

## The Power of Satan

Because of the subject that I have decided to address in this book, I cannot pursue other very interesting theological questions. I will merely touch upon certain points that come up as a result of exorcisms. An exorcist with a solid theological and scriptural background, such as Father Candido, who spoke with demons for thirty-six years, is well qualified to make some assumptions on subjects such as the sin of the rebellious angels—that theologians have dismissed in the past with a "we do not know". Everything that God created follows a harmonious design; therefore, the smallest atom influences everything, and every shadow casts some darkness on everything. Theology will be unfinished and incomprehensible until it focuses on the world of the angels. A Christology that ignores Satan is crippled and will never understand the magnitude of redemption.

We will now continue with Christ, the center of the universe. Everything was created for him and in view of his Coming, in the heavens (angels) and on earth (the tangible world, man first of all). It would be wonderful to speak only of Christ, but it would not be according to his every teaching and action, and we would never be able to understand him. Scripture talks to us about the kingdom of God but also of the kingdom of Satan. It tells us about the power of God, the Creator and Lord of the universe, but also of the power of darkness. It speaks of the sons of God and of the sons of Satan. It is impossible to understand the salvific action of Christ if we ignore the destructive action of Satan.

Satan was the most perfect being created by the hands of God. His God-given authority and superiority over the other angels are recognized by all, so he thought that he had the same authority over everything that God was creating. Satan tried to understand all of creation but could not, because all the plan of creation was oriented toward Christ. Until Christ came into the world, God's plan could not be revealed in its entirety. Hence Satan's rebellion. He wanted to continue to be the absolute first, the center of creation, even if it meant opposing God's design. This is why Satan continually tries to dominate the world ("the whole world is in the power of the evil one", I Jn 5: 19). Beginning with our forefathers, he seeks to enslave men by making them obey himself and disobey God. He was successful with our forefathers, Adam and Eve, and he hoped to continue with all men with the help of "a third of the angels", who, according to the book of Revelation, followed him in rebellion against God.

God never rejects his creatures. Therefore, even though they broke with God, Satan and his angels maintain their power and rank (thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, and so on) even if they use them for evil purposes. Saint Augustine does not exaggerate when he claims that, if God gave Satan a free hand, "no man would be left alive." Since Satan cannot kill us, he tries to "make us into his followers in opposition to God, just as he is in opposition to God".

The truth of salvation is this: Jesus came "to destroy the works of the devil" (I Jn 3:8), to free man from Satan's slavery, and to establish the kingdom of God after destroying the reign of Satan. However, between the first coming of Christ and the Parousia (the second, triumphant coming of Christ as judge), the devil tries to entice as many people as possible

to his side. It is a battle he wages with the desperation of one who knows he is already defeated, knowing "that his time is short" (Rev 12:12). Therefore, Paul tells us in all honesty that "we are not contending against 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" (Eph 6:12).

Scripture tells us that angels and demons (I want particularly to mention Satan) are spiritual creatures but also that they are individuals gifted with intelligence, will, freedom, and initiative. Those modern theologians who identify Satan with the abstract idea of evil are completely mistaken. Theirs is true heresy; that is, it is openly in contrast with the Bible, the Fathers, and the Magisterium of the Church. The truth about Satan was never doubted in the past; therefore, there are no dogmatic definitions in this respect with the exception of the following statement of the Fourth Lateran Council: "The devil [that is, Satan] and the other demons were created good by God; but they became evil through their own fault." Whoever denies Satan also denies sin and no longer understands the actions of Christ.

Let us be clear about this: Jesus defeated Satan through his sacrifice. However, Jesus also defeated Satan before his death, through his teachings: "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Lk 11:20). Jesus is the strongest one, who tied up Satan (Mk 3:27), despoiled him, and pillaged his kingdom, which is at an end (Mk 3:26). Jesus first gave the power to cast out demons to his apostles; then he extended the power to the seventy-two disciples, and in the end he granted it to all those who would believe in him.

