

THE TWO ECONOMIES OF DIVINE GOVERNMENT: Satan and Christ in the New Testament and Early Christian Tradition

~: Louis Bouyer ~:

God has not left us entirely ignorant about his plan of divine government. He has revealed to us his economy of salvation, the mystery of which St. Paul speaks throughout his epistles. We can then dare to scrutinize the concrete plan of his government. We know two things. On the one hand, God has constituted Christ “to be the judge of the living and the dead.”¹ Christ himself attests that he possesses this power.² He is the veritable heir of David, the King³ to whom the Father has given “all judgment.”⁴ He is himself the Son of Man prophesied by Daniel, to whom are given “power, and glory, and a kingdom, and all peoples, tribes, and tongues shall serve him.”⁵ Even the angels are subject to him.⁶ “Therefore God has exalted him and bestowed upon him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend of those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue should profess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father.”⁷

But on the other hand, we see that Christ does not effectively acquire this power and does not as master dispose of his Kingdom until after having fought and obtained the victory. “Now is the judgment of the world; now will the prince of this world be cast out.”⁸ And after this fight, which the Church’s ancient liturgy represents as a duel of life and death,⁹ he declares once more in the Apocalypse: “I also have overcome and I have sat with my Father on his throne.”¹⁰ Who, then, is this adversary who had established himself or been constituted by God as king of the world, emperor of men, before Christ? And what is the meaning of this

1 Acts 10:42.

2 John 5:27.

3 Luke 1:32.

4 John 5:23.

5 Dan. 7:14.

6 Matt. 20:31; Heb. 1:14.

7 Phil. 2:9–11.

8 John 12:31.

9 See the sequence of the old Easter Mass, *Victimae Paschali Laudes* (“Praise the Paschal Victim”): “Sublime duel! Life and death are engaged in a terrific combat. The Author of Life, laid low by death, is living and he rules today.”

10 Rev. 3:21.

grandiose victory of Christ whose effects seem to us so little visible? To understand what God wishes to reveal to us of this design is to give an answer to this double question. Such is the object of the present article.

When we read St. Paul's epistles with the sole intention of finding in them the idea which he had formed of evil in the world, we are immediately struck with this discovery: for him the world prior to Christ is a haunted world, one might almost say *possessed*. This latter word however is not fully suitable, for "possession" implies a state in which responsibility no longer exists or has never existed. For Paul, however, the world has been placed in this state by its own fault and, since it cannot withdraw itself from this state, it freely sinks a little deeper each day, enlarging to that extent its original culpability.

Two expressions jointly designate the state of the world and the human race—*slavery* and *enmity*. Already in Romans and Galatians, we find Paul using the terms for slaves and slavery: *doulos*,¹¹ *douleia*,¹² *douleuein*,¹³ or *douloun*,¹⁴ which is much stronger. Likewise for enmity: *echthra*¹⁵ and *echthrē*.¹⁶ We discover *echthros* in the first chapter to the Corinthians.¹⁷ To enmity we must liken anger, which, according to a sequence of texts in Romans, weighs on man, and the world.¹⁸ The epistles of Paul's captivity at the end of his life,¹⁹ accentuate this impression. Philippians goes so far as to announce the incarnation of the Son of God by saying that he assumed the condition of a slave (*morphēn doulou*).²⁰ Likewise Ephesians and Colossians speak also of anger ready to crush the world,²¹ with Ephesians going so far as to say that "we were by nature children of wrath."

Still, what is this slavery which weighs on the world and man? What is this enmity of which they are the target, and of which they are at the same time accomplices, to the point that the divine anger thus descends on them? It seems that Paul pays little attention to explaining who this enemy is who has subjected us. Or rather he speaks to us of different enemies, different agents of oppression. But, across these different formulas, it remains visible that there is a unity in the

11 Rom. 6:16, 17, 19, 20.

12 Rom. 8:15–21; Gal. 4:24; 5:1.

13 Rom. 6:6; Gal. 4:8, 9, 25.

14 Gal. 4:3.

15 Rom. 8:7.

16 Rom. 5:10.

17 1 Cor. 15:20.

18 Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22.

19 Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians are traditionally considered to be the letters written while Paul was imprisoned. They are grouped together because they all mention Paul's current imprisonment. Compare Acts 28:17–20.

20 Phil. 2:7.

21 Col. 3:6; Eph. 5:6.

malevolent source, that a unique power holds the reins of these multiple powers. Confronted with the royalty of the Son of God, Colossians sets up a mysterious “dominion of darkness [*exsousia tou skotous*],”²² though Ephesians, preserving the plural, speaks of “the world rulers of this present darkness [*kosmokratores tou skotous toutou*].”²³

We see nevertheless enemies enumerated. Those designated most frequently would seem at first to be only abstractions. But the way in which Paul speaks of them as if speaking of persons does not permit us to reduce it to a simple figure of speech. If they are not themselves persons, we cannot escape the impression that they are at least masks covering a face hidden in the darkness which one in no way desires to see appear.

Sinister Pairs in Paul: Sin and Death, Flesh and the World

There is first the sinister pair found in Romans: sin and death (*hamartia* and *thanatos*). The first man permits sin to enter the world, and sin causes to enter with it death as an acolyte.²⁴ Then sin rules and death rules also.²⁵ According to another figure, death passes from one man to another, while sin dwells in us.²⁶ More precisely men become slaves of sin to the benefit of death.²⁷ Or, reversing the procedure, Paul will say that the wages paid by sin to its slaves is death,²⁸ just as to sin we ourselves have been sold.²⁹ Sin, moreover, like death, has a complete service (*diakonia*) in the world.³⁰ Finally, in order to deliver us, it will be necessary that sin be itself condemned³¹ and that death, which is the last enemy, be overcome.³²

Behind this pair of enemies another pair arises. Its traits are less pronounced, but then it is because it holds the reins from higher up. This new pair is formed of the flesh (*sarx*) and the world (*kosmos*). Let us observe immediately that it is very difficult to interpret exactly the meaning of these words “flesh” and “world” in the first Christian authors; we always run the risk of seeing substances where it is rather a question of tendencies. We are here at the point of insertion of the later metaphysical dualisms, which pretend to interpret Paul, and only make a travesty of his thought. One thing proves the travesty: Paul’s condemnation pronounced

22 Col. 1:13.

23 Eph. 6:12.

24 Rom. 5:12.

25 Rom. 5:14, 21; 6:12.

26 Rom. 5:12 and 7:17.

27 Rom. 5:21; 6:16.

28 Rom. 6:23.

29 Rom. 7:14.

30 Gal. 2:17; 2 Cor. 3:7.

31 Rom. 8:2–3.

32 1 Cor. 15:26.

on the flesh and the world is accompanied by an extraordinary optimism and appreciation of the body (*sōma*) and of creation (*ktisis*). Both were promised to glory³³ and both are actually victims of a state of things against which they constantly protest.³⁴

How shall we then define *sarx*? Let us say that it is an obscure but invincible complicity that the power of darkness finds in us, inherited in fact with our earthly nature and bound to the present state of it. The material, instrumental element of our complex being, instead of being found in the service of our mind (*nous*), which itself is basically in agreement with the inspirations of Spirit of God (*pneuma theou*), is revealed to be dominated by an external power. *Sarx*, then, thanks to this external power, acts not only upon us, but in us, introducing its enmity against God at the very sources of our action.

