Philip G. Ziegler, *God's Adversary and Ours: A Brief Theology of the Devil* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2025), pp. x + 140, ISBN: 978-1481324137. £19.99

In *God's Adversary and Ours: A Brief Theology of the Devil*, Philip Ziegler, Professor in Christian Dogmatics at the University of Aberdeen, contributes an erudite and insightful re-examination of the place of the devil within Christian systematic theology. While many consider the diabolical subject matter of this concise book to be a marginalised outlier of theology, and perhaps an anachronistic contribution coming long after the zenith of interest in the demonic in the 1980s and 1990s, Ziegler lists a number of reasons why, specifically within Reformed theology, the subject matter of the devil should be revisited.

Notwithstanding the fact that one of Ziegler's theological influencers – Karl Barth – famously spent one hundred and fifty pages in his *Church Dogmatics* developing an angelology and kingdom of heaven thesis before giving only a 'momentary glance' at demons in thirteen pages, Ziegler lists several motivations for re-examining demonology. Before ironically giving Barth an honourable mention for his brief diabology, Ziegler lists motivations for the project from culture (the ubiquitous, persistent reality of evil), ecumenism (the many denominations which are seeing a surge in interest in the demonic and spiritual warfare), biblical considerations (gospel accounts cannot be understood without talk of the devil), and the apocalyptic Paul (one cannot understand Paul's gospel minus a focus on demonic powers and principalities). Fundamentally, if Christian theology is to take intellectual responsibility for the preservation of the Church's witness and integrity, as claimed by Ziegler, then it is imperative that the doctrine of the devil be revisited and reworked in order to address common and pervasive elements of the current Western zeitgeist.

In his endorsement of the book, David Fergusson of the University of Cambridge states that *God's Adversary and Ours* will most likely prove to be 'the most important work on the subject in a long time.' This is not a hyperbolic nod from one professor to another but rather reflects the inimitable quality of Ziegler's attempt to produce a robust account of sin, redemption and evil. This he effectively does by analysing the history of the devil within Christian theology with the claim that the dogmatic location and ordering of the devil needs to change. For too long Christian thinkers have explicated a doctrine of the devil through the lens of the first

article of the Apostles' Creed with a focus on his origins, ontology and place within God's sovereignty. Following Augustine, the systematised demonology that has pervaded church history promulgates the devil as a fallen angel, defines evil as *privatio boni* (the absence of good), and situates the work of the devil within the constraints of divine permission and providence. As Ziegler himself states, 'In sum, Augustine positions the figure of the devil dogmatically at the intersection of claims about the goodness of creation, the nature of angelic being and willing, the privative quality of evil, and the exercise of meticulous divine providence' (p. 27).

While this first-article demonology has enjoyed a long career, espoused by the likes of Augustine, Aquinas, and Schleiermacher, Ziegler argues that we should follow the lesser-known Christological tendencies of Calvin and Barth, both of whom advocated for a theological understanding of the devil in relation to the cross, i.e. a soteriological account instead of a creational one. While there is satisfaction for sin on the cross there is also always deliverance from evil. As Ziegler quotes Barth, 'Demonology is in fact only a negative reflection of biblical Christology and soteriology' (p. 40).

Moreover, locating the devil in the second article (which focuses on Jesus Christ, his identity, and his redemptive work) instead of the first, helps deal with one of the epitomal criticisms against Reformed theological demonologies. As Gregory Boyd concludes when critiquing the Reformed spiritual warfare account of David Powlison, spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry within Reformed theology is often reduced to a level of domestication, which is far removed from the gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry of exorcism. Due to a strong and meticulous account of sovereignty, Reformed accounts of demonology are often little more than the moral struggles involved in living out the Christian life. Ziegler is cognisant of this, recognising that in the first article the devil is 'readily and safely domesticated, a tethered rebel angel in the service of the outworking of providence' (p. 104). In contrast, however, when housed in the soteriological second article, the devil is on display with his true colours – feral, evil, intractable, and a genuine enemy of the triune God and his people.

The placement of the devil within Christology and soteriology enables Ziegler to construct a demonology that is unique and demonstrates the sheer inimical qualities of the demonic. By using three of Jesus' Johannine messianic titles – the Way, the Truth, and the Life – Ziegler teases out the

full extent of the devil's inimical ways with exegetical reflection on biblical material followed by theological consideration of diabolic temptation, possession and falsehood as a sort of anti-Christological portrait of Jesus as the way, the life and truth respectively. By examining the scriptural material on the temptation of Christ (i.e., with Satan in the wilderness, Peter's rebuke of Jesus' impending road to the cross, and Christ's difficult acquiescence to God's will in Gethsemane), the author argues that the gospels offer a picture of struggle regarding Christ's identity and vocation. Exegeting gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry of exorcism and deliverance enables Ziegler to posit demonisation as *contra* the abundant life promised by Jesus in John 10:10, a terrorizing of the *shalom* given to redeemed creatures by the prince of peace. Finally, investigation into the Johannine autoptic witness of Christ as one who speaks truth and indeed *is* truth reveals the devilish deceit of the enemy at work and his mendacity which is completely oppositional and hostile to the saving truth of God in Christ Jesus.