The Acts of the Apostles tell us that after the descent of the Holy Spirit the apostles continued to expel demons, and all Christians have done so after them. Already, the earliest Fathers of the Church, such as Justin and Irenaeus, clearly express Christian thought about the devil and about the power to cast him out. Other Fathers, in particular Tertullian and Origen, concur. These four authors alone can refute many modern theologians, who, for all purposes, either do not believe in the devil or completely ignore him.

The Second Vatican Council powerfully reminded us of this abiding teaching of the Church: "For a monumental struggle against the powers of darkness pervades the whole history of man. The battle was joined from the very origins of the world" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 37). "Although he was made by God in a state of holiness, from the very dawn of history man abused his liberty, at the urging of personified Evil. Man set himself against God and sought to find fulfillment apart from God. Although he knew God, he did not glorify Him as God, but his senseless mind was darkened and he served the creature rather than the Creator" (no. 13). "For He sent His Son, clothed in our flesh, in order that through this Son He might snatch men from the power of darkness and of Satan" (*Ad Gentes*, no. 3). How can those who deny the existence and the many activities of Satan understand the achievements of Christ? How can they understand the value of the redemptive death of Christ? On the basis of Sacred Scripture, the Second Vatican Council affirms that "[Christ], by His death and resurrection, had freed us from the power

of Satan" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 6). And "[Christ] was crucified and rose again to break the stranglehold of personified Evil" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 2).

Satan, defeated by Christ, fights against his followers. The battle against the evil spirits "was joined from the very origins of the world, and will continue until the last day, as the Lord has attested" (no. 37). During this time, every man is on battle alert because life on earth is a trial of faithfulness to God. "We strive therefore to please the Lord in all things (cf 2 Cor 5:9). We put on the armor of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil and resist on the evil day.... For before we reign with the glorious Christ, all of us will be made manifest 'before the tribunal of Christ, so that each one may receive what he has won through the body, according to his works, whether good or evil' (2 Cor 5: 10)" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 48).

Even if this battle against Satan concerns all men and all times, there is no doubt that Satan's power is felt more keenly in periods of history when the sinfulness of the community is more evident. For example, when I view the decadence of the Roman Empire, I can see the moral disintegration of that period in history. Now we are at the same level of decadence, partly as a result of the misuse of the mass media (which are not evil in themselves) and partly because of Western consumerism and materialism, which have poisoned our society.

I believe that Pope Leo XIII, in a vision that will be detailed in the appendix of this chapter [pages 37-39] received a prophetic warning concerning this demonic attack on our times. How does the devil oppose God and our Savior? By claiming for himself the adoration due to God and by mimicking Christian institutions. Therefore, he is anti-Christ and anti-Church. Satan uses the idolatry of sex, which reduces the human body to an instrument of sin, against the Incarnation of the Word who redeemed man by becoming man. Satan uses his churches, his cult, his devotees (often consecrated through a pact of blood), his adorers, the followers of his promises, to mimic the worship due to God. just as Christ gave his apostles and their followers specific powers for the good of body and soul, so Satan gives specific powers to his followers for the destruction of body and soul. We will examine these specific powers in our explanation of witchcraft.

I will mention one more item on this subject. Just as it would be wrong to deny the existence of Satan, it is also wrong to accept the prevalent opinion that there are spiritual beings that are not mentioned in the Bible. These are the invention of spiritists, of followers of the occult, of those who espouse reincarnation, or of those who believe in "wandering souls". There are no good spirits other than angels; there are no evil spirits other than demons. Two Councils of the Church (Lyons and Florence) tell us that the souls of those who die go immediately to heaven or to hell or to purgatory. The souls of the dead who are present during seances or the souls of the dead who are present in living bodies to torture them are none other than demons. God allows a soul to return to earth only in very rare, exceptional cases, but we recognize that this subject is still full of unknowns. Father La Grua attempts to explain some of his own experiences with souls who are possessed by the devil, but I must reiterate that this is a matter that requires further research, and I will address it in a different book.