Thus Paul will say that the “mentality of the flesh [*to phronēma tēs sarkos*],” or if one prefers, the design that it has in mind and its dispositions for realizing it, is death.³⁵ This *phronēma* is then the enemy of God, in the sense that those who live in the flesh cannot please God.³⁶ There is a positive design which the flesh seems to carry inscribed in itself;³⁷ there is a desire of the flesh;³⁸ it has its wishes;³⁹ and finally its works⁴⁰ are accomplished by men. In one passage Paul goes so far as to use the paradoxical expression, *nous tēs sarkos*, literally “the mind of the flesh.”⁴¹ Moreover, he speaks of “children of the flesh.”⁴² These are expressions which push furthest the personification. But these instances, especially the last, where “children of the flesh” is made parallel with “the children of promise,” should not, it seems, be pressed too far.

The *kosmos*, when used in the same unfavorable sense as the “flesh,” designates the state that the created reality is found rather than this reality itself. When paired with the “flesh,” it was considered as in ourselves; by itself the “world” designates the state around us. It is especially in the first chapter to the Corinthians that this meaning is frequent. It gives the impression of a general organization of the forces of evil, superimposed and more or less identified with the organization of the universe which the word *kosmos* properly expresses. It is in this sense that

33 1 Cor. 16:43; Rom. 8:21.

34 There is a question here of the pains of childbirth, Rom. 8:22–26.; compare 1 Cor 16:53; 2 Cor 5:4; Phil. 3:21.

35 Rom. 8:6.

36 Rom. 8:6–8.

37 Rom. 13:14.

38 Rom. 5:16–17.

39 Eph. 2:3.

40 Gal. 5:19.

41 Col. 2:18; the Revised Standard Version (RSV) translates “the sensuous mind.”

42 Rom. 9:8.

Paul spoke of the wisdom of the world as folly in the eyes of God,⁴³ of the judgment which the world must undergo,⁴⁴ and that one is warned to be on guard against falling under its condemnation.⁴⁵

Moreover, it is necessary to compare the word *kosmos* with the world *aiōn* (“age,” “time”), particularly the expression *aiōn outos* (“the present age”) as opposed to *aiōn mellōn* (“the age to come”).⁴⁶ The term is always taken by St. Paul in the sense of the economy of the present world and always in a bad sense.⁴⁷ We must not conform ourselves to it;⁴⁸ its wisdom is vain;⁴⁹ Christ has been given in order to rescue us from it,⁵⁰ while up to that time we walked, Paul says, uniting the two terms in an untranslatable formula, *kata ton aiona tou kosmou toutou*, which the Revised Standard Version translates as “following the course of this world.”⁵¹

“The World Rulers of This Present Darkness”

It might be said that the world and the flesh are like instruments on which play the power or powers of darkness which are revealed in sin and death. But what really are these unknown enigmas which rule the *aiōn outos* which dwell in the flesh and the world? The letters of the captivity seem to offer us a clear picture of it. Ephesians speaks of “the world rulers of this present darkness” (we have already cited this singular expression). The same letter explains that “our conflict [*palē*] is not with flesh and blood,” a biblical expression to designate humanity, “but with principalities, powers, the cosmic rulers of the present darkness, the evil spiritual beings [*ta pneumatika tēs ponērias*] which are in the superior heavens.”⁵² Colossians presented the victory of Christ as a regular triumph over the principalities and powers, a triumph which despoiled them.⁵³

On the other hand, this last letter really seems to identify them with those entirely mysterious beings which it calls “the elemental spirits of the universe [*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*]”⁵⁴ and in regard to which we are dead with Christ. Galatians had already spoken of it. It is to these “elements” that we were subjected when we

43 1 Cor. 3:19; compare 1 Cor. 1:20.

44 1 Cor 6:2; compare Rom. 3:6.

45 1 Cor. 11:32.

46 See, for example Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:20 (*aiōn outos*); Eph. 1:21; Heb. 6:5 (*aiōn mellōni*) Compare Gal. 1:4: *aiōn enestōs* (“the present age”)

47 Gal. 1:4.

48 Rom. 12:2.

49 1 Cor. 1:20; 12:6–8.

50 Gal. 1:4.

51 Eph. 2:2.

52 Eph. 6:12.

53 Col. 2:14–15.

54 Col. 2:8, 20.

were under the Law, and it is to the slavery of “these feeble and poor elements” that we return in taking up the yoke of the Law from which Christ set us free.⁵⁵ Here it seems, we have found a solid dovetailing. The legal observances Paul refers to are observances concerning days, months, seasons, years; yet the slavery in question related to those “elements” who, by nature, are not gods but evidently are considered as such.⁵⁶ Either that means nothing, or it signifies a cult of astral powers (powers which reign over the course of time).

Putting these “elements” in relation to the Law may seem at first sight surprising. But it is necessary to think of this Jewish belief as it is taken up in the Acts of the Apostles and in Hebrews.⁵⁷ According to this belief, the angels served as intermediaries to give to Moses the Law at Mount Sinai. Paul accepts this explicitly in Galatians when he says that the Law was “delivered [*diatageis*] by the angels.”⁵⁸ We must likewise consider the full force of the reticences which Hebrews makes: “For he has not subjected to angels the world to come [*tan oikoumenan tan mellousan*],”⁵⁹ a fact which indicates that the present, on the contrary, was subjected to them.

From here on we hold, it seems, the whole chain. St. Paul represents to himself the actual world as mysteriously dependent upon the angels from the beginning down to the point that, until the revelation of the Law, they were mediators between God and man. Now it appears that at least a part of the angels must have broken away from God. In any case, a portion of the angels is clearly opposed to him. Setting up a screen between God and us, keeping up in us the illusion that they constitute a final reality—and so a divine reality—on which the world depends, these rulers of the elements or of the stars hold us in servitude. Through their deception, by the false wisdom which they teach to men, as well as by the seduction which they exercise over our sensible appetites, these elemental powers have succeeded, to our great harm, in leading us into their enmity. Thus the circle of Paulinian thought seems completed.

Now certain expressions completely singular in the early epistles are clarified—“the princes of this age [*aiōn outos*],” whom Paul says would not have crucified the Lord of glory if they had understood the folly of the act, which for them was catastrophic;⁶⁰ the “spirit of this world,” which is placed in opposition to the spirit of God and which should not be less personal than he himself;⁶¹ finally and especially, this most extraordinary expression of 2 Corinthians: “the god of

55 Gal. 4:3–9.

56 Gal. 4:8–10.

57 Acts 7:38, 53; Heb. 2:2.

58 Gal. 3:19.

59 Heb. 2:5.

60 1 Cor. 2:6–8.

