

*The Origin of Satan in Christian Tradition*

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This evening I invite you to consider Satan as an inverse image of how we see ourselves —and others. After all, Satan virtually has made a profession out of being “the other”; like his fellow extraterrestrials in science fiction, the devil virtually defines what we think of as inhuman, nonhuman, alien. Like many people today, I used to think of Satan as an antiquarian relic of a superstitious age, a kind of throwaway in Christian tradition; but, after considerable research, I’ve come to see how important this figure has been in the history of Western culture. What emerged from it —a vision of the world in which the forces of good contend against the forces of evil —still shapes our political and religious imagination; and I’ve come to see that this remains even now for millions of people, whether or not they believe in Satan, enormously consequential.

Where did the figure of Satan originate, and what is he doing there? Satan is scarcely present in traditional Judaism to this day—and not present at all in the form that Christians later came to know him, as the leader of an “evil empire,” an army of hostile spirits who make war on God and humankind alike. Yet when I began to investigate these questions, I discovered that images of evil spirits did develop and proliferate in certain Jewish sources in late antiquity, from about 150 years before the common era. Significantly, they did not develop among groups later taken to represent the main currents of Judaism, but specifically among groups of “dissident Jews” —groups that ranged from the Jewish sectarians who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls to the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Within decades, the figure of Satan —and the image of cosmic war —became central to Christian —and later to Muslim —tradition. How did this happen?

The lecture presented here is a brief sketch of the results of six years of research, available in more detail in my book *The Origin of Satan* (Random House, 1995).

Having started out asking these questions, I'd like to invite you on a mad dash through where these questions led me. What I'm *not* doing is what other people have already done well; I do not intend to investigate the cultural background of the figure of Satan or its literary history; and I'm not looking primarily at theological or psychological questions. What interests me instead is what I called to myself —as a joke —the “social history of Satan” (for how can a supernatural being have a social history?) — how he is invoked to express human opposition, to characterize human enemies, and to interpret all-too-human conflict. What I've come to see is that when people invoke Satan —whether in the first century or the twentieth —they have in mind not only some supernatural being, but also some very human beings. People who say, for example, “Satan is trying to take over this country, but we are resisting him,” know exactly who they have in mind, and probably can name names!

The earliest mention of Satan occurs in a few scattered references in the Hebrew Bible. Jewish storytellers introduce a supernatural figure they call *ha satan*, which can be translated from Hebrew as “the adversary,” or “the opposer,” or “the obstructor.” But this supernatural “opposer” never dares to oppose *God*. On the contrary, he is one of God's obedient servants, his messengers, called in Hebrew *malakim*, members of the heavenly court. Translated into Greek, *malak* becomes *angelos*, from which we get the word “angel.”

The book of Job, for example, pictures Satan as an angel, one of the “sons of God,” a member of God's council—a kind of divine “prosecuting attorney” to whom God assigns the task of afflicting Job in order to test the limits of his loyalty—indeed, a kind of “devil's advocate.” But in Job, as in all classical Hebrew sources, Satan never acts independently, never on his own initiative; on the contrary, he remains one of God's angels, entirely subject to God's will. But some 500 years later, the dissident groups I mentioned began to turn this rather unpleasant angel into a far

grander —and far more malevolent —figure; he becomes God’s *enemy*, his *antagonist*, even his *rival*.

How, then, could one of God’s angels go wrong? Jewish storytellers offered various theories. One group of stories takes its clue from Isaiah 14, suggesting that one of the angels high in the divine hierarchy rebelled against the commander in chief and so was thrown out of heaven, demoted and disgraced (cf. John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*). A second group of stories was sparked by the story in Genesis 6, which tells how some of the “sons of God” fell in love with human women and violated divine order by mating with them. A third group of stories blames, in effect, sibling rivalry: the ancient Jewish *Life of Adam and Eve*, for example, says that after God created Adam, he called the angels together to admire his work and ordered them to bow down to their younger human sibling. Michael obeyed, but Satan refused, saying, “Why do you press me? I will not worship one who is younger than I am, and inferior; I am older than he; he ought to worship me!”

