

SATAN, THE PERSONAL DEVIL by Anthony F. Buzzard

A contemporary of John Thomas, the founder of Christadelphianism, produced a controversial work in 1842 entitled *The Devil: A Biblical Exposition of the Truth Concerning That Old Serpent, the Devil and Satan, and a Refutation of the Beliefs Obtaining in the World Regarding Sin and its Source*. A critic of this book described it as “a labored attempt to dispose of the existence of the Devil, adding one more proof of the awful fact.”

Clearly there is a matter of the greatest importance at stake here. It is tragic that there should still be doubt and division amongst students of the Bible about what the Scriptures mean by *the Satan, the Adversary, the Devil, the Serpent, the Tempter*.

It is a fact that the believer in the non-personality of Satan must hold that belief against practically all of his brethren who share with him a rejection of traditional dogmas. It is true that a tiny number of scholars at the time of the Reformation did not take the doctrine of Satan literally. And some Jews taught that "Satan" is the term for human sinful inclination. The earliest Christian writers after the New Testament time are quite clear that Satan is an external evil angelic being. The works of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, spokesmen for the Church in the second century, show no Trinitarianism in the later, Chalcedonian sense (though they do not retain belief in the fully human Messiah of the New Testament); they contain no belief in the survival of the soul in heaven after death, nor in eternal hell-fire; they are also strongly millenarian. The notion that Satan is not a personal being, however, is utterly foreign to their writings. This will mean that Irenaeus, the “grand pupil” of John the Apostle, through Polycarp, had gone badly astray on this major point: the proper understanding of Satan. Is such a proposition credible?

It will be our purpose to show that it is not only most unlikely on any reasonable view of the history of doctrine; but, more important, the non-personality idea is based on an unjustifiable treatment of Scripture. It is a dangerous mistake, divisive in its effects, and liable to cast doubt on the credibility of its exponents as responsible teachers of the Bible. It is an error, however, which can be corrected, provided there is a willingness to lay aside tradition and examine the matter carefully, if necessary over an extended period of time.

There is no doubt that the popular medieval devil, with pitchfork and stoking the fires of hell, is a caricature of the scriptural devil. We must, however, guard against the natural tendency to jump from one extreme to another and attempt to do away with the personal devil of the Bible. If that personal devil exists, nothing will please him more than to have his existence denied by those exponents of Scripture who have seen through the mistaken teachings of “orthodoxy.”

To say that the Trinity, in the popular sense, is not in the Bible is in fact only to say what numerous scholars admit. To proclaim the future millennial reign of Christ is to echo the opinions of the first 250 years of Christianity and of many noted theologians of all ages. To deny the immortality of the soul is to align oneself with scores of scriptural experts from all denominations. To deny that *the Satan* (i.e. Satan as a proper name) is an external being in Scripture, is, however, with a few exceptions, virtually unknown in the history of exegesis. Such a situation demands an explanation which will fit the facts of history as well as the facts of the Bible.

The writer has examined in detail scores of tracts written by Christadelphians and discussed the question at great length with their leading exponents. One very important fact emerges from these studies: the exponents of “non-personality” constantly blur the difference between *a satan* and *the Satan*. On this unfortunate blunder, the whole misunderstanding about the meaning of the word

“Satan” is built. No one will deny that there are occurrences in the OT of the term “satan” where a human adversary is intended (just as in the New Testament “*diabolos*” (devil) can occasionally refer to human accusers, I Tim. 3:11). The question we are facing is what is meant by *the* Satan or *the* Devil in Job and Zechariah and some sixty times in the New Testament (not to mention numerous other references to the Satan under a different title).

When Matthew introduces the terms Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven, he assumes that his readers are familiar with these phrases. When he introduces *the* Devil (Matt. 4:11), having already called him *the* Tempter (v. 2), he uses a title well recognized by his readers. He nowhere speaks of *a* tempter or *an* accuser. If we realize the importance of the definite article here our subject can be clarified without further difficulty. The celebrated New Testament Greek authority, Dr. A.T. Robertson, states: “The definite article is never meaningless in the Greek...The article is associated with gesture and aids in pointing out like an index finger...Wherever the article occurs, the object is certainly definite” (*Grammar of Greek New Testament*, p.756). Thus *a* savior may be one of many saviors. *The* Savior means the one and only Savior. *An* “ecclesia” is an assembly of people gathered for many different reasons (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). But no one would consider confusing this with *the* Church. Similarly, the Satan, the Devil, the Tempter is that well-known Satan not requiring definition, because the writer knows that his readers understand who is meant. Will anyone deny that *a* book carries a very different meaning from *the* book?

It will be instructive to see how Christadelphian literature confuses the issue from the start: “The word Satan...simply means *an* adversary, as will be evident to the least instructed from the following instances of its use: ‘The Lord stirred up *an* adversary (a ‘satan’) unto Solomon, Hadad, the Edomite’ (I Kings 11:14). ‘Lest in battle he (David) be *an* adversary to us’ (I Sam. 29:4)...There are New Testament instances, such as where Jesus addresses Peter as ‘Satan,’ when he opposes Christ’s submission to death (Matt. 16:23); where Pergamos, the headquarters of the enemies of truth is described as Satan’s seat (Rev. 2:13). Now if Satan means adversary we will read the scriptures intelligently if we read adversary wherever we read Satan” (*The Evil One*, by Robert Roberts, p. 12).

Unfortunately, however, Mr. Roberts has misled us by introducing the quotation from Revelation 2:13 without any indication of the fact that the text says that *the* Satan (not “a satan”) has his seat there. [1] *he* Satan is very different from the indefinite adversaries (satans) cited from the OT.