61 1 Cor. 2:12.

this world (*o theos tous aiōnos toutou*) has blinded the thoughts of unbelievers.”⁶² In the context furnished by Galatians, Colossians, and Ephesians, the strange expression, “the god of this world,” takes on a meaning of frightful realism. At the same time, it cannot be doubted that this “god” is identical for Paul with the “devil,”⁶³ and with the “Satan,” the envious and tempter.⁶⁴

Although Paul insists that many evil powers surround us, it is undeniable that their group forms for him a coordinated system and that the unity of this systems finally leads us to the obscure dwelling of a malicious person. The devil there appears in a disquieting parallel with God. To the luminous hearthstone around which gravitates the creation of the children of light is opposed the darksome orbit in which is directed an obscure creation superposed on another. The presence of this dualism underlying the whole thought of Paul is not seriously disputable. It is really surprising that so many modern studies could have passed it by without even seeming to perceive it. This is the framework, however, in which is inscribed the whole conception of redemption. Thus, the redemption for Paul, intervenes exactly as a solution, not conceptual but real, to the problem of the Evil One. But before coming to that, we must be quite clear on the nature of this dualism.

Cosmic Dualism in Paul and its Meaning

One first remark is necessary: in his captivity epistles, Paul wavers in his consideration of the “powers.” I do not wish to address the extent to which Paul might have adopted the categories and the hierarchies in which the Gnostics took such delight and to which he was vigorously opposed.

The fact is that he cites diverse nomenclatures and seems not to be much concerned about them. For a long time this permitted exegetes to pass over these texts by saying that Paul took no account of the statements of his adversaries. But the truth is that he overturns the configuration of these mysterious universes that each Gnostic sect wants again to reshuffle with an imperturbable fecundity of imagination. But no one can doubt that for Paul these “powers,” whatever they may be, exist and have real power; indeed, for Paul, the whole reality of the work of Christ has been to take these powers away. To say, as some scholars have, that Paul is merely referring to what takes place purely in the mind of men who have been delivered from superstition by Christian doctrine, is not an exegesis but a whitewashing of texts.

But, once again, the difficulty is not rightly given there. It is rather that Paul, in describing the victory of Christ in despoiling the “powers,” seems to speak of what we call “the good angels” at the same time as of the bad angels. But he does so in a way that makes it difficult for us to distinguish clearly what is applied to

62 2 Cor. 4:4.

63 Eph. 4:27; 6:11.

64 1 Thess. 2:18; 2 Thess. 2:9; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 5:5, 7; 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14; 12:7.

some from what is applied to all. Sometimes scholars have tried to explain this as if the powers were basically amoral, neither good nor bad, in the manner of the good among “the demons” of the Greek religions. This explanation is an arbitrary simplification. It supposes in Paul a conception which everywhere else appears as something foreign to Christian thought. In addition, there are some texts, such as those concerning the devil or Satan, in which Paul undeniably considers evil powers and others in which he has in view powers that are basically good, such as the angels that he says will accompany Christ in his final revelation, or the angel of light precisely opposed to Satan.⁶⁵

Thus Paul appears to mix the lot and the activity of the good angels with the lot and the activity of the bad. This seems to give to the bad angels a certain access to the presence of God. We recall the singular moral of the prologue and the epilogue of Job. There, Satan appears as an angel who has been granted access to the divine court in which the God does not disdain to argue with him. There remains some of this in Paul’s writings. For instance, in his intimate confession in 2 Corinthians, Paul seems to believe that God himself sent to Paul, if not Satan, an angel of Satan to buffet him.⁶⁶ In 1 Corinthians, the same Satan appears in a most curious role—as a kind of executioner of high commissions to whom people are delivered when condemned in order to receive a salutary punishment: “for the destruction of the flesh, in order that his *pneuma* [spirit] may be saved on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶⁷

Divine Wrath and Divine Law

The strangeness recognizes however one more degree, leading us to the confines of the paradoxical. But it is here perhaps that the solution will be discovered, in a stepping back from the point of view in order to give a new dimension to all perspectives. We tried above to enumerate the enemies which held us, even in spite of ourselves, in militant slavery against God. But we did not name them all. There is still one which we merely glanced at, that is, wrath (*orgēs*). In 1 Thessalonians, Paul says that Jesus “has delivered us from the wrath to come.”⁶⁸ Likewise, in Romans he says that “we shall be saved through him from wrath.”⁶⁹ In Ephesians, speaking of the wrath which will come,⁷⁰ he says that “we were by nature children of wrath,⁷¹ which he explicitly calls “the wrath of God.”⁷² In Romans, he says that “the wrath

65 2 Thess. 1:7; 2 Cor. 11:14.

66 2 Cor. 13:7.

67 1 Cor. 5:5.

68 1 Thess. 1:10; compare 1 Thess. 2:16.

69 Rom. 5:9.

70 Eph. 5:6.

71 Eph. 2:3.

72 Eph. 5:6.

of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness.”⁷³ Here God himself seems to take a place among the enemies of man!

It is true that with wrath, if there were nothing else, one might still be able to get out of the difficulty by the usual escape: figurative expression, oratorical style. But there is a last enemy whose apparition rolls back all camouflage, “the Law of God.” For it is not to be doubted that Paul, especially but not exclusively in Romans, presents the divine Law as the great enemy par excellence that Christ overcame. Sensing that he is going to shake the most deeply rooted convictions of his listeners, Paul anticipates their objections. “The Law indeed is holy, the commandments holy and just and good.”⁷⁴ But he does not deny the possibility of withdrawing something of what he has said:

For the Law works wrath; for where there is no law, neither is there transgression.⁷⁵

Now the Law intervened that the offense might abound.⁷⁶

For without the Law sin was dead. Once upon a time I was living without the Law, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.⁷⁷

Therefore, my brethren, you also, have been made to die to the Law ... the sinful passions [*ta pathēmata tōn hamartiōn*] which were aroused by the Law. ... But now we have been set free from the Law having died to that by which we were held down, so that we may serve in a new spirit and not according to the outworn letter.⁷⁸

In Galatians, after having lengthily affirmed these impotencies of the Law, Paul concludes that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law,”⁷⁹ and that “if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.”⁸⁰ Ephesians says the final word: “In his [Christ’s] flesh the Law of commandments expressed in decrees [*ton nomon ton entolon en dogmasi*] he has made void.”⁸¹

73 Rom. 1:18.

74 Rom. 7:12.

75 Rom. 4:15.

76 Rom. 5:21.

77 Rom. 7:8–10.

78 Rom. 7:4–6.

79 Gal. 3:13; compare Gal. 4:6.

80 Gal. 5:18.

81 Eph. 2:14–15.

Let us take up again this sequence of disconcerting statements. In the triumph of Christ, the good angels, in certain respects, appear confused and dispossessed along with the evil. Inversely, in the ancient economy which, down to the last days, subsists side by side with that restored by Christ, the devil sometimes appeared as an agent of the designs of God. Finally, Christ seems to deliver us from the divine wrath, that is, the divine Law, as much as from the satanic malice. How resolve these apparent contradictions?

