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GOD AND SATAN:
A LOOK AT MARTIN LUTHER'S TITLES FOR SATAN AND WHAT THEY REVEAL
ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND SATAN

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
Alexandria M. Shick
December 2021

Approved by:	Rev. Dr. Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.	Thesis Adviser
	Rev. Dr. David Maxwell	Reader
	Rev. Dr. Gerhard Bode	Reader

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To my babies lost in miscarriage, the heartbreak of losing you inspired much of this work.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to God for the ability to do my graduate studies at an institution such as Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. I must acknowledge some of the professors, mentors and teachers that have helped me in my studies and in the preparation of this thesis. My thanks to Dr. Leopoldo Sanchez, my adviser, for His guidance, direction, and patience, as well as my readers, Dr. David Maxwell and Dr. Gerhard Bode for their thoughts and contributions to this work.

I must also acknowledge Graduate School Director, Dr. Beth Hoeltke, for keeping me on track with my writing, and Dr. Timothy Saleska, in whose class this topic piqued my interest and inspired the writing of this work. To Dr. Gillian Bond, for inspiring a heart for spiritual care in me. I am grateful to all those faculty and staff at Concordia Seminary for their intentionality and dedication to my success as a student.

I must acknowledge the sacrifices that my husband, Samuel Shick, made throughout this process. For the many conversations, contributions, and efforts he made to give me the ability to take the time and effort to create a work I could be proud of. I could not have done it without his constant encouragement and support. My friend and unofficial editor, Travis Henry, must be acknowledged for his hours of help in editing, proofreading, and refining my writing. Many thanks to my classmates and peers at Concordia Seminary, for the conversations that have promoted and aided in my thoughts and research throughout this process.

I would like to recognize the work of Dr. Charles Schulz and Dr. Theodore Hopkins, professors at Concordia University, Ann Arbor, for being such patient and intentional servants of Christ in their service to the Church through education and fueling my love for and interest in theology.

For the Lutheran Haven Retirement Community, a place in which the hand of God and the

attacks of Satan are so prevalent in one place. Those I fell in love with while serving there encouraged me to strive for equipping and educating myself to be better able to offer spiritual care to the suffering.

I am so incredibly grateful to God's faithful servants, Jeanne Zimmerman, pastor Mark Zimmerman, pastor Scott Faith, and the congregation of St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Muskegon, Michigan, for taking me into the family of the Church and raising me in the faith. It was their love and support that encouraged me to become a deaconess and further my education at Concordia Seminary.

ABBREVIATIONS

LCMS

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

LW

Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works: American Edition*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehman. 56 vols. St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955–1986

ABSTRACT

Shick, Alexandria M. "God and Satan: A Look at Martin Luther's Titles for Satan and What They Reveal About the Relationship Between God and Satan." M.A. Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 2022 87 pp.

The relationship between God and Satan is complex and intertwined. There is a tendency in Christianity to overemphasize Satan's power and his place in the realm of evil and in so doing neglect and disregard what it means for God to be truly omnipotent. Luther understood Satan as being under God's will, only having the ability to act where, when and how God allowed or permitted. The complex and intertwined relationship between Satan and God must be properly understood for the benefit of spiritual care in the church.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The King and the Executioner

A man commits a crime, and the king declares “off with his head!” The executioner drags the criminal up to the guillotine and swiftly chops off the man’s head. Who killed the criminal? Who is responsible for his death?¹ The man himself shoulders most of the blame for having committed a crime worthy of death in the first place, but the question remains: Who is responsible for killing the man? Who shoulders that blame? One might say the king is responsible for the criminal’s death because he is the one who made the decision that the criminal was to die for what he had done. Had the king not made that decision, the man would be alive. Yet another might blame the executioner. The executioner physically placed the man in the guillotine. Had the executioner not let go of the rope on the guillotine, the criminal would still be alive. He performed the outward act that killed the criminal and therefore is the one responsible.

Now imagine that the metaphorical king is God, sinful human beings are the criminals, and Satan is the executioner. Would this new revelation change our answer as to who is responsible, or would the answer stay the same? People in the church arguably tend to see God and Satan in contrasting terms, belonging to two completely different spheres of activity. By doing so, they often aim to keep God’s hands clean from any association with evil or the devil. As Steven Paulson notes, “humans desire a sleeping God.”² A God who is uninvolved and silent and only awakes when we call on him in our distress. A picture of God and Satan that is more interconnected, a picture of a God who is attentive, awake and aware of Satan’s action is

¹ Timothy Saleska, interview by author, St. Louis, March 6, 2020.

² Steven D. Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God: Hiddenness, Evil, and Predestination*, ed. Paul Rorem, T. J. Wengert, M. J. Haemig, M. C. Mattes, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), 1:59.

uncomfortable to say the least. Luther's view of the relationship between God and Satan is much more complex than the one often taught in LCMS churches today. Perhaps part of the reason the relationship between God and Satan is so uncomfortable is that it reminds us that God is very much awake and active in the workings of the world, including the works of Satan.

It is an uncomfortable picture, to say the least, to think of God and Satan working so closely in Luther's theocentric view. But we see examples of this relationship throughout Scripture, in stories like the Fall, King David's census, the thorn in Paul's flesh, the temptation of Jesus, and especially in the book of Job. God offers up Job to Satan. Why? Because he is a faithful and upright man. What do we do with that uncomfortable truth in our theology and in the way we speak about the dynamic relationship between God the Father and Satan? If we claim that God is the Creator of all and He is, in fact, omnipotent, how do we speak appropriately of his role (if any) in the workings of Satan? In each of the scriptural examples listed above God plays a role and so does Satan. The examples display the interconnectedness and complexity of their relationship. If God is omnipotent, can he really be fully guiltless in the realm of evil? God is in all and works in all, but how does this play out practically when it comes to the workings of Satan and his demons? In this thesis, I will offer multiple accounts and ways of viewing God's relationship to Satan and reflect on the practical implications of this relationship for how we speak to and provide spiritual care to persons encapsulated by and suffering evil.

Relevance in the Context of the Lutheran Church

Steven Paulson said it best when he argued that "humans desire a sleeping God."³ A sleeping God is passive, waiting for us to call on Him in our distress, wake Him from His

³ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 1:59.

slumber when we need Him, and leave Him to His beauty sleep when we do not. Humanity desires a sleeping God, not a God active in all things. As the sinful creatures we are, we rarely recognize God's hand in the good, and we certainly do not want to recognize it in the bad. A tendency is to blame God for not stopping the evils in this world. The image of the sleeping God invites us to imagine a God who is not paying attention when tragedy strikes. If God were paying attention, He would never have allowed such a terrible thing to happen! He would have prevented or stopped it, right? It is safer and easier to assume God was asleep and not paying attention, and therefore did nothing, than to believe he was fully aware even in the midst of the suffering. We imagine a world in which God is unaware and uninvolved. If God is viewed as passive, aloof, and asleep, it follows that He is also distant, passive, and uninterested in the work Satan is doing in the world.

This is not the case. God is active. He is very much awake, and He knows, permits, and allows the workings of Satan. Christians are at times uncomfortable with this reality and unwilling to truly accept what it means, namely, that God is omnipotent in all His works. During tragedy and suffering, Christians are quick to blame Satan for their misfortune and let God off the hook. The Christian often imagines that everything evil comes directly from Satan and everything good comes directly from God. This thesis will show that Luther's titles for Satan reveal a more complex theological understanding of the relationship between God and Satan. God is involved in the workings of Satan and Satan can at times appear to be working not only in what is abhorrently evil but also in hidden ways that appear to be good. Luther's view of the relationship between God and Satan based on Scripture is vastly more complex and interconnected than LCMS teaching and preaching admit. The dynamics of this relationship in Luther's works allows for a variety of legitimate ways of articulating such relationship.

Brief Overview of Luther's Thoughts on the Relationship between God and Satan

The word “devil” is found 7,047 times in Luther’s Works.⁴ The word “Devil”, “devils” and “devilish” is found 228 times throughout the *Book of Concord* and 84 times in the Large Catechism alone.⁵ Satan is not a singular doctrine in the mind of Luther, but he is an integral piece intertwined and interwoven throughout all of Luther’s theology. Throughout his works Martin Luther often uses the terms “permit” and “allow” in reference to God’s relationship to Satan’s actions. God permits, allows, prohibits, or restricts Satan’s actions. He is never fully passive in the workings of Satan. To say so would be to deny the totality of His omnipotence. Throughout this thesis, I will discuss the ways God permits and allows Satan’s actions as stated in selected writings from Luther. Luther calls Satan by many different names and titles, some are his own original thoughts and others are referenced in Scripture. The main three ways Luther views Satan in relation to God are when Satan acts as an Author or Originator of Sin, an Angel of Darkness and when he disguises himself as an Angel of Light. These three titles of Satan will be the focus of my research and the central theme of this thesis.

Satan as an author of sin can also be characterized as Satan the instigator. In this title Luther reminds us that Satan encourages and leads Christians to sin, but humanity is held accountable for its own sin. Satan cannot forcibly lead a Christian to sin. He can only tempt and lure him toward it. Luther uses the terms author and originator to describe Satan’s relation to sin, for examples he writes “For we have the Holy Spirit as our Guide. Through Moses He does not give us foolish allegories; but he teaches us about most important events, which involve sinful

⁴ Esko Murto, “The Old Evil Foe Now Means Deadly Woe: The Works of the Devil in the Theology of Martin Luther,” STM thesis (Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, 2008), 2.

⁵ R. H. Bennett, *I Am not Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare, True Accounts from the Lutheran Church in Madagascar* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), 129–32.

man and Satan, the originator of Sin.”⁶ Satan as an angel of darkness is the stereotypical Devil, the devil of horror films and nightmares, the one who tortures, possesses, and oppresses. Luther specifically speaks directly of the angel of darkness, for example he writes, “But this much is certain: The devil fell and was transformed from an Angel of Light into an Angel of Darkness.”⁷ He also says Satan also works by disguising himself as what he was formerly, that is, an angel of light. Luther writes “Satan is in the habit of transforming himself into an angel of light .”⁸ Luther often cites 2 Cor. 11:4 “And no wonder for even Satan disguises himself as an Angel of Light.”⁹ Satan uses his knowledge of God’s Word as a weapon in the church and the heart of the believer by creating doubt. This thesis will discuss the ways in which Luther and various Lutheran authors recognize God’s involvement in Satan’s actions when he works in these various ways.

Martin Luther speaks to the question of the relationship between God and Satan throughout his works, including the *Bondage of the Will*.¹⁰ Here Luther reminds his readers of the hiddenness of God, that His omnipotence cannot be precisely pinned down because there is nothing with which to compare it to. God is said to be ruler and creator of all, but we do not and cannot understand the width and depth of His omnipotence. Luther asserts that God is by nature completely good, but also that He is connected to Satan in the sense that He is in all and works in all. Luther claims that Satan is evil because God has abandoned him and left him to live out his

⁶ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 1 of *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 185.

⁷ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* in *LW* 1:185.

⁸ Martin Luther, *Sermons in the Gospel of St. John Chapters 14–16*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 24 of *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 41.

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are taken from the ESV.

¹⁰ Erasmus, Desiderius and Martin Luther. *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. Rupp, E. Gordon and Philip Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 232.

evil nature.¹¹ Apart from God there can be no good. When a creature is abandoned by God, he will give into his evil inclinations, and this is the position we find Satan in today. That which is separated from God is evil; therefore, it follows that God cannot be evil because He cannot be separate from Himself. Despite the way God is in relation to Satan, His goodness must be upheld, since God's hand in Satan's works does not correlate Him with the evil of Satan.

As noted above, Luther's titles for Satan reveal a theological understanding of the relationship between God and Satan that is complex and interconnected, and which allows for a variety of legitimate ways of articulating such a relationship. In Luther's view, Satan is not nearly as powerful as one might think. Instead, Satan's power is limited by God's will and therefore Satan is only able to work in the world in very specific ways. He is only able to work where and when God allows. It is not the place of the Christian or the purpose of this thesis to discern the reasons why God allows Satan to work when and where He wills, but only acknowledge the fact that He does. Instead, the thesis aims to uncover how Luther's titles for Satan and Lutheran authors' reflections on related topics offer a theological view that upholds God's omnipotence over and above Satan despite the latter's activity in the world. Finally, the thesis will show how an interconnectedness between God and Satan is not something that should be feared but a comfort to those who are spiritually distressed. The right teaching of the relationship between God and Satan relieves the discomfort of the teaching of God's place in Satan's evil acts and aids in the spiritual care of the church.

Brief Overview of Contemporary Lutheran Authors

Steven Paulson and Oswald Bayer¹² focus on God's hiddenness and omnipotence to

¹¹ Erasmus and Luther, *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*. 231–77.

¹² See Oswald Bayer, "God's Omnipotence," *Lutheran Quarterly* 23 (2009): 85–95; and "God's Hiddenness,"

explain and understand Satan’s role in this world, how Satan is already defeated and yet can still be referred to as the “prince of this world.” Paulson recognizes how limited Satan’s power is under the cross and the ways God’s law limits Satan’s actions. Bayer states the same by emphasizing God’s omnipotence over creation, including his created being, Satan, thus asserting that God’s omnipotence also limits Satan’s actions. Paulson and Bayer emphasize that Satan cannot work outside the will of God. To say otherwise is to deny the totality of His omnipotence. Both authors recognize the relationship between God and Satan as one in which Satan is in total submission to God—one in which, to go back to our introductory analogy, God is the King, and Satan is His executioner.

Robert Bennett focuses on Satan working as an agent outside of the will of God. In his book *Afraid*, he asserts, “There is evil in this world and behind that evil is the Devil and all his demons. It is true that humanity is included in the evil, but Satan and his demons stand behind that evil.”¹³ Bennett acknowledges Satan and humanity’s place in evil, but for the most part leaves God’s role out of the conversation. He acknowledges God’s sovereignty throughout the book, but at the same time appears to give Satan (and humanity) most if not all the credit for the evil and chaos of the world today. Satan is behind evil, but a question remains: If we take one more step backward, could we also say of God that He acts as the king, giving direction to Satan, his executioner? Bennett’s views on the ways that Satan works in the world can be further clarified with a look at how Luther uses different titles for Satan in his works.

Jon Furgeson also has written on a Lutheran perspective of spiritual warfare and has much to contribute to the conversation of how Satan and his demons act practically in the world today,

Lutheran Quarterly 28 (2014): 266–74.