The fundamental error is now established and the argument proceeds on the false premise: “The trial of Jesus is usually cited in opposition to our conclusions. The great feature of the narrative relied upon is the application of the word ‘devil’ to the tempter: but this proves nothing. If Judas could be *a* devil, and yet be a man, why may the tempter of Jesus not have been *a* man? His being called ‘devil’ proves nothing” (*Ibid.*, p. 19).

What we are not allowed to see is that the tempter of Jesus is not called *a* devil; he is called *the* devil (Matt. 4:5, 8, etc.), that is, the one and only Devil we all know. The Christadelphian argument continues with the basic error entrenched: “‘Devil’ proves that it was one who busied himself to subvert Jesus from the path of obedience. *Who it was it is impossible to say because we are not informed*” (*Ibid.*, p. 19).

The average reader of the book of Job and of the temptation accounts in Matthew and Luke will find it very difficult to believe that the Satan who acted as the Tempter was an unknown *human being*, as Christadelphians propose. John Thomas and his followers, despite their invaluable work of biblical exposition on other subjects, have regrettably distorted the Scripture by doing away with the definite article. This we dare not do. *The* Satan, *the* adversary, is the external personality who tempted Jesus and Job. A tragic mistake was made by Roberts when he wrote: “Why may not the tempter of Jesus

have been *a man*? His being called ‘devil’ proves nothing.” He was not, however, called ‘devil,’ but *the* devil. Roberts has effaced the word “the” from the text, and by implication from the sixty or more occurrences of the Satan and the Devil throughout the New Testament.

When a group of Bible students arrive at the same conclusion but cannot agree amongst themselves on the arguments upon which the conclusion is built, there is usually cause for suspicion that the conclusion is faulty. They are accepting the creed because it has been dictated to them by their leader. They have very probably always believed the tenets of the group. They have not personally examined the arguments in detail, very often because they have had so little exposure to contrary points of view and have never been challenged. They may accept the excellent truths taught by their founder and in their enthusiasm swallow an error as part of “the package.” We are all prone to make this mistake. God requires of us a passionate desire to know the truth; we must stand personally responsible before Him for everything we teach as “the oracles of God.”

The Christadelphians are unable to agree about the identity of the Tempter of Jesus. Most contemporary Christadelphians insist that Jesus was talking to himself in the wilderness. Apart from the difficulty which this raises about the sinlessness of the Lord, it is arbitrary in the extreme to say that when Matthew reports that the Tempter “*came up to Jesus and spoke*” (Matt. 4:3), he meant that Jesus’ *own* mind produced twisted versions of the Scriptures. Matthew ends the description of the Temptation by saying that the Devil departed and angels “*came up to him*” (Matt. 4:11) to minister to him. On what principle of interpretation can we justify taking the words “came up to him” in two totally different senses in the same paragraph? Where in Scripture does human nature come up to a person and speak, and hold an extended conversation? It is most unnatural to think that Jesus invited himself to fall down before himself and worship himself! If the departure of Satan means the cessation of human nature’s temptation of Jesus, why may not the arrival of the angels be no more than the comfort of the spirit of God within him?! Can anyone fail to see that the treatment of Scripture which the Christadelphians propose in this passage involves the overthrow of the plain meaning of language?

The older Christadelphians are rightly indignant that anyone could suggest that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by his own mind. One Christadelphian writes: “Some think that the devil in the case of the temptation was Christ’s own inclination; but this is untenable in view of the statement that ‘when the devil had ended all the temptations, he departed from him for a season.’ It is also untenable in view of the harmony that existed between the mind of Christ and the will of the Father (John 8:29). It might be added also that it is untenable because a tempter or devil, i.e. one who attempts to seduce to evil, is invariably a sinner (Matt. 18:7, RSV) whether it is oneself or another...[This is] illustrated also in Mark 4:19: ‘The lusts of other things entering in choke the word.’ Lusts, then, that ‘enter in’ and ‘draw away’ (James 1:14), being not legitimate desires...are forbidden and therefore sin. Jesus was not thus ‘drawn away’ or inclined from the right and consequently *could not have been the devil or ‘satan’ in the case*. The devil was obviously a sinner who aimed to divert Jesus from the path of obedience and wrested the Scriptures (Ps. 91:11, 12) in the attempt. So that those who believe that Jesus himself was the ‘devil’ and Satan [i.e. fellow Christadelphians] make him a sinner, their protestations notwithstanding” (*The “Devil” and “Satan” Scripturally Considered*, by E.J.R.M., pp. 14, 15).

It is remarkable that the numerous attempts of the Christadelphians to explain away the personal Devil nearly always avoid a detailed analysis of Matthew 4, the temptation story. It should be obvious to any reader of the passage (it has been clear to millions of readers over the ages!) that an external person tempted Jesus; and that external person was called the Tempter, the Devil, the Satan. The use of the article means only that it is “the Devil we all know about.” (To suggest, as some Christadelphians do, that it was the High Priest is a desperate evasion!) Scripture likewise speaks of “*the* Jesus” (with the definite article in Greek), that is, “the Jesus we all know.” If the Devil is well known in Matthew’s mind, we must go to the Old Testament, the Intertestamental Jewish literature, and to the rest of the

early Christian literature of the New Testament to find out what was meant by the personal name Satan.

