race in which the person either wins or loses. However, the most important thing is not so much to win the race at the end, but to be a winner *in the course of* the run.²⁴ To lead in the race means to win in the end. To be second place in the race puts in doubt one's status at the end. There is a certain anticipation of the Christian Parousia in prosperity thinking, or at least IURD preachers act like that.²⁵ As Campos says, IURD

is opting for the idea of accepting that the flow of riches of life, health, prosperity, and all the good things in existence is a natural thing. The belief in the anticipation of paradise is spreading among the lower middle class, and no longer is moved to the end of time, in an uncertain and indeterminate future. For the *iurdianos*,²⁶ the temple is the beginning of a life in paradise to be built within history, through the effort of each one.²⁷

Christians' main adversary in achieving such prosperity is the devil. As we saw in chapter 3, the devil *creates* obstacles to slow Christians down and win over them. It is up to the person to win his personal race by making the devil give up. When the only opponent is defeated, there is no other final result but victory. The reverse is true. "If we don't take the initiative and attack these demonic forces with faith in the name of Jesus, we'll become their next victims. By succeeding in their attacks against us, they may succeed in finding a way to force themselves into our families. It's either win or lose."²⁸

²⁴ "Although IURD theoretically claims to believe and expect the second coming of Christ . . . in practice the Universal Church emphasizes that the Christian has the right to live a life of joy, peace, and prosperity in all things. This present-oriented conception overshadows concerns about tomorrow. . . . Hence the slogan 'stop suffering'". Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 375 (translation mine).

²⁵ Bitun, "Transformações no Campo Religioso", 216–17.

²⁶ That is, members of IURD.

²⁷ Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 136.

²⁸ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 81.

How to Win the Race?

One of the ways to win this race is by not fearing the adversary. In fact, there is no reason to fear the devil *if* someone dedicates his life to Jesus through commitment, i.e., tithing. Once you have done your part, you can rest in the Lord and doubt nothing. Challenging the devil in the rite of *libertação* has the main goal of showing how the devil is weak before a human being who is without doubt in the Lord.

“Look at My Eyes and Seek for Doubt!”

In one of the most intense videos of IURD’s rite of *libertação* that I am aware of (also mentioned in the previous chapter), pastor and demon clash against each other in a challenge to see who is going to kneel to whom. At the beginning of the video, the demon says that there are seven thousand of them inside a person. The demon speaking is the leader of the seven thousand. He presents himself as belonging to a tribe of warrior demons, but more than that, he is a general of a great army of that tribe. The pastor, Bishop *Adilson Silva*, is going to challenge this demon.

Pastor: Do you want us to give up?

Demon-possessed person: Yes.

P: Are you strong?

D: Yes.

P: [*yells*] Are you strong?!

D: Yes!

P: What if I tell you that you are not?

D: I can insist, until the last day.

P: Let’s do a challenge here?

D: I don’t flee.

P: If you win, . . . by the way, open his eyes [referring to the possessed one]

D: You are of age! You will have to give up!

P: So, *don’t hold your breath!*²⁹

. . .

D: I can buy you; I have this money.

P: Money for me?

D: Give me your price.

²⁹ Literally, in Portuguese: “You can wait laid down.”

P: Oh, really? I give you the price and you. . .

D: *[interrupts] Tonight*

P: You pay?

D: *Let's close this door.*

P: Do you pay? Do you want to do business with me so I can drop everything?

D: *We can make a deal.*

P: And what do you want?

D: *I want you out of my way.*

. . .

P: Look at my eyes and search for doubt.

D: *You are hungry! You are so hungry!*

P: Look at my eyes. *[the demon-possessed person puts his face near the pastor's face while grunting]* Like that. Take your place, your position before the One who lives inside me.

D: *I am not afraid of your office [of bishop].*

P: Neither am I afraid of you!

D: *You should be. . .*

P: I am not bound to the office.

D: *You should. Many would!*

P: Look at me.

D: *I would occupy your office. Give up, I can scare you!*

P: *[ironically]* I'm scared to death!

D: *[screams] Give up!*

P: Look at my eyes and search for doubt!

D: *There are times in which you lose your physical protection.*

P: Search for fear!

D: *What saves you outside this place?*

P: Search for fear in my eyes! Seek doubt inside my eyes!

D: *You are going to fall. You are going to fall! You are going to fall.*

P: And take your place before the One to whom I gave my life!

D: *I won't fall!*

P: The One who dwells in me!

D: *[among screams, he brings one arm to the front and touches the pastor's chest] I could break your neck!*

P: Before the One who dwells in me! *[the audience starts screaming in prayer]*

D: *[starts to duck] You are only a mortal! You are old, you will be gone.*

P: I am a mortal who serves Him!

D: *You will not make it! It is not going to work; your ministry is a scam! You are going to fall like the others.*

P: *[smiles]* Say more! Say more to see if I have any doubt!

D: *You will give up! You will retire! You will not make it!*

P: Try it! Try to put the seed of doubt in me!

D: *Give up! There are better churches for you! You don't need this! It is written that the grace of God is sufficient for you, you don't need to go on until the end [kneels].*

*The old covenant was cancelled, you don't need to go on until the end. [the audience applauds]*³⁰

Someone could ask: What is Jesus' role in this challenge? Apparently, Jesus is not doing anything except for dwelling inside the pastor. Jesus is no longer needed to act during the *libertação*. He is not performing any act, nor is He sending angels to deal with the demons. He is only in the pastor, and because the pastor gave himself entirely to Jesus and has no doubt, then the demon needs to obey the pastor. Maybe this way of thinking is a reflection of the modalism in which we are living today in the "age of the spirit", where Jesus, or the Word, is no longer needed to account for a fully Trinitarian picture of God's action in the world, and people can reach a spiritual life through a living and free spirit.³¹

We may speak of the pastor as a sort of *pastor victor* in this challenge, since he not only commands the demon to tell the truth, kneel, and bow down, but also incites the demon to battle against him. It is not Jesus, *Christus Victor*, who battles against the demons. The responsibility finally falls on the pastor. After the pastor's demonstration of power against the demon, if one accepts the premise that the event is trustworthy, nothing that is said and done by the pastor can be doubted. People are led to think, like the people of Samaria that "this man is the power of God that is called Great" (Acts 8:10).

"If You. . . I Will Eat This Bible"

In another instance of a church service, the same bishop, *Adilson Silva*, is interviewing a demon that identifies himself as *Apollyon* (or *Abaddon*), and reproduces the sound of the infernal

³⁰ See "Demônio propõe um pacto ao bispo," YouTube vídeo, 10:52, "Bispo Adilson Silva Oficial", published in January 26, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hsrgkd0nJcs>.