¹³ R.H. Bennett, *Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare in America*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2016), 174.

and of their relation to God and activity under His will.¹⁴ Furgeson's main complaint is that the Lutheran Church, scholars and church workers alike, tend to have a weak view of God that does not align with Luther's teaching. He claims that a misunderstanding of how Satan and the fallen powers exist in relation to God causes an understanding of God that makes him appear powerless in the face of evil. Both Robert Bennett and Jon Furgeson tend to emphasize Satan's role as an Angel of Darkness, wreaking havoc in the world through spiritual attacks, torment, possession, and oppression. Yet a study of Luther's titles reveals other dimensions of Satan's work, and how it relates to God's actions in the world.

Esko Murto, in his thesis titled *The Old Evil Foe Now Means Deadly Woe*, speaks at length about the way in which Satan disguises himself as an Angel of Light and assaults the church. Murto specifically speaks to Luther's titles of Satan, angel of light and angel of darkness. Murto addresses the distinction between the two and how Satan functions in both ways. Satan is well versed in God's law, and he uses it as his weapon against the believer. We see this title play out especially in the fall and in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. One of Satan's greatest weapons is to twist God's Word and to make God's followers doubt His commands and intentions. Murto addresses Luther's perspective on Satan as an Angel of Light and how Satan has worked in this way throughout history.

The proposed thesis seeks to analyze not only the ways in which Luther speaks to this relationship between God and Satan, but also how various contemporary Lutheran scholars address this relationship. I will pull from these experts and condense their thoughts, looking at how they converge with the theology embedded in Luther's titles for Satan, in order to arrive at a

¹⁴ Jon Furgeson, "The Sword and the Mask: Toward a Confessional Lutheran Account of Spiritual Warfare" (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 2020).

succinct account of various ways of thinking about the relationship between God and Satan. It is expected that such an account will aid in spiritual care of the church when it comes to dealing with the reality of Satan's work in the world and God's place in and during Satan's attacks.

In my study of Luther's texts, I hope to build upon the scholarship that has already been done on topics related to the relationship between God and Satan, focusing primarily on insights from Robert Bennett, Steven Paulson, Oswald Bayer, Esko Murto, and Jon Furgeson. I will be using these experts in the field of demonology and theodicy to clarify the relationship between God and Satan in conversation with and under the umbrella of Luther's language and insights on the topic gathered from his use of the titles already described. I do not anticipate finding a single answer through my research, but rather many ways of speaking to this relationship. I will describe and analyze the theological insights in each of Luther's titles and see how the contemporary theologians listed above fit or do not into his categorizations. Finally, I will explore what is helpful and unhelpful for spiritual care from Luther and these various scholars' contributions.

What to Expect in the Thesis

Although the scope of my research will be, broadly speaking, under the umbrella of studies in demonology and theodicy, I will be making no attempt to explain the origin of evil or the "why" of suffering. Instead, my interest only touches on these areas to the extent that they help clarify the ways in which God interacts with Satan in the world in Luther's thinking. The relationship between God and Satan does not uncover the mystery of suffering but attempts to properly define God's role and Satan's role in it. Through an analysis of Luther's and Lutheran authors' works, the thesis offers appropriate ways to discuss the relationship between God and Satan in a way that honors and upholds God's omnipotence and goodness yet recognizes His

place in the realm of Satan. I will then address how this distinction and understanding of the relationship fosters the spiritual care of suffering neighbors.

In the thesis I will organize the thoughts of Luther and various Lutheran authors and scholars on the relationship between God and Satan. I will offer multiple ways to discuss the topic appropriately, rightly, and practically. The goal of my research is to explain the dynamics of the relationship between God and Satan in order to talk about God's place in evil and suffering rightly, not about why He allows or permits it at all. I want to open the conversation up so that the teaching, preaching and spiritual care of LCMS congregations can represent an accurate depiction of God the Father's participation in Satan's activity. The anticipated outcome lies in finding a way to uphold God's omnipotence and goodness while not giving Satan too little or too much credit for the evil of this world.

Through my research I will establish and develop a clear, succinct, and practical way to speak about an omnipotent God who works in and through all His creatures, including Satan. To go back to the illustration I introduced earlier, I hope to find out who is responsible for the criminal's death, the king, the executioner, or both? I recognize that there will not be a singular conclusive answer to this question, but I plan to explore and organize my thoughts around this paradox. I hope to build on this metaphor, and at the same time uphold what Scripture, Luther and contemporary Lutheran authors have to say about God's relationship to His created being Satan and because of that, God's relationship to evil. I will attempt to do this by taking the titles Luther gives to Satan in some of his works and infer what they have to say about the direct relationship between God and Satan. The titles to be researched are the following: Satan as the Author of Sin, Satan as the Angel of Darkness (also known as the Black Devil), and Satan

disguised as an Angel of Light (also known as the White Devil).¹⁵

This thesis will attempt to organize Lutheran authors' views of Satan's actions under God's omnipotence, which are discussed broadly under the umbrellas of demonology and theodicy, bearing on the question of Luther's understanding of the relationship between God and Satan. Many Lutheran authors who will be discussed in this thesis—Robert Bennett, Steven Paulson, Oswald Bayer, Esko Murto and Jon Furgeson—have written on the subject of God and Satan, but typically with the goal of addressing demonology and spiritual warfare and/or theodicy and suffering. Few attempt to directly address the relationship between God and Satan as such. The thesis builds on their scholarship in these areas, seeking convergences between their proposals and Luther's theological use of titles for Satan in order to formulate a clear and concise way of speaking about the relationship between God and Satan for the benefit of the churches' practice of spiritual care.

¹⁵ There are times when Luther is talking about Satan as an Angel of Darkness and refers to him as the "Black Devil." He also refers to Satan disguised as an Angel of Light as being the "White Devil." Associating black with evil and white with good was acceptable at the time in which Luther was writing, but we must recognize that these distinctions between black and white as evil and good are not always helpful to use in a society working to abolish racist ideas and conventions. These terms will be used only insofar as Luther uses them, but in no way am I trying to encourage that these labels of black and white devil continue without attention to context.

CHAPTER TWO

SATAN AS THE AUTHOR OF SIN

The way in which Satan works as an Author of Sin is similar to the demons we see depicted in C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*.¹ In the *Screwtape Letters*, Wormwood, a demon in training, writes letters to his teacher and uncle, Screwtape, who teaches him the best ways of winning humans or "patients" over to Satan's kingdom. The demons in the *Screwtape Letters* are the behind-the-scenes masterminds of much of their "patient's sins." They poke, prod and persuade their patients to think, feel and act in certain ways, but it is ultimately the patient who falls into sin and is held accountable. Although Lewis' book is fictional, Satan does work in a similar way to the demons depicted in the letters. Satan persuades human beings to think, feel and behave in certain ways. He does not force humans to sin out of nowhere, he often uses the innate sinful desire of the human to orchestrate and incite a sinful action in the person. Satan can tempt, poke, and urge, but he is not the cause of sin. It is the sinful flesh that sins and the blame for that sin rests on the shoulders of the Christian. Satan as the author or originator of sin can be characterized as a weak Satan, who is allowed or permitted to work in ways and places which the omnipotent, creator God deems appropriate for His ultimate purposes. Even Screwtape recognizes and acknowledges throughout his letters the restraints and limitations the "enemy" God puts on demons. Satan as the author or originator of sin can be described as Satan on God's leash, Satan under God's thumb or as "God's Devil," able to go where he wants or wills only as far as he is allowed and permitted by God.

In this title Satan is described more by what he is not as opposed to what he is. Satan is not the creator, nor is he omnipotent. He is not able to force or entirely control sin in humanity, but

¹ Lewis, C. S. *The Screwtape Letters*. Westwood, NJ: Barbour Books.

he works through means to incite, provoke, encourage, and entice us to sin. Satan is a creature of God formed by His hand and therefore was not created evil, for God is not evil. Satan became discontent with his lot, wishing to exceed God's power. He therefore separated himself from God and thus evil enters the picture. Anything that is separated from God is no longer good, but evil. Satan is no longer good because he separated himself from the source of all things good. Satan cannot bring things into this world as God can, but merely stirs up malice, suffering and evil from that which is already in the world. In this sense, Satan authors, orchestrates, and originates sin.

We have established what Satan as an author of sin is not, that is omnipotent, so then what is he? If we look at the term author as it is commonly used, we think of a writer of a book or article. An author in a sense "creates" a work but he is limited and bound by the confines of the pages, human language, and understanding. The author is not creating something completely new out of nothing but working within the bounds of this world to bring about a new thought, idea, or story. So it is with Satan, he works within the confines of this world, the boundaries which God gives him to work with what is available to him. Definitions of "author" and "originator" can include words such as instigator, source, cause, prompter and often even creator. An author writes a book but is bound by rules of language, literature, and the confines set by a publisher. Similarly, Satan as an author or originator of Sin is best characterized as a creature who is the source of evil and sin but is bound by the limits or boundaries which God sets for His activity.

Luther's Understanding: What it Means to be Author and Originator

In Gen. 3:14 Luther mentions some of the foolish things people have said about the text and states that we should not go along with these foolish assumptions because, "For we have the

Holy Spirit as our Guide. Through Moses He does not give us foolish allegories; but He teaches us about most important events, which involve God, sinful man, and Satan, the originator of sin.”² Luther gives Satan the title of Author or Originator of Sin throughout his works. He is comfortable speaking of Satan in this way, but he also acknowledges and upholds God’s goodness in His relationship with Satan as author of sin. Satan as an author of sin encourages man to be compelled by Satan’s own will.³ Satan incites, provokes, and encourages sin in fallen man. God does not tempt, he tests; but He can use Satan’s temptations to test a Christian’s faith.⁴ This is one of the ways God uses Satan for His purposes. When God works in this way, Satan is typically acting as an author or originator of sin. God is over, above and in control of every move Satan makes because God is omnipotent. To say anything less of God’s control over all actions would be to deny this attribute. This can be said with assurance and boldness. Luther does not shy away from talking about the way in which God “allows” and “permits” Satan’s actions. Luther always addresses the fact that God and Satan are enemies and are in complete opposition to one another, and yet God uses His enemy to achieve His purposes.

Luther reminds his readers time and time again that God and Satan are enemies. To look at the ways in which they are in relation with one another, and the ways God uses Satan may make one forget that despite this interconnectedness God and Satan are opposed to one another. The danger with understanding Satan as an author of sin and God’s role in evil is that evil is then

² Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 1:185.

³ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15–20*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 3 in *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), 296.

⁴ As Sánchez puts it: “Just as Scripture can see God’s testing and Satan’s temptation as two sides of the same coin in the life of the believer, Luther sees ‘spiritual attacks’ simultaneously as the work of God and the devil (though with the evil creature ultimately remaining under the Creator). Common to the sufferings of *tentatio* is the experience of one’s faith being tested and one’s need for strength and resilience in moments of doubt.” Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., *Sculptor Spirit: Models of Sanctification from Spirit Christology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 102.

attributed to God. Luther gently and consistently writes against this theory. For instance, he says, “he [Satan] was not created evil but had a will in conformity with the will of God. This will he lost; he has also lost his very beautiful and excellent intellect and has been turned into an awful spirit which rages against his Creator.”⁵ Satan is evil because He is separated from God and he still tries to rage outside the confines of God’s power, but to no avail because of his creatureliness and God’s omnipotence. God is active in the works of Satan, but this does not imply that it is correct to attribute evil to God. God’s goodness should be recognized all the more when He is involved in the workings of Satan because God controls and restrains Satan’s chaos. Luther writes “For how could we withstand our invisible enemy if he had not only the determination to inflict harm but also the power to do so?”⁶ Satan does not have the power to do the harm he wishes. If he did the world would cease to exist as we know it. Satan does not have the power to rage and inflict harm as he wishes because, in His relationship with God the Creator, he is a mere author of sin, he does not have total control over sin. God is not evil, nor is he the cause or originator of evil. His relationship with Satan is one of complete control and provision over the creation. As Luther writes, we must never forget that:

For it is not God who torments you if you believe in Christ; it is the devil. . . . Hence if any misfortune befalls you, conclude boldly that it is from the devil and does not mean that God is unfriendly toward you, except insofar as He lets this happen as a trial, in order to put your faith to the test for your own good.⁷

At times, this analogy can be pushed so far as to make God out to be evil or to be Satan himself. That is not at all what Luther is saying when he gives Satan the title of author of sin. Luther finds it comforting to know that God is in control of Satan’s actions and uses his evil for our benefit.

⁵ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 1: 143.

⁶ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 1:133.

⁷ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 3:265.

Luther uses Sarah, the wife of Abraham as an example of how we understand this complex relationship between Satan and God. Sarah addresses God in a state of humility when it comes to her barrenness. Luther writes:

Take note of Sarah's temperate language: "The Lord," she says, "has prevented me from bearing." She does not indignantly blame Satan, as we are in the habit of doing; she acknowledges the act of God with humility and says: "So far, it has not been the Lord's will that I should bear children."⁸

Sarah recognizes that the barrenness that has caused her so much grief, heartache and shame is the Lord's will. It is not a free act of Satan working to torment her while God stands idly by. But this evil that befalls her is God's will. Evil was never God's intention, but He uses it for His ultimate plan and purpose as we see in the story of Sarah. Sarah acknowledges the evil Satan has committed and still manages to recognize God's will and hand in it. The lesson for Luther is that humans are quick to blame Satan for the evil in their lives, and thus they do not often look for God's hand or will in it. As Luther mentions above, it is fine and right to blame Satan for evil and he is the author and originator of it, but it is just as important, if not more so to recognize God's will in it. Recognizing Satan as an author of sin, a creature of God used for His purposes helps put this event in Sarah's life in a theocentric perspective.

Luther recognizes that God's will is ultimate, over and above all things, including Satan. He understands Satan as an author of sin because, as he says, God's will "...can neither be resisted nor hindered."⁹ Satan's actions fall under God's will. As noted earlier, Luther often uses

⁸ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 3:45.

