

Spiritual Warfare

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT



BY FR VIVIAN BOLAND, OP

-DEEPER CHRISTIANITY SERIES-

Catholic Truth Society Publications
Distributed by Ignatius Press

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ISBN 978 1 86082 421 0

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*All booklets are published thanks to the
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CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY
PUBLISHERS TO THE HOLY SEE

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Introduction

In 1589 an Italian priest, Lorenzo Scupoli (1530-1610), published a book called *Spiritual Combat*. In less than twelve months it was being used by St Francis de Sales, then a young student at Padua. Referring to it as his spiritual director, Francis treasured this book all his life, reading a passage every day and the whole book every month. Quickly translated into many languages, it joined Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* as one of the classic manuals of Catholic spirituality. Its success came from its simplicity, its practical character, and the way in which its teaching rang true, forged as it was in the crucible of Fr Scupoli's personal suffering. John Henry Newman (1801-1890) used it, especially in the years of his conversion, and it helped form the spiritual life of Blessed John XXIII (1881-1963) when he was a young seminarian at Bergamo. Nicodemos the Hagiorite (1748-1809), one of the editors of the *Philokalia*, the standard collection of spiritual writings of Eastern Orthodoxy, adapted it for Orthodox Christians.

In recent years Scupoli's work is not so well known, perhaps because the themes of self-denial, self-distrust, and even doing violence to oneself in order to follow

Christ, trouble rather than encourage people. But any serious spiritual teaching involves discipline and the practice of asceticism, a readiness to engage in the struggle with oneself, with the powers of the spiritual world, and with the mystery of how we come to prefer God's will to our own. In each of the gospels Jesus teaches that those who want to follow him must deny themselves and take up their cross, and that those who lose their life for his sake will find it (*Mt* 16:24-25; *Mk* 8:34-35; *Lk* 9:23-24; *Jn* 12:25).

In 1943 a French Jesuit, Henri de Lubac, wrote an essay called *Spiritual Warfare*. In this work the future Cardinal identifies the attack on it by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche as the greatest contemporary challenge facing Christianity. For de Lubac this challenge was not just a political and philosophical one although it was that for sure - he writes in a France occupied and partitioned by the Nazis - it is also a spiritual and theological challenge. 'The Christian who wants to remain faithful', he writes, 'can only reject with a categorical *No* a neopaganism that is constituted against Christ' (page 500).

The warfare in which the Christian must engage is on many levels, then, not just the personal moral and spiritual quest but also the social intellectual and political contest, what has more recently come to be

called 'the culture war'. It is worth noting that when used correctly the Arabic term 'jihad' has a similar range of meanings as Christians give to the 'spiritual warfare'. The so-called 'Greater Jihad' refers to the personal spiritual struggle to be ever more faithful to God.

The language of combat and warfare is not fashionable in spirituality or theology today. It is clearly open to misunderstanding and abuse. Yet there are many places in the New Testament where the Christian life is presented in just these terms, as warfare (2 Co 10:4), struggle (*Ph* 1:30; *Col* 1:29; *Heb* 10:32; 12:4), a fight (1 *Tm* 1:18), an athletic contest or *agonia* (1 *Co* 9:24), a boxing-match with oneself (1 *Co* 9:27), a readiness to kill things in ourselves and in our relationships (*Rm* 8:13), a conflict between good and evil (*Jn* 5:29; *Rm* 7:21), light and darkness (*Lk* 11:34-36; *Jn* 3:19), truth and falsehood (*Jn* 8:44), life and death (*Rm* 6:13,23). In this conflict we are participants and not just spectators, agents but also victims dependent on the power of Christ if we are to survive it. In 1996 John Paul II wrote that spiritual combat is 'a demanding reality which is not always given due attention today' (*Vita consecrata* § 38).