³¹ See John J. McNeill, "The Church in the Age of the Holy Spirit," *CrossCurrents* 50, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer, 2000): 163.

grinding of teeth. We also mentioned this case in the last chapter, talking about how pastor and demon team up against those who think they are faking their testimonies. During this video, the pastor challenges the demon to possess him, if he is strong enough.

Pastor: I will propose a challenge for you: if you win, I will take out this tie, stop preaching the gospel, and will say that *Apollyon* is Lord. Who is the other one, again? Is it *Abaddon*? *Abaddon* and *Apollyon*?

Demon-possessed person: [whispers] *In Hebrew is Abaddon, in Greek is Apollyon.*

P: That's how it is in the Bible, isn't it? [looks at the audience] He is speaking exactly what is written, in Hebrew and in Greek. The Bible mentions these demons, *Abaddon* and *Apollyon*, just like he said. [turns to the demon-possessed person] If you win the challenge, I will stop preaching, and I will not leave here today [an obreiro gives him a Bible] without eating the last page of this Bible, and I will work for you. Let's do it! Or not?

D: [whispers] *I want a challenge with your people, you bastard! I want [one] with them. [points to the audience]*

P: Let's do it! Or not? You said you like challenges. . .

D: [whispers] *Do you think I will back off? Let's do it!*

P: Ok, so come closer, stay here in front of me.

[Scene cuts. Now, the pastor is standing on one side of the altar and the demon-possessed person is standing in front of him. They are around four feet away from each other.]

P: The bravest one ties the least brave one, takes the house and loots the goods. [looks at the audience] The house is the body, the brave one keeps the house. [looks at the demon-possessed person] If you who say you like challenges and are that brave, look at me, tie the Brave one who is in me and loot the house. [points to his own head]

Possess me in front of this crowd, put me on my knees, and I will preach that *Apollyon* is Lord. [the demon-possessed person tilts her head up] Look at me. [points to the demon-possessed person] Look at me. [the demon-possessed person looks] I know that you are seeing me, even without her eyes, but look at me with her eyes. If what is in me, the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, the one to whom I consecrate my life, is bigger than you, He will put you on your knees. Do you want to come closer? [pastor steps ahead] Do you want to make more noise?

D: [pastor puts the microphone in the demon-possessed person's mouth and she grinds her teeth repeatedly]

P: [steps back] It is on! How do you want me to position myself?

D: [whispers out of the microphone] *In war position.*

P: In war position? Ok. [remains the same way, and looks at the audience] Are you hearing the teeth [speak]? [people nod]

[15 seconds of silence. The demon-possessed person says something and the pastor gets close to the microphone, only getting the final of the sentence]

D: [inaudible] . . . *spiritual!*

P: [looks at the audience] He is saying, "this fight is mine and yours, because those who are carnal won't understand that."

[Scene cuts]

P: Are there people who doubt us?

D: *[yells]* In this exact moment!

P: And who do they think we are?

D: *[yells]* They wish you would fall!

P: And what do they think of us?

D: *[whispers]* A bunch of deceivers, damn it, making everybody guinea pigs, horses.

P: And who makes them think like that? *[Demon-possessed person grunts]* Where do these ideas come from?

D: *First I play with them, then their point of view changes, because I will only have [influence] where people let me, you bastard!*

P: *[looks at the audience]* You understood. *[looks at the demon-possessed person]*

Let's go! Either it is or is not! *[5 seconds of silence. Pastor yells]* Either it is or is not!

[18 seconds of silence; pastor points to the Bible] The Bible is there. I will eat the

Bible. *[12 second of silence; the demon-possessed person struggles but kneels;*

people applaud; the pastor laughs, turns to the audience, and points to the roof] To

the Lord Jesus, all praise, all the honor, and all the glory, amen? Look, amen. Do you

want the Rulers on their knees before you? Hell on its knees before you? Be God's.

Be faithful. Give your life [to Jesus]. In a moment I will pray for those who want this.

Amen?³²

In this situation, we see the first mention of Jesus doing some action. He is the one who puts the demon on his knees, because he is bigger than *Apollyon*. But the goal for Christians is revealed at the end of the dialogue, namely, to put the demon on his knees before them. Faith in Jesus is *instrumental* to achieve this final goal. Faith is *to be used* by Christians to manipulate the demons and make them obey. Faith is about *being a winner* right now and stop suffering by stopping the demons to act in one's life.

It is clear that the pastor is an example of how anyone who is like him, i.e., one who has given his life to Jesus and does not doubt for any reason, can deal with demons. Christians can even provoke demons to be "incorporated" in them if they are really strong. If the Christian is sealed up by the Spirit, Satan can try as hard as he can, but he will not be able to get in. God is obligated to provide the Christian with protection, since He promises to do that. We thus have a

³² See "Demônio Faz O Som Do Ranger De Dentes do Inferno – Forte!!! Compartilhe!", YouTube video, 11:14, "Bispo Adilson Silva Oficial", published in December 16, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urDHZKnryQk>.

twofold challenge: the pastor challenges the demons to possess him, and then challenges God to fulfill His promise of protection. It is not God who tests His creatures, but the creatures who test God.

Who Is in Charge of IURD?

Challenging a demon also has an institutional function in IURD. They not only are sure that the Holy Spirit is with them because the demons submit to their orders in the church, but also because the demons themselves tell them that.³³ Frequently demons reveal how they take people from IURD and put them in other popular neo-Pentecostal churches like *Igreja Mundial do Poder de Deus*, for example, founded by an ex-IURD pastor called *Valdemiro Santiago*. That is the case in the following occasion. Before the demon's confession, bishop *Sergio Corrêa* has no other reaction but to challenge the demon to see who is in charge of IURD.

Demon-possessed person: I used the mouth of many obreiros to speak ill of her behind her back, and her family saw it and also walked away [from the church]. They went to the Church of Mu. . . [laughs]

Pastor: They went where?

D: To my temple.

P: To which temple?

D: Mine!

P: Where is your temple?

D: My temple is here. . . [points somewhere outside the church]

P: Here where?

D: At Mundial.

P: *[looks at the audience]* There is a wave of demons saying that the Mundial is their temple. Let's do a test?

Audience: Yes!

Pastor: *[looking at the audience]* Let's do a test?

Audience: Yes!

P: *[directs an obreiro]* Take that armchair that was here and bring it back. *[turns to the demon-possessed person]* I am placing this throne here, this chair, under this

³³ "We are sure that the Holy Spirit has guided us, which is why we are stepping on Satan's head. In our meetings of libertação, demons are required to show who they really are, proving that the Lord is with us. People are set free and become new creatures for God. . . . The Holy Spirit has worked in our community, manifesting all His power through the name of Jesus, in the lives of all the people who come to us." Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1405–11 (translation mine).

name [above the altar, the words *Jesus Cristo é o Senhor* – Jesus Christ is Lord, are written] If... pay attention demon, If this place here [*points to the ground*], the Universal Church, is Satan's throne, as he is saying the other church is, they will manage to sit here [*pastor sits in the chair*] in this place, under the name that is above here [above the altar].