⁹ Oswald Bayer, "God's Hiddenness," *Lutheran Quarterly* 28 (2014): 86; Martin Luther, "Review of Erasmus' Preface" in *Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Philip S. Watson, vol. 33, *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972) 43. This quotation is taken out of a longer one and is Bayer's German rendering of the Latin translated to English. This translation of *LW* 33:43 reads "This in particular is the only and the highest hope of the Christians, that even in the midst of circumstances that would seem to deny this very fact (that the love of God triumphs and is victorious over sin death and the devil) they know that God does not lie, but rather does everything immutably, and that his will can be neither resisted, nor hindered."

the words “permits” and “allows” when discussing the way in which God relates to Satan and the havoc he wreaks. Luther understands God’s relationship to Satan to be one in which Satan is bound and completely subject to God’s might and will.

Oswald Bayer: Insights from “God’s Omnipotence” and “God’s Hiddenness”

Oswald Bayer, in his articles “God’s Omnipotence” and “God’s Hiddenness,” does not directly address Satan as the author or originator of sin. Regardless, he still has much to contribute to the conversation in the way he understands God’s omnipotence and hiddenness, and his understanding of distinction between the *Deus Absconditus* (hidden God) and *Deus Revelatus* (revealed God). Bayer says, “Omnipotence is the central element in the definition of ‘God,’ for the very word God implies this being’s omnipotence.”¹⁰ God is denied when omnipotence is neglected as His defining trait. God is denied when Satan is not viewed appropriately in reference to his limited power and reign in this world. Bayer writes: “When Omnipotence is denied, God himself is denied.”¹¹ Satan can only be defined as the author or originator of sin from the position of what he is not, namely which he is not omnipotent. Satan is not God, but he can be made out to be a god when he is given too much power and authority in the way he is viewed. Because Satan is not an omnipotent god, he cannot inflict harm and evil in an untampered way. Because of God’s almighty power, He is responsible for keeping Satan in check. The proper relationship between God and Satan can only be understood when God’s omnipotence is upheld and acknowledged.

In his articles Bayer addresses the tension or paradox between a God who is not evil and yet is in control of the evil one. In the face and experience of evil, there is a very fine line

¹⁰ Bayer, “God’s Omnipotence,” 88.

¹¹ Bayer, “God’s Omnipotence,” 87.

between the *Deus Absconditus* or hidden God and the *Deus Revelatus* or revealed God. In other words, there can be at times a seemingly thin line between God and Satan himself. Bayer describes God's place in evil according to His hiddenness in this way, "The *Deus Absconditus* remains for the moment so dark and vague that he can be mistaken for the Devil."¹² By the phrase "for the moment" Bayer means to say until the eschaton. In the position we are in now, in the experience of suffering, a hidden God can easily be confused for the Devil. We cannot afford to push this title of Satan and this understanding of the relationship between God and Satan so far as to make God out to be evil or to be Satan himself. Bayer takes his point a step further in addressing Isaiah 45:7. God is the speaker of this verse and He says, "I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things." How does one understand this verse and not make God out to be the source of darkness, calamity and evil? This verse becomes much easier to understand if read through the lens of the relationship between God and Satan as the author of sin.¹³

The Lord is not the source of evil or the cause of sin. Satan is the cause, the author, the originator. But God does use evil vessels like Satan for His purposes. Luther says something similar:

Here you see that when God works in and through evil men, evil things are done, and yet God cannot act evilly although he does evil through evil men, because one who is himself good cannot act evilly; yet he uses evil instruments that cannot escape the sway and motion of his omnipotence."¹⁴

¹² Bayer, "God's Omnipotence," 91.

¹³ The *Lutheran Study Bible* interprets this in a way amenable to Luther's cosmology: "The Lord is not the source of evil or the cause of sin. Nothing happens without the Lord's knowledge and permission. He is the cause of well-being. He may inflict retribution, but He may also permit calamity to come through Human sinfulness, through Satan, or through the sin corrupted order of this world." *Lutheran Study Bible* (St. Louis, Concordia, 2009), 1164.

¹⁴ Martin Luther, *Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Philip S. Watson, vol. 33 in *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 176.

Throughout his articles, Bayer agrees with Luther's writings on the hiddenness of God. With Luther, he agrees that God's hiddenness must be acknowledged despite how little is understood about it. Bayer explains further, "When he [The believer] experiences God's terrifying hiddenness, he can only turn away in order to flee to God's mercy, which revealed itself ultimately in the Son in the Spirit."¹⁵ When God and evil, God and Satan, become too closely intertwined in the mind and heart is best to flee to the God who is known and recognized, the God revealed to us in the Son and in the Spirit, the *Deus Revelatus*.

On the terrifying nature of a hidden God, Bayer turns to Rom. 8:38–39: "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Of these verses, Bayer writes, "The certainty of the love of God is the certainty of this love's omnipotence, which is able to overcome all powers that would stand against it."¹⁶ Although God's omnipotence is what puts Him in a position over and above Satan's actions, this is ultimately a comfort and not a terror. The certainty of the love of God is His omnipotence, His ability and willingness not only to protect and defend His children from the opposing powers of sin, death, and the devil, but His ability and willingness to use those opposing powers for their benefit: "Omnipotence inheres only in one being – only in that being who is a match for all countervailing powers."¹⁷ God is the only almighty one. When evil seems to be prevailing, one must flee to God's mercy. Because Satan is not omnipotent, he cannot reign

¹⁵ Bayer, "God's Hiddenness," 275. Similarly, in a reflection on Luther's treatise *When Facing Grave Temptations* (1521), Sánchez notes that because God's "purposes are often hidden from us, and there is nothing to gain by peeking into God's inscrutable mind to discover them, one must never "presume to deal directly with God" when suffering but instead turn to God revealed in mercy through Christ the mediator." Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 103–4.

¹⁶ Bayer, "God's Omnipotence," 86.

¹⁷ Bayer, "God's Omnipotence," 90.

where God does not allow. Satan is no match for God's omnipotence.

Steven D. Paulson: Insights from *Luther's Outlaw God*

Steven Paulson in *Luther's Outlaw God* focuses on the question of evil and centers on humanity's relationship with and view of the almighty God in the face of evil. His thoughts reveal the ways in which an almighty God relates to Satan as an originator of sin. Paulson criticizes that the reason God allows evil is to allow for human freedom. Paulson's view of the relationship between God and Satan addresses God's relationship with humanity as the basis for how God limits Satan. Paulson writes, "If God is not to be blamed for evil, then humans must be blamed to some extent so that what they caused must be able to be reversed by those same humans."¹⁸ By this he means to say that we excuse God for the evil in the world, if evil and suffering is brought on by human hands; then it would follow that humanity must be able to "fix it" on their own and in fact wants to fix it on their own, which diminishes the human need for God. If God is stripped of His omnipotence, humanity will attribute too much power to its own potential and abilities. This is exactly the position that Satan would like humanity to be in. Satan then uses man's own pride and sense of power to draw him further from God's promises.

Paulson speaks at length about how "humans desire a sleeping God,"¹⁹ he clarifies, "We do not want God to be God."²⁰ By this Paulson means we do not like the idea of a God who is almighty, omnipotent, a God with no limit: "We do not want God to be one, unique, and to act so potently that it leaves no room for humans to fill a gap, contribute, or have at least a little potential or power."²¹ This relates to God's relationship with Satan in that a view of a sleeping

¹⁸ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 107.

¹⁹ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 59.

²⁰ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 103.

²¹ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 103.

God, or a God who is not omnipotent, leaves room not only for humanity to rule and reign but also space for Satan to reign and roam freely. If one desires a sleeping God who is uninvolved, creatures are then elevated to higher positions with more potential and more power. Satan as God's creature also then has much more potential and power. This view and innate human feeling is what has led to the much of the dissonance about the relationship between God and Satan. If God is not involved in my life unless He is called upon, then He is certainly oblivious to the workings of Satan unless I fill Him in on what is going on. This is simply too weak a view of God and strips Him of His might and omnipotence. God's hand in Satan's action must be acknowledged if His omnipotence is to be upheld and understood rightly.

Paulson refers to Erasmus' theology of "striving," or reaching towards God with mostly works and a little bit of faith, to define further the faulty view of a sleeping God. Erasmus' view of God's omnipotence falls under the category of desiring a sleeping God, not wanting God to be God, and giving humanity more power than it ought to have. For Erasmus, "When trouble comes and one falls short of this striving, we resort to praying for God's grace to finish the business."²² Humanity's power and potential reaches and strives firstly and God's almighty power comes second. We reach out in faith only when our weak human flesh and power has failed. Erasmus continues this analogy using John 15, where Christ is the vine and we are the branches. As Paulson explains, in Erasmus' view "even though the vine does, the first, the bulk, and the final things for salvation, nevertheless the branches are doing their own growing and producing their own actual fruit."²³ Again, the Erasmian position on human cooperation with God in salvation ends up with too weak a view of an almighty God. Paulson explains further the consequences of

²² Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 115.

²³ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 115.

this position: “Evil excuses God and accuses humans to give humans potential and the possibility of empowerment.”²⁴ This is the trap humanity falls prey to when we do not view God rightly in His relationship with Satan’s evil actions. Paulson’s reflections show how when God’s omnipotence is not understood rightly, one cannot understand the relationship between God and His people or the relationship between God and Satan.

Similar to Oswald Bayer’s thoughts, God’s hiddenness and omnipotence are central to Paulson’s understanding of evil in the world and shape how we ought to look at the question of evil and understand God’s place in it. Paulson writes, “Evil is normally used in this way as an escape hatch from the one thing even more dreadful than evil, which is to conclude that all things happen by divine necessity.”²⁵ Recognizing that God has a part to play in the suffering of humanity is uncomfortable. For humans who desire a sleeping God, the realization that God and Satan are interconnected is terrifying as opposed to comforting. Yet for Paulson the central theme regarding God and evil is the need for God’s promise. Can and will God keep His promise despite and during suffering and evil? The focus is not the origin of evil, but God’s place in it as He relates to Satan, and as we understand God’s promise amid Satan’s activity as the author of sin. For Paulson this relationship is understood rightly when we recognize God’s omnipotence as His central attribute, when we recognize how and why He limits evil and human power and potential, and when we recognize the steadfastness of His promise in the midst of all of it. Paulson writes, “Faith does not deal with evil by seeking evil’s origin itself, or even in some other entity, but by suffering it in faith.”²⁶ We speak of Satan as the author of sin rightly when we understand that we are not searching for an evil God in conjunction with Satan’s works, but that

²⁴ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 107.

²⁵ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 107.

²⁶ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 109.

God is in control of the ways in which Satan acts, where and when he will or will not work. This is an important concept to understand so that the Christian may suffer evil through faith as opposed to blaming God for suffering or picturing Him as uninvolved or sleeping during it.

Scripture Reference: The Fall

Eve sinned. The serpent did not eat the fruit himself, nor did he force Eve to eat it. He incited, encouraged, and enticed her to eat it. He in fact made the whole experience of sin seem enjoyable and God pleasing. He worked this sin in and through Eve by trickery, deceit, and the means he had around him—those being the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Eve’s innate desires, and God’s command. The way in which Satan interacted with Eve in this moment in time is a perfect example of Satan as the author/originator of sin, although we also see here the theme of Satan disguised as an angel of light which we will address later. Sin did not make its grand entrance on the day or in the moment Eve took the bite. Satan, Lucifer, God’s angel sinned first. The curse of sin was not brought on humanity until Eve’s disobedience, but sin had already entered the game long before then. The way in which Satan seduces, provokes, incites Eve to eat the apple is the way in which he authored or originated sin in her. Satan was the actor and Eve was a more than willing instrument that he chose to use.

In discussing a prayer of Moses, Luther says, “Thou savest us from Thy work alone. Which Thou hast performed by delivering us from the disease which Satan, through Adam, inflicted on the entire human race: that is, sin and eternal death.”²⁷ Satan orchestrated, authored, sin in Adam but Adam shoulders the blame. Satan did not possess Adam, nor did he create sin in Adam that was not already lying dormant there; therefore, both Satan and Adam shoulder the blame for the

²⁷ Martin Luther, “Psalm 90” in *Selected Psalms II*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 13, *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 137.

evil that happened. As it is today in reference to Satan and our own sin, Satan cannot control man and cannot force him to sin, but instead he leads and guides the horse to water and it drinks.

Similarly, Luther says, “This is the true cause of the evil, namely, that Adam sins against God, disregards His order, and obeys Satan.”²⁸ Adam is under no obligation to obey Satan but does so willingly, and God allowed Adam’s and Eve’s temptation to take place. Satan works as an author or originator of sin in and through our first parents in the garden. Luther later states in reference to John 8:44, “You are of your father the devil and you do your fathers desires”:

This therefore is the chief meaning of this passage, so that you may understand that the devil was the originator of this catastrophe. Similarly, when someone commits a murder, it is correct to say of the murderer’s dagger: ‘The dagger killed him.’ Surely, it was not the dagger alone or by itself, but the human being who used the dagger. But it is a common synecdoche that by the instrument we understand the actor himself.²⁹

Luther writes that by the instrument we understand the actor. In the case of the Fall, Satan is the actor, Adam and Eve are His instruments. In this way and through these means Satan originated this most grievous sin or catastrophe as Luther calls it.

Scripture Reference: David’s Census

Another example of Satan working in this way in Scripture is the way he worked in and through David to incite him to take a census against God’s command. First Chronicles 21:1 reads “Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel.” Here we see the word “incited” again. Satan provoked, incited, encouraged, and authored this sin within David. David’s commander Joab reminds David that committing this act would be to defy God’s command and would more than likely bring judgement upon Israel, but David does it anyway.

²⁸ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 1:96.

²⁹ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 1:218.

The story continues in verses 7–8, “But God was displeased with this thing, and He struck Israel. And David said to God, ‘I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing. But now please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have acted very foolishly.’” Satan incited David to number Israel, but David sinned. David takes responsibility and Israel takes the punishment. It is referred to as David’s census and not Satan’s census though as the text tells us Satan certainly played a role in this disobedience. Satan promotes the desires of the heart and incites, provokes, encourages sin, but ultimately it is the sinful flesh that acts out and must bear the blame, as David did after he took the census against God’s command.

Assessment: Satan Is the Source of All Evil

Satan as an author of sin is defined by what he is not, namely, not omnipotent. God is the only almighty one, the only one to whom the adjective omnipotent can be properly attributed to. Satan is a creature and therefore has no more power than he ought, and even the small amount of power he does have still falls under God’s command, law, and forbearance. Satan is an author or originator of sin in the way he incites, provokes, and encourages sin. He does not bring about sin through thin air, but he works in the world through means and by his instruments. But we take comfort in knowing he does this only where and when God allows or permits.

