

XI. - Christ and Satan.

And he said unto them, I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Luke 10:18.

If anyone stands up to you and refuses to believe in the existence of Satan and his demons, you can usually say that such a person is caught up in Satan's snares. The Christ does not leave any key unused in order to reveal His Name and to save through this revelation, while Satan, on the other hand, is always trying to hide from you and to destroy you through the mysterious influences he exerts over you. Light and darkness are opposites here. Christ is the Light that spreads its rays ever farther; Satan is the Darkness that withdraws ever more into the dark and shadowy, in order to lose itself and the whole earth in gloomy night. Not believing in the existence of Satan and his workings is therefore so extremely dangerous, because it gives Satan the best chances to win your heart, and it is certainly a deterioration and a sign of a weakening faith that in the church of Christ and in its preaching less and less account is taken of the demonic power. The test of this is easy to take. When the Lord's Prayer is recited, everyone still prays: Deliver us from evil. But notice now how in free prayer our God is almost never invoked to cover us with His shield against the poisonous arrows of Satan. It was therefore imperative, if Christ's kingship was to regain its glory in our eyes in this respect as well, that we should make it clear that Jesus himself understood his struggle through life as one mighty battle against Satan, and that this understanding of Jesus himself is decisive for us. As it was for him, so it must be for us, because it is like that and not like that. From ourselves we know nothing of the spirit world that is certain. He, on the other hand, who descended to us from heaven, from the spirit realm, has the fullest authority in the matter. What came to us from his lips was revelation, and everyone who professes that the Christ is the way, the truth and the life, must obey that revelation. To say, however, that belief itself in the existence of a demonic world is nothing but the fruit and invention of superstition is tantamount to short-sighted superficiality. It was precisely the most deeply disposed spirits that throughout the ages have felt themselves caught in one mighty struggle with the demonic world.

We therefore proceed on the basis of the certainty of Revelation: 1°. that there is a world of spirits outside our human race; 2°. that these spirits form two hosts, one of angels, the other of demons; 3°. that the demon hosts are temporally under the dominion of Satan; 4°. that both these angels and demons received powers, gifts and talents from their Creator; 5°. that they are called to spend these powers, gifts and talents in the service of their God, not only to praise Him but also to be instruments of His Kingdom's reign; 6°. that, consequently, all kinds of effects are

also exerted by these spirits on our earth, not only in the spiritual life of this earth but also in the physical, material and spiritual spheres; 7°. that the demons, after their fall, were able to use these powers, gifts and talents to bring about a change in the world. That after their fall the demons abused these powers and workings to destroy this earth and especially our human race; 8°. That these demonic influences until Jesus' coming had brought about, with the exception of Israel's nation-state, a reign of Satan over the peoples and nations, which made Satan at their head the ruler of the world; 9°. That it was then that the Christ came to break the works of the devil and to become himself, not the ruler, but the head and king of this world; 10°. That this explains the temptation in the wilderness and the constant casting out of the devils; 11°. That through this the power of the ruler of the world was broken so fundamentally before nineteen centuries that Jesus could exclaim: I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning; and 12°. that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, after Jesus' Ascension, brought about the penetration into this world of a holy spiritual atmosphere, destined to repress without restraint the demonic atmosphere that was weighing heavily on the lives of the people.

The Scriptures tell us that Satan was imprisoned from that hour onward. In the end of days he will once again be "unbound" and released with his full demonic power (Rev. 20: 7). But it is precisely this important prophecy that establishes that Satan, in the period in which we live today, does not have his full effect. Not only in the sense that Satan never achieved anything, nor is he able to do anything, except under God's permission, but in the further sense that the Kingship of Christ is increasingly undermining Satan's kingdom and that the spiritual atmosphere which prevails in the congregations of the living God through the Holy Spirit and which radiates from him into the world is restraining the working of Satan's power. Not as if it were already destroyed by this and doomed to utter powerlessness. The Lord's Prayer teaches us that the evil one's struggle to destroy us is unceasing, and the Apostle expressly teaches us that behind flesh and blood lies the fearful struggle with spiritual wickedness in the air. But after Christ's coming and after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit this great change has been accomplished, that there are now two very distinct areas of demonic influence on earth: on the one hand, the area of unbelieving nations, where the old power of Satan still operates as it did in the past; and on the other hand, and in contrast to this, an entirely different area, which is covered by the Holy Baptism, and where the power is not the spirit of Satan, but the Holy Spirit.

In the Baptism itself this is what lies behind it.