So there are many stories about Satan’s origin; but what struck me about them is this. Diverse as they are, whichever version you choose, they all agree on one thing: that this greatest and most dangerous enemy did not originate (as we might have expected) as an outsider, an alien, or a stranger. Satan is no distant enemy: on the contrary, he is an “intimate enemy” —one’s closest relative, older brother, or trusted colleague —the kind of person on whose goodwill and loyalty the well-being of family and society depends, but one who turns unexpectedly hostile, jealous, and dangerous.

It is this attribute of Satan —his characteristic as *intimate enemy* —that disqualifies him so well to express internal conflict among Jewish dissidents, especially those minority groups whose primary quarrel was with other Jews. For those who developed the image of Satan and turned it against their enemies did not turn it against Israel’s traditional enemies —against the alien enemies whom they called “the nations” (*ha goyim*, in Hebrew). Those storytellers who asked, “How could one of God’s own angels be-

come his enemy?” were asking, in effect, “How could one of *us* [meaning God’s own people] become one of *them* —an alien, an enemy?” So it’s not surprising that stories about Satan, rare as they are among mainstream Jewish sources, proliferated especially among certain dissident groups who had, in effect, turned against the rest of the Jewish community and consequently concluded that the others had turned against *them*— *or*, as they would say it, against *God*.

In ancient times, we learn from the Dead Sea Scrolls of perhaps the first significant group to invoke Satan —a devout and passionately sectarian group of Jews. Members of this group denounced the Jewish majority as apostate; they attacked the leaders of the Jewish people as totally corrupt for accommodating to Gentile ways and for cooperating with the Roman occupation of their land. Such sectarians declared that the majority had been seduced by the power of evil, whom they called by many names: Satan, Belial, Mastema (hatred), Beelzebub, “Prince of Darkness.” One of the Dead Sea Scrolls is called the *Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*. For these sectarians, calling themselves “sons of light,” actually entered into their own sect —which they called the *new covenant* —by ritually blessing all members of their group and by ritually cursing all other Jews who were *not* initiated. The initiated “sons of light” eagerly awaited the day of judgment, when they expected God to come and annihilate the corrupt majority, their “intimate enemies,” those Jews whom they called “sons of darkness,” who, they said, belonged to the “synagogue of Satan.”

Now the sect that wrote these words died out in the first century, and so remains a kind of antiquarian curiosity. But the case of another first-century Jewish sect —the followers of Jesus of Nazareth —has become rather more than an antiquarian curiosity, having structured much of our cultural heritage, whether or not we identify ourselves as Christian. And it’s no accident that the foundational texts of Christian tradition —the gospels of the New

Testament, like the Dead Sea Scrolls—all begin with stories of Satan contending against God’s spirit. Each of the gospels frames its narrative—both at its beginning and at its close—with episodes depicting the clash of supernatural forces it sees played out in Jesus’ life and death.

How, then, does the figure of the devil (here usually called Satan) function in the New Testament gospels? Many liberal-minded Christians have preferred to ignore the presence of such blatant supernaturalism. Yet the story that the evangelists have to tell would make little sense *apart* from the context of cosmic war. For how could anyone claim that a man betrayed by one of his own followers and brutally executed on charges of treason against Rome not only was, but in fact still is, God’s divinely appointed Messiah—*unless* his capture and defeat were (as the gospel writers insist) only a preliminary skirmish in a vast cosmic conflict now enveloping the universe? No doubt the devil serves the purposes of Christian theodicy—that is, his presence expresses what one scholar calls the gospels’ “sense of the immediacy of evil” (Jeffrey B. Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1953], p. 14). But this is not some vague idea or some abstract cosmological principle: what concerns these writers is the way they see the power of evil working *through certain* people to effect violence and death, above all, what Matthew calls “the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Berachiah”—violence epitomized in what these writers regard as the greatest of all evils, the execution of Jesus.

Having started out to explore how Satan in the New Testament serves to characterize human opposition to Jesus and his followers, I discovered that while the gospels never identify Satan with the Romans, they consistently identify him with Jesus’ *Jewish* enemies. Although Jesus and his followers did not *invent* such demonization of their enemies, they (and Muslims after them)

carried it considerably further than others had, and with enormous consequences.

Yet who actually *were* Jesus' enemies? What we know historically suggests that his enemies were the Roman governor and his forces, who condemned and executed Jesus on grounds of sedition against Rome. The gospels indicate that Jesus also had enemies among his own people, especially among those of its leaders who regarded his activity as threatening and potentially dangerous. *Yet had Jesus' followers identified themselves with the majority of other Jews, they might have told his story very differently—and with considerably more historical plausibility.* For example, they might have told it in a style like that of the book of Daniel, which tells how a spirit-inspired man defied the foreign enemies, risking death for the sake of God and of Israel.