This idea of Satan being God’s Devil or Satan on God’s leash can either bring comfort or terror to the Christian. It is comforting to recognize that Satan does not work outside the bounds of God’s law and will, to know that Satan cannot act outside of God’s commands for him. The terror comes when we see the suffering of this world and when we see Satan at work and know that God permits and allows such things. But to this fear Luther would say of Satan’s attacks on this world, “For how could we withstand our invisible enemy if he had not only the

determination to inflict harm, but also the power to do so?”³⁰ It is a comfort to know that God restricts Satan’s powers, even when we see his evil works in the world. If Satan were unchecked by God, he could and would presumably do much more harm. Ultimately this realization and recognition of God’s omnipotence over Satan brings comfort.

Satan works only in ways in which God allows and permits. As noted before, this does not in any way mean that we have an evil God or a God who promotes evil. But it means that we have a God who is omnipotent and rules over all things, including the evil one. To say God allows and permits Satan’s actions is an uncomfortable picture, but to take a step back and think about what that truly means brings more comfort than anything else. Luther has this to say about those who ask why it is that God allowed Satan to tempt Eve.

But who can supply the reason for the things that he sees the Divine Majesty has permitted to happen? Why do we not rather learn with Job that God cannot be called to account and cannot be compelled to give us the reason for everything He does permits to happen? . . . Let us not sit in judgement on our God; let us rather be judged by Him.³¹

We must after all submit to God’s omnipotence and his hiddenness at the same time. Why God allows or permits what he does through Satan is not a matter of further exploration for us. But it is important to recognize that God does test through His creature Satan’s works. Therefore, as Luther says, let us not sit in judgement of God but recognize and uphold the ways in which we know Him to work through His word.

Satan most certainly works evil in the world. But what does this say about the relationship between God and Satan? It shows us that God is in total control. God is the creator, God is omnipotent. Satan cannot act outside of the will of God; to say otherwise would be to deny

³⁰ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 1:133.

³¹ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 1:144.

God's omnipotence. God's work through Satan forces us to acknowledge God's ultimate control over Satan's actions in our own lives and in the evil in this world. When God protects us from Satan's advances, we praise Him and offer thanksgiving and when He does not seem to do so, we know that despite Satan's attacks, despite any harm or chaos he may inflict, God is still above all else in control. God is omnipotent, even when Satan is active. Moreover, God's promises to His children stand even amid Satan's seductions.

CHAPTER THREE

SATAN AS AN ANGEL OF DARKNESS (THE BLACK DEVIL)

Satan as an Angel of Darkness is the Satan you see when you close your eyes. The red horned beast, wielding a pitchfork, with evil in his eyes. Satan as an angel of darkness is the devil who lurks and stalks, possesses, and torments, the devil of spiritual warfare and the like. Satan as an angel of darkness is the devil that is known and despised. Satan is thought of as an angel of darkness far more often than he is thought of as an author of sin or as one disguised as an angel of light. Satan as the angel of darkness acts out to personally harm the Christian in body, spirit, and mind. He does this by spiritual attacks, inflicting illness on persons or their loved ones, causing misfortune to befall a person and in the form of hauntings or what most people view as “ghosts.” The angel of darkness wears the Christian down until he curses or rejects God and turns to another god or preferably Satan. John Furgeson writes, “Because God considers humanity the pinnacle of His beloved creation, the fallen angels seek to maximize the number of individuals who will refuse faith in Christ to spite God.”¹ The goal of spiritual attack for Satan and his demons is to persuade the Christian to reject and hate God. The goal of spiritual attacks for God is to refine a Christian’s faith. Furgeson later adds, “Any conflict which emerges between the Christian and the fallen powers via the greater world is used by God to drive the Christian back to prayer and Scripture, to further shape and deepen identity, strengthening the Christian faith.”² As we noted before, God allows Satan to work in this way insofar as He permits him. Satan can only inflict harm where, when, and how God deems appropriate. Where that line is and how God decides all of this is not for the Christian to know or ask. He must trust

¹ Furgeson, “Sword and the Mask,” 133.

² Furgeson, “Sword and the Mask,” 135.

and take comfort in God's omnipotent power and promise.

The most obvious scriptural example of Satan working as an angel of darkness is the book of Job, which will get considerable recognition in this chapter. Throughout the book of Job, Satan's tactics of torture and torment are displayed, and an example of what standing firm in faith looks like is given. We see God in relation to Satan more directly in Job than almost anywhere else in Scripture. God is having a conversation with Satan, a conversation about the torture and ruin of a faithful man. It is a difficult story that has much to teach the Christian about the dynamics of the relationship between God and Satan. Satan also works as an angel of darkness by creating a "thorn" in Paul's flesh in 2 Cor. 12, Paul's response to this persecution reveals much about how Paul views the relationship between God and Satan. Satan as an angel of darkness causes and inflicts direct suffering upon persons with the permission of God. The analogy of the king and the executioner is clearest when Satan acts as an angel of darkness. God is clearly the King and Satan is the executioner. Satan is at his deadliest when he works as an angel of darkness and acts out in the most violent of ways, similar to that of an executioner, while God allows this either to punish, benefit or for the purpose of His will, similar to that of a king. Luther explicitly calls the Devil "God's executioner"³ in one of his famous table talks. He makes this connection while addressing how God wants us to view the sicknesses, sadness and sufferings that come to us. Luther acknowledges that these things are Satan's work, but God sends them to us using Satan as His executioner.

One might believe that when Satan attacks, it is the Christian's duty to fight back and defeat him and end his treachery. The reality is, however, that the Christian by himself, left to his

³ Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Tischreden*, (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912) 1. English translation in Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 1:401.

own devices is powerless in the face of Satan and his demons. The Christian does not fight the battle against Satan and his demons alone. Christ goes before him, is with him and behind him. The Christian has power only in the name of Jesus, in the prayers of the church and rites of exorcism enacted in Jesus' name, but the Christian himself has no strength of his own to fight against the fallen powers. Spiritual warfare is a battle between Christ and Satan and the Christian is caught in the crossfire. Despite this, the Christian need not be afraid in the midst of the battlefield. Despite Satan's persecution and attacks the battle has already been won, the victory claimed, and as we have mentioned previously, God is still the one who has ultimate control. Despite God and Satan being opposing forces, God directs Satan's action as He is actively and directly opposing him. Satan as an angel of darkness is an opponent that the Christian cannot defeat of his own volition or ability. Only when Jesus' name and the word of God is invoked does Satan run and flee.

Most Lutheran authors discussing Satan as an angel of darkness talk about it in terms of spiritual warfare, attack, and demon possession. John Furgeson writes, "The fallen angels have an unabating hate for God but cannot directly contend with him. Therefore, they attempt to hurt God indirectly by destroying what He loves."⁴ Every hero and villain story is loosely based on this relationship between God and Satan. The villain knows he is no match for the hero, so instead of attacking him directly he attacks what He loves the most. In most movies and books, what is most loved is a woman or the hero's beloved family members; in Scripture, it is God's beloved children who are attacked out of spite for their heavenly Father. This approach to attack will also be discussed in the following chapter's description of Satan disguised as an Angel of Light. Satan works as an angel of darkness to directly attack God's people.

⁴ Furgeson, "Sword and the Mask," 133.

Luther's Understanding: The Stereotypical Satan

Luther speaks to the status of Satan in the world today in saying “But this much is certain: The angels fell and the devil was transformed from an angel of light into an angel of darkness.”⁵ Lucifer once lived as an angel of light, but now because of his separation from God he lives as an angel of darkness. Luther describes the “black devil” as the one “who impels men to overt acts of evil.”⁶ Martin Luther arguably takes the thought of Satan as an Angel of Darkness much further than most western Christians are willing to go. Luther acknowledges Satan’s presence in all arenas of life. Luther did not deny the existence of black magic, witches, goblins, and the like, but he credited their existence and work to Satan. All ghosts and things that go around in the night were credited to demonic activity. Luther’s emphasis when it comes to Satan as an angel of darkness is that God does in fact permit and allow Satan’s attacks and persecution, but he also restrains and restricts it: “How could we withstand our invisible enemy if he not only had the determination to inflict harm, but also the power to do so.”⁷ If left to his own will, Satan could and would destroy God’s people, but the fact that he has not is proof of God’s involvement in restricting and restraining his power. God uses Satan only where it is fitting for Him and His will. The Christian is not to take offense or be angry with God for allowing these persecutions, but thank him for limiting and restricting them, even when they feel like too much to bear. Satan could and would do much more harm if it were not for God’s intervention, and the faithful response to these attacks should be thanks and praise to God for his involvement in Satan’s actions.

⁵ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 1:23.

⁶ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535 Chapters 1–4*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 26 in *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 49.

⁷ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 1:133.

Satan pokes, prods, and tortures so that humans might turn from God toward him. God allows Satan's actions so that we might flee from the darkness and cling even more to the grace of God. Both Satan and God use suffering as a tool to turn the human soul towards one or the other. Luther writes,

God wants us to regard the evils we experience as coming to us with His permission. If He had not permitted it, the devil never would have afflicted Job so fearfully (Job 1:12). God permits evils to come to us; for it is His will that, when we have been chastened, we cast ourselves on His mercy.⁸

It was Luther's belief that God wanted suffering to be seen as coming from His hand and not the hand of the enemy. God wants His people to recognize suffering and evil as a reminder to cling to His mercy and grace. The western church tends to do the opposite in the face of suffering. When evil and tragedy strike, they view God as being distant and uninvolved, like He has turned His back on them. Luther thought the opposite. Satan's attacks are reminders of God's merciful involvement in our lives. The angel of darkness, a fallen angel of light, uses evil, suffering, physical and mental torment, to draw the Christian from God to his kingdom. Satan wants Christians to reject the idea of a God who would allow such things to happen. Yet God uses Satan's advances to recenter the Christian back to Himself. Edward Plass quotes Luther saying,

God sends no sickness into the world but through the devil. All sadness and sickness are of the devil, not of God. For God permits the devil to harm us because He receives little regard from us. Whatever therefore pertains to death is the handiwork of the Devil and whatever pertains to life is the blessed work of God. . . . The Devil must be our Lord God's executioner.⁹

Luther explicitly calls the devil God's executioner in the context of Satan's works as an angel of darkness, causing sickness, sadness, and harm—although the sadness and sickness are

⁸ Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, in *LW* 13:135.

⁹ Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Tischreden*, (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912), 1. in Plass, Ewald. *What Luther Says*, 1:401.

not from God but Satan. Satan's intentions through suffering, God still wants Christians to recognize Satan's actions being present in the world only through His permission, though they are still to be regarded as Satan's works. In this way Satan is the almighty God's executioner.

R. H. Bennett: Insights from *Afraid* and *I am Not Afraid*

Bennett defines spiritual warfare as “the battle between God and Satan for the souls of people,” and goes on to claim, “Sin is what places us in that warfare.”¹⁰ Bennett's whole reason in writing the *Afraid* series is that he fears the LCMS does not properly and rightly understand the demonic, how to defend against it, and what to do when one encounters it. He studied both American and African pagan, animistic, and voodoo practices at length to properly understand the demonic from an international standpoint, and concludes, “The area of exorcism is one in which the Western Church can learn from its partner churches.”¹¹ I agree with Bennett that the LCMS has a weak understanding of Satan and his influence, and propose that the best way to understand his influence on us is through his relationship with God.

In both of his books, Bennett emphasizes the growing need for educating western Christians, specifically the LCMS, on demonic activity because western Christianity is growing in its practice of animism, occult practices, voodoo, and attempts to reach the dead or ancestral spirits. Through his studies of American voodoo practices, as well as the Malagasy Lutheran Church in Madagascar, Bennett finds people reaching out to dead ancestors and spirits only to find themselves in the company of demons. Bennett believes these activities and practices bring about spiritual attacks from Satan and his demons. He backs this up with his research and interviews with those who have converted from traditional animistic religions to the Malagasy

¹⁰ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 12.

¹¹ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 53.

Lutheran Church. He states, “The majority of those questioned, reported being demonically possessed before being brought to Jesus. Following their conversion into the Christian Faith the overwhelming number of respondents described their lives in terms of peace and release from the oppression of the spirits or their representatives (*ombiasy*).”¹² Those who sought after darkness and demonic practices lived lives full of suffering and oppression, restrictions, and then found release and safety in the arms of Jesus. Satan is much more able to grab hold of those who seek him than those who call upon Jesus. “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). This concurs with what we have said previously about God and Satan, that is, anything that is separate from God is evil and those who reach out for Satan in ways like voodoo and occult practices are separating themselves from God and opening themselves up to Satan’s advances, being drawn into his kingdom. Bennett’s study describes a way in which the relationship between God and Satan can be viewed when Satan acts as an angel of darkness.

Even the description of Satan as angel of darkness, which may sound straightforward and familiar, does not deny that Satan can also disguise himself. Not all the works of the angel of darkness are evil upfront. Satan can give what appear to be blessings and riches, give people what they want to increase his following. Bennett found this to be the case with the Malagasy Lutherans in a set of interviews with those who had converted to Christianity as adults. He found many who had faithfully practiced animism, and they described the “immense wealth and power they had received from the charms and talisman purchased from the *ombiasy* [animistic shaman].”¹³ In other cases, he recounts conversations with people who believed the voodoo doctor or medium reached their dead parent or spouse and gave them closure with their deceased

¹² Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 95.

¹³ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 58.

loved one. These are all ways in which Satan works to win people over to his kingdom. Bennett recognizes that many people reach out for the dark arts and occult practices because sometimes it provides them with what they think they need or want, even if it is a trick of Satan. There is no evidence in Scripture of Satan “healing;” even when it appears that Satan heals, it is a case of deception. In an interview with Bennett, he writes: “The way I understand it is Satan can heal the sicknesses he brings upon unbelievers. It is not a real healing but removing an affliction he has given.”¹⁴ Many of those Bennett interviewed claimed healing for them or a loved one through the animistic rituals they were practicing, but as we know from Deuteronomy 32:39, God says, “See now that I, even I am He, I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal, and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.” Satan can only do what God has permitted him to do. Satan cannot remove an affliction that he did not cause. Dr. Gibbs writes in his commentary on Matthew, “There is one true power, namely, the triune God. If Satan possesses any power at all, it is only that which God has allowed him to exercise.”¹⁵

Bennett talks at length about the importance of exorcism and asserts that “Exorcism is the answer for any demonic problems faced in this world.”¹⁶ He discusses exorcism not only today in the context we are currently living, but throughout Jesus’ ministry. Exorcisms in the Gospels are uniquely important when discussing the relationship between God and Satan because it is one of the few places in Scripture, we see Satan and God’s Son interacting face to face. In discussing the exorcism in Matt. 8:28–34 (as well as Mark 5:1–20 and Luke 8:26–39), Bennett writes, “Jesus was in control. The demons could do nothing but beg. The demons are so fearful of exorcism that they themselves say, ‘if you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.’ They

¹⁴ R.H. Bennett, Interview with author, November 3, 2021.