Some people marvel at the ability of demons to tempt man and even to own the body (but they can never take the soul unless man freely gives it to them) through possession and oppression. We should remember what is written in Revelation (12:7, etc.): "Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.... And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman", who was "dressed like the sun", from whom Jesus was born (it is very clear that we are also talking about the Most Holy Virgin Mary). When the dragon realized that his efforts had failed, "he went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus."

During a May 24, 1987, visit to the Sanctuary of Saint Michael the Archangel, John Paul II said, "The battle against the devil, which is the principal task of Saint Michael the archangel, is still being fought today, because the devil is still alive and active in the world. The evil that surrounds us today, the disorders that plague our society, man's inconsistency and brokenness, are not only the results of original sin, but also the result of Satan's pervasive and dark action."

The last sentence is a clear reference to God's condemnation of the serpent, in Genesis (3:15): "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Is Satan already in hell? When did the battle between angels and devils take place? We cannot answer these questions unless we keep in mind that hell is more a state of mind than a place. Place and time are different concepts for spirits.

Revelation tells us that demons were hurled down to earth; therefore their final damnation has yet to happen, even if it is irrevocable. This means that they still have the power that God had given them, even if only "for a brief time". That is why they ask Jesus, "Have you come here to torment us before the time?" (Mt 8:29). Christ is the only judge; he will gather to himself his Mystical Body. This, then, is how we should interpret Paul's statement to the Corinthians, "since we are to judge angels" (I Cor 6:3). When the "legion" of demons who possessed the man from Gerasa pleaded with Christ "not to command them to depart into the abyss" (Lk 8:31-32), they were seeking to hold on to their power. To a demon, leaving the body of a person and sinking into hell is an irrevocable death sentence; that is why the demon fights it to the last. However, his eternal pain will increase proportionately to the suffering he caused on earth. It is Saint Peter who tells us that the demons have not yet been definitively sentenced: "When angels sinned, God did not spare them; he sent them down to the underworld and consigned them to the dark underground caves to be held there till the day of judgment" (2 Pet 2:4). The glory of the angels, too, will be increased according to their good deeds; therefore, it is very useful to invoke their help.

What harm can the devil cause to the living? There are few books on the subject and a lack of common language. I will now attempt to define the words that I will use in this book.

*Ordinary activity.* This is "temptation", which is the most common activity of the demons, and it is directed against all men. When Jesus allowed Satan to tempt him, he accepted our human condition. I will not talk about this common diabolical endeavor, because the purpose of this book is to highlight Satan's "extraordinary activity", which can take place only if God so allows.

This second category can take six different forms:

1. *External physical pain caused by Satan.* We know of this from many lives of the saints. We know that Saint Paul of the Cross, the Curé of Ars, Padre Pio, and many others were beaten, flogged, and pummeled by demons. This external form of persecution does not affect the soul; therefore with this type there has never been the need for an exorcism, only for prayers. Here I will dwell only on the other types of actions that directly affect exorcists.

2. *Demonic possession.* This occurs when Satan takes full possession of the body (not the soul); he speaks and acts without the knowledge or consent of the victim, who therefore is morally blameless. It is the gravest and most spectacular form of demonic afflictions, and it attracts the attention of producers of movies such as *The Exorcist*. According to the *Ritual* for exorcisms, some of the signs of possession include: speaking in tongues, extraordinary strength, and revealing the unknown. The man of Gerasa is a clear Gospel example of possession. To fix a set "model" for demonic possession would be a serious mistake; the affliction runs the gamut of symptoms and severity. For instance, I have exercised two totally possessed persons who remained perfectly still and silent during the exorcism. I could cite many other examples and as many different symptoms.