But at this crucial juncture, for reasons too complex to summarize now, the evangelists chose to *dissociate* themselves from the Jewish majority and to focus instead upon their own quarrel with the majority of Jews who resisted their claims about Jesus.

Let's take a quick look, then, at the most influential portrait of Jesus—that of the gospel of Mark, probably the earliest of the New Testament gospels, and the one that Matthew and Luke used to write their own gospels. Mark opens his narrative with an account of Jesus' first appearance, identifying him as God's agent and placing him into the context of cosmic war. The story line goes like this: when Jesus is baptized, the spirit of God descends upon him and "immediately," Mark says, "drives him into the wilderness to be tempted by the Satan." From this first, single-handed combat between Jesus, filled with God's spirit, and Satan in the desert, Jesus emerges victorious, proclaiming the coming kingdom of God—God's imminent victory over the forces of evil. Immediately after, when he enters the synagogue at Capernaum, a demon-possessed man, hearing him preach "with authority," cries out, "What is there between us and you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us" (1:24). The implied answer, of

course, is yes: Jesus commands the evil spirit to leave and forces him out; the demon convulses the man and screams “with a loud voice” as he departs. All who witness this contest, struck with astonishment, ask each other, “What is this? New teaching! With power he commands the unclean spirits, and they obey him” (1:27). Even in his first public challenge to the forces of evil, Mark shows how Jesus’ power sets him in contrast —and soon into direct conflict— with the Jewish authorities, for, as he explains, Jesus “taught with authority, and not like the scribes.” No sooner had Jesus engaged Satan’s power, Mark says, than his opponents’ hostility turned murderous. Immediately after witnessing Jesus heal on the Sabbath, the Pharisees began to plot with the Herodians “how they might kill him” (3:6). Next, Mark says, “the scribes who came down from Jerusalem” charged that Jesus “is possessed by Beelzebub; by the prince of demons he casts out demons!” Even in the opening chapters of Mark, then, we can see that conflict between God and Satan sets the stage for conflict between *people*: or, put another way, conflict between God and Satan is a religious interpretation of *human* conflict —between those believed to be “on God’s side” and those accused of being in league with the devil.

Finally, as Mark’s narrative darkens into the events leading to the crucifixion, the reader senses Satan closing in, his presence manifest through the increasingly hostile and dangerous machinations of Jesus’ “intimate enemies.” Mark only implicitly connects Satan with Jesus’ Jewish enemies — as Luke and John will do explicitly; and he does this by telling two accounts of Jesus’ trial, aimed at showing the reader who is responsible for his death— and who is not.

Mark now tells how Jesus’ disciple Judas — the most intimate enemy of all — knowing the hostile influential people bore against Jesus, betrayed him to the chief priests and facilitated his arrest. Mark gives a dramatic story of Jesus’ immediate arraignment that night before the high priest, in whose presence, he says, “all the chief priests and elders and the scribes were assembled.” At the con-

clusion of a judicial procedure, including interrogation of the accused and of witnesses, the high priest charged Jesus with blasphemy and the whole assembly “all condemned Jesus as deserving death.” Scholars of judicial procedure point out the glaring improbabilities in this story. The Jewish council never met at night, so far as we know; the death penalty required a 24-hour delay; and, if imposed, would have proceeded by Jewish methods — certainly not by crucifixion, which the Romans invented and carried out in cases involving sedition.

Without rehearsing all the arguments here, I agree with many scholars who have argued that Mark’s account of what happened was a construction designed to make an apologetic point. By this means, as one scholar observes, Mark evades “the indisputable fact . . . that Jesus’ first trial and sentence were the work of a *Roman court*” (Paul Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus*, 2nd ed. [Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1974], p. 34). Mark’s account goes on to give an equally artificial story of Jesus’s so-called trial before Pilate, but in this trial, as Mark tells it, Pilate never condemned Jesus to death; instead, he actually declared him innocent, and decided to release him. Only later, intimidated by the mobs outside shouting for blood, Pilate caved in and reluctantly allowed Jesus to be executed.