The Two Economies in Paul

First we must reply that the two economies definitively substitute for the metaphysical dualism which we might have been tempted to place behind Paul's system, what I would call a historical dualism. There are two successive economies. The one was established on the subordination of the physical world to the "powers" created by God, and more particularly, to the chief, "the prince of this world." This first economy failed through the prevarication of its chief, pulling down with him, if not the whole hierarchy at whose summit he was, at least a considerable portion of it. Still it subsists. This subsistence is provisional, but so long as it endures, the *stoicheia tou kosmou toutou* ("the elemental powers of this world") and the *kosmokratores* ("world rulers") preserves them together with their function, in whatever way they might fulfill it, and their authority of divine origin. It is true that they abuse it in this sense: that they draw toward themselves the worship of inferior creatures, a worship of which they should be only the ministers in regard to God. But it is not less true that they deceive themselves about it and that at the height of their malice they only serve, unwittingly, the divine plans.

This paradoxical situation appears in the blindness of the "princes of this world," who have crucified the Lord of glory, but who would have no doubt protected themselves from it if they had known the import of what they were doing.⁸² In fact, by carrying the perversion of the economy which had been confided to them to its highest pitch, they broke its power. From then on, a new economy could take its place, in which the new humanity, the humanity of Christ, at once God and man, could rule in the name of God.

In this perspective, everything is explained. The good angels underwent the counterblows of the defection and eviction of Satan—not personally, but as members of a spiritual organism disorganized in its head and consequently in the whole of its structure. They will indeed collaborate in the new economies. They will even have a place of honor, but they will no longer be princes. They will enter into it with the rank of auxiliaries of a new prince, who is the second Adam, the God-man. In this sense, they will be found subordinated to the world of which they were, till that time, the rulers, since the new humanity—one with its chief, Christ, and one with a unity to which they cannot aspire—will participate in his sovereignty.

82 1 Cor. 2:8.

It is on this ground that Paul can say: "Do you know that we shall judge angels?"⁸³ And this is exactly the situation that he describes as our own in Galatians with respect to the Law established through the angels. We have been under the Law, and therefore subject to angels, as an heir is subject to his regent. As long as the heir has not reached his majority, the regent is his master. But when the heir attains his majority, the regent becomes what he always was, basically: a simple servant—the right word is a slave—in the house in which the heir is master by hereditary right.⁸⁴

In a reciprocal fashion, as long as the economy of Christ has not supplanted the first economy, this first economy will persist within the relations which constitute its framework. Satan remains the prince of this world; in his malice, he is the agent of justifying wrath by which God reaches through Satan all those who were united with him in revolt. It follows that this wrath will fulfill the aims of divine love. For the devil, in searching to extend his power over Christ, the divine champion clothed with humanity in order to ruin the satanic kingdom, will exhaust the power that was permitted to him. Having tested Christ through the devil, the divine wrath reveals the infinite love that it encompasses. Refracted into anger by sin, this love becomes once more itself as soon as it touches Christ, the holy and the just one whom God has made sin for us in order that we might become justice in him.⁸⁵ Thus Satan brings about his own downfall, whether it be that he damns with himself those who are definitively one with him in his revolt, or whether in crucifying Christ, he tears up the schedule according to which the world belonged to him.⁸⁶ This schedule was nothing but the Law, good in that it expresses the divine will of justice, but the enemy of man nevertheless because it renders him a victim of Satan's punishment from the moment man has consented to his rebellion. This schedule is wiped out by Christ on the cross, because on the cross can be seen the absurdity into which the first economy, good as it was in principle, has fallen, as a consequence of the perversion of the powers which ruled it. This perversion, in fact, reached its perfection in the contact with the supreme initiative of divine love.

Thus it appears that the diabolical tendency is always an inhibition. It holds on to the first stage of the divine initiatives. It refuses to follow its developments. It retains what it has. But it is surpassed and as it were drowned by the mounting wave of divine love. Philippians hints at this contrast between the two successive princes of the world: he who wanted to seize equality with God as if by theft is cast out; he who emptied himself in the generosity of his love was raised above every created power.⁸⁷

83 1 Cor. 6:3.

84 Compare Gal. 3:23–24.

85 2 Cor. 5:21.

86 Col. 2:14.

87 Phil. 2:5–12.

From all this it follows that the dualism we have identified in Paul, far from diminishing God, far from leaving him only half of the universe, ultimately mounts up to God by two branches. God is not divided, rather he wishes for his creatures both liberty and this free response to the love which he created—"faith" in the Pauline sense. The first gift is the condition of the second. But if one stops short, he places an obstacle to the love of the Creator. The possibility of conflict that results appears as the necessary condition of the superior unity toward which the divine love, which creates liberty in the first place, tends.

Thus becomes a real conflict whose possibility appears as the necessary condition of this superior unity toward which the love which creates liberty tends. However, to suppose this reading is already to approach questions which are not those of Paul.

The New Adam and the Binding of the Strong Man

A trait common to the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke is that the ministry of Christ is opened by his baptism in the Jordan. For all three, the essence of this event is the descent of the divine Spirit upon Jesus; and all agree that the Spirit's first movement is to lead Jesus into the desert, where he will meet the devil and overcome his temptations.⁸⁸ The historians of the first century, not seeing in the gospels anything but a mine of information for the biography of Jesus passed over this episode as over some trifle without consequence. Merely from the literary point of view their error is grave. Since the account of the temptation of Adam was found at the beginning of Genesis, we cannot doubt that Christ's temptation was noted at the beginning of the Gospel for the purpose of drawing this parallel. In this, evangelical history is represented to us as a new beginning of Adamic history, that is to say, of the history of man. In this respect, Milton has seen more clearly than many of the modern exegetes in that he encloses his biblical poem between these two episodes of "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained."

The parallelism is related to the notion of Christ as the "Second Adam," a New Testament theme that exegesis is still far from having accorded the importance it deserves, particularly in the writings of Paul. It even seems that we must restore to this notion that of "the Son of man," found in the gospels as a designation for Jesus.⁸⁹ The comparison between Adam and Christ in the scene of the temptation, with the background of Satan as the instigator of pride and greed, was certainly familiar to early catechists. We will meet it again as the theme behind Paul's meditation on the incarnation in Philippians, which we cited above. It is notable that scholars are generally agreed to see in this chapter, not a speculation

88 Mark 1:12.

89 Compare Acts 7:56.

proper to the apostle, but a reference to a hymn known to the Philippians, and perhaps a citation of the very text of this hymn.