At the moment in which a person asks to be admitted to the Church as a catechumen he or she is asked to reject 'every power which sets itself up in

opposition to God and his Christ' as well as 'every form of worship which does not offer God true honour'. Soon after this the catechumen receives the exorcisms and is reminded that the spiritual life is a battle between flesh and spirit, that self-denial is needed if we are to gain the blessings of the Kingdom of God, and that God's help is needed continually. The prayers of exorcism refer to evil spirits, to falsehood and sin, to all forms of immorality, to the tyranny of the enemy, to the spirit of falsehood, greed and wickedness, to the spirit of selfishness and greed, of pleasure and worldly pride. The person is then anointed with the oil of catechumens, an athlete's oil to strengthen them for the contest. Baptism is the beginning of a struggle, more or less severe according to God's providence, that ends only at the moment of death.

This booklet does not pretend to emulate either Scupoli or de Lubac. All that is attempted is a survey of the theme of spiritual warfare in the Bible. This is done in four parts: the struggle with ourselves, with powers that are 'not just flesh and blood,' and with God, and a reflection on how these aspects of Christian spiritual warfare are embraced and resolved in the work of Jesus Christ, our leader and victorious champion.

The Struggle with Ourselves

A Threefold Temptation

In its account of the original sin, the Book of Genesis tells us that the human beings decided to take the fruit for three reasons:

- because it was good to eat
- because it was pleasing to the eye
- because they judged it desirable for the knowledge it could give.

These phrases from Genesis 3:6 are echoed towards the end of the Bible in the First Letter of Saint John. All that is in the world, it says,

- the lust of the flesh
- the lust of the eyes
- the pride of life

is not of the Father but is of the world (1 *Jn* 2:16). These are the attractions of transgression, the factors that make sin possible.

The Bible seems to offer us a threefold pattern of temptation, then, and not just in these two texts. The temptations of Jesus can be interpreted according to this pattern (*Mt* 4:1-11; *Mk* 1:12-13; *Lk* 4:1-13). One is about feeding his hunger, a lust of the flesh. Another is about displaying his power, a lust of the eyes, something to impress. And the third is about taking on God, putting God's wisdom to the test, and standing over against God somehow, being as wise as, even wiser than, God.

The Book of Deuteronomy speaks of the paths to sin as

- a straying heart
- surrender to idolatry
- a refusal to listen (*Dt* 30:15-20)

and the Book of Sirach warns us against

- following passion
- giving our hearts to money
- saying 'I am self-sufficient, who has authority over me' (*Si* 5:1-8).

It seems, that this threefold pattern does structure the universal human experience of temptation. What touches us deeply attracts us powerfully,

- firstly the desires and needs of the body
- secondly what is pleasing and delightful whether in our own eyes or in the eyes of others

- thirdly the desire for knowledge and the power and autonomy it brings.

What tempts the human being are the satisfaction of bodily needs, perhaps to the point of indulgence; having some standing in the world through the things one possesses that are admired by others; and taking control of one's life, becoming wise in one's own estimation, to the point of not needing anybody else, even God. There is much to be gained from meditating on this threefold pattern.

The Christian Triangle

Another way of thinking about this is to say that the temptations that come our way will inevitably concern

- relating to self
- relating to others
- relating to God.

If we think of these as the three corners of a triangle, then we can say that it is within this triangle that the Christian is called to live, remembering always God, others and self. If we remember one of these to the exclusion of the other two, or we remember two to the exclusion of the third, then we are not remembering all that needs to be thought about as we reflect on our following of Christ.

Spiritual warfare, the struggle against sin and temptation, involves battles at each corner of this triangle, sometimes in relation to oneself, sometimes in relation to the challenges posed to us by others and our dealings with them, sometimes with regard to God. The Christian tradition has fixed on seven deadly sins, pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth. Each of these attacks one or more corners of this triangle, our relationship with God, with others, or with ourselves. The major spiritual battles in which we find ourselves engaged, whichever deadly sin they are about, involve all three corners of the triangle. No aspect of Christian life is adequately considered without constantly remembering all three. The great commandment that summarises the duties of the Christian life makes this clear:

You shall love **the Lord your God** with all your heart, and with all your soul, and all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your **neighbour** as **yourself** (*Mt 22:37-39*).