Baptism originated in the ancient idea that just as water removes impurity from the body, clothing and household effects, so also religious cleansing came about through sprinkling or immersion. Almost all peoples have incorporated such cleansing into their religious practices. Israel was fully aware that its land and property were consecrated, holy and pure, compared to the land and property of the heathen. If a Gentile was to be accepted into Israel's nation-state, he had to undergo the so-called proselyte baptism, i.e., before being accepted into Israel's nation-state he had to be purified figuratively from the contamination that clung to him because of his Gentile origin. And the symbolic meaning of proselyte baptism made all the more impression, not only because the person to be baptized had to break all ties and relationships with his home and family, but also because Israel carried the stain of sin not only in the soul, but also in the body and in the outside. Between the pure and the impure the Law of Moses draws a deep distinction, and that impure and unholy thing is also attached to the animals, to the sick, to the corpse, to the dead carrion, and each time ablutions, purifications and sprinklings are performed to make it clear that the demonic action affects not only the soul and the invisible, but also the body and the visible. Hence the Baptism of John and the Baptism of Jesus and his Apostles had such a tremendous impact on Israel's pride. This new baptism included Israel itself among the unclean and unholy, and prophesied the coming of a new Kingdom, of the Kingdom of Heaven, from which by nature both Jew and Gentile were excluded, so that only through this new baptism could both undergo that high purification by which they were transferred to the holy precincts of the spiritual Kingdom. In the early days of the Christian Church, the so-called Exorcism was therefore linked to Holy Baptism. Before being baptized, the person to be baptized had to renounce Satan and detach himself from his service and workings. For the child to be baptized this vow was made by its godparents. In itself there was nothing against this, it made a rich sense and kept the meaning of Baptism alive in the consciousness. This only became misplaced when the Church entered the second generation and children born of Christian parents were also offered baptism. However, these children were by no means on a par with the Jews and pagans. Born of Christian parents, these children were pure and holy. They were not born on the demonic terrain, but on the terrain where the Holy Spirit rules, and therefore the Exorcism had no meaning for these children. That is why our Reformed Churches did not adopt this Exorcism.

However, not enough consideration has been given to the question whether the old practice should still be applied to the Baptism of converts from the Gentiles, Jews

and Mohamedans. Such converts do not come from the holy grounds, but from the as yet unholy grounds, and only pass into the holy grounds through Baptism. In a literal sense, they are still being transferred "from the power of the evil ones into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13). It seems to us, therefore, that with a more serious understanding of the fundamental distinction between the holy and unholy realms, it may be advisable to include the element of devil worship in the Baptism of converts who are in the same condition as the first baptized in the days of the Apostles. At the time of the first Baptism the difference between the Baptism of John and the Christian Baptism was precisely that the Christian Baptism was baptized with the Holy Spirit. Something from which two things follow: first, that whoever is born of Christian parents does not first have to be transferred to the new terrain, but rises from it, so that there can be no question of an Exorcism here; but also, that whoever is born on the unholy terrain and only transfers to the holy terrain through Baptism, has to break with the ruler of the world, in order to honor Christ as his King instead. The whole doctrine of the Covenant of Grace rests on this distinction; a distinction in which it is always necessary to understand the working of the Holy Spirit in its broadest sense. Those who think only of the personal action of the Holy Spirit in reawakening the soul fail to see how the Holy Spirit radiates from the center of the spirit to all sides of our lives, creating in them a completely different atmosphere of human existence. It is already true, in part, of Satan that he created such a demonic atmosphere in the lives of the heathen peoples through his workings on their souls; it is even more true of the Holy Spirit, who with divine omnipotence permeates the whole field of human life as soon as he has chosen his own center of radiation in the congregation.

This is by no means to say, however, that the dividing line between the consecrated domain of the Holy Spirit and the unholy domain of the ruler of the world has been drawn cleanly and sharply from the beginning, and has always been kept clear. Wherever Christ's Church appeared in a flourishing pagan city like Corinth, it was of course initially no more than a very small oasis in the moral wilderness. It was not those few Christians who dominated city life. City life initially remained pagan, and there was rather a danger that from the center of this pagan life the demonic influences would penetrate into Jesus' church. Hence Paul's sharp and earnest admonition in his two letters to this church. Only gradually, as more and more people were baptized, and finally the whole population, with a few exceptions, joined the Christian church, could that church also encompass public

life. And this process took place even more slowly in the countries of central and northern Europe, when the conversion of individuals was replaced by the Christianization of entire tribes and nations. With such massive conversions it was inevitable that Christian life would initially be no more than outward show, and under the Christian name the old pagan life with its inherited demonic influences would continue. This continuation of the old pagan life manifested itself not only in the persistence of pagan customs and a lower moral standard, but also in a determined effort to perpetuate the reign of the demonic being through superstition. Sometimes this was done so crudely and ruthlessly that a kind of satanic worship was established. Asian influences in particular were shocking, but European tradition also constantly nourished certain attempts and striving to seek out the demonic powers, to reconcile with them, to place themselves in their service, and sometimes to celebrate their services in shameful orgies. This tradition appeared under all kinds of superstitious forms, and it left the most frightening memories in the so-called witch trials.