Demon-possessed person: [yells]

P: [*Looks at the audience*] You got it? Yes or no?

A: Yes!

P: Because if they manage to sit here without receiving any fire [i.e., being burned by the Spirit's fire], then who dominates, who reigns, who directs the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, who is inside bishop Macedo? Are the demons? [*points to the demon-possessed persons who are kneeling and grunting*]. We will see: Holy Spirit, let's do like this. My Father, if these demons manage to sit here in this place now that is the throne, and manage to sit without being roasted, burned by You, it's because they direct the Universal Church, [then] it's the devil, it's Satan who directs the church.

D: [starts screaming louder]

P: But if [*yells*] Your Spirit [*speaks normally*] is inside the bishop, and directs the Universal Church, then, when they [the demons] sit here, if they manage to sit here, there will be so much fire that I don't even know what is going to happen to them.

[Scene cuts]

P: [*looks at the demon-possessed person*] Is anybody seated here already? Do you see someone?

D: [yells frenetically]

P: So, come closer to the One who is there and bang your head³⁴ before Him. Come on! If your spirit, devil, is sitting here [*points to the chair*], then you will not bang your head, but if it is the Spirit of the Lord who is already sitting here, bang your head before Him here. Is it empty?

D: No, you know that it is not.

P: What?

D: [yells] You know that it is not!

P: If this chair is empty, you will not bang your head here, before the One who is here. But if you are seeing someone sitting here already, you will bang your head before Him. Come on!

D: [grunts]

P: Do you want to sit there?

D: [screams]

P: Do you want to?

D: You bastard! Bastard! [starts to duck] I won't give up! [yells, but finally touches the floor with his head]

³⁴ An expression also used for bowing down.

P: It's done! [audience applauds while the demon-possessed person keeps yelling frenetically]³⁵

In this challenge, it is not only the pastor who is being portrayed as strong, but IURD itself. The demon testifies, by losing the challenge, that IURD is being directed by the One who is present inside bishop Macedo, i.e., Jesus Christ. The contrast is made with *Igreja Mundial*, which is called *the devil's temple*. Yet the role of the pastor as the mediator, who teases God's Spirit and proposes a challenge between Him and the demon, is still powerfully portrayed. The pastor is actually in charge of the challenge in the sense that he *declares* what God will do with the demon if he tries to sit on the "throne."

God, again, a mere puppet in the pastor's hands. If the pastor, for example, had told God that the demons would receive a bucket of ice if they managed to sit on the throne, God would have obeyed him, or the test would have failed. The challenges tie God so much to the pastor's will that He cannot do anything but to obey what the pastor proposes. Otherwise, the church would be unmasked as false, and God's kingdom would not be established around the globe through the church (IURD). Therefore, if God wants people to believe, He better obey and do what the pastor proposes.³⁶ Maybe based on 1 Kings 18, when Elijah *begs* God to prove himself to the confused people of Israel as the only true God in opposition to Baal, pastors of IURD pair up with God, *declaring* what He ought to do. They challenge not only Satan, but also God.

³⁵ See "Teste da Verdade / Bispo Sergio Desafia Demônio", YouTube vídeo, 4:20, "FJU Regente Feijó", published in February 24, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQPTRsu9E7Q>.

³⁶ In an interview to the newspaper *O Globo* of 04.29.1990, Edir Macedo said, "If God does not honor what he said three or four thousand years ago, *I* would be bad" (<https://acervo.oglobo.globo.com/consulta-ao-acervo/?navegacaoPorData=199019900429>, page 16, accessed in 03/25/2020 – translation mine). Therefore, Campos adds that "we have here no longer an indebted human being, but an indebted god." Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado*, 371 (translation mine).

“Fear Nothing!”

The purpose of the challenge between the pastor and the devil in IURD is to show people that, if they are with Jesus, i.e., if they are baptized with the Holy Spirit, they do not need to fear the demons at all. The problem is that, as we already saw, *to be with Jesus* means to take many steps to be his disciple. In IURD, such steps include being freed from the demons, forgive everyone who has hurt you, not lying, not being a part of the things of this evil world, confess everything sinful to God, disconnect oneself from all of this world’s preoccupations, and praising God in an audible voice at all times.³⁷ And even if all these steps are taken and the person receives the baptism with the Holy Spirit, there is almost no guarantee that the person is *really* baptized. There are only signs. Macedo admits this instability by saying that sometimes the demons pretend or produce signs similar to those of the Holy Spirit.³⁸ The gift of the *discernment of spirits* is again called in order to produce some sense of comfort to the person. The pastor would know if it is the devil or the Holy Spirit who is in action. However, since the baptism with the Holy Spirit is considered a *state* and not a *condition*, there is always a certain doubt about having received it, even though the person may not admit it.

In this sense, the challenge between the pastor and the demon can be seen as adding an extra element of security for the people. Although they may question themselves as to whether they are totally protected, they know that IURD is the right church to be to receive such protection. Macedo explains the role of fear and how a person who is afraid can be easily manipulated by the demons:

Fear makes man respect and be terrified of the devil and his demons. Many say that they respect all religions, but in fact what is behind all this is the fear of God, fear of the spirits, fear of the “saints,” etc. Thus, if humanity is afraid to resist the devil, it

³⁷ Edir Macedo, *Nos passos de Jesus* (Rio de Janeiro: Universal, 2004), 143–46.

³⁸ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1734–46.

becomes coward and is, therefore, oppressed by him. . . . The worst is that many who know the truth and have Jesus in their hearts, are afraid of the devil and do not resist him, nor join the battle against our already defeated enemy.³⁹

Therefore, by challenging the demons and defeating them in front of the people with God's power inside the pastor, IURD aims to do away with all the insecurity Christians may have. In other words, if the devil is so strong as they themselves picture him, then the church must prove to be even stronger. One way to do that is by challenging, laughing at and defeating the so-called strong demons in front of everyone. IURD presents itself as a strong church, and the pastors and bishops as faithful and aggressive servants of the Lord, so that the audience can feel safe, follow their example and

be ruthless against the devil. We need to understand our authority in Jesus, come against the 'strong man' with no fear or trepidation, tie him up, and throw him out so we can 'rob' all that he stole from us. This . . . was definitely the attitude of the Lord Jesus. If we are His followers, we need to get in line with His Spirit and start aggressively attacking our enemies.⁴⁰

Is the Christian's Role to Attack or Resist the Devil?