Any aspect of Christian life - say reconciliation and forgiveness - cannot be established if we neglect any corner of the Christian triangle. When they think about forgiveness and reconciliation people tend to think first of their relationship with others. But difficulties

experienced in that corner of the triangle might well find at least part of their explanation in one of the other corners, for example in the fact that there are ways in which people cannot forgive themselves, or even that there are things about which they cannot forgive God. Inability to forgive ourselves gets in the way of our ability to forgive others. Lorenzo Scupoli is realistic and encouraging in telling us that we will sin, so the thing to do is simply acknowledge our failure, ask forgiveness and help from God, and get on with things.

Inability to forgive God is more complex. If it is accepted that we might on occasion be angry with God, then it seems acceptable also to think that there might be ways in which we find it difficult to forgive God. For what might we need to forgive God? Well, for being God when we are not, or for having His own will about our lives and for not revealing it more clearly to us (for so it seems to us most of the time). To say that there is no way in which I need to be reconciled not only *with* God but *to* God is to say that I understand his wisdom completely and that there is no room for the garden of Gethsemane in my relationship with God.

When we reflect on temptation and its roots we quickly find ourselves recognising this triangle. To reflect adequately on living the Christian life I need to think not only about myself and others but also about God, not

only about myself and God but also about others, not only about others and God but also about myself.

The Weapons of this Warfare

The threefold asceticism of Lent, which is the threefold asceticism of the Christian life at any time, consists of almsgiving, prayer and fasting (*Mt* 6:1-18). Notice that the three corners of the Christian triangle are addressed in these practices

- almsgiving concerns others
- prayer concerns God
- fasting concerns myself.

Notice that we can also align these practices with the threefold structure of temptation identified earlier. The attractions of transgression are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 *Jn* 2:16), what is good to eat, pleasing to the eye and promises wisdom (*Gn* 3:6). These things are not in themselves our enemies but they are the things that most easily turn against us when we pursue them disproportionately.

How are the classical ascetical practices the antidote to temptation?

- fasting and other disciplines of self-denial help us to manage the desires of the flesh in ways that are appropriate to our true needs as well as to our commitments and relationships

- almsgiving and other practices of charity and justice-making help us to manage our relationships with others, our standing in the world and our evaluation of what is important in regard to possessions, reputation and achievement
- prayer and other acts of the virtue of religion - adoration, devotion and sacrifice - sustain our relationship with God and help us appreciate that it is in God we live and move and have our being (*Ac 17:28*).

There is a tendency now to value human beings simply for their capacity either to produce things that others can consume or to consume things that others have produced. There are many reasons for this not least the fact that the economic system that prevails requires the constant creation of new needs and of new products to meet those needs. Economic prosperity seems to depend on it: that what would have been considered a luxury before, or would not have even been thought of, is now a necessity. The ascetical disciplines of fasting and almsgiving oblige us to think again about this way of valuing humanity just as they help us to develop the virtues needed to resist it.

Fasting

Over indulgence in food and drink is always possible and it is often easier to find excuses for it than to recognise it simply as temptation. If we give ourselves over to the culture of blaming and litigation, of complaining and standing on one's rights, we run the risk of losing a sense of being blessed, the awareness of creation as a gift from a gracious God. A proper appreciation of the good things of the earth must include recognising where they come from, discerning how they are to be wisely used and remembering that there are other people in this world whose basic needs (food, water, shelter) are not being met while we are satisfying imaginary needs. Fasting cannot be simply a personal challenge to see if we can meet certain spiritual targets, a visit to a kind of spiritual gymnasium. Modesty in our intake of food and drink, and even abstinence from them, supports concentration and meditation, reminds us of the needs of others, and helps us to acknowledge the gifts of God.