In the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the temptation account derives its value, not only from its place at the beginning, but from its relation with baptism and especially with the descent of the Spirit. One has the impression that this is the reason the Spirit descended on Jesus—in order to make him confront the devil. This impression is strongly confirmed by the ensemble of accounts which follow. The place accorded by the synoptics to the expulsion of the demons does not need to be underlined. It is clear that for the synoptics, these exorcisms, along with his healings, are the typical work of Jesus. That some extraordinary diabolical manifestations accompanied the apparition of Jesus in this world and that he reduced them to nothingness, is not for the evangelists an accessory detail; it is their basic idea. To measure the importance they attribute to Jesus' exorcisms, we have only to consider the terms in which the evangelists characterize the vocation of the Twelve. As Mark writes: "And he appointed twelve that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach ... and drive out devils."⁹⁰

When it was foreseen that Herod had designs on his life, Jesus himself says in Luke: "Go and say to that fox: Behold, I cast out devils and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am to end my course."⁹¹ But in his teaching, such as we can trace it out in the gospels, one large discourse is particularly significant. Matthew and Luke report it in nearly the same terms.⁹² Some Jews (Pharisees, according to Matthew) say that it is by Beelzebub, the prince of devils, that Jesus drives out devils. Jesus is presents them with a vigorous protest. Three elements are involved: the claim that he drives out devils by the Spirit of God, the parable of the strong man bound and robbed by a stronger one, and finally, the declaration on the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit.

The first assertion confirms our own: the specific work of the divine Spirit, accomplished in this world by Christ, is to cast out the evil spirit. Moreover, the terms in which both Matthew and Luke formulate this work throws light on the central notion of the synoptic gospels—the Kingdom of God. Jesus affirms that what we really see in his work is the kingdom of Satan pulled down. In that, he says, the Kingdom of God has come upon us. In this teaching we are referred back to the great theme of the two economies beneath which we saw that the whole thought of St. Paul lies. The Kingdom of God which comes in the person of the Son of Man is essentially a Kingdom which must ruin that of Satan, consolidated

⁹⁰ Mark 3:14–15; compare Matt. 10:18 and Luke 9:1.

⁹¹ Luke 13:32.

⁹² Matt. 21:22–32; Luke 11:14–23; compare Mark 3:23.

in this world through the weakness of the old Adam. This is exactly what the parable of the strong man tells us. The strong man lived securely in his fortress. But when a stronger comes along, he seizes the arms of the former and, having robbed him, throws him out and installs himself in his place. The parable, applied in this context to the work of Christ, is clear.

We are perhaps now in a position to understand the gravity of the sin against the Holy Spirit. This sin consists in refusing to recognize, in the works of the Son, the triumph of the divine Spirit over the evil spirit. But as soon as this refusal is consummated every escape is closed. Because the means that would permit a new beginning from the unhappy experience of the first man, Adam, were not recognized, the Kingdom of God has come in vain. We did not seize the opportunity of escaping from slavery and enmity. Henceforth we are sunk. This is to say: the whole work of Christ is ordered to the expulsion of Satan. If it was not, there would be no sense in the evangelists' presenting as the sole unforgivable sin the culpable blindness which refuses to recognize in Christ one Spirit driving out another. Nothing throws more light on the mission of Jesus as it is presented in the synoptic gospels.

If we want to point out everything in the Gospel that refers to the opposition of the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, it would be necessary to cite the parable of the wheat and the tares.⁹³ It gives us the historical perspective of a simultaneous development and inseparable mixture of two kingdoms on earth from the time of Christ. Only the final judgment, unleashed by Christ himself, will definitely separate the two kingdoms, crushing the one and exalting the other.

The Cosmic Crisis of Light and Darkness

In a general way, the Gospel and letters attributed to St. John deserve a development not less extended than that which we gave to the letters of Paul. At first sight, John's writings seem infinitely quieting, with their calm contemplation of grand ideas which are so characteristic of them: light, truth, glory. But although these concepts are developed by John in a more lyrical than dialectical manner, closer study reveals a background of oppositions at least as pronounced as those in Paul. Indeed, every development in the fourth gospel can rightly be described as part of a cosmic drama in which light comes to confront darkness. In the last analysis, the light will dissipate the darkness—but at the price of a mortal combat.

Light is proper to God and to Christ. "I am the light of the world," our Lord declared in the Gospel. "He who follows me does not walk in the darkness."⁹⁴ Let us note that he speaks these words on the porches of the Temple, on the last day

93 Matt. 13:24–30.

94 John 8:12.

of the Feast of Tabernacles, that is to say, when the people came to decorate with great torches illuminating the entire holy city, Jerusalem. Likewise, the first letter of John says: "And the message which we have heard from him and announce to you is this: that God is light, and in him is no darkness."⁹⁵

Still darkness does exist and it fills the world. The prologue of the Gospel will describe the whole work of Christ in this simple phrase: "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness grasped it not."⁹⁶ This translation indicates already in darkness more than the word would seem to contain—that is, a positive hostility. In the other context to which I have just referred, the light-darkness opposition is similarly emphasized by Jesus: "I am come a light into the world that whosoever believes in me may not remain in darkness."⁹⁷

The meaning that John puts into this expression: "to remain in darkness" is explained by a phrase in his first epistle: "He who hates his brother is in the darkness ... and he does not know whither he goes, because the darkness has blinded his eyes."⁹⁸ Let us remark once more the aggressive note of these latter words. The hostility everywhere recurrent is found in an explicit way in an important passage of the Gospel:

Now this is the judgment [*krisis*]: the light has come into the world, yet men have loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light that his deeds may not be exposed [*elegchthē*]. But he who does the truth, comes to the light that his deeds may be made manifest, for they have been performed in God.⁹⁹

The word translated above as "judgment," *krisis* in the Greek, would be almost better translated by our word "crisis." A final remark on the opposition is given us in the first chapter, and it announces what will be the issue of it: "The darkness has passed away, and the true light is now shining."¹⁰⁰

Again, this antithesis of light versus darkness lends its framework and its foundation to the whole tableau of the life of Christ proper to St. John—especially

95 1 John 1:5.

96 John 1:5.

97 John 12:46.

98 1 John 9:2–11.

99 Joh 3:19–21.

100 1 John 2:8.

in the outbreak between Jesus and the “Jews” over the cure of the man born blind.¹⁰¹ We repeat the words pronounced by Jesus at the height of this controversy:

If God were your Father, you would surely love me. For from God I came forth and have come; for neither have I come of myself, but he sent me. Why do you not understand my speech? Because you cannot listen to my word. The father from whom you are is the devil, and the desires of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has not stood in truth because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie he speaks from his very nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth you do not believe me. Which of you can convict me of sin? If I speak the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear is that you are not of God.¹⁰²

Thus the contrast defined is precisely that of light and darkness—although the word itself is not once found there. This whole text turns on the concept of truth, and the truth in John is nothing else but the reality of God—light, known in love and opposed to the foggy illusions of the world.¹⁰³ John proceeds to show us that this reality given to darkness depend upon the devil. Indeed, the dualism can even seem crude. Jesus goes so far as to say, “You cannot listen to my word.” In the New Testament, there is certainly no other writings that give such an impression of an irremediable antagonism.