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God will say that the best defense against the devil is a good attack. And they argue that God commanded us to attack when Christ gave His authority over the demons to the disciples. With that authority true Christians "can go after *Exús*, *Caboclos* and all demons and expel them from people's lives. . . . You can call the boss of the demons that are dominating that body, that are in the person's house, in your relatives or in anyone else, and they will have to obey you!"⁴¹ By challenging, mocking, and laughing at the devil, IURD aims to transmit the idea that anyone can become an exorcist, if they fulfill certain prerequisites. Once you understand how the invader can be defeated, you can then trust the

³⁹ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 772–80 (translation mine).

⁴⁰ Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 47.

⁴¹ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1510–14 (translation mine).

method and attack them with no fear.

Everyone who attends IURD meetings has the method to become capable to do with the demons what they observe their pastor does with them. Claiming this right depends only on the person's initiative. If the person does his part, God will do His as well. By contrast, "if we doubt, if we are wishy-washy in our faith, if we are passive or apathetic, we are useless to God and can be sure we won't receive anything from Him."⁴² Having the armor of God, which includes the sword of the Holy Spirit to counterattack, Christians can trust God and themselves, fearing nothing: not the demons, not the devil, not even God.⁴³ On the contrary,

the devil is frightened when he meets someone who exercises Jesus' authority. The demons fall on their knees, the *Exús* roll on the floor and walk on their knees if we order it from them! Dear reader, . . . do not give up on your rights, do not put aside what the Lord Jesus Christ has given you, cling to the blessings of Jesus tooth and nail⁴⁴ and step on the heads of *Exús* and all demons!⁴⁵

A Lutheran Response

To humiliate the devil means to resist him. Imagine how humiliated he is when a poor, sinful, and weak creature is able to resist the assaults of the Father of lies, the great and fiery red dragon (Rev. 12). Luther proposes this by saying that "God bids the devil defiance and says to him: You mighty spirit, I shall place a poor, weak vessel before you; I challenge you to attack him. This annoys the devil immeasurably; hence he goes about as a roaring lion and would love to break and shatter the weak pots and vessels."⁴⁶ But what are those ways in which God strengthens Christians to resist the devil's assaults?

⁴² Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 45.

⁴³ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1364–70.

⁴⁴ This expression in Portuguese means to use all your strength to remain with something.

⁴⁵ Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*, Kindle Locations 1485–92 (Translation mine).

⁴⁶ Plass, *What Luther Says*, 401. WA 17, 450.

The Best Offense Is a Good Defense

Leopoldo Sánchez speaks of the Holy Spirit as *the sculptor* who shapes Christians according to the image of Jesus Christ. In his dramatic model of *sanctification*, which is inspired in Luther's reflections on *tentatio* (spiritual attack), he reminds us that it is through meditation on the Word and prayer that Christians stand firm when Satan attacks.⁴⁷ He argues that dealing with *tentatio* is not a matter of attacking the devil, as if human creatures were capable of going after the demons, challenge them, and defeat them. On the contrary, spiritual warfare is more like taking the attitude of Christians in the arenas during the first centuries. They did not attack but stood firm amidst attacks. Rather than going on the offense, Christians are vigilant. They acknowledge that the devil is like a lion always ready to attack and, therefore, "one must . . . not put himself in situation that would make him an easy prey."⁴⁸

After hearing the victorious discourse of IURD, in which pastors presents themselves as the specialists in *libertação*, exercising dominion over all demons by challenging them, putting them on their knees, and commanding them to confess all their secrets, the defensive strategy sounds cowardly or pessimistic. However, this position has more to do with what God reveals in the Scriptures than with cowardice, uncertainty, or weakness. Lutherans are *theologians of the cross* and call a thing what it is. That means in part acknowledging one's dependence on Christ and His Word in the midst of the attacks.

Jesus in the Wilderness

The memorable event of Jesus' temptation in the desert can teach us many things. First of all, right after his baptism in Matthew 3, Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be

⁴⁷ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 95.

⁴⁸ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 112.

tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1–11 and Luke 4:1–13). This is not merely a moment of vulnerability the devil saw and took advantage of. It is part of God’s plan. Life in Christ involves life in the wilderness, full of temptations coming from the devil, our own flesh, and the world.

Second, Jesus is not providing us instructions on to how fight the devil, for a *do-it-yourself* exorcism. Rather, Jesus is taking the place of God’s firstborn son, the people of Israel, to win the battle that they had lost in the desert. For forty years, the people of Israel sinned in the desert (Deut. 9:13–21). Sánchez highlights the salvific significance of the event: “Now, Jesus, in his forty desert days . . . recapitulates or does over the failed history of Israel, becoming the faithful Son of God, obedient to his Father alone.”⁴⁹ In this substitutionary sense, Jesus is not showing us how to defeat the devil, he is actually defeating the devil *for* and *in place of* God’s people.

Third, the challenge of (or testing in) the desert has a very interesting dynamic. As we saw earlier, Sánchez points to the fact that temptation and testing are different sides of the same coin. When the devil tempts, God tests, although the coin is still God’s. In the gospels’ temptation accounts, the target is the Son of God. He does not attack the devil, but remains firm and faithful to the Father and His will. He does not disobey his Father, but “the obedient Son puts himself under God’s command.”⁵⁰ It is not by chance that the only one who directly challenges Jesus is the devil: “If you are the Son of God. . .” (Luke 4:3,7,9). Yet God is not excluded from this picture, since it is Jesus’ sonship that is being tested.

Similarly, Christians should look at temptations not merely as the devil’s evil, but also as a testing of the loving God which makes them strong to endure the journey in the wilderness. IURD focuses on the present moment of victory over the devil in the race through the desert.

⁴⁹ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 90–91.

⁵⁰ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 91.

Lutherans focus on a broader eschatological perspective in which Christians still struggle with the devil until the last day and, in the midst of their sufferings, submit to God's discipline and "are formed into the likeness of his obedient Son, who in his submission to the Father was made 'perfect through suffering.'"⁵¹ The attitude of Jesus before the devil and of the demons is also paradigmatic for the church. Christians charge against the devil with the sword of the Spirit to attack him and his demons, but *the Holy Spirit leads* Christians through temptations, so that, through mediation and prayer, they stand firm, do not abandon their position, and let God be God, fighting His battle against the forces of evil.⁵²

Laughing at the Devil

Martin Luther has many writings on how he dealt with the devil. One of the things he enjoyed most was to ridicule the devil. By doing that, Christians take the devil's only argument, *sin*, and at the same time hurt his pride.

Letter to Andrew Ebert (1536)

In a letter written to Luther, Andrew Ebert, a preacher in Frankfurt, Germany, asks for guidance. A young lady called Matzke Fischer, known for suffering mental problems, was doing certain uncommon things like chewing and swallowing small coins, and talking in a German dialect previously unknown by her. There was an attempt of exorcism by a Roman priest, but it did not go well. Part of Luther's answer was:

Inasmuch as you have to do here with a jocular spirit who in his leisure pokes fun at our security, we must first of all pray earnestly for the girl who is compelled to suffer such things on our account. In the second place, this spirit must in turn be ridiculed and derided, but he must not be attacked with any exorcisms or serious measures, for

⁵¹ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 94.