¹⁵ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 101.

¹⁶ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 43.

know they cannot sustain their position before Jesus; indeed, they are anticipating exorcisms.”¹⁷ In exorcism we see the power that Jesus’ name holds over Satan and his demons. We as humans are caught on the battlefield of a supernatural war, but we fight with the one who has all the power. In exorcism it is not the ritual or the act of the exorcism but the power of Jesus’ name that leaves demons to shudder and flee. As Bennett says, “Jesus was in control. The demons could do nothing but beg.” Even when the devil terrifies us the most, we are assured that God is in control of the warfare. He is on the battlefield with us, and he goes before us. The person conducting the exorcism is merely a vessel for God’s word to work. Bennett says, “Exorcism is not something an individual does, but the work of Jesus, who drives Satan and his demons away from either person or place.”¹⁸ The Christian uses the name of Jesus and the power in His name to exorcise those possessed.

John Furgeson: Insights from “The Sword and the Mask”

In his dissertation, “The Sword and the Mask,” John Furgeson asserts that the current Lutheran approach to spiritual warfare is “an uneven collection of views in which God seems to lack the power to properly care for his people, creating notions that the fight against the demonic and evil rests on the shoulders of the Christian.”¹⁹ He describes how and why the approaches and definitions of spiritual warfare circulating are incomplete, lacking, or plain wrong. Whereas Bennet defines spiritual warfare as “the battle between God and Satan for the souls of people,”²⁰ Furgeson defines it as “The fallen powers of creation railing against the reign of Christ.”⁴⁷ He claims that this definition “reorients the nature of spiritual warfare, moving the center away from

¹⁷ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 109.

¹⁸ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 44.

¹⁹ Furgeson, “Sword and the Mask,” 129.

²⁰ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 12.

humanity.”²¹ Which is one of the main problems he sees with Lutheran authors on the topic today. They seem to focus too heavily on the role of the Christian in spiritual warfare and seem to give humanity and Satan more power than they ought, while painting God as being weaker than they ought.

With his definition of spiritual warfare, Furgeson says, “The focus becomes God’s sovereign activity and the reactive actions of the fallen powers.”²² Placing the focus on God’s sovereignty puts the Christian in a position to focus not on the suffering per se but the hand of God in it. In this definition and focus, Furgeson proposes a relationship between God and Satan in which Satan actively seeks to oppose God and yet God remains in control because of His omnipotence and ultimate reign. He explains further,

Spiritual warfare properly speaking, is not being fought by Christians at all because the work of Christ in overcoming sin, death, and the devil is already completed. Rather, the issue is that those fallen powers, standing at odds with God’s will, attempt to refuse acknowledgement of the soteriological work of Jesus and the resulting authority he has attained in his risen and ascended exaltation.”²³

Furgeson views Satan's relationship with God as one in which Satan rejects Christ’s victory and actively and vehemently opposes Christ’s reign. But alas, Satan’s rejection of Christ’s victory does not make His reign any less valid, and therefore this relationship continues to be one of ultimate power and domination of God over Satan's actions, no matter how much he opposes and reacts against God’s will.

Furgeson lists four main approaches to spiritual warfare within the church, namely, the dismissive, social, pneumatic, and bifurcated. Each, he complains, gives an inaccurate view of the relationship between God and Satan, and therefore does not adequately address the problem

²¹ Furgeson, “Sword and the Mask,” 130.

²² Furgeson, “Sword and the Mask,” 130.

²³ Furgeson, “Sword and the Mask,” 130.

of spiritual warfare. Of these four approaches the bifurcated approach, Furgeson says, is the most dominant approach in western churches. The bifurcated approach is a dualism of separation: “The reality of angels and demons is upheld, but they lack specificity and clarity, rendering spiritual warfare unfamiliar and uncomfortable for mainline Christians.”²⁴ Western Christians tend to talk vaguely about angels and demons with a lack of understanding about these creatures, their role and purpose. This lack of specificity in the churches’ teaching causes lack of knowledge and misunderstanding. This lack of knowledge and clarity is seen the most in death and suffering. Often when someone dies their loved ones claim they have become an angel or have “gained their wings.” This shows a stark misunderstanding about the role and purpose of angels. The same happens with Satan and suffering. Often Christians are quick to blame Satan for evil, chaos, and suffering, and are quick to let God off the hook. They might become angry with God for doing nothing, when in reality He is much more involved than they may want Him to be. This is a clear misunderstanding of the relationship between God and Satan. This lack of knowledge and understanding in turns makes these angelic beings foreign and makes Christians uncomfortable to bring them up in conversation and practice.

Furgeson states that Lutheran authors' views on the topic of spiritual warfare have, until now, created an unfortunate dualism. He asserts,

These views imply that somehow God is not able to eradicate evil completely or is unable to control the portions of the natural and supernatural aspects of His creation which work at odds with His will. This is a type of dualism. Also, this dualism implies that Jesus has not completely won the victory and is only partially reigning. Neither of these implications or positions integrate with Lutheran doctrine.²⁵

One of the most challenging aspects of the relationship between God and Satan is understanding

²⁴ Furgeson, “Sword and the Mask,” 4.

²⁵ Furgeson, “Sword and the Mask,” 6.

Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil, and yet recognizing Satan's actions in the world today. The idea of Christ's reign being "now and not yet" belongs to a proper understanding of how God and Satan's relationship works itself out in a practical way. Furgeson emphasizes that Satan's activity in the world today does not negate Christ's victory over Satan or that the Almighty God is still completely in control over all things. Furgeson affirms that it is not Christians who fight in this warfare, but Christ who fights for us and is already victorious. The victory is complete but will not be fully realized until He comes again to fully restore His kingdom on earth.

Assessment: Satan Has and Is Continuing to Work as an Angel of Darkness Despite Christ's Victory

Scripture Reference: The Book of Job

Job is one of the most horrendous stories of suffering in Scripture. Job is also one of the most contested books in all of Scripture. Because of its nature as wisdom literature and its difficult to swallow plot, there are many varying opinions on the overall meaning of this book. God allowed Satan to use all his power as an angel of darkness to attack Job and his family. In this we have a clear picture of God as King and Satan as executioner. Satan is not even the one who pointed Job out to God as a potential subject. God permits, offers up, and even encourages Satan to test Job because of his faith and "uprightness." We learn much about the specific ways in which Satan works as an angel of darkness through the ways he chooses to torment Job. Satan takes Job's livelihood, home, family, possessions, and inflicts physical harm on Job in the form of a skin disease. Satan prodded and tormented Job just to see if he would break, to see if he would renounce God and enter Satan's kingdom. His theory was wrong, his test failed, and Job remained faithful despite it all. Satan's goal in his attacks on Job were to show that Job would

renounce God if God did not bless Job like he had been doing and had done in the past. Satan wanted to prove that God's people only followed him because they thought they would be blessed because of it. Concerning the motives of Satan, Horace Hummel writes, "This issue is the profoundly biblical one, whether or not God is served for His own sake, out of sheer gratitude and loyalty, or whether, as in Satan's opinion, every man has his price."²⁶

The focus of the story of Job is really between the vertical relationship between God and man and, through that relationship, what we learn about God's relationship to Satan. God was not enough for Satan. Satan wanted more. Because of this, he assumes God is not enough for humanity, that there will always be something more important for the human—a "price" they are willing to pay to rid their lives of God. Satan's price was power. He rejected God to pursue power above all else, and he works as an angel of darkness to find the price each man is willing to be bought for.

Job's friends, his so-called comforters, were working from the premise that "good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people." They knew Job to be a "good" blameless, and upright man, so they did not understand why bad things were happening to him. They assumed that Job must have done something terribly bad and wrong to make God so angry with him. Hummel explains, "Job's friends misunderstood that the 'answer' to evil and suffering is beyond mere translation into rational argument."²⁷ Job's friends neglected to see Satan's role properly in the drama of Job's life and therefore inaccurately diagnosed his suffering. A right understanding of the relationship between God and Satan would have given Job's friends a much better avenue for spiritual care for their friend in his suffering. Job's friends and most western

²⁶ Horace Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979), 473.

²⁷ Hummel, *Word Becoming Flesh*, 487.

Christians struggle with this same mindset, the very mindset that Satan was testing. The book of Job does not answer the question of suffering, nor reveal the deep inner thoughts and workings of God, but it gives us a glimpse into the ways He utilizes and restrains Satan for the benefit of His people.

Scripture Reference: The Thorn in Paul's Flesh

Second Corinthians 12:7–9 reads, “So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” The thorn Paul was given has long been believed to have been an illness, health condition, or possibly an addiction. This thorn Paul states was given to him by a messenger of Satan, a demon. And yet Paul prays repeatedly to God to take it away. Paul recognizes by whose hand he truly came to have this thorn. He says he was given this thorn “to keep me from becoming conceited.” Satan would not torment Paul to humble him and prevent his sin of boasting on himself. Paul recognized that this thorn, though given by Satan, was ordered by God to humble him. The king gave an order and the executioner obeyed. Paul specifically states that the thorn came from a messenger of Satan but addresses the ways in which God uses it for Paul's benefit.²⁸ Demons carry out the will of God. The evil that befalls a person, whatever the thorn or evil may be, is permitted by God for His greater purposes. The relationship between God and Satan is one in which God's orders are executed by Satan and his

²⁸ In reference to Paul's term “a messenger of Satan,” the *Lutheran Study Bible* states: “Evils of body and souls—permitted by God to work a greater good— occur through demonic agency.” *Lutheran Study Bible* (St. Louis, Concordia, 2009), 1997.

demons. Satan and his demons mean it for evil and harm to torture humans, to convince them to turn from God, but God permits evil for His good purposes.

Conclusion

Satan as an Angel of Darkness is the Satan behind spiritual warfare, attack, demon possession and oppression, and the devil involved in stirring up evil and chaos in the world. Luther's focus on the role God plays when Satan acts as an angel of darkness is on how He restricts and restrains Satan, and not as much on how He allows and permits his activity (as in the case of Satan as the Author of Sin). Luther emphasizes how much more harm Satan would inflict if God did not reign in his power and abilities. Luther's perspective invites the Christian to respond in praise of God's protection as opposed to attempting to interpret God's intentions or motives. Luther and Bennett both closely link this description of Satan with the work of witch doctors, dark magic, witches, and ghosts. Bennett studies these areas both in an American and international context and finds that Satan's reach is incredibly broad, and he works in similar ways in varying contexts. Bennett understands Satan as an angel of darkness to be a relentless pest who attacks those who seek him, knowingly or unknowingly. Jon Furgeson emphasizes God's power over Satan and the fallen powers in the realm of spiritual warfare. Despite how fervently Satan and his minions may try to escape the thumb of God, He always prevails against their railing.

Under the title Angel of Darkness, we tend to think of Satan as the devil in red tights with a pitchfork, poking, prodding, and tormenting God's people. In some ways, this Satan is the most difficult to relate to God. We have shown the ways in which God permits, allows, or prohibits Satan's activity. When we recognize Satan as an angel of darkness, we recognize that God is in fact permitting and allowing spiritual torment, torture, and warfare, and yet in that we recognize

the human activity that can at times promote and provoke these things. This title of Satan shows the clearest picture of God as King, and Satan as executioner, with humanity caught in the middle. It is uncomfortable for most western Lutheran Christians to recognize and acknowledge this tension. We must also acknowledge that God's "permission" does not make him guilty in the evil actions of Satan. God's interconnectedness with Satan does not do away with the fact that God and Satan are still opposing forces. God's permission of Satan's actions cannot be made to mean that those things bring him joy or satisfaction. God permits Satan's actions in so far as they fulfill His will and purpose in Christ and that is about as far as we dare attempt to take our understanding of spiritual warfare. In speaking of Luther's approach to dealing with grave temptations, Sánchez points out that "without denying God in his hiddenness, Luther ultimately directs the sufferer, more encouragingly, to God's gracious promises in the Word, prayer, and the community of saints for comfort."²⁹ A step beyond that and we find ourselves attempting to peak behind the veil at the hidden God who cannot be known or comprehended.

²⁹ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 104.

CHAPTER FOUR

SATAN DISGUISED AS AN ANGEL OF LIGHT (THE WHITE DEVIL)

In the Augsburg Confession, the church is defined as “the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.”¹ It follows that a place such as this would be despised by Satan. A place such as this provides fertile ground for him to attempt to collect souls from God’s kingdom to his own. Satan disguised as an Angel of Light describes the way in which Satan infiltrates the church, twists God’s word, and stirs up doubt in the heart of believers. Satan at one time was an actual angel of light, a servant of God, and because of that he is well versed in the word of God. Now, as a fallen angel, he masquerades as his past identity and uses that same word of God as a weapon. Despite Satan using God’s word as a weapon, this title of Satan is best characterized as a Satan who does not openly, aggressively attack, but instead is a devil in disguise. Esko Murto writes, “Luther’s demonology does not depict Satan primarily as a terrifying, outwardly threatening enemy. The Devil is first and foremost a tempter, who makes himself appear noble.”² When Satan works as an angel of light, he attacks not with a pitchfork, but with Scripture. Satan as the father of lies and a master of deceit is very good at disguising himself, especially as something seemingly “good” like an angel of light. Outside of when he works as an angel of darkness, Satan seems to prefer to appear before the Christian not as a threatening enemy but as a messenger of God, pushing his agenda through and under the guise of the will and word of God.

Satan disguised as an angel of light preys not only on the laity, but he especially seeks out

¹ Augsburg Confession VII.1, in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 42.