There is not a single reference in the Old Testament to Satan as an *internal* tempter. The Serpent in Genesis was clearly not Eve's human nature! It was an *external* personality who spoke and reasoned with refined subtlety. Likewise the "satans" of the OT (without the definite article) who provided opposition were invariably *external* persons. It is therefore amazing that anyone should propose that the devil of Matthew 4 (where the term occurs for the first time in the New Testament) is an *internal* "person," i.e. human nature. The suggestion imposes an alien idea upon Scripture. Moreover, the "spiritualizing" method of exegesis necessary to obscure the fact that a real person came up to Jesus and spoke to him will, if applied elsewhere, render the whole biblical account meaningless. This very technique has been successfully used by the churches to do away with the millennial Kingdom of the Coming Age.

It is proper that we establish our understanding of biblical terms both from the evidence of Scripture as a whole and from sources current at the time of Jesus. We have ample evidence, for example, of the Kingdom of God referring to the future Messianic reign. We know from Matthew 4 that *the* Devil cannot be human nature; no such idea is to be found in the Old Testament. Nor can the Devil be an unknown human being. The presence of the definite article, which the Christadelphians have been keen to drop, forbids us to understand the Satan as an *unknown* person. The fact that Matthew introduces the Satan as well known to his readers shows that we must connect him with the *external* Satan of Job and Zechariah 3 and I Chronicles 21:1 (where Hebrew scholars take the reference to be a proper name).

It would be hard indeed to think that the Satan who appears amongst the Sons of God (whom the book of Job identifies with the *angels*: Job 38:7) and can "walk to and fro in the earth," call down fire from heaven, generate whirlwinds and inflict Job with boils, was a human being. Was *the* Satan appearing opposite the Angel of the Lord a man? (Zech. 3). Where in these passages is there the faintest hint that the Satan means human nature? And in the New Testament, on what principle shall we say that the "Prince of this world," "the Father of lies," "the Original Serpent," "the god of this age," "the roaring lion going about to destroy Christians," "the one who shoots darts at us" is internal human nature? The idea that these are personifications and not a person is an invention created by liberal Protestants of the 19th century who rejected the supernatural and whose philosophy did not allow them to admit a spiritual personality in opposition to God. But man is in opposition to God. Why not a fallen angel? It is the teaching of the New Testament that Satan is an angel of darkness. Paul describes him as transformed into an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14). A word study on the verb Paul used ("*metaschematizetai*") will show that Satan changes his *outward* appearance to masquerade as an angel of light. He is by inward nature an angel, but he changes himself into an angel of light by an *external* transformation. Only an angel can become an angel of light by this means. Paul states the belief, common to his contemporaries, that Satan is an angel, albeit a fallen one. He states the same thing in so many words in II Corinthians 11:3, 4, 14 where he identifies the Serpent with the transformed angel (verses 5-13 represent a parenthetical section).

This identification is well known in the writings of Paul's contemporaries. It is clearly made in Revelation 12:9 and 20:2. The fact that the Serpent of Genesis is to be crushed by the seed of the woman Eve alerts us to the fact that the Serpent continued to exist until the times of the Messiah (Gen. 3:15). The Serpent was cursed for its wickedness. It should hardly be necessary to point out that the curse was imposed because of the Serpent's *guilt*. Every Christadelphian must weigh carefully whether to follow the Scripture at this point or embrace John Thomas' extraordinary statement that the Serpent was "not morally accountable" — "it did not intend to deceive"; "it did not intend to lie"; "it did not intend to cause the woman's death" (*Elpis Israel*, p. 88). These statements from the founder of Christadelphianism will suffice to show that he has misunderstood the subject at the outset. He has God

cursing an innocent creature! He goes on to propose his fundamental theory; that the Serpent is henceforth to be equated with the sin he produces; that “Satan” equals sin (*Elpis Israel*, p. 91). By this twist the real Devil disappeared as a synonym for human nature, where he has remained ever since, but mostly only in the minds of John Thomas’ followers!

Students of the Bible should never think that Satan is as powerful as God! He is not omniscient or omnipresent. Nor need he be feared by those who are properly instructed Christians and who seek the strength and protection of God, their Father. The Satan of the New Testament is the god of the present age — the age until the coming of the Kingdom (II Cor. 4:4). As Beliar (a common Jewish term for Satan) he is contrasted with the supernatural Christ (not with the “good” in human beings — II Cor. 6:15). He is also the prince of the demons (Matt. 12:24). Jesus made no effort to challenge this idea. He assumes it along with a belief in the reality of demons. He had himself stated that Satan is chief of a host of *angels* (Matt. 25:41). Satan is also seen in conflict with Michael, the Archangel, in Jude 9. Any attempt to explain this passage in terms of human beings, as Christadelphianism does, involves a desperate effort to eradicate supernatural evil from the Scriptures.[2] This is matched only by John Thomas and his followers’ attempt to remove the demons from the gospel records and the epistles.

It is the Christadelphian attempt to explain the demons which demonstrates most clearly the extreme difficulty of trying to erase them from the New Testament records. Once again the Christadelphians cannot agree on the right explanation. They must deny that demons exist, because their creeds demand it. How to explain the constant presence of demons in the New Testament is a real problem. Their most detailed treatment of the demons is found in their publication *The Devil, the Great Deceiver*, quoted below. Many Christadelphians have not read carefully what Peter Watkins has to say. They are confident that his explanation must be sound, for it has been approved by the movement. Some, however, are beginning to question the traditional Christadelphian view of the demon stories, sensing that there is something amiss with the treatment of the subject by Roberts. To say that Jesus and the writers of the New Testament invested the term “demon” with a meaning unknown to the Greek language of the time is a bold theory indeed.