What motivates Mark to tell the story this way? For in Mark’s account —and even more in Matthew, Luke, and John —the Pilate we know from history disappears and is replaced by the well-intentioned weakling of the gospel narratives. Yet a contemporary of both Jesus and Pilate, Philo of Alexandria, an educated, wealthy, and influential man who represented the Alexandrian Jewish community on a delegation to the Roman emperor, describes a very different Pilate: “a man of inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition” —a man whose administration, Philo says, was characterized by “greed, violence, robbery, assault, *frequent executions without trial*, and endless savage ferocity” (emphasis added). Even if Philo exaggerates, we find Pilate’s reputation for brutality

confirmed in the histories written by Josephus, the Jewish governor of Galilee, some thirty years later. Josephus says that when Pilate was first assigned to govern Judea, he immediately —and apparently intentionally —introduced into Jerusalem a garrison that bore standards Jews considered idolatrous, an act that provoked mass demonstrations, as outraged crowds protested for five days outside his residence. Josephus says that Pilate also changed the coin types minted in Judea into coins bearing images that violated Jewish religious sensibilities and that he diverted sacred money from the Temple treasury to pay for building projects — an act that even Romans considered sacrilegious. Josephus tells us, too, how Pilate dealt with unruly crowds; in one episode, for example, he ordered his soldiers to mingle with the people dressed as civilians but fully armed; at a signal, they began to beat and kill demonstrators; others were trampled to death in the ensuing stampede. (Even Luke, who depicts at Jesus' trial a most benign Pilate, mentions in ch. 13 an incident involving galilean Jews “whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices.”) Finally, after an incident in which Pilate had executed the ringleaders of a Samaritan religious group suspected for inciting rebellion against Rome, repeated protests from his Jewish subjects finally persuaded Emperor Tiberius to recall Pilate and apparently to discharge him from office, since after that he disappears from history.

We cannot understand why Mark tells the story as he does — effectively exonerating the Romans —until we recall that this was, in effect, wartime literature, probably written during the Jewish war against Rome. Josephus, who fought in that war, calls it “not only the greatest war of our own time, but one of the greatest of all recorded wars.” As I reread his account of that war, I thought of the American revolution; but the Jewish war was an attempted revolution against the Romans who occupied, ruled, and taxed Judea, a war fought by Jews under the slogan, “for God and our common liberty.” The Romans saw it as sedition, however, and sent in 60,000 expert troops that swept into Jerusalem and left tens

of thousands of people dead, the great Temple desecrated, burned, and razed to the ground, the center of the city in ruins.

Yet certain followers of Jesus, convinced that he had predicted all these events, had refused to fight in the war along with other Jews—a stand that alienated them from the communities. And when they continued to insist that Jesus—even after his execution—was actually God’s appointed future king of Israel, they encountered predictable reactions from the majority (reactions that Mark depicts the scribes having toward Jesus) — that they were either crazy or demon possessed.

Among Romans they encountered no less hostility. Roman officials and troops were attempting to regain control over Judea after the war, were wary of any hint of renewed sedition, and were naturally suspicious of people who still professed allegiance to a would-be “king of the Jews” who had been recently executed on charges of sedition against Rome. On both sides, then, Jesus’ followers often found themselves in dangerous and, at times, even desperate situations. Their greatest leaders had all died by violence: shortly before Mark wrote, Jesus’ older brother, James, had been stoned to death by a mob in Jerusalem. Paul had been repeatedly denounced and beaten by Jewish groups and repeatedly hauled before Roman authorities until they finally executed him. And Peter, too, had been crucified, and like Jesus, charged with sedition.

Mark, then, addressing a largely Gentile audience after the war, is careful to present Jesus—and so, by implication, his followers—as an innocent person, falsely accused, who presented no real danger to the Roman order—even Pilate, Mark insists, knew that! Why, then, was he executed? That only happened, Mark says, because of a quarrel internal to the Jewish community. Certain Jewish enemies of Jesus, incited by Satan, tricked the Roman government against his own better judgment: Mark insists that the real quarrel was a religious one between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Mark and his fellows still hoped to persuade their

fellow Jews to “see the light” —to recognize God’s spirit in Jesus; consequently, he treats this as a kind of family quarrel between Jews.