To give to the preceding observations their full value, it would be necessary to compare them with the imagery of the Apocalypse. The importance of the luminous metaphors, and particularly of dazzling whiteness (corresponding to the word *lampros*),¹⁰⁴ but this brilliance always originates on the background of a particularly somber storm. Finally, in the description of the celestial Jerusalem in which there will no longer be night, the light prevails, but only at the end of a long and titanic battle with the powers of darkness.

The word *kosmos* (“the world”) occurs in the Johannine writings with astonishing frequency, and it is very striking that it is everywhere taken in a bad sense, save for a few exceptions, entirely emphatic however: whether it be the famous text: “God so loved the world,”¹⁰⁵ or in the designation of Christ by the title: “Savior of

¹⁰¹ See John 7–10.

¹⁰² John 8:42–47.

¹⁰³ Compare John 3:21, cited above.

¹⁰⁴ Compare for *lampros*, Rev. 15:6; 18:14; 22:1, 16.

¹⁰⁵ John 8:16.

the world.”¹⁰⁶ We have seen that in Paul, the two-fold enemies of man are made up of the “flesh” (*sarx*) and the “world,” but the “flesh” in particular receives Paul’s attention. The opposite is true of John. In his writings it can even be said that the “flesh” takes on too pale a color to remain a veritable enemy.¹⁰⁷

The opposition in John is henceforth manifested no longer *within* man, but *outside* of him. Consider these affirmations of John: The world did not comprehend the light, although the light was made present to the world and although the world was made by it. The world cannot receive the Spirit of truth. The peace which Christ gives is not that of the world. The world hates Christ and his disciples because they are not of this world, nor is Christ himself. Christ convicts the world of sin. The joy of the world, like its peace, is opposed to that which Christ gives. Christ has overcome the world. Christ does not pray for the world, as he expressly declared. The world did not recognize God. Finally, Jesus will say to Pilate that his kingdom is not of this world.¹⁰⁸

This line of thinking continues in the Johannine letters: “Do not love the world or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him”; “the world with its lust is passing away.” False prophets will come into the world in which the spirit of anti-Christ has already come, and it is why the world listens to them. But, “all that is born of God overcomes the world” and “the victory [*nikē*] that overcomes the world, our faith.” Finally, the word which expresses everything: “the whole world is in the power of the evil one.”¹⁰⁹

Still, from the first words of the gospel’s prologue, we easily see that the *kosmos* in John, no more than the *sarx* in St. Paul, is not bad by nature; indeed, the *kosmos* is the work of light. Neither has light been sent into the world to judge it (and understood between the lines, to condemn it), but to *save* it¹¹⁰ because of the great love which God has for the world—to the point of sacrificing his only begotten Son for it.¹¹¹ It is not, then, surprising that one title of Jesus characteristic of John should be “Savior of the world.”¹¹² This is clarified when Jesus himself, at the approach of his passion, explains: “Now is the judgment of the world; now will the prince of this world [*archōn tou kosmou toutou*] be cast out.”¹¹³ The expression of the gospel is to be compared with one we read in 1 John that apparently refers to

106 1 John 4:14.

107 Compare, for instance, John 3:6; 6:35.

108 John 1:10; 14:17–27; 15:18–19; compare John 17:14–16; 16:8, 20, 39; 17:9, 25; 18:36.

109 1 John 2:15, 17; 4:3–5; 5:4, 19.

110 John 3:17.

111 John 3:16; compare John 12:46.

112 John 4:42; 1 John 4:14.

113 John 12:31; compare John 14:30.

the Holy Spirit: "Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world."¹¹⁴ With these two texts, we are brought back exactly to the ideas suggested in the synoptic gospels by the parable of the strong man.

We shall not push further this inventory of the New Testament. Its whole doctrine of evil, its whole solution of the problem of evil, can be put in one phrase from Hebrews which runs as a dominant recurring theme through the patristic tradition.

Because children [that is, men] have blood and flesh in common, so he [Christ] in like manner has shared in these; that through death he might destroy him who had empire over death, that is, the devil; and might deliver them, who throughout their life were kept in servitude by the fear of death.¹¹⁵

The Meaning of Death in the Church Fathers

It is quite certain that the reflections of the Church Fathers are merely developments of scriptural themes. Thus, rather than focus on a series of monographs by individual Fathers, it will be more interesting to follow in the Fathers the development of certain themes, paying attention to the mold that these themes are made to pass. We shall thus examine, each in its turn, the themes of *death*; *sin*—or, more precisely, *idolatry*, the concrete sin which is for the Fathers the sin *par excellence*; and *diabolical captivity*, that is, the way in which we are bound by it and the way in which we and the world with us will escape it.

The theme of *death* in the Fathers has often been misunderstood by scholars because they absolutely misunderstand the meaning of death in the early Christian mind, seeing in the patristic use of the term nothing more than what it means for modern Christians. Today, death appears to Christians first as a purely physical phenomenon; the spiritual being is not touched by it, passing away somewhat like a spirit over a wall. Death has become in modern Christian spirituality what it was in Plato's dialogue *Phaedo*—the pure and simple deliverance of the soul.¹¹⁶ Under these conditions, it is not surprising the historians, finding in the Fathers an idea entirely contrary—that it is from death itself that we must be delivered—infer from it a radical degradation of the idea of salvation. There will no longer be question of a physical or bodily redemption. That is one of the most beautiful

¹¹⁴ 1 John 4:4.

¹¹⁵ Heb. 2:14.

¹¹⁶ I could cite manuals destined for those whom pious writers will call the "afflicted" or even "souls in mourning," and who do not seem to consider any other Christian consolation than the identification of death with deliverance.

contradictions produced by the unconscious tracing off of modern conceptions from the ancient ones.

In order to get rid of this misunderstanding we must try to acquire new eyes for the representations that the Fathers communicate to us. There is a unity of man which, going back to the purest biblical tradition, is opposed in them, almost brutally, to the dichotomies of Hellenistic spiritualism. And behind this unity of the person, there is a basic optimism, entirely drawn from the idea, itself wholly biblical, of creation. *Gloria Dei vivens Homo* ("The glory of God is man fully alive")—the expression of St. Irenaeus of Lyons, often and rightly cited, dissipates the atmosphere of the old pun *sōma*–*sōma* (body equals tomb). It dissipates it there even where the resumption of an intellectual traditions transmits this expression. For it is not to matters of detail that it is necessary to attend in a truly historic interpretation, but to the strong lines according to which this material will be ordered or re-ordered.