The average Christadelphian will propose that the demons of Scripture are to be explained as an accommodation to the ignorance of the times. They will maintain that Jesus did not disturb the superstition of the contemporary Jews, in order to assist in the cure of the demon-possessed. The important question is whether there is any other example of Jesus allowing superstition to pass uncorrected. Another problem is Luke’s (and the other reporters’ of Jesus’ miracles) insistence that the demons spoke *in their own person*, and recognized Jesus as the Messiah when the ordinary people did not. The New Testament records make an absolute distinction between the victim who is “demonized” and the demon who has possessed him. Jesus is concerned with addressing the demon as a person *distinct from* the sufferer.

In Luke 4:33: “There was a man in the synagogue who had a spirit, an unclean demon. [Luke’s Gentile audience might have understood demons as supernatural personalities, both good and bad. Thus he makes it clear that it was an unclean demon.] And he cried out: ‘Ah! What have we to do with you, Jesus, the Nazarene? Have you come to destroy us? I know you, you are the Holy One of God.’ And Jesus rebuked him and said: ‘Hold your peace and come out of him.’ And when the demon had thrown him down in front of them, he came out of him without hurting him...” Verse 41: “And demons went out from many, the *demons* crying out and saying ‘You are the Christ, the Son of God.’ And he rebuked them and did not allow them to speak because they knew him to be the Messiah.”

We must note that the demon spoke as a member of a class of demons: “What have *we* to do with you?” Jesus then addressed the demon as distinct from the man: “Come out of *him*.” In verse 41 the Greek participles “crying out” and “saying” are neuter plural agreeing with and referring to the

demons. They *cannot* refer to the men. To suggest that the *men* cried out (though clearly the demon spoke through them) is to overlook the laws of the Greek language. Jesus then rebuked *them* (neuter plural, the *demons*, not the men). Throughout the accounts, as everywhere else in the New Testament, the demons are treated as a well-known class of personalities quite distinct from the victims they oppress. To blur this distinction, as Christadelphian literature does, is simply to undermine the truth of the historical records.

The International Critical Commentary makes the wise statement that if demons exist, there is no problem at all with this passage. “The narrative is in harmony with the facts” (Plummer in *ICC* on Luke, p. 136). Note that any other explanation means that the account is *not* in harmony with the facts, another way of saying that it is untrue!

Christians will do well to avoid the attack on Scripture implied by the denial of the existence of demons. They should understand that to say that Jesus merely accommodated himself to the ignorance of his times makes him less than honest. There is no hint anywhere in the New Testament that Jesus knew better than to believe in demons! He discussed them privately with his disciples, as well as in front of the Jews (Luke 10:20, see also Luke 11:14-28, where Jesus talks at length about the demons). The comment of Henry Alford, the distinguished British theologian and a leading millenarian, is very much to the point:

“The Gospel narratives are distinctly pledged to the historic truth of these occurrences [the accounts of demon possession and expulsion]. Either they are true or the Gospels are false...They form part of the general groundwork upon which all agree. Nor can it be said that they represent the opinion of the time, and use words in accordance with it. They relate to us words used by the Lord Jesus in which *the personality and presence of the demons is distinctly implied*. Now either our Lord spoke these words or he did not. If he did not then we must at once set aside the concurrent testimony of the evangelists to a plain matter of fact; in other words establish a principle which will overthrow equally every fact related to the Gospels. If he did, it is wholly at variance with any Christian idea of holiness in him to have used such plain and solemn words repeatedly, before his disciples and the Jews, in encouragement of, and connivance at, a lying superstition. It will be unnecessary to refute the view of demoniacal possession which makes it identical with mere bodily disease...We may observe that it is everywhere in the Gospels distinguished from disease...” (Alford, *Greek Testament*, Vol. I, p.79, emphasis his). Henry Alford’s well-worded statement is a defense against liberal theologians and critics of the reliability of the New Testament. It is sad that his defense must be used against Christadelphians.

The notion that Jesus was accommodating to the ignorance of his times when he spoke of demons was so problematic to the Christadelphian writer Peter Watkins that he wrote: “Let it be stated categorically that *it is not sufficient to say that the New Testament writers were using language that would have reflected current superstitions*...It was not the limitations of language that compelled the Gospel writers to make such elaborate use of demon terminology. It was the Spirit of God” (*The Devil, the Great Deceiver*, p. 65). Peter Watkins correctly opposes the arguments which his colleague Christadelphians almost always use to defend their belief in no Satan or demons. Watkins, however, instead of accepting the New Testament facts, proposes a solution which no one, surely, including other Christadelphians, will take seriously. He says: “The subject of Satan and the demons — or the Devil and his angels — must be thought of as one elaborate New Testament parable” (*Ibid.* p. 64). What extraordinary lengths Bible students will go to avoid the truth! The idea that the exorcism stories are meant only to be parables is without foundation. We might just as well say that all the healing miracles are parables. Fortunately the biblical writers did not intend their readers to be so hopelessly confused. They make it clear when Jesus spoke in parables. They never say that the accounts of the casting out of demons were parables.

We are left with the simple explanation that Satan is the chief of an army of demon spirits, fallen angels; that the Serpent of Genesis *is* the Devil (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). The identification of the Devil with the Original Serpent (Rev. 12:9) was the common belief of the times. It is merely confirmed by the Scriptures. Paul implies the same identification in II Corinthians 11 (discussed earlier). He equates the Satan with the Serpent in Romans 16:20 where he says that Satan will shortly be bruised, a reference to the future bruising of the Serpent by the Messiah, as promised in Genesis 3:15. The Nachash (serpent) of the third chapter of Genesis appears again in the third chapter from the end of the Bible, where he is bound and imprisoned so that he cannot deceive the world any longer (Rev. 20:1-3). The Serpent appears in the religious books of nearly all ancient cultures; so also does the flood. The millennial idea is known to the Persians. These facts do not mean that the ideas are all false. Major theological truths are held by the Bible in common with other faiths. The belief in the personal Devil and in demons is a prime example.