But ten to twenty years later, Jesus’ followers had encountered increasingly disappointing response among their fellow Jews and unexpected success among Gentiles. The gospels of Matthew and Luke, written around 80 *C.E.*, reflect both experiences and incorporated them into the story of Jesus. Since we can only glance at Matthew here, take a look at the way Matthew introduces the story of Jesus —the story of his birth.

Matthew’s birth story is no Christmas card idyl. According to Matthew, the infant Jesus barely escaped death during a mass slaughter of Jewish infants ordered by a murderous tyrant. Many commentators have pointed out that here Matthew is presenting Jesus as the new Moses —whose infancy, even, parallels accounts in the life of Moses. But no one has pointed out how he simultaneously reverses basic elements in the Moses story —a story well known to every Jew from the yearly Passover celebration. Shockingly, Matthew casts the Jewish king, Herod, in the villain’s role that tradition reserves for Pharaoh. Here it is Herod — not Pharaoh — who orders the mass slaughter of Jewish infants; Matthew declares that no sooner was Jesus born than King Herod, supported by “the chief priests and scribes and all the people,” determined to “search for the child and kill him.” Jesus’ family eluded Herod by escaping into the land of Egypt; thus the land that in the Passover tradition symbolizes slavery and oppression now becomes the land of deliverance and refuge. And Matthew expects us to notice that while Herod and his court are trying to kill Jesus, Gentile foreigners, the *magi* —who will become the “three kings from the East” of Christian tradition —are coming to *worship* him. We cannot go through the whole gospel in this quick stretch, but let’s take a glance at the story’s climax —the terrible moment in which Matthew says, “*all the people*” —the whole nation of Israel, in effect —cried out to kill Jesus, even to

the point of calling down a blood curse on themselves (“His blood . . .”). By contrast, Matthew depicts Roman officials in relatively positive ways, from Pilate to an anonymous soldier among Jesus’ executioners who becomes nothing less than the first Christian convert!

While Matthew implicitly associates the Jewish majority with Satan, Luke does so explicitly. This is probably the only gospel written by a Gentile convert. Luke follows Mark and Matthew by opening with the story of Satan attempting to destroy Jesus in the wilderness; when his first attempts fail, Luke suggests that the devil continued to work underground—or on the ground, so to speak, through human undercover agents. Early in his account, Luke tells an astonishing story of Jesus’ first public preaching in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. Favorably received at first, he then predicts that his own townspeople shall reject him and declares that God intends to bring salvation to the Gentiles. Within moments, his words so outrage his audience that, Luke says, “hearing these things, all those in the synagogue were filled with rage, and they rose up to throw him out of the city, and led him to the edge of the hill on which their city was built, in order to throw him down headlong.” But Jesus quickly departs, and so survives this first attempt on his life. Finally, at the climax of his story, Luke says that “Satan entered into Judas Iscariot”; Luke actually has Jesus himself identify the chief priests, scribes, and elders, to their face, as agents of Satan (the “power of darkness”). In the concluding story of Jesus’ trial, Luke adds and changes details so that now Pilate three times declares Jesus innocent and insists that he is going to release him; but three times he is cowed by the crowds shouting for Jesus’ blood, until he gives in to their demands.

What motivates Luke, like Matthew, to revise the trial account is not so much vindictiveness toward the Jews as defensiveness toward the Romans. So, as we’ve seen, the gospel writers want to present Christians, like Jesus, as innocent people falsely accused. Second, they increasingly represent Pilate acting as Christians

hoped to persuade Roman officers to act, fairmindedly and justly; and third — where both of these fail — Luke’s version offers Christians facing execution an exemplary paradigm for how to die. In the process of the changing accounts, as one scholar notes, “the stern Pilate grows more mellow from gospel to gospel . . . (from Mark to Matthew, from Matthew to Luke, and then to John). The more removed from history, the more sympathetic a character he becomes” (Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus*, p. 88). In regard to the “intimate enemies,” a parallel process occurs, but in reverse. Where Mark depicts conflict within the Jewish community, division regarding Jesus’ mission and identity, Matthew, writing ten or twenty years later, takes up Mark’s gospel and revises it, so that Matthew —and only Matthew —has Jesus denounce the Pharisees as a “generation of vipers,” “whitewashed graves,” even “sons of hell.” Luke goes considerably farther, having Jesus identify the Jewish leaders explicitly with “the power of darkness.” The gospel of John, which we don’t have time to discuss, seems to dismiss the devil as an independent supernatural character. But John depicts specific human enemies of Jesus acting, in fact, as the devil in person. John has Jesus declare to his disciples that “one of you is a devil,” meaning, of course, Judas Iscariot. Soon afterward, Jesus addresses “the Jews” and declares that they are the offspring of the devil. For all its sophisticated theology, this gospel expresses the perspective of a beleaguered minority denouncing the Jewish majority in a cosmic war as polarized as that of the Essenes —but enormously more consequential.