John Paul II reminded consecrated religious of their need to rediscover the ascetical practices typical of the spiritual tradition of the Church. These are powerful aids to authentic progress in holiness, he said, helping to master and correct the inclinations of human nature wounded by sin, indispensable if we are to remain faithful and follow Jesus on the way of the cross (*Vita Consecrata* §38).

Almsgiving

When Jesus speaks of almsgiving he warns against doing it in a way that draws attention to ourselves. The temptation of what is delightful to the eyes is not just about physical beauty that might arouse our lust but about how we want to appear to others, how we wish to be seen. It is about power and autonomy, being influential and recognisable, being in a position to help others and make them indebted to us. There are great dangers here and the virtues we need to resist them are those associated with justice: gratitude, respect, humility, truthfulness, generosity, as well as justice itself. We give alms to others not only by giving them a handout but also by respecting their property, by honouring their good name and reputation, by seeking to be honest in regard to their gifts and failings (as well as our own). In a world obsessed with fame and celebrity, with how people seem rather than how they are, there is more need than ever for followers of Jesus to be humble, comparing themselves only with God and thereby recognising their nothingness as well as their greatness.

The desire to count for something, to find one's place in the sun, even to have authority over others, can be as powerful as the desire for food or drink or sex. Who can survive being praised, the Book of Proverbs

wonders (27:21). Who can stand up to riches, the Book of Sirach asks (31:10; see 1 *Tm* 6:10). There is nothing to be done except to engage in the combat these desires force on us. We must get involved in this combat if we are to remain directed towards our goal, if we are to continue to grow in the life Jesus gives us.

Prayer

If fasting seeks to manage the lust of the flesh and almsgiving the lust of the eyes, we can think of prayer as the Christian antidote to the pride of life. The original sin of pride is the decision to go it alone and to seek wisdom apart from God. To pray is to acknowledge our need of God. Another tendency of our time is to regard independence and autonomy as simply good, dependence and neediness as simply bad. But our situation is one of dependence and neediness: on parents and teachers, family and nation, friends and colleagues. Secular humanism fears that God is a threat to humanity, that we cannot be truly free until we shake off God. Adam and Eve, in seeking to be wise apart from God, are the original secularists. Christian humanism knows that the truth is directly contrary to this: Christ, who is the head of humanity, leads it not towards destruction but towards flourishing. Prayer is the fresh air in which the Christian lives and blossoms.

To submit our life to God in prayer is neither humiliating nor cowardly: it is simply truthful and spiritually healthy. To give up on prayer is to enter a place of loneliness and sadness. To persevere in the struggle of prayer requires courage but is the way saints are made.

Another Three: Poverty, Chastity, Obedience

Another act of the virtue of religion is the taking of vows and it will not come as a surprise to suggest that the three vows of religion may also be aligned with the threefold structure of temptation and the threefold asceticism of fasting, almsgiving and prayer. The vow of chastity seeks to manage the lust of the flesh, to order the fulfilment of physical desires, and to counter the deep-rooted tendency that leads us to focus on self to the exclusion of others and God. Poverty seeks to manage the lust of the eyes, to order our desire for cutting a dash and making an impression, and to counter the tendency to find our sense of identity in what we own or in what we manage to achieve. Obedience seeks to manage the pride of life, to order our involvement in God's plan in a way that is according to His will and not our own, and to counter the tendency to go it alone, to fall back on our own plans for our life and so miss the depth of what God's

love has in mind for us. The names of these vows are also names of virtues that ought to characterise the lives of all Christians in ways appropriate to their relationships and commitments. Anyone who follows Christ must be poor, chaste and obedient. In publicly making profession of these vows, religious thus become a witness and sign to the Church as a whole of its own deepest reality and calling.

The Usefulness of Temptation

In the Bible temptation most often refers to a testing of the human heart by God. According to the Book of Proverbs

the crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tries hearts (17:3; see also 3:12; 27:21).