The connection of the Nachash (serpent) with the Seraphs, the shining angelic beings who surround the throne of God (Isa. 6), provides further evidence of the identification of Satan with a fallen angel (Num. 21:6-9). Though the origin and ultimate fate of Satan are obscure, this is no excuse for not accepting the united testimony of the New Testament writers to his existence as an external personality. Would anyone refuse to accept the existence of angels in Scripture simply because the details of their origin and future are not made clear? There is nothing in the Bible to say that the life of Satan must be prolonged indefinitely. Immortality is conditional upon God granting it. He grants life to Satan at present as part of the divine plan.

The believer in the non-personality of Satan will have to explain how it is that the Satan is everywhere *external* in the Old and New Testaments. In the parable of the sower the “birds of heaven” devoured the seed (the message of the Kingdom) which fell by the wayside. Jesus’ explanation of the birds is that “the devil comes and takes away the Message from their heart so that they may not believe and be saved” (Luke 8:5, 12). Will anyone seriously suggest that the birds of the sky represent *internal* human nature? The analogy is of course parallel to Paul’s description of Satan as the Prince of the power of the air, the wicked spirit in heavenly places (Eph. 2:2; 6:12). How can the air be the seat of human nature? The air, in Paul’s terminology, is located above the earth (I Thess. 4:17). The very atmosphere is polluted by the presence of Satan and the demons who at present “energize” the children of disobedience, just as the Spirit of God “energizes” the children of God (see Eph. 2:2, Phil. 2:13, where the same Greek word describes the activity of Satan and God). That the air is contaminated by evil spirits is evident from the need for Christ to reconcile to himself things both *in heaven* and on the earth (Col. 1:20).

It must be emphasized that belief in Satan as an external spirit does not excuse us from responsibility for our sins or false beliefs. We cannot blame Satan for our errors, claiming that “the Devil made me do it.” We are responsible, with God’s help, for learning the Truth, and turning from our sinful ways. The temptation which arises from the heart of man (James 1:14) and the evil thoughts which proceed “from within, out of the heart of man” (Mark 7:21) may be prompted by Satan; they may also arise naturally, since human nature has been poisoned by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. But we must not confuse the evil which comes “from within, out of the heart” with the Satan who comes up from the outside, as in the temptation story (Matt. 4). There is a close connection between sin and the original cause of sin, just as the conductor and the music he produces from an orchestra are connected. But no one would confuse the conductor with the orchestra.

If demon in the New Testament means epilepsy and mental disease, then it must be shown how epilepsy and mental disease can “believe in God and tremble” (James 2:19, “the demons believe in God and tremble”), produce false teachings (I Tim. 4:1), or be the object of the worship of pagan people (I Cor. 10:20, where “demons” are parallel to God). The Greek language has perfectly good words for

“mad” and “madness,” and they are used in the New Testament. Despite this, elaborate use is made of demon terminology by the biblical writers. The demons are everywhere treated as living, active, supernatural agents, able to speak through human beings. It is unthinkable that Luke would have written as he does, had he wished to convey the Christadelphian belief that demons do not exist! There is, of course, abundant evidence of demon phenomena, both throughout history and in our own times. Personal experience of the phenomena is quite unnecessary; it should, of course, be avoided. It is sufficient merely to *believe* the New Testament records.

The view of the Satan as a personification of human nature is a theory imposed upon Scripture. It represents a serious misreading of the Bible which cannot be sustained by sound exegesis. Those who hold such a belief must consider, as we all must, the remark of James that all teachers of the Bible carry a heavy responsibility for teaching the Truth, and may be found guilty of leading others astray. Worst of all, a vagueness or error in understanding the Satan, who has a dozen or more titles in Scripture^[3] (and must therefore be a personality of some importance), may lead to others losing confidence in one’s ability as a teacher of the Bible. They will then be deterred from accepting the real Truths which are offered to them. Until the important matter of Satan and the demons is properly explained, according to the Scripture, there is little hope of a group being counted worthy of the task of bringing to the world the whole counsel of God. We must beware of putting a barrier between us and others who are unable to see how we can fail to understand a matter as straightforward as the existence of the personal Satan.

Additional Notes on Matthew 4, Jude 9 and Demon Terminology

The Christadelphian treatment of the temptation accounts is all the more bewildering in view of the fair principles of exegesis they use elsewhere. The fact is that they arrive at Matthew 4 knowing that there cannot be a supernatural Devil. It is then impossible that he should be found there. To avoid him, they must embark on a method of interpretation which distorts the biblical text. This will be illustrated from *The Mystery of Iniquity Explained, a Biblical Exposition of the Devil*, by Lyman Booth, 1929.^[4]

The author lets us know at the outset the technique he proposes to employ, with his comment on Mark 1:13: “And Jesus was forty days in the wilderness, being tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild animals; and the angels ministered to him.” The “wild animals,” he tells us, “represent the animal feelings in man’s nature” (p. 174). He then suggests as a method of interpretation that “no passage of Scripture can be interpreted partly literally and partly spiritually. If it is to be literally understood, it must be literally understood throughout; if it is to be spiritually understood, it must be spiritually understood throughout” (p. 183). However, he undermines his own principle by admitting that Christ was literally in the wilderness though the temptations were figurative (p. 184). (By “figurative” he presumably means that the temptations did not involve an external person.) Christ’s appetite created an “impulse” within him (p. 185). “The Self-principle, the desire principle in the Christ when he felt hungry suggested at once what was a truth, surely, seeing thou art the Son of God ‘command that these stones be made bread.’ This state of mind was the Devil that tempted Christ” (p.187).