3. *Diabolical oppression.* Symptoms vary from a very serious to a mild illness. There is no possession, loss of consciousness, or involuntary action and word. The Bible gives us many examples of oppression; one of them is Job. He was not possessed, but he lost his children, his goods, and his health. The bent woman and the deaf and dumb man who were cured by Jesus were not subject to total possession, but there was a demonic presence that caused physical discomfort. Saint Paul was most certainly not possessed by a demon, but he had a demonic oppression that caused an evil affliction: "And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me" (2 Cor 12:7). There is no doubting the evil origin of the affliction.

While possessions are still relatively rare today, we exorcists run into a great number of people who have been struck by the devil in their health, jobs, or relationships. We must make it clear that to diagnose and heal an oppression-related illness is not any easier than to diagnose and cure a person afflicted by full possession. The degree of gravity may be

different, but the difficulty of the diagnosis and the amount of time involved in healing are the same.

4. *Diabolic obsession.* Symptoms include sudden attacks, at times ongoing, of obsessive thoughts, sometimes even rationally absurd, but of such nature that the victim is unable to free himself. Therefore the obsessed person lives in a perpetual state of prostration, desperation, and attempts at suicide. Almost always obsession influences dreams. Some people will say that this is evidence of mental illness, requiring the services of a psychiatrist or a psychologist. The same could be said of all other forms of demonic phenomena. Some symptoms, however, are so inconsistent with known illnesses that they point with certainty to their evil origins. Only an expert and well-trained eye can identify the crucial differences.

5. *Diabolic infestation.* Infestations affect houses, things, or animals. This book will only mention the topic. I merely want to state that I will never use this term when I refer to persons. I will always talk about possession, oppression, and obsession.

6. *Diabolical subjugation, or dependence.* People fall into this form of evil when they voluntarily submit to Satan. The two most common forms of dependence are the blood pact with the devil and the consecration to Satan.

How can we defend ourselves from all these evils? A strict interpretation of the *Ritual* confines the use of exorcisms only to instances of true possession. However, as I stated before, the current *Ritual* fails to address many occasions in which an exorcist diagnoses an evil influence. In all cases when there is no possession, the usual means to obtain grace should be sufficient. These means are prayer; the sacraments; almsgiving; leading a Christian life; pardoning offenses; and soliciting the aid of our Lord, Mary, the saints, and the angels. I will now say a few words about the angels. I gladly end this chapter on the devil, Christ's adversary, by speaking about the angels. They are our great allies. We owe them a great debt, and it is a mistake to mention them as rarely as we do. Every one of us has a guardian angel, most faithful of friends twenty-four hours a day, from conception to death. He unceasingly protects us, body and soul, while we, for the most part, never think about him. We also know that each nation has its particular guardian angel and, probably, every community and family, although we are not certain on the two last points. We know, however, that the angels are a multitude, and their desire to help us is much greater than Satan's desire to destroy us.

Sacred Scripture often tells us about the missions that God entrusted to his angels. We know the name of the prince of the angels, Saint Michael. There is a hierarchy among the angels based on love, which is guided by the divine intellect "in whose Will we find our peace", as Dante says. We also know the names of two other archangels:

Gabriel and Raphael. The Apocrypha add a fourth name, Uriel. Sacred Scripture divides the angels into nine choirs: dominions, powers, thrones, principalities, virtues, angels, archangels, cherubim, and seraphim. The believer who lives in the presence of the Trinity and is certain of its life within himself knows that he also has a mother, God's own

Mother, who ceaselessly helps him. He knows that he can always count on the help of the angels and of the saints; therefore, how can he feel alone, abandoned, or oppressed by evil? In the life of the believer there is pain, because it is the way of the Cross that saves us, but there is no room for sadness. He who believes is always ready to give witness, to those who ask him, about the hope that sustains him (see I Pet 3: 15).

It is also clear that the believer must be faithful to God and must fear sin. This is the basis of our strength, as Saint John tells us: "We know that any one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him"(I Jn 5:18). If sometimes our weakness leads us to fall, we must immediately pick ourselves up with that great gift of God's mercy: repentance and confession.