The Book of Sirach says

My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation. Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be hasty in time of calamity (2:1).

God weighs human hearts and tests them to see what they are made of (*Ps* 7:9; *Jr* 12:3; *1 Th* 2:4). Why would God do this? In order, it seems, to purify our hearts so that we can love with greater integrity; in order also, it

seems, to make human hearts grow bigger so that we can love more. God tests people in order to refine them: *Jr* 6:27; 9:7; *Zc* 13:9; *Ps* 66:10; *Is* 48:10; *1 P* 1:7; *Wb* 3:5; *Sr* 2:5.

Temptation is then a necessary part of life with God, something potentially useful and helpful to us. St Luke points out that it was the Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted/tested by the devil. The First Letter of Peter says we are not to be surprised at the 'fiery ordeal' that tests us as if something strange were happening to us (*1 P* 4:12; see *1 Co* 10:13). God tests individuals (*2 Ch* 32:31; *2 Co* 9:13) or the entire people (*Ex* 16:4; *Dt* 8:2, 16; *Jg* 2:22) often using the nations and other instruments (*Dt* 13:3; *Jg* 3:1,4; *Jdt* 8:25; *Ps* 11:5).

Temptation helps us to know what we really stand for. Only by facing options and making decisions do we come to know what it is we really value and where our hearts are really given. The struggle with temptation brings about a growth in self-knowledge. We learn about our weaknesses and blind spots, about the depth of our commitments and about the extent to which we are ready to serve God. In practice it is only through temptation that we come to distinguish what we really value from what we think we value. The struggle with temptation helps to clarify this difference for us.

It is easy to be virtuous when we have no choice. Faced with the choices that temptation offers we can, by choosing wisely and well, grow in virtue. St Teresa of Avila says that love is seen, not if it is kept hidden in corners but in the midst of the occasions of falling. Temptation then helps us to set our hearts right and to purify our loving by giving ourselves clearly and decisively to what is of real value.

Temptation usually involves struggle and difficulty, perhaps even blood, sweat and tears, but through such suffering we grow. Rather than shrinking us by limiting our options, our survival of temptation helps us to become greater and bigger than we were. The experience of struggling with it will mean that we will not be hasty in time of temptation but will grow in that calm wisdom which is a hallmark of holiness. Temptation hones the spirit and moral character of the human being:

Blessed is any one who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him (*Jm* 1:12; see also 1:3).

Temptation is, therefore, useful although the outcome of our struggle is not guaranteed. The value of the temptations of Jesus for us is in the knowledge that what we go through, he has gone through already. And

as we go through it we have his help, strength and life to support us. The ascetical practices of fasting, almsgiving and prayer already strengthen us in virtue and prepare us for temptation. In Lent we turn our minds to the testing and training that Christian life requires but Lent serves simply to recall us to things that ought to mark our life always: honestly facing up to what it is we really value, and growing (even with some pain) in the faith and love of the Lord.

In his *Spiritual Combat*, Scupoli identifies four ‘most sure and necessary weapons’ in the spiritual warfare against self

- distrust of oneself
- trust in God
- spiritual exercises
- prayer.

Distrust of self and trust in God is an attitude quickly noted and discussed by him (chapters 2-6) but fundamental to his spiritual teaching. Thinking about the weakness of our nature in the face of temptation is already sufficient to encourage us to distrust self and trust God. When we recall that our struggle is with more than flesh and blood we are encouraged even further in this direction. It is to this aspect of spiritual warfare that we now turn.

Not Just Flesh and Blood

Cosmic Battle

In the first chapter we proposed a triangular model for the spiritual struggle: temptation has three aspects (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life), there is a triangle in which we must live (relating to self, others, God), the classical works of asceticism are three (fasting, almsgiving, prayer), and the vows of religion, seeking to confront directly the threefold root of sin in us, are also three (chastity, poverty, obedience). But our struggle, as St Paul says in the Letter to the Ephesians, is not just with flesh and blood 'but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (*Ep* 6:12). This is why the Christian, if he or she is to remain standing in the evil day, must 'put on the whole armour of God in order to stand against the wiles of the devil' (*Ep* 6:11,13).