² Murto, “Old Evil Foe,” 56.

the leaders of the church. He tempts leaders of the church into the sin of pride. As they study the Word, Satan encourages pastors and church workers to question it, “Did God actually say?” As he did with Eve in the garden and with the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, Satan uses the word to create doubt in God’s commands and promises. He works in and through the leaders of the church to incite false teachings and erroneous doctrines loosely based on the word of God. If Satan can get ahold of a church leader, his lies are able to be spread all the more quickly through that leader’s teaching, preaching, and counseling. When Satan deceives a pastor or church worker in this way, he is then able to sit back and watch his work of spreading lies be done for him. Satan’s reach then becomes as broad as the influence of that leader or theologian.

For sure, sinful humanity is also to blame for false teaching and division within the church. This is not something that can be blamed on Satan alone. Sinners often make Satan’s job easy by causing their own conflicts and quarrels within the body of believers. Nonetheless Satan is there waiting to fuel the fire when humans get in the way of the churches’ teaching, proclamation, unity, and mission. When Satan hides himself as an angel of light, he is also usually working as an author of sin. These two descriptions of Satan often go hand in hand. This was previously mentioned in Chapter Two in relation to the way Satan works in the Fall. He incites, instigates, or authors sin in Eve by using the word of God as his preferred weapon. He pokes, prods, and entices Eve to sin, by presenting God’s word in a way that appeals to the man’s desire above the actual command of God. Satan disguised as an angel of light best characterizes Satan as a deceptive teacher of theology.

Luther’s Understanding: Satan as a Teacher of Theology

“But this much is certain: the angels fell and the devil was transformed from an angel of

light to an angel of darkness.”³ Satan at one time was an actual angel of light, that is why he is so talented in disguising himself in this way though he no longer lives in the light. Luther writes, “Satan is so successful in disguising himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14) and into the image of God that he entices us away from prayer and the Word and then attacks and overpowers us in our nude and helpless condition.”⁴ Satan himself was enticed by his own desires and separated himself from prayer and the Word. He now works through these means within the Church to bring Christians to his kingdom of darkness. Martin Luther seems to be particularly disgusted by the ways in which Satan is active in the church and how fervently he attacks God’s word. Throughout his works he often accuses specific heretics, such as Thomas Müntzer, Ulrich Zwingli, the pope, and the anabaptists for being vessels of Satan, or for acting under Satan himself in disguise. He points to the idea that Satan stirs up false teaching as evidence that those who contradict the true word of God are working for Satan whether they recognize it or not. In pointing out these specific church leaders and theologians as Satan’s workers, Luther emphasizes the role church leaders, pastors and theologians play under Satan’s deceptions. Satan especially works to twist the word of God through those who have the most influence in teaching it. It then follows that his lies will reach more people at a rapid pace. This is not to say Satan does not attack individual Christians with these lies, but the leaders and teachers of the church are more eagerly targeted by Satan in this way. Satan extends his reach by working to corrupt the proclamation of those who teach and preach in God’s church, so that he can spread his own teaching more rapidly through them. Satan’s powers of deceit are crafty enough to fool even the leaders in the church, those who are well versed and those who are dedicated to the study of

³ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 1:23.

⁴ Luther, *Selected Psalms*, in *LW* 13:109.

God's word. Satan uses God's word to turn its ministers against God.

The most worrisome of the advantages that Satan has in working under this disguise is that those who fall into his trap can be so blissfully unaware of his work and so blinded to the error of their understanding that they believe they are still following the true word of God. When one is so steeped in this deceit, there is no repentance, no turning back to God, because the deceived sees no need for these things. They vehemently believe they are waking in the truth. Regarding this all-consuming kind of deceit, Luther writes, "So great is the efficacy of this satanic illusion in those who have been deluded this way that they would boast and swear that they have the most certain truth. This is how far they are from admitting they are in the wrong."⁵ The roots of this deceit can become so entwined in a person's heart and mind that there is no convincing them of their need to repent and turn back to the word of God. They do even not recognize that they have strayed. In order to guard ourselves from this deception, Luther says we must regularly pray the Lord's prayer, "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). The Christian can only avoid this deep seeded deception by being immersed in the word and praying for protection from it.

In Scripture's portrayal of Satan working in disguise as an angel of light, Satan often quotes the word of God. He does not try to misquote or alter what the word literally says, but he instead aims to twist God's motive behind His words. Luther explains Satan's motive for this more manipulative form of attack in this way:

If Satan were to teach that people ought to kill, commit fornication, and disobey their parents, who would not realize that he is suggesting something that is forbidden by the Lord? Therefore it would be easy to be on one's guard against him.⁶

⁵ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, in *LW* 26:195.

⁶ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, in *LW* 1:148.

Satan recognizes that he would quickly be found out if he were to encourage sin using God's word outrightly in its true form and intent. He is craftier than that, using God's true and real word while attempting to present it in a way that appeals to human desire. When Satan works through this type of deceit, he gives the Christian an opportunity to follow his own desire while believing it is the will and word of God. The devil is crafty enough to hide himself under the guise of an angel of light so that the Christian does not recognize his own sin in twisting the word of God. He uses God's word in such a way that makes it difficult to recognize his deceit. In this way, the Christian falls into Satan's trap while believing they are serving and following God. Satan knows better than to work at the heart of a Christian with teachings so blatantly against the teachings of God's word. He recognizes that a learned Christian would recognize his trickery right away. As an angel of light, Satan disguises himself as a teacher of theology, a child of God, a shepherd to His people. Because of this, both the weak and strong in faith are susceptible to Satan's trickery. He is well practiced in deception and well versed in the word of God, which makes his disguise a particularly dangerous one for the church as a whole and the individual Christian.

Satan disguises himself so well as an angel of light because of his knowledge of God's word and the way he makes it appear appealing to human desire. Luther explains, "Satan also has his promises, and very fines ones at that. Therefore keen judgement is needed to distinguish properly between the promises of God and those of Satan, that is, between the true and the false."⁷ Satan sugarcoats his deception to look like the sweet promises of the true gospel. This idea that not all of Satan's tricks and attacks appear evil at the outset was also discussed

⁷ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 6-14*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 2 in *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia), 266.

previously in Chapter Three. Satan often entices Christians to sin in ways that are seemingly good. As an angel of darkness, we saw him promising wealth, power, and healing. When he hides himself as an angel of light, his false promises come in the form of human desire. He twists and softens God's word to make it more appealing to human reason. His promises are at times disguised well enough to look like God's and that is why Satan is particularly dangerous when he works in disguise. Pertaining to this disguise of Satan, Luther emphasizes the importance of educating Christians on the word of God so that they will be able to discern which promises and commands are from God and which are not. He writes, "Satan is in the habit of marring the church in this manner by scandals which the uninformed attribute to the Word."⁸ If the Christian is not informed in what the true Word is and says how can he be expected to stand firm in it when Satan works to twist and distort it? One cannot tell the difference between Satan's church and God's church if one does not first recognize what God's true church is. Satan disguised as an angel of light is the most difficult of Satan's guises to recognize because of how skilled he is in manipulation and how well he knows the words and commands of God, but it is the easiest to defend oneself against if and when it is recognized, and he is exposed. Continuous study and reading of God's word as well as prayers for protection over this temptation protects one against falling into the snares of Satan. Luther recognizes that Satan often attacks that which God loves the most, His people and His church. Luther writes, "Where the word of God is, there Satan makes it his business to spread falsehood and false teaching; for it grieves him that through the word we, like Adam in paradise, become citizens of heaven."⁹ Satan so earnestly hates when heaven gains citizens because this is a privilege he lost. He once was a citizen of God's kingdom,

⁸ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 3:234.

⁹ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 1:82.

and he wants nothing less than for humanity to feel the sting of separation from God forever and in turn gain citizens for his own kingdom.

Esko Murto: Insights from “The Old Evil Foe Now Means Deadly Woe”

Esko Murto’s thesis titled, “The Old Evil Foe Now Means Deadly Woe: The Works of The Devil in The Theology of Martin Luther,” focuses on how Martin Luther understands Satan to work in the world—specifically in creation, the Church and its doctrine, and against the individual Christian. He concludes his research by urging that as a church body we must “rediscover the Devil in everyday life,”¹⁰ which is where Luther understood him to operate. He spends the most significant portion of his research discussing how Luther viewed Satan at work to tear down the church and its doctrine. He recognizes Satan working in other ways, that is, as an author of sin and as an angel of darkness, but he describes how and why he believes that Satan disguised as an angel of light is the most dangerous way in which he acts:

The deadliest Devil is not the one who tempts men into immorality, but the one who tempts them into heresy of false belief and self-righteousness. Immorality will be forgiven if a person repents, but lapsing into false doctrine quenches the source through which such forgiveness flows, i.e. destroys the faith in Christ.¹¹

Luther was quoted in a previous section saying that the devil does not attempt to teach people that God’s Word says to kill, fornicate, and disobey parents, because then all Christians would be able to smell his trickery. Satan is much more deceptive than that. Murto explains that Satan disguised as an angel of light works primarily in two ways. His first mode of attack is to attempt to make Christians blind to their own sin, to make them distort God’s word in their hearts and minds in order to fit their own desires and neglect repentance because of this. The second is to

¹⁰ Murto, “Old Evil Foe,” 109.

¹¹ Murto, “Old Evil Foe,” 58.

make the Christian feel so burdened by their sin and lowly status before God that they feel the need to justify themselves through extraneous religious rites and activities. In both cases, Satan's end goal is to lead people within the church to a false piety and sense self-righteousness through the deceptive use of the word of God.

When Satan attempts to blind people to their own sin, he does not come looking like the Satan we know and easily recognize: "The doctrine of the Devil does not seem like what people call evil, immoral or rude. Instead, the Devil poses himself as religious pious and good—truly an angel of light."¹² To successfully use the word of God to convince Christians what they thought was sin is not, Satan must appear to be a true angel of light or his disguise would be ruined. In this way, the devil schemes and makes himself appear to be a messenger of God, by coming in a way that does not look outwardly evil or immoral. When Satan works through the word of God to blind one from their own sin or wrongdoing, he does not purposefully misquote or alter what the word of God says but aims to make the Christian question God's motives or reasoning for saying such a thing. When a Christian subsequently falls into this trap, it then becomes easy for the Christian to shape God's word to fit his own desires. In so doing, it becomes difficult for Christians to see their sin and therefore they continue living in it unrepentantly, as if they were living in the truth. Murto explains, "If a person can be convinced that his/her wrongdoing are not actual sins which are not to be taken seriously, the purpose of the law, or the 'second use of the Law' is lost, and subsequently the need for Christ forgotten."¹³ Satan's goal is accomplished when the need for Christ is forgotten, and this is accomplished when a person is not confronted by their sin and wrongdoing. A person's sins cannot be reflected to them through the mirror of

¹² Murto, "Old Evil Foe," 57.

¹³ Murto, "Old Evil Foe," 59.

the law if they do not recognize their thoughts, actions, or understandings as wrong. They see only righteousness and sinlessness looking back at them in their false piety. Murto writes, “The Devil seeks to convince people that they are not sinners.”¹⁴ Even though one may know they are a sinner, nobody wants to be a sinner, or to recognize themselves as one; therefore, it does not take much effort on Satan’s part to convince someone they are not a sinner for this is something they desire already.

Satan works in contrasting ways to accomplish his goal as an angel of light, that is, he either blinds Christians to their sin or he crushes them under the weight of their sin. Both serve his purpose of driving a Christian to self-righteousness. He does this by encouraging them to forget Christ’s redemptive work or doubt that His work is enough for them. If Satan can convince a Christian that Christ’s work is not enough for their redemption, it follows that the Christian must do something to save themselves from their overwhelming sin. Murto explains how Satan uses even those things that are intended for the glory of God in order to corrupt the motivations of the saints. He writes, “Prestige, Masses, and even love are often used by the Devil as a temptation for drifting away from the pure Word of God. Thus, the Word and the doctrine is precisely the place where the Devil will concentrate his attacks.”¹⁵ The Devil makes a habit of taking God’s good gifts and turning them in on themselves to create in the believer a sense of self-satisfaction and false piety in the act of doing these things which were made for the glory of God. Satan twists the good things God has given the church in the minds of Christians so that they may serve the self instead of God. Murto explains:

¹⁴ Murto, “Old Evil Foe,” 59.

¹⁵ Murto, “Old Evil Foe,” 49.

By enticing sufficient sense of indebtedness before God, the Devil can motivate people to religious activities with the aim of bettering their souls—yet without Christ. Thus, Satan directs people’s attention away from God’s Word into good deeds.¹⁶

Satan hides himself comfortably under false piety and self-righteousness. Religious activities are not negative things in and of themselves, but Satan twists them to make the Christian believe they must do these things in order to promote themselves and their status before God. In so doing they unknowingly reject Christ and His salvific work, which is exactly what Satan wants out of these practices.

Murto explains why it is advantageous for Satan’s ultimate goals to attack the church and its doctrine. He writes, “Corruption of the doctrine and the Word of God would be the end of the Church since everything in the Church is based on the Word. In the case that the Word is lost, the Church is no more.”¹⁷ If the word of God were to become so corrupt that the church becomes unrecognizable as a place that is “an assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely, and the sacraments are administered rightly,”¹⁸ then Satan would have accomplished his goal and won. Yet we know that Satan cannot win in an ultimate sense. He may win churches over to his kingdom, but God’s true church cannot be taken by Satan for God is still working to preserve and protect it through the proclamation of His Word and the administration of His sacraments. Murto emphasizes that the “Holy Spirit and truth go together, as well as the evil spirits and erroneous doctrine.”¹⁹ Throughout this thesis, we have affirmed the need to uphold God’s goodness in understanding the relationship between God and Satan. Despite God’s place in allowing and permitting Satan’s actions, God cannot be understood to be attacking and working

¹⁶ Murto, “Old Evil Foe,” 59.

¹⁷ Murto, “Old Evil Foe,” 49.

¹⁸ AC V11, 1 in Kolb and Wengert, 42.

¹⁹ Murto, “Old Evil Foe,” 47.

to tear down His own church. Instead, the Holy Spirit promotes truth in the church and in the heart and mind of the believer. At the same time, the enemy works in the church to stir up falsehood surrounding the word of God and the intentions of God. In the church, both the Holy Spirit and Satan's evil spirits are actively at the war with one another.

Assessment: Satan is Living and Active in the Church

Scriptural Example: The Fall

In chapter one, we discussed the ways in which Satan works as an author or originator of sin in his temptation of Eve, by poking, prodding, and encouraging her to sin. Now we will discuss the way in which Satan also disguised himself as an angel of light in the same situation.