⁵² "The battle belongs to Him. He alone is our salvation, the one who delivers us from the enemy. He is the victor in the contest. All our armor and our ammunition come from Him." Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace*, 248.

he laughs at all these things with diabolical scorn. We must persevere in our prayer for the girl and our contempt of the devil until finally, Christ permitting, he lets her alone.⁵³

For Luther, there seems to be a relation between the demon's acts and the way the church should act towards him. In this particular case, the demon refused to depart, laughing at the first attempt of exorcism. As a second plan, Luther suggests that the pastor deal with the demon with his own poison. This injures exactly the thing the devil and the demons are most proud of, that is, their pride. The focus for Luther definitely is not in the person of the pastor, nor in the holiness of the Christian or his will, but in God's own Son Jesus Christ, the only specialist in exorcisms.⁵⁴

Chitchatting with the Devil

In one of Luther's *Tischreden* (table talks), he reveals that the devil likes to tempt him especially at night, reminding him of all his sins, and of death as their logical consequence. But Luther also discloses how he answers the devil. The way he does that is delightful.

When the devil comes during the night to plague me, I give him this answer: Devil, I must sleep now; for this is God's command: Work during the day, sleep at night. If he does not stop vexing me but faces me with my sins, I reply: Dear devil, I have heard the record. But I have committed still more sins which do not even stand in your record. Put them down, too. . . . If he still does not stop accusing me as a sinner, I say to him in contempt: Holy Satan, pray for me! You never have done anything evil and alone are holy. Go to God and acquire grace for yourself. If you want to make me righteous, I tell you: Physician, heal yourself.⁵⁵

Luther is so casually talking to the prince of darkness, using of sarcasms and ironies that it

⁵³ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel (Library of Christian Classics)*, vol. 18 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 44–45. WA-BR 7, 489–90. Interestingly enough, Luther warns Ebert to check very carefully whether there might be a fraud or simulation to deceive the Church. Such a careful investigation is not undertaken in IURD, and there are many online videos of people pranking IURD pastors, pretending they have a demon and making fun of it later. This is one example: “FINGINDO DEMÔNIO NA IGREJA,” YouTube vídeo, 2:23, “Não é sério! TV”, Published in August 18, 2014, accessed in February 16, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5S2Rsquf7qQ>.

⁵⁴ Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace*, 219.

⁵⁵ Plass, *What Luther Says*, 403–04. WA-T 2, 132.

is almost impossible not to laugh after reading his words. While the devil tries to point Luther to himself to deal with the demonic, Luther directs the devil to God. The battle is not about Luther and what he did, but it is all about God and what He did in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶

Humor, therefore, when rooted in the firm soil of the triune God and his action in favor of us as revealed in His Holy Scriptures, is a usable feature for dealing with the devil and his temptations. However, Robert Bennett still warns that to ridicule Satan out of a sinful pride is a temptation to be avoided, because “we have no authority over the devil, but we stand in the stead of the One who has ultimate authority over all of creation—namely, Jesus.”⁵⁷

Sacraments as Means for the Devil’s Humiliation

Our God is a God who works through means. He uses the Word and the Sacraments (Baptism and the Holy Supper) as ways to provide pure forgiveness of sins to His children. He does this not because of their rights, achievements, or desires. Forgiveness is purely given by grace, as a free gift. If we consider how these sacraments operate for our benefit, we can see not only how they are means of deliverance from sin, but also how God humiliates the devil through these means in our lives.

Baptism

Baptism is exorcism *per excellence*. As Bennett points out, all of Luther’s versions of the rite of baptism “included a series of exorcisms” (commands telling the devil to depart from the one being baptized).⁵⁸ When God is coming to dwell in the person, there is no room for the devil

⁵⁶ “Luther is not ridiculing the devil by offering a personal assault, as one person ridicules another. Luther ridicules the devil by speaking of his defeat by Jesus on the cross.” Bennett, *Afraid*, 168.

⁵⁷ Bennett, *Afraid*, 170.

⁵⁸ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 144.

anymore. He must flee, for Jesus promised to make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the triune God. In baptism, deliverance from the devil is proclaimed *in the name of Jesus*, but differently from IURD, the words “in the name of Jesus” are not repeated (or yelled) as a mantra or as magic words which the healer uses to manipulate God into doing something. To do something *in the name of Jesus* means to do it according to His commandment, acknowledging who is doing the action. As Bennett puts it, “[t]here is no power in the officiant, the power and the command to depart originates in Jesus,” the only exorcist.⁵⁹

In his dramatic model of sanctification, Sánchez reminds us that baptism is “like a little exorcism that brings the baptized into conflict with the devil.”⁶⁰ When we are brought by God to his side, into His kingdom, the devil works even harder in order to drive us apart from the right path. Therefore, baptism “does not make us immune to the attacks of the devil but the objects of those attacks.”⁶¹ In this sense, baptism at the same time puts Christians in conflict with the devil and gives them the needed security to stand firm in defensive position when he attacks. IURD does not see baptism in the same way. For them, baptism in water is a personal and conscious human decision to stop all sinning and former way of life, and not a divine action by which God makes someone His adopted son (or daughter).⁶² Instead, for IURD, if a complete change of behavior does not visibly happen in the person in baptism, this means that the baptism did not actually happen.⁶³

⁵⁹ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 146.

⁶⁰ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 100.

⁶¹ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 93.

⁶² Consequently, only adults are baptized, since children are considered *pure* until reaching the *age of conscience*. Edir Macedo, *Doutrinas da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*, vol. 1 (Rio de Janeiro: Universal, 1999), 87.

⁶³ Macedo, *Doutrinas*, vol. 1, 85.

For Lutherans, baptism is the great moment in which God has promised to act on our behalf, and because of that, we can trust it. “The devil may be powerful and a great adversary, but before the Word of God, he is nothing to be feared. . . . In baptism, Satan is defeated in the individual just as he was defeated upon the cross. For that is what baptism does – it connects us to the cross and the resurrection of our victorious Lord and Savior.”⁶⁴

Holy Supper and Absolution

Luther links absolution more closely to baptism than to the Lord’s Supper. However, the Lord’s Supper also emphasizes strongly the forgiveness of sins. “Take, eat; this is my body. . . . Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many *for the forgiveness of sins*” (Matt. 26:26–28). In the institution of the Holy Supper, Matthew registers the words of Jesus, which speak to the nature and purpose of the Supper: It is Jesus’ body and blood; it forgives sins. Receiving this gift is a blessing for people dealing with demonic oppression or possession. Based on Walther *Pastoral*, Bennett emphasizes the importance of the Lord’s Supper for spiritual warfare as follows: “Where Jesus stands, the devil must flee. In the gift of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus has promised to be present in the very unique way of His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Where sin is forgiven, Satan is emptied of his power and loses all hope of victory.”⁶⁵ Sin is the strongest argument on the devil’s side, and when he assaults Christians, they need more than ever to be assured of their identity as partakers of Jesus Christ’s body and blood.