For the Fathers, Christian hope is constantly the hope of the resurrection. That alone evidently implies that death for them is basically bad. Their general agreement on this point is the more striking in that they seem often close to admitting that an immortality, even for the soul alone, is in no way natural to man. But whatever may be the truth on this point, to which we shall return, the presence of death in a world of which the author is the God of Christian revelation, is a scandal for them. There is no explanation which can reconcile them with this fact; the only solution is its disappearance.

Irenaeus writes:

Man had been created by God in order that he might have life. If therefore having lost life, having been wounded by the serpent, he was not to return to life, but to be abandoned to death, God would have been deficient and the malice of the serpent would have prevailed over the divine will.¹¹⁷

When therefore the question is raised: "Why did God become man?" Irenaeus has only one answer: "That he might indeed kill sin, that he might vanquish death and restore man to life."¹¹⁸ The same thing is found in his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*: "The Word of God has been made flesh in order to destroy death and to lead man back to life, for we were attached to and bound by sin, we were born in sin and we lived under the domination of death."¹¹⁹

117 Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, Bk. 3, Chap. 23, 1; in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 455.[^]p

118 Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, Bk. 3, Chap. 18, 7; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:448.

119 Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 37; in *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. and

That this vitalism in no way implies a materialistic conception of religion and that it does not at all lower the redemption to a salvation, especially or even principally physical, is what the texts which we have just cited would indicate, by the close relation in which they place death and sin. But that is what appears in a serene clarity as soon as one examines a bit more closely what Irenaeus understands by "life." It is not enough to say that for him it is sin that always entails death. According to the expression of a good historian of his thought, sin is for him *ein bestandteil des todes* ("an element of death").¹²⁰ In order to take account of it, it is enough to attend to the admirable definition which Irenaeus himself has given us of life and of death, such as he understands them.

Communion with God is life and light and the enjoyment of the goods which are near him. But on those who fundamentally rebel against God, he causes a separation to take place between them and him; and the separation from God is death.¹²¹

All this is more profoundly elucidated by another Greek Father, often reproached by Irenaeus because of his insistence on redemption as deliverance from death. I refer to St. Athanasius, and specifically his treatise *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*. His conception of death flows from what he calls the *phthora*, corruption. The study of what he understands by *phthora* ("ruin," "destruction," "corruption") is quite revealing.¹²²

The *phthora*, considered as a tendency towards dissolution into non-being naturally invincible in every created being if God does not intervene, reveals an essentially religious view of universal becoming. It means that in the world, as God has willed it, there is no real possibility of an arrest for a being limited to itself. Either this being will be immortalized in its reunion with God, the source of all being, who calls the being to himself, or, by refusing to follow this vocation, it will deliver itself to nothingness.

Death is therefore inevitable for a being which is not united to God; but in this sense the being becomes itself like the final expression of disobedience to the

intro. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1997), 64.

120 Nathanael Bonwetsch, *Die Theologie des Irenäus* [The Theology of Irenaeus], *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1925), 80.[^]p

121 Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, Bk. 5, Chap. 27, 2; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:556.

122 We observe in Athanasius perhaps even better a phenomenon pointed out by Henri Marrou in St. Augustine. I refer to the complete disintegration of the idea of permanent substances. But we must be on our guard not to see there, at least not in Athanasius' case, merely a simple phenomenon of decadent philosophy. Compare Henri Irénée Marrou, *The Resurrection and Saint Augustine's Theology of Human Values*, trans. Maria Consolata (Villanova, PA: Villanova University, 1966).

designs of God. This is why death will be, literally, according to the expression of Paul, not only the enemy of God, but also the supreme enemy. We will not then be surprised to find in Athanasius an astonishing picture of the defeat of death as the final act of redemption. Athanasius shows us how, in their own field, the Fathers are able to take up all sorts of Hellenistic expressions of death as deliverance. In fact, these expressions will be completely reversed in the Fathers, because they will be referred to a divine stratagem, thanks to which Christ, “through death has conquered death,” as expressed in a Byzantine figure of speech. We shall return to this.

Idolatry and Civil Religion

For the present, we note in all this that the patristic notion of death as an enemy postulates a certain conception of sin. To grasp the Fathers’ understanding, it is best to study what for them was “the sin,” *par excellence*—idolatry. It is supremely important to note that the ancients, by *idolatry* (*eidōlōlatría*), mean something quite different from what we do. When a modern Christian speaks of “false gods,” that expression in his mouth means gods who do not exist. When an ancient writer employed this expression, he understands on the contrary, gods whose principle offense was to exist. The idea according to which paganism with its polytheism and its numberless superstitious practices would have been only a vast illusion, is an idea which never entered the ancient mind. Certain derogatory expressions deceive us and make us place, wrongly, a modern rationalism in patristic refutations of polytheism.

Already in our exegesis of Paul, we run the risk of permitting ourselves to be deceived, although we may have immediately what would be necessary to undeceive ourselves. Paul says to the Corinthians:

We know there is no such thing as an idol in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are what are called “gods,” whether in heaven or on earth (for indeed there are many gods and many lords); yet for us there is only one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him.¹²³

The ambiguity of these expressions, deceiving for some, is cleared up when he adds a little later:

What then do I say? That what is sacrificed to idols is anything?
Or that an idol is anything? No. But I say that what the Gentiles

123 1 Cor. 8:4–6.

sacrifice, “they sacrifice to devils and not to God”: and I would not have you become associates of devils.¹²⁴

This position will remain that of the whole patristic period. The Fathers will be led to systematize it through the necessity of sustaining the irreducible opposition, up to and including martyrdom of the first Christians rather than participate in idolatrous practices in appearances most harmless. When we go into detail, modern writers find it difficult to justify the dispositions of early Church councils that forbid Christians to accept civil offices—even those in which they would have occupied an incomparable position of influence—simply because they could not fulfill their duties without performing some small rite that the highest pagan pontiffs at that time were ready to declare as of no real significance. But quite justly the Christian apologists did not regard participation in such rites as insignificant.¹²⁵ This system of ritual, which imprisoned the whole of ancient life, was for them only the shadow thrown by a system of diabolical influences quite authentic. To give in, even on one point, to this encroaching idolatry, would have been to commit the sin the least pardonable, because it would have been to accept anew the basic error in all sin—namely, for the free and conscious creature to stop short, to place itself at enmity to God, an adhesion to self which is in itself the whole principle of slavery in which man found himself before Christ.

Let anyone read for example the treatise *Against the Pagans*, by Athanasius or, a century later, any apology, but in particular those of St. Justin or Tertullian, and he will easily discern the same fundamental intellectual reflexes. Behind all the beauty, the grandeur, the justice of this world, there is a group of spiritual powers, relatively autonomous, although all dependent on God for their universal state as creatures. But it is found that these powers have wanted to arrogate to themselves the glory of the goods of which they were the guardians. The feeble mind of man permitted itself to be seduced by them to the point of stopping at these goods instead of mounting up by them to God. This process describes indifferently sin under its most diverse forms of idolatry. Idolatry, thus conceived, is only sin under a fully explicit form.