There is any number of New Testament texts that speak about these spiritual hosts and about the struggle

with them in which we are also involved. We do not have to turn to the Book of Revelation for the gospels themselves are full of this cosmic drama. In his ministry Jesus is not only a teacher and a healer, he is also an exorcist come to take on and to overpower the spirits of evil and sin, of sickness and death. The demons themselves recognise him as one more powerful than themselves. Reading through the narratives of the passion in all four gospels it is clear that things are happening not just on the level of the relationship between Jesus, the Father and ourselves, and not just on the political level of conflict and misunderstanding between Jesus, the Jewish leaders and the Romans, but intertwined with those, spiritual warfare in another sense is under way, a conflict between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God, involving realities that are beyond human beings but that are of crucial importance for us.

St Luke concludes his account of the temptations of Jesus by telling us that the devil departed from him 'until an opportune time' (*Lk* 4:13). That opportune time, the 'hour' of which Jesus often speaks, is the time of his passion, death and resurrection. The hour of Jesus is the hour of the paschal mystery through which we are redeemed. At the beginning of the account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet St John tells us that 'the

devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray him' (*Jn* 13:2). The time has come for the showdown. As it unfolds, it seems that darkness is triumphant and the prince of darkness has conquered yet again. Jesus is condemned, is crucified and dies on the cross. But God's power reaches even into the kingdom of death, the last enemy of humankind (*1 Co* 15:26), and the swallowing up of Jesus by death becomes the hour of the triumph of God's glory. The Father's only Son, freely accepting his death and having dwelt among the dead, is raised by the Father's power in the glory of the resurrection. His victory means new and eternal life for us.

The Invisible Creation

Whenever we say the Creed we express our faith in God as Creator of heaven and earth, and 'maker of all things visible and invisible'. How are we to understand this reference to the invisible creation? It means things invisible in themselves, not just invisible in the sense of not yet having come within our line of vision. Past or future events on this earth are invisible in that sense - we cannot witness them - but we know that the Creed means something more than this. It refers to immaterial creatures, made by God but spiritual and not physical. In the great hymn to Christ in the Letter to the

Colossians we read that 'all things were created in him, through him and for him, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities' (*Col 1:16*). The hymn is worth quoting in full and repays constant meditation:

God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption through the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God
the firstborn of all creation
for in him all things were created
in heaven and on earth
visible and invisible
whether thrones or dominions
or principalities or authorities -
all things were created through him and for him.

He is before all things
and in him all things hold together
He is the head of the body, the church.

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (*Col 1:13-20*).

Notice that another point is quickly made, not only that there is an invisible creation but that, however we think of it, it does not fall outside the work of Christ. Christ is the firstborn of creation and everything that is created, whether visible or invisible, is created in him, through him and for him. Likewise Christ is the firstborn from the dead, the beginning of the new creation. In making peace by the blood of his cross he has reconciled all things to himself, not only things on earth but also things in heaven.

So we are not tempted to be Manichees. Manicheism is a recurring error that finds it easier to understand spiritual warfare - the battle between flesh and spirit, between evil and good - as a battle between two equal and opposing principles, the God who created the spiritual realm and another god who created the physical realm. St Augustine was persuaded by this view for a time until he came to see that evil too must fall within the plan and power of God. It is a more difficult teaching to understand, that the devil and his angels are creatures of God and not powers opposed to him on the same level as God. The powers of darkness, just as they do not fall outside God's creating power, do not fall outside the work of God's redemption in Christ, at least in the sense that they do not succeed in foiling that redemption. We are told that all things are made subject to Christ, all principalities and powers, even death itself,

so that he can present an eternal kingdom to the Father when God will be all in all (1 Co 15:28; Ep 1:23). Evil does not have the last word and nor does sin or death.