Booth goes on to speak of the “falsely accusing principle, figuratively represented by the Devil” (p.189). “Hence the whole passage is merely a figurative description of the result of the mental examination of the prevalent worldly system.” “The Devil leaves him — that is, these states of mind cease to trouble him; he had gained the victory, and angels, i.e. messengers came and ministered unto him” (p. 190). “Hence the better view of the trials is that which regards them as mental scenes...The whole account of the trial of our Lord admits of an easy, clear and conclusive explanation when viewed figuratively as a picture of the thoughts that passed through his mind in the survey of this great struggle” (p. 191). He then goes on to speak of the “absurdity connected with the belief in the Devil; the atheistical tendency of such a belief in a devil...If there is a God there cannot be a devil” (p. 195).

We must note that the method of interpretation proposed by Booth is abandoned. He admits that Christ was literally in the wilderness and that angels came to him and ministered to him. These facts he dare not treat figuratively.

The question that must be asked is: why should the phrase “came up to him” (v. 3) mean the onset of thoughts within him, when exactly the same phrase “came up to him” (v. 11) means a literal approach of angels? The method used by Booth is quite arbitrary. In the single sentence “the Devil leaves him and angels come up to him,” the first half of the sentence is taken figuratively to mean the end of temptation in the mind of Jesus, and the second half is literally true! This is in contradiction to Booth’s own principle of consistency, quoted above.

The proper and commonsense method is surely to compare the phrase “came up to him” in verse 3 with Matthew’s use of the same phrase elsewhere, and then with the use of the same words in the New Testament as a whole. (In deciphering poor handwriting, we look for other occurrences of an obscure letter to see how it fits in different contexts.) In Matthew 8:2, a leper “came up to him”; in 8:5 a centurion “came up to him”; in 8:19 a scribe “came up to him”; and in 24:3 the disciples “came up to him.” In Acts 22:27, “the chief Captain came up to Paul and spoke.” The words in the original text in all these cases and scores of others throughout the New Testament are exactly the words used of the approach of the Satan to Christ. In no case in the Bible are these words used of thoughts arising in the mind. This will suffice to show that the “figurative” view of “came up to him” in Matthew 4:3 has *no parallel anywhere in Scripture*. No lexicon known to the writer will allow a figurative meaning for the phrase in question. The theory that no one approached Jesus in the wilderness temptation is a private one, which has simply been imported by ascribing to words meanings which they cannot bear. This involves a revolution in language which if applied elsewhere will effectively overthrow every fact stated in the New Testament.

We must examine briefly the passage in Jude 9 which describes Satan in conflict with the Archangel Michael. The ordinary reader has no difficulty in understanding that the Archangel Michael is the Archangel Michael. Not so the Christadelphians. Booth embarks on a complex explanation which is all the more misleading because of the confidence with which it is presented.

To explain Jude 9, he refers us to Zechariah 3, where he says *Satan is Tatnai*. The latter opposed the rebuilding of the Temple in the days of Joshua the High Priest. Booth says: “Referring to this event [in Zechariah 3] Jude says: ‘Yet Michael, the Archangel, when contending with the Devil, he disputed about the body of Moses, [and] dared not bring against him a railing accusation, but said “The Lord rebuke thee.”’ Here Tatnai is represented as ‘the devil’ because he falsely accused the Jews...The ‘body of Moses’ is merely the Jewish church, and the disputation regarding the body is the disputation regarding the building of the Temple for the Mosaic system of worship. Thus the passage in Jude which has been the cause of much perplexity becomes easily intelligible...As Michael, the chief messenger, did not rebuke Satan, but said ‘The Lord rebuke thee,’ so it was in the case of Joshua” (pp. 101, 102). On page 76 he states boldly: “It is evident that Michael, the chief messenger, and also the false-accuser (Satan) were individual HUMAN BEINGS” (capitals his).

A less intelligible explanation would be hard to imagine. It is evident, says Booth, that Michael, the Archangel, is a *human being*. Is it evident that the angel Gabriel is a human being? It is evident to Booth that Joshua in Zechariah 3 is Michael, the Archangel, in Jude 9! Booth has not noted that in Zechariah, the *Lord* said “the Lord rebuke you.” In Jude, Michael the Archangel uttered the same words. Will this mean then that the Lord is Michael and Joshua?! There is no good evidence for equating the two passages, much less for equating the high priest Joshua with the Archangel Michael!

To propose that Michael, the Archangel, is Joshua the High Priest is unprecedented. I Thessalonians 4:16 provides the only other occurrence of the word archangel, and no one suggests that he is a human being! If we consult contemporary Jewish writings (Jude himself quotes from the book of Enoch), we find a reference to the dispute over the body of Moses — which means Moses' body — in the Targum of Jonathan on Deuteronomy 34:6, and a reference in the church father, Origen, to the Ascension of Moses in which the story of a dispute over his body occurs. The event was clearly well known to Jude's readers and needed no explanation. The mention of Satan in opposition to an Archangel is further proof of Satan's reality as a supernatural being, and this is confirmed beyond any doubt by Revelation 12 where a war occurs in heaven between "Michael and his angels (who) made war with Satan and his angels." To explain these passages away, in an effort to suppress the scriptural evidence for Satan as an angelic being, is strongly discouraged by the verse in Revelation 22:19 which warns us not to "take away from the book of this prophecy."