In a similar way, confession and absolution of sins, in its proclamatory character, is the beginning of all counseling for people oppressed or possessed. When the afflicted understand

⁶⁴ Bennett, *I am Not Afraid*, 144.

⁶⁵ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 152.

who they are before God because of Christ, they can defend themselves better against the devil's attacks. This protective aspect of confession and absolution is absent in IURD's rite of *libertação* and in its public worship. There is no public or private confession of sins. There is no public or private proclamation of forgiveness. Worship is all centered in the "if you do . . . then God will do." Therefore, for Lutherans, Holy Supper and Absolution are means of grace through which ultimately God humiliates the devil and strengthens His fallen and weak creatures, assuring His children of His favor towards them. With God and His Word on their side, afflicted Christians can resist the attacks of the evil one.

Other Tools to Resist/Humiliate the Devil

Meditation on the Word

Meditation on the Word of God is another way in which the triune God speaks with His creatures, and therefore, a way in which Christians are fortified to resist the devil. Recognizing the necessity of being fed by God's word every day is an exercise in humility before God, and not a sign of weakness. For Luther, this aspect of Christian life should not be exclusively seen as a personal experience between an individual person and God, but also ought to be seen as a church practice taking place outwardly "by writing, preaching, singing, hearing, and speaking God's word. One becomes a strong and disciplined theologian . . . in the company of fellow theologians who share reliance on God's wisdom through their corporate prayer and study of God's Word."⁶⁶

Luther's cycle of *oratio*, *meditatio* and *tentatio* can be seen as a way in which God humiliates the devil by using his attacks to draw Christians closer to Him. When the devil wants

⁶⁶ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 102.

to draw Christians apart from God, what God does is lead Christians to the Word and prayer, which then in turn makes the devil try harder to lead Christians away from God, and so the cycle repeats itself. Life under the cross follows this cyclical rhythm.

Prayer

The narrative of Jesus in Gethsemane's Garden (Matt. 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22) demonstrates that, in the moment of His biggest temptation, prayer in the Spirit sustained Jesus. The obedient Son puts His will of parting from that cup of suffering under the Father's will. The Son's attitude of humility before God in the face of temptation becomes paradigmatic for Christians, for His brothers and sisters to imitate, since in all synoptic gospels, some disciples were present (at least physically, since they appear to be very tired and sleepy) in the moment of Jesus' prayer. In Matthew, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee (25:37). In Mark, Peter, James and John (14:33). In Luke, simply "the disciples" (22:39). Jesus teaches his disciples, by his attitude, that the will of God comes first than the will of man.⁶⁷

Jesus does not claim His rights before God, nor he challenges God's will and faithfulness. He only obeys, placing Himself under the Father's will, and takes up His cross. Amidst the attack, God provides: "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him" (Luke 22:43).

Another evidence that this is a paradigmatic occasion can be found in the Apostle Paul's story, in 2 Cor. 12, when he talks about his famous and mysterious "messenger of Satan", or "thorn in the flesh" (v. 7). Talking about how he chose not to boast of anything except his own weaknesses, he revealed that he had implored the Lord for three times that this suffering would

⁶⁷ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 93.

leave him. And although God did not attend him, as far as we know, He did not leave him without anything, but, as in Jesus' story, God provided for him with grace: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9).

Prayer in the Spirit is a way Christ dealt with *Anfechtung*. Prayer in the Spirit is a way Christians deal with *Anfechtung*. It is an exercise in humility just like meditation in the Word of God. Similarly, when praying, Christians recognize that humans are not in charge of their lives, but God is. He is the only one who can help. This is different from what IURD teaches concerning prayer. For IURD, prayer has to do with demanding God's actions (since God is obligated to fulfill His promises of blessings to the faithful) according to human standards of what is good and what is not good for them. For Lutherans, the words of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane teach us to put our lives in the Father's hands when we are tempted: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).⁶⁸

Vocation

God never stops creating. Although God created everything out of nothing (*creation ex nihilo*), right after that He invited creation to participate in God's work through vocation (*creatio continua*). Therefore, God continues to use his creatures to create, even today, through vocation. He is still in charge of the world, and He has the right to intervene directly or indirectly on it. Esko Murto, in his essay *An Iron Wall on our side*, uses the lens of *creatio continua* through vocation to argue that God humiliates the devil by making humans serve Him. Through daily

⁶⁸ Higginbotham calls pejoratively this kind of prayer a "safe prayer". Obviously, this kind of prayer must be avoided, since God apparently wants radical decisions of faith, and not humility. Higginbotham, *Possessed Believers*, 12, 18.

services in vocation, a Christian participates in *militia Christi* and therefore “fights against the Lord of Death, Satan, who seeks to destroy what God has created.”⁶⁹ Again, God attacks the pride of Satan when He uses fallen and weak creatures to keep His world in order and functioning.

The Chained Dog

An important image used by Martin Luther to illustrate the tension between fear and comfort when it comes to the devil and the demons is that of the chained dog. Let us hear it from the doctor himself:

Why should you fear? Why should you be afraid? Do you not know that the prince of this world has been judged? He is no lord, no prince anymore. You have a different, a stronger Lord, Christ, who has overcome and bound him. Therefore let the prince and god of this world look sour, bare his teeth, make a great noise, threaten, and act in an unmannerly way; he can do no more than a bad dog on a chain, which may bark, run here and there, and tear at the chain. But because it is tied and you avoid it, it cannot bite you. So acts the devil toward every Christian. Therefore, everything depends on this that we do not feel secure but continue in the fear of God and in prayer; then the chained dog cannot harm us. But this chained dog may at least frighten him who would be secure and go ahead without caution, although he may not come close enough to be bitten. Vicious dogs, as one observers, lie in wait and do not let themselves be heard.⁷⁰

For Luther, the devil is not so strong that he can break the chain imposed on him by God, who is always in charge over him. At the same time, the devil is a vicious dog, who knows how to let Christians think that everything is under their control, attracting them closer and closer to him until the day he attacks and causes serious damage on them.

The biggest temptation when it comes with demonology is precisely to rely on oneself and take the devil for granted, thinking that human knowledge, human strength, and human

⁶⁹ Esko Murto, “An Iron wall on our side: Martin Luther’s understanding of Christian Devotional Life as a Battleground against the Devil” in *Theology is Eminently: Practical Essays in Honor of John T. Pless*, ed. Jacob Corzine and Bryan Wolfmueller (Fort Wayne: Lutheran Legacy Press, 2012), 137.