Sin is Behovely

Julian of Norwich (1342-c.1420) tells us that Jesus revealed to her this strange fact, that 'sin is behovely'. It means sin is fitting and appropriate, even in some sense necessary. It does not mean that sin is nothing: think of the suffering it causes, Julian says. But 'sin is behovely' because God can make it serve His purposes. Paradoxically, those things that soil the glory of God are made to testify to that glory and mean it is more gloriously revealed. The liturgy of the Easter vigil puts it this way:

O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a redeemer! [The original Latin says more: *O certe necessarium Adae peccatum, quod Christi morte deletum est! O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem!* O certainly necessary sin of Adam, which is cancelled by the death of Christ. O happy fault which gained such and so great a Redeemer.]

A contemporary theologian who has written much about this mystery of the victory of Christ over sin and

evil is Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988). Basing himself not only on texts of the New Testament such as the hymn in Colossians 1, but also on the experiences of Christian mystics, including his friend Adrienne von Speyr, Balthasar believes Christians are obliged to hope for the salvation of all. We cannot claim to know either that all are saved or that some are lost for the judgement belongs to God. But the commandment to love all obliges us to hope for the salvation of all. The moment in the paschal mystery that illustrates the truth of this doctrine is the descent of Christ into hell. What does it mean to say that 'He descended into Hell'? It means that the victory of Jesus reaches all corners of creation, even the darkest ones. There is no created place, time or experience that has not been touched by His redeeming power.

Angels and Demons

Our minds naturally ask the question 'what kinds of being are we talking about when we speak of spiritual creatures whether good or bad'. Some might be tempted to avoid the issue by saying that this way of thinking belongs to a cosmology we have outgrown (an underworld, a world and an overworld) and that the powers and principalities Jesus tackled are better explained in psychological, sociological or other terms.

After all, people often talk about struggling with their ‘inner demons’ and we know they are talking about psychological and moral battles. People talk about the power of invisible things like ‘the market’ or ‘institutionalised prejudice’ or ‘the atmosphere in the group’, realities that are in themselves invisible but whose effects and consequences are all too visible. There are impersonal things that are powerful in our world, though the Church has difficulty in accepting that there can be social sins in the strict sense whose evil is not attributable to individual human moral agents. But Christianity has always believed also in the reality of spiritual beings active within creation for good and for ill, in ways that are relevant to us and to our relationship with God.

A moment’s reflection on our personal experiences of struggle in trying to live the Christian life will confirm that we are up against forces stronger than ourselves. Scupoli is in no doubt that the devil is active in trying to prevent and confuse our efforts to follow Christ more faithfully (*Spiritual Combat* chapters 16, 23, 27-32). John Paul II speaks of the ‘diabolical deceit’ that causes some evils to present themselves under the appearance of good (*Vita consecrata* §38). The devil uses things, people and events against us but only because God allows him to test us (*Rv* 2:10).

Nevertheless, St Paul expresses concern that the tempter might try us too hard (1 *Th* 3:5) and Jesus teaches us to pray that we not be led into temptation (*Mt* 6:13).

The Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984), writing about a 'theology of sleep', speaks about the supernatural battles that take place over the beds of sleeping Christians. Things happen in the course of the night. The Bible speaks of God revealing things in dreams. God's people are then more vulnerable to spiritual interference, a fact that is recognised in the liturgy of Compline, the prayer that seeks God's protection from the dangers of the night.

But even when awake we may be conscious of the interference and distraction of spiritual powers that are in us but not of us. In his Letter to the Romans St Paul makes the startling statement, 'I do not understand my own actions' (7:15). 'I do not do what I want', he continues, 'but do the very thing I hate. I can will what is right but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me' (*Rm* 7:15,18-20). This is very re-assuring, at least in helping us understand the reality of our struggle. In the story of Adam and Eve it is likewise re-assuring that there we see the presence and

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