Esko Murto fits Satan simultaneously into both roles:

The first heresy in the Garden of Eden was originated by the Devil when he questioned the word of God by stating 'You shall not die.' The fall of humanity in the paradise was not just falling away from God's Word, but also falling to Satan's word.²⁰

Satan originates and authors Eve's sin, but he does not commit the sin. Eve is responsible, yet he plays a part in enticing her to it. The way he does this is by directing her away from the word of God to his own erroneous and false teaching of God's command concerning the tree. Satan originates this sin in Eve by masquerading as an angel of light, a teacher of the Word. Satan's words sounds more lovely to Eve compared to God's, so she led herself to believe that the serpent was telling the truth.

"Did God actually say?" This is how Satan often chooses to place doubt in the heart of the believer. When the serpent asked Eve, "Did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?" (Gen. 3:1), he already knew the answer. He was only trying to sow seeds of doubt in

²⁰ Murto, "Old Evil Foe," 51.

the woman's head. The woman answered correctly in Gen. 3:2–3 saying, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” Eve knew the word of God, she knew and remembered what God had told her, and yet the crafty serpent still deceived her. He gave her an excuse, a way to rationalize breaking God's command and obtaining what her flesh desired. Notice here that Satan does not purposefully try to misquote or alter the command God had made. He is much craftier than that. He is not attempting to make the woman think she misheard what God said, but only what He meant in saying it. Satan sees that the woman knows God's command, so instead of directly and blatantly altering God's Word he makes her question God's motives and intentions in giving them. Satan tells Eve that God only told her not to eat from the tree because if she ate of its fruit, she would become like God herself. Satan knew this would stir up in the woman a desire for that kind of power as he had once felt when he tried to reach beyond the throne of God and attain such power for himself. Of this temptation Luther writes, “The Fall becomes very easy when the pretense of the Word and the will of God [i.e., the lie Satan makes up about God's word and will] are added to what desire suggests.”²¹ Satan knew that if he lied about what God had actually said the woman would not have believed him for, she know God's command. Satan knew he just had to convince the woman there was another way to interpret what God had said that conformed to what the woman already desired. Satan, in using God's word as a tool or weapon, aims to make his subject the authority of God's word by using one's own rationale, human reason, and common sense as the key to the true meaning and intent of God's word. Murto describes Satan's use of this tactic in tempting Eve: “Again, this is well in accordance with the way the Devil tempted Adam and Eve in the paradise. Instead of obedience,

²¹ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 1:158.

they were successfully tempted to make judgement concerning the usefulness of God's command."²² Satan told Eve that she would become like God if she ate of the fruit but inspiring her to judge what the usefulness of God's command was in her own life had already made her a god in her own mind.

As noted previously, Satan does not often contradict the word of God in straightforward ways, for then his deceit would be much more obvious. Instead, he uses what he knows about God's word and the sinful human nature to twist God's command into something it is not, just as he did in the garden with Eve. Satan came to Eve disguised not only as a serpent, but also as an angel of light, convincing her that she could have what she wanted and avoid death. God tested Eve through Satan's tempting. God allowed Satan to come to Eve and test her with His own true, pure, and holy word. He permitted her testing to refine her faith and to see if she would follow His command and she failed.

Scriptural Example: The Temptation of Jesus

Satan foolishly attempts to deceive the Son of God in the wilderness, using God's word as a weapon against him in his temptation. It is made clear that God is the one that permitted and allowed such a thing to happen as Luke 4:1 reads, "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry." The Spirit brought Jesus to the desert to be tempted. God offered up Jesus as He had offered up Job and Eve to be put to the test by Satan. Satan uses a similar tactic with Jesus as he did with Eve. He first properly quotes Scripture, and gages Jesus' response before proceeding. Jesus always

²² Murto, "Old Evil Foe," 53.

answers Satan's prompting with more Scripture. Satan, seeing that Jesus will not falter when it comes to the word of God, appeals to Jesus' humanity by tempting him to fulfill his earthly needs and desires. Satan offers Jesus' food in His hunger, power in His humiliation and protection in His weakness. Satan succeeded in deceiving Eve, but Jesus, as a true and faithful bearer of the light, resisted Satan's temptation by outdoing him.

It is certainly no coincidence that Jesus is taken straight from His baptism into the wilderness, the text tells us that He was "full of the Holy Spirit," as the Spirit had descended on Him for His mission in the Jordan. Jesus did not go into the wilderness alone, but was given the Spirit to lead, guide, and guard Him. This text is a reminder that the Christian also is given this very same gift of the Holy Spirit as a guide and a guard against the temptations of Jesus. This is a reminder that even Jesus himself was tempted and tested, and as Christians we should expect the same. God does not allow Satan to come to us without first giving us protection through the Spirit and the sword of the Word. As Sánchez puts it in his reflection on Ephesians 6:

In the grand arena of life, Christians too must "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" and "put on the whole armor of God" to "stand against the schemes of the devil" (vv. 10-11). In this spiritual warfare against evil, the saints rely not on themselves but on God's armor for protection (vv. 13-17). Like Jesus in the desert, they are resilient and hold on to "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (v. 17) to withstand the devil's attacks in all life circumstances. They learn to rely on God and his Word and will, his commands and promises, especially during difficult times of suffering that the evil one uses to bring them down.²³

Perhaps the most interesting of the three temptations of Jesus in the wilderness is when Satan encourages Jesus to jump off the pinnacle of the temple. Satan quotes Ps. 91:11-12, "He will command His angels concerning you, to guard you, on their hands they will bear you up." Jesus refuses quoting Deut. 16:16, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." And Matt.

²³ Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit*, 95.

4:11 reads, “Then the Devil left Him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to Him.” Jesus knew God’s angels would have protected Him had He jumped off the temple. His temptation would be over, and He would be in the care of the angels. Yet He put off his current comfort, for He knew that his reward would be greater if He resisted. He knew the angels would be coming to care for Him. He needed to only be patient and wait on God. Here Jesus gives us a great example of standing firm against Satan’s attacks. God has promised paradise and everlasting life despite what suffering and ills we go through in this world. We need only to stand firm in faith and be patient until Christ comes again and fulfills His promise. As Paul writes in Rom. 8:18, “For I consider that the current sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” No matter how fervently Satan twists God’s word, or how much we are tempted and tested in this world, God’s word remains steadfast in that these current sufferings are nothing compared to the life of salvation we have coming. As we wait, we have the Holy Spirit, the word of God, prayer, and the company of the saints to assist us in navigating through the temptations and testings of life.

Conclusion

Satan is always crafty, conniving, and deceptive, but most especially when he disguises himself as an Angel of Light within the church through his deceptive use of the word of God. If the Christian is not well prepared and immersed regularly in the word of God, he is opening himself up to fall into one of these deceptions of Satan. Satan is very good at disguising himself in this way because he was formerly an actual angel of light, well versed in God’s Word, which makes him a worthy opponent to the church and its proper teaching of God’s word. Satan works tirelessly against the church to stir up conflict and division and to lure souls into believing in his word as opposed to the true word of God. Satan especially works in the hearts and minds of the

leaders of the church to sow his seeds of deceit through them and extend his reach to more and more of God's flock. Because of his craftiness he has the ability to mold his word into a form that looks like that of God's. He does not attempt to misquote or alter God's word directly or outrightly but prompts the Christian to question God's motives or intentions behind the word by asking, "Did God actually say?" as he asked Eve in the Garden. As Luther writes,

He [Satan] Does not immediately try to allure Eve by means of the loveliness of the fruit. He first attacks man's greatest strength, faith in the Word. . . The pattern of temptations of Satan is the same, namely, that he first puts faith to trial and then draws away from the Word.²⁴

Eve knew the true word of God, yet her faith in the word wavered. Her desire compiled with Satan's nudging gave her the capability to justify breaking God's command. Satan first questioned the word of God and then distracted Eve from it by dangling her desire in front of her.

In almost every hero/villain story, the villain operates by taking the thing the hero loves the most to draw out of the hero what he wants. Satan is no different from any Marvel or Disney villain and he operates in this realm just the same. Satan knows that God, as our hero, is too powerful, so he does not dare to attack God directly but attacks that which He loves. The thing God loves the most is His people and His church, so it makes sense that Satan would so fervently attack the thing which God loves most. It is most difficult to view the relationship between God and Satan within this title for Satan, specifically God's role in it. Most authors, including Luther himself, focus much more ardently on the ways in which Satan acts out in the church and then on God's place in it or response to it. God's church is a place he bids the Christian to go, a place he promises to be, and therefore should not be regarded as an unsafe space simply because of

²⁴ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in *LW* 1:162.

Satan's attacks on it. Christians stand in the line of fire in front of Satan because of their relationship with God. Despite this, God uses Satan's activity in the church to refine our faith and obedience to Him, just as He did with Eve and with the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. God permits and allows Satan's activity in the church. He allows Satan to cause discord, spread lies, and twist His word within the walls of His church and through His people. The ways in which Satan acts out against the church are worth noting only to encourage Christians to be on their guard for false teachers and to encourage Christians to protect themselves by being constantly immersed in the study and reading of God's word. As has been reiterated with all of the titles of Satan, the most important thing to recognize and understand about the relationship between God and Satan is that Satan is bound by God's will and command. This is true even when Satan rages against the church. God is still omnipotent, and He is still in control. Therefore, despite the division and corruption our churches face, we do not fear these attacks of Satan but cling even more to God's word and His mercy and grace. In this title of Satan, God is still the King and Satan is still the executioner, even when he is wearing the disguise of a white robe and stole.

We have mentioned that it is important that we do not attempt to define God's motives outside of what we are told in Scripture. What scripture does tell us about God's motives in times of suffering is that at times God uses suffering to refine and strengthen faith. For example, 1 Peter 4:12–13 states: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." What better way to do this than to allow God's testing of the Christian's knowledge and faith in the authority of the Word amid the devil's temptations. Without romanticizing these sufferings, we

must ultimately not view God's allowance of Satan working in the church as God's abandonment of the church but rather as His strengthening of it.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Robert Bennett writes, “How can one survive a war if one does not recognize that the war is waging in one’s midst?”¹ If the church does not acknowledge that there is a complex and intertwined relationship between God and Satan, and if it chooses not to acknowledge the battle that rages for our souls, we cannot be prepared to stand firm and guard ourselves in such a battle. It is vital to the faith of those in our congregations to understand the relationship between God and Satan properly and rightly so that we do not give Satan more credit than we ought, but also so that we recognize how he works under God’s law to wreak havoc in our lives and in the church. The relationship between God and Satan is a doctrine that has been both ignored and misunderstood for too long and such lack of knowledge has arguably damaged the ability of LCMS pastors and church workers to properly walk alongside their congregants in the face of Satan’s attacks and suffering in general. Too often in spiritual care our church leaders give Satan too much credit and let God and sinful humanity off the hook. When we blame Satan for all the suffering in the world and do not recognize our own sinful brokenness playing a part in this, or the role of God’s providence and omnipotence in bending Satan to His will, we misunderstand the relationship between God and Satan. In doing so we give our parishioners a weak picture of God and a terrifying view of Satan. When God is viewed as weak, a sense of powerlessness and helplessness in the face of an evil tyrant (Satan) follows. When God’s omnipotence and goodness is upheld and Satan’s place under God’s will is recognized rightly, the spiritual care we offer benefits our people and we are able to more accurately comfort a soul troubled by Satan’s actions.

¹ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 12.

Most if not all the authors addressed in this thesis mention the lack of general understanding, research, writing, and especially teaching on the relationship between God and Satan. Most note how such lack of understanding is affecting our pastors, deaconesses, and other church workers in that they are not equipped to lead people during and through Satan's attacks in their lives. On the dearth of serious Lutheran work on Satan and the fallen angels, John Furgeson states that "[l]ittle formal work has been done in Lutheran circles on this subject."² Furgeson notes that false teaching and misunderstandings so easily infiltrate the church and the heart of the believer when there is an improper understanding of the relationship between God and Satan. This damage is further exacerbated when a weak or vague explanation of this relationship is given in spiritual care, taught in bible studies, and preached from the pulpit. Robert Bennett's main concern is on the education of our church workers and the lack of focus on spiritual warfare, as well as on better grasping the relationship between God and Satan in dealing with the demonic. Bennet writes,

Today, Seminaries [sic] education rarely discusses the topic of demon possession or exorcism. It is my hope that this section of the book restarts the conversation, not only with academia, but also in sermons, bible studies, and general pastoral care.³

Bennett points out that grasping a proper understanding must start with our church workers, especially in seminary education, before we can ever dream of it getting across to our congregations. Lutheran authors on the topic today agree that LCMS leaders are not equipped to guide their people through issues of the demonic and questions of evil and theodicy in their teaching and general pastoral/spiritual care practices. The right understanding of the relationship between God and Satan proposed in this thesis can contribute towards helping the church worker

² Furgeson, "Sword and the Mask," 132.

³ Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 105.

address this area of spiritual care. Educating church workers on a proper understanding of God's omnipotence in restricting, restraining, as well as allowing and permitting Satan's actions, is a first step toward better spiritual care in LCMS congregations.

Of all the authors discussed, Bennett was the one with the highest sense of urgency about educating pastors and church workers. Bennett teaches at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne and has firsthand experience with the curriculum's focus or lack thereof on demonology and theodicy, and therefore on the relationship between God and Satan. He is very concerned that our pastors and deaconesses in the field are not being adequately trained to deal with the demonic in the lives of their congregants. Most of Bennett's stories throughout *Afraid* and *I am Not Afraid* were examples of congregants who turned to their pastors for guidance only to find that "they simply lacked the experience and resources to deal with the topic of the demonic."⁴ Chapter seven of Bennett's book *Afraid* is titled "Don't Worry Pastor, They Are Nice Ghosts."⁵ In this chapter he recounts the story of an LCMS woman who went to her pastor after feeling guilty about attending a paranormal conference. Prior to attending the conference, the woman had begun to recognize two small childlike "ghosts" in her home. The woman had already gone to another LCMS pastor who refused to help her with her problem. She feared experiencing this rejection again, and she feared that the church would not believe or understand her plight. She instead decided to attend the paranormal conference for answers, since her pastor had failed in appropriately teaching and caring for her. At the conference, the people there assured her that the ghosts she had were friendly and harmless, but their "antics" became increasingly severe and dangerous and so she came to another pastor searching, hoping, and

⁴ Bennett, *Afraid*, 105.