⁷⁰ Plass, *What Luther Says*, 402. WA 52, 296.

experience are enough to deal with him. As John Kleinig rightly points out, humbleness is the starting point for someone who wishes to study spiritual warfare.⁷¹

The battle against the devil is God's even though He invites us to remain firm by the means of grace provided by His Spirit. Like the people of Israel who through Moses received the great news that "the Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent" (Exod. 14:14), so also we that are in Christ Jesus—the New Israel— understand that the fight is not ours, but the Lord's. And in a way this fight is *already* defined. Satan has been judged and condemned (John 12:31; 16:11). We stand still and firm, waiting the eschatological judgment to happen, when the devil will be thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, being tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:10).

Then God Himself will dwell in perfect relationship with His creation, and "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4). If the story of everything started with God creating heaven and earth, and it was very good, the story will conclude with God making all things new through Jesus, the Lamb in the throne, "and then it will be really, really good."⁷²

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that IURD is a church of *revolt*. It uses the pastor's challenging of the devil as a way to show the audience that they do not need to fear the devil if

⁷¹ "In spiritual warfare we fight in the dark. None of us is an expert. We are all learners; we are disciples of Christ, who is the only expert. We rely on Him at every step and in each new case. In each encounter He guides us in the battle with His Word and His Holy Spirit. We depend on Him; He speaks to us and empowers us as He speaks His Spirit into us. That's why in spiritual warfare we must learn to listen attentively to Christ, for He alone can see and interpret what is going on in us and around us." Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace*, 219.

⁷² Joel Okamoto, "The Word of the Cross and the Story of Everything," *Concordia Journal* 45, no.3 (2019): 60.

they are like the pastor, and moreover, that IURD can challenge the devil and even God, fearing *no one*. The pastor portrays himself as a sort of *pastor victor*, emerging as a Christian example of true self-giving to Jesus and total trust in Him. The pastor is apparently so strong that he can even challenge the devil to possess him, and sometime teams up with demons to mock those who think the he and demons are faking the rite of *liberação*.

IURD's focus is on being victorious in the course of the race here and now, having an overrealized eschatology that does not account for the place of struggle and daily return to the Gospel in everyday life. In dealing with the devil, Christians' role is to directly attack this enemy, making use of the armor provided by the Holy Spirit to force him to give up. For IURD, the best defense is a good offense.

For Lutherans, the logic is the opposite. The best offense is a good defense. And this defense consists in resisting, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the devil's attacks. Not directly challenging the devil but standing firm in God's Word, who points us Jesus Christ himself for faith and life, is the worst humiliation for the devil. Christians' role is to be vigilant against the attacks of the enemy and learn dependence on God amidst these attacks. Dependence on the means of grace, forgiveness of sins, prayer, and vocation are tools in the hands of the Holy Spirit, through which He shapes us amidst temptation into the image of Christ, while we wait for the eschatological condemnation of the devil and the new creation in and through Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This research sought to understand three main aspects of IURD's demonology, namely, its *dualism*, the place of the *devil's testimony* and the *humiliation of the devil by the pastor* in IURD services of *libertação*. After the analysis of each one of these aspects, we critiqued them from a Lutheran perspective. In the first chapter, we showed the size and scope of this neo-Pentecostal church in the context of Brazilian society. Evidence of IURD's importance is seen in the amount of academic literature produced by the human sciences like sociology and anthropology on this church. There is, however, a dearth of interest from a theological perspective. The books, articles, and reports that propose to look at IURD's demonology through a theological perspective are scarce, and this is the gap this thesis sought to fill.

In the second chapter, we saw the historical and theological development of this church. IURD is part of the *third wave of Pentecostalism* (or neo-Pentecostalism) in Brazil, which led us to briefly situate it in the Pentecostal movement as a whole. U.S. Pentecostalism arguably began at the beginning of the twentieth century with William Seymour's Azusa Street revival and his teacher Charles Parham, but that does not mean to say Pentecostalism is a completely new historical movement. Pentecostalism can be understood as an intensification or further development of already existent revivalist and holiness movements, which in turn emerged from the methodism of John Wesley and John Fletcher. What began with a common experience with the Holy Spirit soon developed into separate denominations and doctrines, and one of these schisms took place in Chicago with William Durham. He proposed that, instead of the three-stage experience of conversion, sanctification, and baptism with the Holy Spirit adopted by the first Pentecostals, Christians actually go through a two-stage experience, namely, conversion and

baptism with the Holy Spirit. Sanctification, for him, was part of conversion, a “finished work” accomplished by Jesus on the cross.

From Durham’s school of thought came the first Pentecostal missionaries who worked in Brazil in 1910 and 1911, namely, Luigi Francescon, Daniel Berg, and Gunnar Vingren. They founded churches that became the *first wave* of Pentecostalism in Brazil. In the following decades, other churches with different and more nationalized approaches to the Pentecostal way of life were founded. In the 1950s and 1960s, we had the *second wave* of Pentecostalism in Brazil, which emphasized healing, big mission campaigns, and the use of mass media. And finally, in the late 1970s we had what some call the *third wave*, or neo-Pentecostalism, a hard-to-define movement that include churches, which for the most part emphasize *prosperity of the faithful* as their main doctrine. IURD is one of these third wave churches. More broadly, we could see other three pillars of IURD’s theology besides prosperity, namely, *libertação* (or exorcism), healing, and sacrifice (or sacrificial giving, most commonly expressed in tithing). These four pillars are very well articulated in IURD churches. If man does his part (to *tithe* and not doubt), God will also do His and free man from the *demons* who are blocking his *health* and his *prosperity* in the family, at work, and in society. Therefore, *libertação* is the doorway to a better life here and now, serving as an aide to prosperity. By contrast, for Lutherans, all the secondary doctrines (like angelology) serve as aides to the primary ones, like the *gospel of justification by grace through faith*.

In the third chapter, we analyzed the first of the three aspects of IURD demonology, its *dualism*. The research presented two distinct outcomes in IURD’s thinking on the question of whether the devil is an opponent as strong as God. Theoretically, IURD does not believe there is a dualism between God and the devil. In their literature, both Edir Macedo and David

Higginbotham repeatedly defend God’s exclusive sovereignty over everything. In the services, this understanding is also evidenced by what the pastors do and say. The very rite of *libertação* shows that the devil can do nothing but to obey the pastor, the “man of God.” All this may lead us to conclude that, *officially*, IURD does not support the dualistic idea of the devil and God being two entities similar in strength and power. However, when we take IURD’s theology and practice as a whole, the outcome is quite the opposite. The devil is behind all the problems of humanity, and Macedo even says that *every sin* has a spirit or demon behind it, which make them *virtually* omnipresent. They also create viruses, bacteria, and other micro-organisms that cause diseases in the body, which make them *virtually* creators and not only creatures. They also have the power to resist God’s action in baptism, remaining in people’s lives through generations until someone consciously breaks the chain, which makes them *virtually* stronger than God. The sovereign God cannot use the demons for His purposes, because they are rebels, not submitting themselves to Him, which puts them outside of God’s power. All this led us to conclude that, *pragmatically*, IURD does have a dualistic understanding of God and the devil.