Surely a method of interpretation which entails equating the Archangel Michael with Joshua is self-condemned. The desperation involved in the Christadelphian treatment of Jude 9 should point to the weakness of their whole theory about Satan.

It is customary for the Christadelphians to dismiss the New Testament demon terminology as mere terms bearing no relation to the idea behind them. Thus, it is said, we talk of lunacy without necessarily believing in the power of the moon to produce madness. A moment's thought will reveal that the use of the word "lunacy" is in no way a parallel to the elaborate use of demon terminology in the New Testament. The New Testament records speak of demons entering and leaving their victims. They carefully differentiate between disease and demon possession (Mark 1:32; 16:17, 18; Luke 6:17, 18). The same outward disease may be attributed to natural causes in one case and to demon possession in another (compare Matt. 4:24 with 17:15 and 12:22 with Mark 7:32). As the *Smith's Bible Dictionary* says (quoting Trench, *On Miracles*, p. 135): "Can it be supposed that Christ would sanction and the Evangelists be permitted to record forever an idea itself false, which has constantly been the very stronghold of superstition. Nor was the language used such as can be paralleled with mere conventional expression. There is no harm in our speaking of certain forms of madness as lunacy, not thereby implying that we believe the moon to have or to have had any influence on them...but if we begin to describe the cure of such as the moon's ceasing to afflict them, or if a physician were solemnly to address the moon, bidding it to abstain from injuring the patient, there would be here a passing over to a quite different region...There would be that gulf between our thoughts and words in which the essence of a lie consists. Now Christ does everywhere speak such language as this.

"In the face of the mass of evidence, it seems difficult to conceive how the theory of accommodation to the language of the time can be reconciled with anything like the truth of Scripture. We may fairly say that it would never have been maintained, except for the proposition that demoniacal possession was itself a thing absolutely incredible and against all experience" ("Demoniacs," *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*).

The believer in no personal Satan is invited to reread the passages of Scripture referring to Satan, the Devil, the Tempter, etc., allowing the word angel to mean angel, and "come up to" to mean what it says. It will be found that there is a united scriptural testimony to an external, evil invisible being and his demons. Ultimately the arguments used to suppress the facts about Satan will equally obscure the evidence of the true God. Both are clearly presented in Scripture. Only the prolonged holding of a traditional view to the contrary will make the scriptural doctrine of Satan difficult. The Church of God cannot afford to be uncertain on an issue as fundamental as this.

Non-Personality of Satan — Doctrinal Oddity or Biblical Truth?

It is well for those who deny that there is a supernatural personal Devil in Scripture to realize that they must maintain their position against the views of countless millions of Bible students from all denominations. To do this they must produce clear and sound explanations for those passages in the Bible which have always appeared to their opponents to provide unarguable proof of the existence of the external Satan. The defenders of “non-personality” must, for example, show the basic fallacy in the following remarks of Edersheim in *The Life and Times of Jesus*:

“As regards the reality and outwardness of the temptation of Jesus, several suggestions may be set aside as unnatural, and ex post facto attempts to remove a felt difficulty. Renan’s frivolous conceit scarcely deserves serious notice, that Jesus went into the wilderness in order to imitate the Baptist and others, since solitude was at the time regarded as a necessary preparation for great things. We equally dismiss, as more reverent, but not better grounded, such suggestions as that an interview with the deputies of the Sanhedrin or with a priest, or with a Pharisee, formed the historical basis of the Satanic temptation; or that it was a vision, a dream, the reflection of the ideas of the time; or that it was a parabolic form in which Jesus afterwards presented to his disciples his conception of the Kingdom, and how they were to preach it.”

So unacceptable do these ideas appear to Edersheim that he adds in a footnote that he refrains from naming the individual writers holding such theories. Edersheim continues: “Of all such explanations it may be said, that *the narrative does not warrant them*, and that they would probably never have been suggested, *if their authors had been able to accept the Evangelic history*” (*Life and Times of Jesus*, Vol. 1, p. 296, emphasis added).

We are here at the very heart of the issue. Those who rejected the facts presented by the temptation story were often those who also rejected the resurrection. The proponents of “non-personality” must consider whether they have not been trapped into a form of unbelief by treating such words as “came up to him and spoke” as figurative language for the onset of an inward struggle in the mind of Jesus. It is only fair that they show from Scripture (since we all believe in comparing passage with passage) a single other instance in which those words are used “figuratively.”

Edersheim rightly says that the passage in Matthew 4, **“if naturally interpreted, suggests an outward and real event, not an inward transaction; there is no other instance of ecstatic state or of vision recorded in the life of Jesus, and the special expressions used are all in accordance with the natural view”** (*Ibid.* p. 296, emphasis added).

The celebrated *Dictionary of the Bible* by Smith says: “It would be a waste of time to prove that, in varying degrees of clearness, the personal existence of a Spirit of Evil is revealed again and again in the scriptures. Every quality, every action which can indicate personality, is attributed to him in language which cannot be explained away...This influence is correlative to, *but not to be confounded with*, the existence of evil within.”