Overall, in Chapters three, four and five, Ziegler constructs a theology of the devil within the soteriological second article of the creed by delineating the devil as an anti-messianic and unholy diabolical foil to the Way, Truth and Life found in Christ. From this, he then completes his construction by placing his articulated devil within doctrine, specifically within Reformed theological doctrine. To do this, he presents a 'minority report' in which he places the devil close to the heart of salvation instead of divine providence. This opens different possibilities when presenting new dogmatic theses about the devil and demonic. First, when the devil is located within the second article of the creed, this changes the dogmatic location and ordering as soteriology becomes the dogmatic focus for better understanding the demonic. The life and testimony of the Saviour become a three-agent drama from start to finish and establishes Jesus' identity as 'Christ Jesus *agonistes* (one engaged in a struggle/conflict).' This thesis has real potential to be juxtaposed with models of the gospel and kingdom that accentuate conflict and opposition such as Matthew Bates' 'kingdom allegiance' model.

Second, claims Ziegler, the form and substance of salvation is affected when the devil is placed in the second article. It forces the acknowledgement of prioritising redemption over reconciliation since redemption needs to happen first and conquer the problem of sin and evil which grows in depth and ubiquity once you place the devil in the frame. Moreover,

what can also emerge in this thesis is a new biblical vision of redemption in which Pharaoh becomes the main prototype of the three-agent drama of redemption found in the Old Testament and the cross turns into the 'great exorcism' *par excellence.*

Ziegler's third thesis is unique as he returns to address the three categorical questions about the devil within the first article, namely his origins, ontology and agency. Developing the above-mentioned 'minority report', the devil's identity, being and agency can be defined using the alliterative terms *adversarial*, *adventitious*, and *anarchic*. In other words, the devil 'is' only in the way that he is against God, he has no proper place in creation but is ontologically alien and has no independent positive aim nor accountable *telos* respectively. Defining the demonic in such negative terms only works, concedes Ziegler, within a privative account of evil where there is the absence of good. For a future, fuller work on the devil, however, it would be beneficial to acknowledge the scholarly debate surrounding the origin of the evil one and consider alternative theories such as the progeny of the Sons of God in Genesis 6 or fallen divine council members referenced in Deuteronomy 32 and Psalm 82.

The fourth and final thesis has the most practical consequence. By moving the devil into the second article, Christian discipleship becomes an act and posture of resistance in which all acts of spiritual growth are participatory acts with Christ as co-belligerents against the work of Satan. By humbly submitting to Christ Jesus as the Way, Truth and Life, our moral theology changes into a science of militant faith and resistance, and we participate in the 'great exorcism' of the redemptive gospel.

There are many reasons to commend this brief theology of the devil and view it as a very important contribution to the ongoing debate and discussions about evil, the devil, the demonic, theodicy, and divine conflict. Locating the devil within the second article brings more colour and tangibleness to our reading of the gospels. Refreshingly, it also brings into view a *Christus Victor* angle on the atonement, something that is often missing within Reformed soteriology. That said, more engagement with Gustaf Aulén and Helmut Thielicke would have enhanced the case and demonstrated that despite the many unique qualities of the book, it is in fact building on important historic biblical-theological scholarship of the past.

Even though Ziegler is cognisant of the possible charge of domesticating the devil, his use of only Scripture, tradition and reason does leave

this work open to the charge of relative domestication. Without any scholarly engagement of people's *experience* of the devil and what theological conclusions could be drawn from that, the work is a theoretical treatment of the subject matter. That said, however, given that the subtitle makes it clear that the book is a *brief* theology of the devil, to write a full diabology is beyond its scope. If, as already asked above, there is a fuller work planned, then perhaps the testimonies of millions of predominantly Pentecostal-charismatic Global South Christians who testify to daily encounters with diabolical powers could be considered. Moreover, there is now no shortage of engagement on practical diabology extant within second-generation Pentecostal-charismatic theological scholarship that could be used.

God's Adversary and Ours is a very important offering to theology in general and diabology in particular and deserves to be seriously engaged with by pastors, scholars and anyone who has a genuine desire to see the mitigation of evil in our world through the advancement of the gospel and kingdom of God.

Alistair J. Cuthbert

Alistair J. Cuthbert is Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Theology, and Master's Degree Course Director, at the Scottish Baptist College, University of the West of Scotland.

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