As *theologians of the cross*, Lutherans “call a thing what it is,” which means in part to stick to God’s revealed Word and admit that He is the only one in charge. They understand that only the triune God is the Creator of everything, and that He never loses His sovereignty, even after the Fall. Although Lutherans accept there is an *antagonism* between God and the devil (the devil opposes everything God does), such antagonism is never construed as a *dualism* of equal entities struggling for control over the world. God has no equivalents in any sense. Every single thing is under His power, which makes the question of *theodicy* unsolvable. Lutherans believe that God uses Satan for His own purposes, according to His will (Romans 11:36), and it is not part of our human duty to understand the specifics of why God does that work. Instead, Lutherans look to

the Word and prayer for God's strength in the midst of *tentatio* or spiritual attacks.

The fourth chapter analyzed what may be called a unique feature to IURD, *the interview* with the demons. Although one can argue that interviews with demon-possessed people are not new, the way IURD does it is rather unique. They are long interviews, some of them more than fifteen minutes long, in which the pastor inquires of the chief demon anything he may want to know. Macedo and Higginbotham argue these interviews have a pedagogical goal. Knowing the enemy's strategy helps God's people to defend themselves as well as to attack the evil forces. And what is the best way to know this information? Asking the enemy! As a tortured captain of an enemy army, the demons in IURD services are obligated to tell the truth, even though they are liars by nature. Because of that, the devil's testimony is considered *trustworthy* in IURD services, although *officially* they would never say they trust demons. However, we identified some occasions in which IURD's doctrine is based more on what the demons testify than on what the Bible says. Also, we could see through YouTube videos analyzed in this chapter that pastors base their sermons on what the demons say. Again, we observe a discrepancy between the *official* position of the church and the *pragmatic* outworking of their teachings.

Lutherans do not see the demons' testimonies as trustworthy because it is never their intention to cooperate with Christians on anything. Their intention is to attack and harm them. Meanwhile, through *tentatio* (temptation, testing) the sovereign God uses the devil *against his will* and *without he even noticing*, making of him the best teacher of theology. Temptation is never only the devil's temptation, but it is, at the same time, God's testing, through which the Holy Spirit shapes the Christian into the image of Christ, who stands firm against the evil one amidst spiritual attacks (Matt. 4: 1–11 and Luke 4 1–13).

The last chapter of this thesis introduced a means through which IURD perpetuates its

image of being a church filled with power, i.e., the *devil's humiliation* by the pastor. IURD is a church that incites revolt against the devil and his action. However, the research also identified another target of holy revolt, namely, *God*. This revolt against God has to do with Christians' rights of *getting more* from God. If man does his part, God is obligated to do His too, and man can charge God for it. They do not fear the devil. They do not fear God. In IURD, God is not the only one testing, but God's *creatures* also put their Creator to the test. Now, revolt against the church is considered *rebellion* and dealt with discipline by pastors and bishops. Observing this feature, one may conclude that IURD pastors and bishops fear no one and, therefore, they must be telling the truth. At the same time, another person could conclude that IURD pastors and bishops fear no one, not the devil, not even God and, therefore, they must be feared. This image of power is perpetuated in the rites of *libertação* when the *pastor victor* challenges, provokes, and laughs at the devil in front of all the congregants. Attendees see in their pastor's demonstration of power a proof of God's own power and relief from their doubts—doubts expressed in questions such as, “am I really baptized with the Holy Spirit?,” or “can I have some hope of success?” Therefore, they see in the *pastor victor* a model of successful Christian living that can challenge the devil, charge God for blessings He supposedly owes to them, and at the same time protect them from being attacked. Embodying this power is the final goal of the Christian life.

Lutherans, however, note that the church's life is one of humility. Christians are called to keep guard and stand firm on God's side during Satan attacks. It is God's fight. Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4: 1–11 and Luke 4 1–13) did exactly this. He took Israel's place and, standing firm in God's Word, resisted the temptations that Israel fell into in the desert. That is how God humiliates the devil: He provides for simple and weak human beings to resist the prince of

darkness' powerful attacks. God provides this resistance through His Word and Sacraments, forgiveness of sins, prayer, and vocation. Although humor can be used as a tool to weaken the devil in his pride, it must be rooted solely in the firm soil of the triune God and His action in favor of us as revealed in the Scriptures. To ridicule Satan out of a sinful pride is a temptation to be avoided. We have no authority over the devil. Jesus Christ, the only exorcist, does.

After all this research, a gentle warning must be made to IELB. The absence of resources for dealing with this subject in congregations, which is also reflected in the absence of classes approaching this topic at the Seminary, ends up leaving IELB members dangerously exposed to erroneous and exaggerated understandings of the devil, or to the total or partial denial of the place of the devil in spiritual attacks. Both extremes are dangerous. It is the hope of this thesis to provide some initial thoughts toward a Lutheran response to demonology, as well as encourage pastors and church members to teach on this topic as needed. Understanding bad theology on the devil will hopefully help IELB to appreciate more fully a Lutheran response to the demonic in light of its biblical and confessional heritage.

This thesis left untouched many areas that deserve a deeper analysis. An example is a deeper exploration of what is IURD's understanding of *good* angels. For instance, how do they fit in the battle between God and the devil? Could they manifest in public services just like the bad angels or demons do? Another possible area of research lies in an analysis of IURD's pneumatology in its relationship with *libertação*. What is the Spirit's role in *libertação*? How does He work in freeing an oppressed person? How does the baptism with the Holy Spirit seal a person from demon possession? A third possibility for research would be an analysis of demonology in other denominations pertaining to the third wave of Pentecostalism. For example, how does *Igreja Internacional da Graça de Deus* understand demonology and the process for

taking possession of God's blessings or prosperity? What about *Igreja Mundial do Poder de Deus* and their view of the relationship between the demons and diseases?

C. S. Lewis pointed to a healthy balance between two dangerous extremes when one deals with the devil, and this balance was sought by this thesis. One wants to avoid being a magician or a materialist. The devil is not to be turned into a new god because the triune God is the only almighty and Creator of heavens and earth. At the same time, the devil is not to be forgotten because he is "like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). As we face spiritual attacks, thanks be to God that we are, by Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, on His side!

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