Now I’d like to stop in a moment and open up a discussion — adding just a few words to avoid misunderstanding. Does this mean that Christianity invented anti-Semitism? Certainly not; in the first place, animosity toward Jews occurred long before the Christian moment began, as a new book by Peter Schafer demonstrates. Second, Jesus and his earliest followers were, of course, all Jewish; and the Gentiles who joined them, like Luke, were not so much anti-Jewish as ambivalent. They wanted to lay claim to

Israel's heritage, its traditions, and its promise of a glorious future; and some claimed to be the new Israel, the true Israel —but, of course, these claims encountered resistance among the Jewish majority, and the conflicts inherent in the history of the early movement are woven into the stories they tell. When I was in graduate school, I was told that anti-Semitism was a wholly unfounded misreading of Christian tradition; this research has shown me, however, that at least three of the gospels contain elements of anti-Jewish polemic, reflecting the conflicts from which this movement emerged in the first century. After that time, as this once marginalized movement became increasingly Gentile —and especially after it gained political and military power in the fourth century — its members could —and did —find in the gospel considerable fuel for the later fires of anti-Semitism.

But even during the first few centuries, Christians turned the image of Satan against a far wider range of targets —against the Roman empire and its government, which persecuted Christians, and then against other “intimate enemies” —other Christians, whom they called “heretics.” Christians tend not simply to switch enemies, so much as accumulate them. To mention one of innumerable examples, recall how the founder of Protestant Christianity, Martin Luther, denounced “the Jews and their lies” in a vituperative pamphlet he called by that name; next, he attacked as Satan's allies all who participated in the peasants' war against the landowners; further, he denounced as “agents of Satan” not only the pope himself but all Christians who remained loyal to the Roman Catholic church —and finally he denounced along with them all other “protestant” Christians who were not Lutheran!

Surely none of us will imagine that Christianity invented human hostility, which is probably as old as the human race itself. But we can see that the Christian movement gave to hostility a moral interpretation —one that has proven enormously powerful. Virtually all people tend to denigrate those they define as other,

regarding them as inferior, less than human. The Egyptian word for human being, for example, simply means “Egyptian.” And Greeks regarded everyone who did not speak Greek as obviously “barbarian.” What Christians added was a moral and religious interpretation of difference —one often read to mean that “we are God’s people, and you are Satan’s people.”

Nor is this obsolete in the twentieth century. So compelling is this vision of God against Satan, good against evil, that it has pervaded the imagination of millions of people for nearly two thousand years —not only Christians but also Muslims —and has powerfully influenced the way we interpret political and social events. It was not so long ago that President Ronald Reagan denounced the Soviet Union as the “evil empire,” and while I was working on this, during the Gulf War, President George Bush was denouncing Saddam Hussein as “the devil” —and Hussein no doubt called him the same (cf. Cyrus Vance/Salmon Rushdie).

When I began talking about this with my colleague Toni Morrison, she exclaimed, “But isn’t Christianity a religion of love?” —and, of course, at its best it is, which makes so distressing the recognition that sometimes it has lent itself to hate. But her words remind us that other elements of Christian tradition have always urged Christians toward reconciliation. We recall the saying of Jesus from the gospel of Matthew: “You have heard it said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your father in heaven.’” And many Christians, from the first century through Francis of Assisi in the thirteenth, or Václav Havel and Desmond Tutu in the twentieth — have shared in this same Christian vision of good against evil, believing that they have stood on God’s side, but without demonizing their opponents. Their religious vision inspired them to oppose policies and practices they regarded as evil, often risking their well being and their lives, while praying for the reconciliation —not

the destruction —of those who opposed them. But what this research has shown me —and what I wanted to share with you — is the struggle within Christian tradition between the profoundly human view that “otherness” is evil and the words of Jesus: that reconciliation is divine.