⁵ Bennett, *Afraid*, 103.

praying for answers. Her pastor reached out to Bennett as he had had little training and exposure to recognizable demonic activity. The woman and the pastor went through the home and did a house blessing, and the “ghosts” were never seen or heard from again. Bennett asks, “How many other people have suffered under the power of the devil because Christian clergy have failed to proclaim the freedom of Jesus who breaks the bonds of Satan? Too many to count I suspect.”⁶ Thanks be to God that although the second pastor did not know how to handle the situation, he had an appropriate resource to turn to provide care for the woman in her spiritual distress. Bennett recounts similar stories throughout his book, stories of people who did not receive proper care when dealing with the demonic and whose suffering was elongated and intensified because of it. Some sought answers elsewhere, as the woman in this story. They went to voodoo doctors, paranormal experts, or mediums for answers. Some left the church due to their church leaders rejecting them, denying their problem, or simply being unable or unwilling to provide care. Because these people left the church and often the faith, they became even more susceptible to Satan’s advances. How many people have been relentlessly assaulted by Satan and left alone in their suffering due to a lack of spiritual care? Too many to count, I also suspect. LCMS members are turning to other, dangerous sources because our church workers are not trained or equipped to offer spiritual care in the face of the demonic. Step one to being able to offer appropriate spiritual care is to understand the relationship between God and Satan, and the place of humanity in that relationship.

The three titles for Satan discussed throughout this thesis unveil a proper understanding between the relationship between God and Satan that is vital for proper spiritual care in the midst of demonic attack. A proper understanding of God’s omnipotence gives a troubled Christian

⁶ Bennett, *Afraid*, 105.

confidence in His providential care in their lives, as well as comfort in knowing that God sees and acts in their suffering. God is not asleep, aloof, or uninvolved. God is very much active and involved with what is going on in the world and in the lives of His people. Recognizing that Satan is restricted and restrained by the hand of God gives the Christian comfort in knowing that ultimate control always has and always will lie with God. Satan can only incite and encourage sin where God allows. A proper understanding of the relationship between God and Satan gives relief to those experiencing spiritual attack, demon possession, oppression, and the like. Satan tempts, tortures, pokes and prods to find the breaking point of the Christian. Satan searches to find at what point the Christian will break and reject God and in turn flee to his kingdom of darkness. Knowing that this is the goal of Satan in these attacks, but more importantly, that they come with God's permission, gives the Christian the audacity and courage to stand firm and cling to God's mercy even more in the face of suffering. A proper understanding of Satan's role as an adversary within the church encourages Christians to be ever more aware of the importance of being immersed in the word and its true teaching. To be well versed in the word of God is to protect oneself against Satan's advances as an angel of light and from false teaching. Being aware that Satan works to promote discord and conflict within the church reminds the Christian in these moments and situations that God calls for unity in the body of Christ.

The Usefulness of Luther's Titles for Satan in Spiritual Care

The ways in which Luther describes Satan as an originator of sin, an angel of darkness, and one disguised as an Angel of Light, are helpful in the way the church can prepare and protect its members against Satan's advances. This understanding can also aid in the churches' ability to offer spiritual care to those experiencing suffering. It is important to note that, although we speak of multiple titles of Satan, we are talking about one creature and his activities. All these titles

define what Satan does, and thus intersect in real life. Although they are helpful categories in defining how and where Satan works, there is much crossover in how Satan acts out practically against the Christian in everyday life.

Recognizing Satan's role as an author and originator of sin reminds the Christian that temptation is around every corner. Not only do we need to be ever aware of our own sinful desires and temptations, but also of the ways in which Satan uses them to promote sin in us. In this way Satan works as an author within the bounds of his medium, within the bounds of this world, and bound by God. He cannot force man to sin, but he incites, entices, and in that sense originates, sin. This realization also forces the Christian to acknowledge that the slogan "the devil made me do it" is not an appropriate excuse for sinning, for the blame and responsibility of sin still rests on our shoulders. Repentance is one of Satan's worst enemies and placing sin on another's shoulders is the kind of ownership and recognition of sin that leads to repentance. This played out in the Garden of Eden as Adam blamed Eve for giving him the fruit and Eve blamed the serpent, and yet in the end humanity was held responsible despite Satan's prompting. This recognition of Satan's prodding and human sin benefits spiritual care in the ways it leads to vigilance and repentance.

Acknowledging God's place as King and Satan's role as executioner when Satan works as an angel of darkness can be a difficult thing to grasp but should ultimately be a comfort and rather than a terror to the believer. If God's omnipotence is truly upheld, His place in spiritual warfare must be acknowledged. He is not distant and uninvolved but engaged in the heart of the battle. Despite the terror Satan inflicts through oppression, possession, personal torture, and torment, Christ is still victorious. Satan's affliction can be withstood in the name of and by the power of Jesus, and we are given tools and resources to aid us in standing firm while we wait for

that day in which Christ's victory will be made complete. There are so many examples of faithful people throughout Scripture who were so vehemently attacked by Satan, but what is comforting about these stories is not the will of these people to withstand their attacks, but the faith and strength given to them by the Holy Spirit. It is much easier to ask, "Where is God?" in the face of suffering as opposed to recognizing he is right here with me as it is happening, not taking it away from me but strengthening and upholding me to withstand it. Recognizing God's place in restricting and restraining Satan in this way provides more comfort than imagining God is asleep while Satan rages freely.

There are so many people who have been hurt by the church who in turn blame God without recognizing Satan is at work within God's own holy house. Outside of the church, we are quick to blame Satan but inside we blame God for not protecting or caring for His Church. The expectation becomes that God would put a forcefield around His church, so it was not susceptible to the brokenness of the world, sinful humanity, and Satan. Yet God allows and permits Satan's actions in the world, towards the Christian, and in the Church. In all this, God is involved but he is not to blame. Satan works nowhere as fervently as he does in the church, for it is the thing he hates the most because it is the thing God loves the most. The wounds a church can inflict can be very deep when she does not learn to speak of Satan as a creature under the Creator's will. Acknowledging that Satan participates in the evil that takes place in the church and recognizing the way the relationship between God and Satan works as a whole under the Creator-creature distinction, gives an outlet for those who have been hurt to continue to see God's care and protection over His church in spite of the devil's attacks.

Acknowledgement of Limitations

The thesis makes every effort to use words like "aid" and "help," and not "solve" in

reference to the impact a right understanding of this topic may have on the spiritual care offered by church workers. Even when one fully understands theologically where an omnipotent God stands in the face of evil and suffering, that does not make suffering any less potent or painful when walking through it. It gives a hope to cling to, but not the answer the human heart so earnestly desires, “why?” It is one thing to recognize that God allows and permits evil and another to accept God’s will in the face of it. We cannot know why God works in this way, why he allows Satan to work when and where he does. When it comes to spiritually caring for those suffering it is always best to focus on what we can know as opposed to what we cannot. We know that God is good, we know that He is omnipotent, we know that He restrains and restricts Satan’s actions, that Satan cannot do anything God does not allow or permit and we know that God’s promises stand even in the face of suffering. We also know that Christ is already victorious and is already reigning, even while we live in this broken world. The relationship between God and Satan is complex and interconnected, but despite this it is a relationship of control and dominance by our King and Savior over his creature the executioner, Satan.

A pastor once spoke of his crisis of faith over the unanswerable question, “why?” In the same night he had prayed for his God-fearing sister to be relieved of her cancer and was called to the bedside of a young boy to pray that he might wake from yet another drug overdose. His sister died and the young drug addict lived. The young man continued to live a life of sin and recklessness all while this pastor went about grieving his sister. This man had been a pastor for years, a good and faithful one at that, but moments like this still shook him to the core. Even when we know in our hearts and mind that God’s will is good, it is hard to see how and why when we face, heartbreak, death, and suffering. Why God saves some and not others from the grips of sin, death, and the devil is not for us to know, or even attempt to answer as much as we

may want to. Another example, a woman became pregnant at the same time as a friend of hers. Each night the woman would pray for the life and health of these unborn babies in her womb and in her friends. The prayerful woman experienced a miscarriage, and her friend went on to have a beautiful healthy baby boy. A theological examination and explanation of suffering and sin does not make the pain that this Pastor or the pain this woman experienced go away. It gives a framework for good spiritual care but does not answer the “why?” question or make the pain of a broken world disappear. We hear stories like these far too often and this thesis is in no way attempting to fix or discount the pain and hurt the Christian might experience in facing suffering, but it is a reminder that God’s hidden activity even in our suffering is a comfort to those who trust in Him. He is not asleep or unaware, but more than aware. He has allowed this trial to come to pass. We cling to His revealed grace, mercy, and promises as a comfort when His hiddenness becomes too much to bear. The knowledge of God’s omnipotence does not always heal the deep hurt and wounds we face in our suffering. God does not give an explanation. This thesis does not give an explanation either, but God does give us a promise. A promise that He is there, He is present in our lives, and all that happens in our world. He gives the promise that Christ is coming back and will make all things right again. He promises that the serpent’s head will be crushed once and for all. We know that God refines our faith through Satan’s temptation, that we are called to stand firm and cling to God’s mercy in the face of suffering and trials. and that God’s omnipotence and Christ’s victory puts Him in a position of total power over Satan. And that is enough. To look any further into the motives of God is to attempt to define and comprehend the hidden God which is not for the Christian to define or comprehend this side of the eschaton. But the promises and assured goodness of God in his word are most certainly enough to cling to in these moments and seasons of human suffering.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

A man commits a crime, and the king declares “off with his head!” The executioner drags the criminal up to the guillotine and swiftly chops off the man’s head. Who killed the criminal? Who is responsible for his death?¹ God works as the King and Satan as His executioner, and we as fallen sinful human beings play the role of the criminal. This analogy most certainly breaks down at points, but it is a helpful analogy nonetheless in that it places God in a position of total control over what Satan the executioner does. At first glance this picture may be somewhat uncomfortable, but when it is rightly understood it is a comfort to know that Satan cannot and does not have the ability to act out in whatever we he pleases. He is under God’s will and cannot act outside of it. The titles Luther gives Satan are useful tools in understanding and breaking down the relationship between God and Satan.

Satan is above all the adversary to God; he opposes Him as an Author of Sin in encouraging, instigating, and promoting humans to give in to their sinful flesh. He works as an Angel of Darkness to attack the Christian physically and mentally in order to convince them to reject God and His kingdom and become citizens of the realm of Satan. Satan disguises himself as an Angel of Light in the church; he twists God’s Word and prompts the believer to doubt the motives of God, to become the judge and authority over and above God’s word. He works to break the church apart by inciting division, conflict, and false teaching. These, by no means, are the only ways in which Satan works, but they are helpful ways to analyze the ways in which Satan typically works. Through these titles, what they reveal about how Satan works, and the evidence found in Scripture, we can infer to a degree what the relationship between God and

¹ Timothy Saleska, interview by author, St. Louis, March 6, 2020.

Satan looks like. Though there is still much we will not know until Jesus comes again, acknowledging what we can and do know about this relationship aids in our understanding of God's relationship to Satan in the world. This proper understanding gives the pastor or church worker solid footing when comforting those oppressed by Satan and suffering in their congregations. An improper understanding of this relationship leads to a weak view of God and gives the illusion that Satan is much more powerful than he is and leaves the Christian in distress in the face of spiritual attack.

The LCMS has arguably not done as well as it could in educating its pastors, church workers and its congregations about the way the relationship between God and Satan works itself out in a practical way, and because of that our practice of spiritual care has suffered. There is much to be learned from the way Luther understood the Devil to be "a part of everyday life," not a singular doctrine, but an entity involved in all aspects of the faith.² As has been established throughout this thesis, the relationship between God and Satan is complex and interconnected. A picture of God as King and Satan as His executioner portrays a God who, as He sees fit, permits and allows Satan's actions. This absolutely does not mean that God is evil. Satan is still evil, and God is still good; their interconnected relationship does not change that. To properly understand the relationship between God and Satan, their relationship must be understood as interconnected, yes, but we must also continue to emphasize that they are still opposing forces in the world. Spiritual care suffers when the pastor or church worker counsels in a way that gives Satan more power than he ought and does not uphold God's omnipotence and power over Satan in the midst of suffering. Pastors and church workers can often paint a picture of a weak or sleeping God, who is detached from what Satan does. This leaves a suffering congregant feeling hopeless and

² Murto, "Old Evil Foe," 109.

oppressed by a powerful Satan with no hope of relief from such a powerless God. Understanding God as King and Satan as executioner puts them in a more accurate position of power and authority. Our practice of spiritual care must emphasize that God is active, awake, and aware of what Satan is doing in the world and remains over him.

Human reason and logic do not like the idea of a God who dabbles and deals with Satan. Human reason and logic often cannot wrap the mind around a God who would not end all suffering immediately if He were able. The consequence of this thought then is that He is not able, and God's omnipotence is lost. If we lessen or weaken what it means for God to be omnipotent, he becomes no longer God, for this is his most defining attribute—as Oswald Bayer says.³ When God's place in relation to Satan is minimized, we make him out to be what humans desire Him to be and not what He is, that is, we make Him out to be a sleeping, uninvolved God instead of an omnipotent one. When this Creator-creature relationship is flipped, when God is made to be weak, and Satan is given too much power, we put Satan in the position of God.

All three of our titles for Satan, namely, the Author of Sin, the Angel of Darkness, and Satan disguised as an Angel of Light, boil down to one thing: a struggle for power. Being an omnipotent God, God has all the power, and yet Satan still strives for it day and night. As we have seen from the authors used throughout this thesis, most Western Christians give Satan and humanity more power than they ought and either deny completely, belittle, or do not fully acknowledge God's omnipotence for what it is. God is in control when Christians are led and tempted to sin. God is in control when Satan incites evil and chaos in the world. God is in control when Satan acts out in and against the church. The relationship between God and Satan is one where Satan is a creature of God, made evil by his separation from God, who nevertheless

³ Bayer, "God's Omnipotence," 88.

permits and allows his activity in the world until the Last Day. The battle for the Christian soul rages on. The Christian stands firm. Here they can do nothing other than to call upon the name of Jesus. This particular battle is between forces much bigger than Christians, yet despite the battle that still rages, we thank God that in Christ He is already victorious in the totality of the war.

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