It has not been fully noticed by proponents of “non-personality” that the biblical doctrine of Satan and demons has unmistakable points of contact with rabbinical and other Jewish writings. The *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible* notes: “Satan is called the prince of the demons in Matt. 12:24 just as Sammael ‘the great prince in heaven’ is designated the ‘chief of satans’ in the Midrash. The demonology that confronts us in the New Testament has striking points of contact with that which has developed in the Enochic literature. The main features of the latter, in fact, reappear...The ‘angelic watchers’ found in Enoch 6-16 correspond exactly with the angels which ‘kept not their first estate’ (Jude 6, II Pet. 2:4). In Enoch the demons...exercise an evil activity working moral ruin on the earth till the final judgment. In exactly the same way the demons in the New Testament are described as disembodied spirits...As in the book of Enoch, Satan is represented in the New Testament as the ruler

of a counterfeit Kingdom of evil...Both in St. Paul and in the Apocalypse Satan is identified with the Serpent of Gen. 3. It is also noteworthy that Paul shared the contemporary belief that the angelic beings inhabited the higher (heavenly) regions, and that Satan also, with his retinue, dwelt not beneath the earth, but in the lower atmospheric region: cp. Eph. 2:2, 6:12. Our Lord, as is clearly apparent in the synoptic tradition, recognized the existence and power of a kingdom of evil with organized demonic agencies under the control of a supreme personality, Satan or Beelzebub...that our Lord accepted the reality of such personal agencies cannot seriously be questioned; nor is it necessary to explain this fact away.”

In the article on the Devil in the same Dictionary we read: “The language [used of Satan and the demons], common to all the writers, and pervading the whole New Testament, allows no other conclusion than that the forces and spirits of evil were conceived as gathered up into a personal head and center whose authority they recognized and at whose bidding they moved...For Jesus himself no theory of accommodation can be maintained...*The personality of the Devil must consequently be regarded as taught by Scripture.*”

Edersheim’s remarks on the existence of demons are highly significant. “The reader of the New Testament must form some definite idea...about persons who were ‘demonized’...The first question here is whether Christ himself shared the views, not indeed of his contemporaries, but of the Evangelists in regard to what they called the ‘demonized.’ This has been extensively denied, and Christ represented as only unwilling needlessly to disturb popular prejudice, which he could not at the time effectively combat. But the theory requires more than this; and, since Christ not only tolerated, but in addressing the demonized actually adopted, or seemed to adopt the prevailing view, it has been argued that, for the sake of those poor afflicted persons, he acted like a physician who appears to enter into the fancy of his patients, in order the more effectively to heal him of it. *This view seems, however, scarcely worth refuting*, since it imputes to Jesus, on a point so important, a conduct not only unworthy of him, or indeed of any truly great man, but implies a canon of ‘accommodation’ which might equally be applied to his miracles, or to anything else that contravened the notions of an interpreter, and so might transform the whole Gospel narratives into a series of historically untrustworthy legends...We find that Jesus not only tolerated the popular ‘prejudice,’ or that he ‘adopted it for the sake of more readily healing those thus afflicted’...but that he even made it part of his disciples’ commission to ‘cast out demons,’ and that when the disciples afterwards reported their success in this, Christ actually made it a matter of thanksgiving to God. The same view underlies his reproof to the disciples, when failing in this part of their work; while in Luke 11:19, 24, he adopts and argues on this view as against the Pharisees. Regarded therefore in the light of history, impartial criticism can arrive at no other conclusion than that Jesus of Nazareth shared the views of the Evangelists as regards the ‘demonized’...He would be a bold interpreter who would ascribe all the phenomena even of heathen magic to jugglery, or else to purely physical causes” (*Life and Times of Jesus*, Vol. 1. pp. 480, 483).

We would invite from the exponents of “no supernatural evil” an explanation of the ability of the magicians in Egypt to imitate the miracles performed by Moses and Aaron, and also some reasonable account of the Parousia (i.e. spectacular arrival, as used of the Coming of Christ) of the Man of Sin (II Thess. 2:9), who is able to produce every “power, and sign and wonder” through the energy of Satan. The very same words are used constantly in the New Testament of the supernatural feats of Jesus. How can these be produced by human power alone apart from the intervention of an unseen evil agent?

These are some of the facts that must be explained by those who maintain that the Satan/Devil of the Bible is no more than human nature. It would also be fair to ask them to produce some evidence of this belief having been seriously entertained by anyone other than those who came under the influence of John Thomas and Robert Roberts. The remarkable fact is that where a denomination is divided on this belief, opinions have been formed according to the opinion of the pastors in different

congregations. This proves conclusively that “positions” have been taken up not on the basis of individual study but according to the views of individual pastors. Thus the error of one teacher is perpetuated in his congregation — and not only in one generation. On the other hand the Truth is spread by a single pastor and from his congregation to subsequent generations. It is therefore incumbent on every individual to study these important doctrines for himself, weighing the evidence carefully over a considerable period of time. Each of us must recognize that what we have been initially taught will appear to be right. Such is the strength of conviction gained in early years. The need for unity on fundamental biblical teachings, such as Satan and the Demons, is demanded by the Apostolic appeal of Paul, who speaks to us:

“Now I implore you, brethren, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all say the same thing; that there be no division among you; that you be knit together in the same mind and the same judgment” (I Cor. 1:10).

[1]In Greek "*tou satana*" and "*o satanas*."

[2]The average reader will be astonished at the following: “Now turn to Jude 9, where we find another passage where the word, *diabolos*, occurs and is translated devil: ‘Yet Michael the archangel when contending with the Devil, he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, the Lord rebuke you.’ The proper meaning of the word *diabolos* here is false-accuser; and it is evident that Michael the chief messenger, and also the false-accuser, were individual human beings” (*The Mystery of Iniquity Explained*, Lyman Booth, , Oregon, Illinois: National Bible Institution, 1929, p. 76).

[3]The Devil and his fallen angels are referred to over 300 times in Scripture. In the Gospels alone, these evil forces are referred to at least 116 times. Another 70 references to the devil can be found in the remainder of the NT. 23 of the 27 NT books contain references to Satan or demons.

[4]The source is Church of God (Abrahamic Faith) but the reasoning is Christadelphian.