The Church, and the authorities at its behest, were clearly aware of the serious danger posed to Christianity by these demonic activities. Nowadays it is often presented as if all this superstitious phenomenon arose from ignorance and false delusion, and so must be judged by anyone who does not believe in the existence and operation of unholy spiritual powers. But the Christian church never took that stand. She knew from the Gospel, she knew from her Lord and King, that these demonic workings were all too real, and there is no doubt that in the wide-spread manifestation of such unholy phenomena at the time, there was an attempt by Satan to disrupt the Kingdom of Christ, to maintain his own influence, and to thwart the progress and expansion of the holy field of the Holy Spirit. The mistake made by the Church and the authorities at that time was not that they knew and felt they were dealing with an unholy demonic power, but that, instead of fighting it spiritually, they were fighting it with the sword and with the stake. This makes the struggle of the Christian Church against this demonic power a very somber and dark page in the history of the Christian Church. It was not merely a casting out of devils, as in the days of the Apostles, by high spiritual supremacy, but a pursuit by fire and sword of what could only be undermined and overcome by spiritual means. Our sacrament meeting form has chosen the better path. In this form the demonic evil in the heart vein is seriously attacked, and it is recognized that even in Christ's congregation traces of this evil were still perceptible, but the resistance to the evil is sought in church discipline and in not allowing the Sacrament of the

Lord's Supper. And it is precisely this spiritual fight which has had such an excellent effect, that superstition has never been rooted out more than in the circles of Calvinism. It is not as if the government therefore immediately refrained from violent repression, but the main movement emanated from the churches, and that action was purely spiritual.

The dangerous side of the persistent demonic influence was that people thought they could break the power of demonism by magical means. This meant that people looked to Satan himself for the means to counteract his fatal effects. This is what superstition is all about. It is the conviction that mysterious means exist to break the evil effects of a demonic influence, both where that demonic influence leads us to sin and in cases where an illness or evil in man or beast or a frightening appearance disturbs life. Salvation was then sought in an amulet, a talisman, a spell or an incantation. Satan bewitched evil, and superstition tried to outdo him with even stronger sorcery. People fought the demonic with demonic means, and in doing so they strengthened the reign of the demonic in their hearts. This received a different look when the saving magic was attributed to a relic or to a sign that was derived from Christian worship, but in the attempt to remove demonic evil not spiritually, through the Holy Spirit, but magically through an external secret means, this remained fundamentally one with the old intention of all sorcery.

It has taken centuries for this superstition to be eradicated from our public life in the Christian countries. In the pagan and Mohammedan lands all kinds of mysterious workings of demonic origin still take place, which no longer occur among us, and the superstition to exorcise these demonic workings through sorcery still exists everywhere among these unbaptized peoples. Nevertheless, it should not be thought that for this reason superstition has already been completely driven out of the Christian countries. The winning game stiffens the belief in a mysterious effect of fortune on our lives. Card readers and fortune tellers can be found in all large cities, and they are consulted even by the highest social classes. Superstitious traditions concerning the number of persons with whom one may be seated, and the day on which a ship may set sail, still hold good throughout Europe, and in highly cultivated circles, where the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is no longer felt, one gives oneself over to spiritism and clairvoyance, as if through these phenomena a light above that of the Gospel had risen upon us. We do not dispute that there is truth in these phenomena, nor that they deserve attention; but evil creeps in when, setting aside the Gospel of Christ, one seeks in these phenomena a higher revelation than is given us in Christ. Do not forget that the Scriptures teach

us that Satan will also perform signs and wonders, and that it is therefore always a requirement of the Christian conscience to test the spirits in this regard also.

Only the more powerful action that emanates from the atmosphere of the Holy Spirit in our private and public lives can relieve us of the dominion of these demonic and superstitious powers in a lasting way. Christ, as our King seated at God's right hand, has poured out the Holy Spirit in our midst. Through this, a spiritual power has been ordained on earth in the congregation, of which He is the Head, whose action and influence always serves His reign instrumentally. These influences of the Holy Spirit have also extended beyond the limited circle of His living congregation. They have affected the life of the people, public opinion, legislation, morals and customs. And it is these influences of the Holy Spirit that have created a barrier against the demonic current. Thus, thanks to the constant work of Christ, through His Holy Spirit, we have gradually been freed from the demonic powers in public life. The superstitious idea of combating the effects of the curse by means of magic has left us. Our spirit has become free, and it is this liberated spirit that has felt the power awaken within it to penetrate the mysteries of nature through our research, our thinking and our ingenuity, and thus to subdue the mysterious powers of nature to us in the way ordained by God.

This is not understood by those who honor in Christ nothing but the Savior of the souls of the elect, but who understand that all power in heaven and earth, spiritual and material, has been given to Christ, as an epic of Christ, the Lion of Judah, and that his divine heroic struggle was, is, and will remain until the end, the fundamental struggle to make Satan fall like lightning from heaven, to strip this world, which is God's, of its power, and to bring God's holy order over this world, despite Satan, to its completion.

The dethronement of the ruler of the world and, in return, the glorious unfolding of Jesus' kingship over this world, is the inclusive and guiding idea of sacred history.