In idolatrous forms of worship there is not then merely a fictitious exchange. Men there receive from bad angels, material, substantial favors corresponding to the natural powers that are under the bad angels’ control, according to the first

124 1 Cor. 10:19–20.

125 Athanasius, *Against the Pagans*, 7; in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 7; Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Chap. 66, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Chap. 70; in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:185, 233–234; Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics*, Chap. 40, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:262–263.

plan of creation. But in return for these favors, the “false gods” attach them to themselves. They take from them the counterfeit divine *doxa* (“glory”) to which they aspired when they seceded. And what is more, they acquired even in the eyes of God, if not rights properly speaking over human beings, at least a real and objective title to subject them, since the latter are themselves condemned in the sight of God for preferring communion with the devils to the celestial communion.

This leads us to our final theme: that of captivity into which souls fell and the whole human universe with them.

The “Fall” and the Captivity of Man

It seems that modern accounts of the original fall are all burdened with a latent contradiction. It is understood that the state from which man fell was a state of divine friendship, of adoptive but real filiation, absolutely gratuitous—a pure gift of God which man had no right to demand. As a consequence, fallen man is, strictly speaking, a man fallen back to his own proper level, reduced to the sole resources of his nature. But this nature itself is a gift of God. How then could one say it became bad, simply because it was left to itself? How even could it be said to have fallen, when in reality it has simply been placed back on its own proper level, instead of remaining elevated above itself? In fact, modern theologians approaching the problem of the fall of man as a problem of two terms, God and man, have been caught in this dilemma: either to consider the nature of man as bad in itself, basically bad from its creation, which is Manichaeism, or to deny the reality of the fall, which would be Pelagianism.

For the Fathers the question was raised quite otherwise because there was a third term: the devil. Fallen human nature was not for them a human nature simply deprived of the gratuitous gifts of God and returning to its own resources, but a human become captive of the devil. The fall, in their eyes, did not consist primarily in man’s detaching himself from God in order to become attached to himself, but to be attached to the devil rather than to God. Thus without any contradiction they could retain the idea of human nature as basically good and, remaining so, even though fallen into a state from which it could not in any way free itself by its own powers. In effect, by detaching itself from God, man did not at all become his own master, but rather a slave of the devil. This is why, for a St. Augustine, the fall is in no sense an act of freedom, in the strict sense of the word. It is rather a failure to use freedom rightly, whence slavery has naturally resulted. Freedom is not something which we acquire by detaching ourselves from God. It is God who will give it to us in delivering us from the devil. In a word, the fall for man is to be subjected to the power of one stronger than himself, to one who will not

permit him to escape and return to the light unless he meets someone "stronger," who in his turn can be no other than God himself.

This explains the whole conception not only of the fall, but of the redemption. This conception we find formulated quite clearly in the accounts of one of the texts of Irenaeus that I cited above:

Man had been created by God in order that he might have life. If therefore, having lost life and having been wounded by the serpent, he was not to have regained life, but to be definitively abandoned to death, then God would have been defeated and the malice of the serpent would have prevailed over the divine will. But God being at once invincible and magnanimous, he will show his magnanimity in correcting man and in putting all men to the test, as I have said; still, through the second Adam he bound the strongest man, robbed him of his goods and vanquished death, bringing life to man who had been subject to death. For Adam had become the possession of the devil and the devil exercised over him his power by the fact that he had dishonestly deceived him and in offering him immortality, had subjected him to death. For by promising them that they would be as gods, something which was not in his power, he had accomplished death in them. This is why he who had captured man was himself captured by God and man who had been captured was set free from the captivity to which he had been condemned.¹²⁶

A question immediately arises: Why, in order to conquer the devil, did God through the incarnation place himself in some fashion in the ranks of men? Here we touch once more upon the mysterious background of the enmity between man and the devil which Paul has already pointed out to us. As Irenaeus has just told us, our captivity is a condemnation. The devil, by tyrannizing over us, through a certain bias fulfills divine justice. There is a fault of humanity at the beginning of the captivity, thus this captivity is a punishment, and humanity will not be able to escape until reparation is made for this fault. The whole celebrated theory of Irenaeus on recapitulation is explained by that. The recapitulation is the resumption of human history by humanity itself, led back as it were on this side of its history in Christ. Anew, although burdened with all the sad consequences, the just results of its initial failure, humanity in the second Adam finds itself in the process of making a choice which is presented to it. And this time, it chooses well because it

¹²⁶ Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, Bk. 3, Chap. 23, 1; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:455.

is God himself who makes the choice for it, but not without it. Suddenly the whole Adamic history is as it were abolished.

As Irenaeus says: "If man had not overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been justly overcome. And on the other hand if it was not God who brought us salvation we would not possess it with security."¹²⁷ Whence this conclusion: "The Word of God who created everything, vanquishing the devil through man and declaring him an apostate, subjected himself to man."¹²⁸

The Two Economies in Christian Tradition

Leaving aside now the indispensable explanations which we have given, let us try to sum up in a few lines the data of Tradition: God governs the universe which he has created through the intermediary of his angels. But a certain number of the angels, puffed up by their power, revolted and placed themselves in opposition to God, meanwhile retaining the rule over the goods which God had confided to them.

The trial of man consists in confronting, from his very creation, this rebel rule upon which he himself depends, as does everything else in the world. Man chooses: he prefers to obey the devil rather than God. Satan, ruling over the universe, has also become in addition the jailer of man.

How is man going to be delivered from the satanic captivity and its inherent consequences—death, sin, the slavery of false gods, serving as acolytes of Satan? Would it be right that God should change by his authority this "economy," which he himself had established by placing one of his angels at the head of the universe, and that man should have renounced all other authority in submitting himself to the deceiving angel?

God wishes that human history be remade. In the person of the Son of God who, in assuming our nature, "recapitulated" the whole race, the New Adam presents himself and confronts in his turn the prince of this world. This time, man chooses well and is delivered by the power of God and by the free act of man, a fact which safeguards all justice. Man, in Christ, has become master of Satan, and all men with him. They will judge the angels of God.

We are at present in this new economy. Or at least, we put ourselves freely in it, thanks to Christ. Each of us who follows Christ, in him and through him, must confront the devil and overcome him. Until the return of Christ, the two economies are inextricably mixed up. On the one hand the disciples of Christ must in effect maintain that *Christ is Lord and Master* in the world which remains hostile, in order that the victory may be certain for them and liberty real. On the other hand, Satan preserves certain complicities among men. His role is to put them to

127 Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, Bk. 5, Chap. 1, 1; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:526–527.

128 Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, Bk. 3, Chap. 18, 1; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:445–446.

the test, his ambition is to make them fall in as large numbers as possible. When Christ shall appear, the new heavens and the new earth of men will also appear. Then, death will be no more. Satan will no longer be able to do harm. The Truth and the Life will be all in all.