

# **Resistance and nonresistance: New Testament perspectives on confronting the powers**

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## **Abstract**

*The New Testament depicts a world caught in the throes of an apocalyptic power struggle between the forces of God the Creator and the cosmic powers of evil. This study identifies two contrasting and complementary New Testament strategies for confronting these “powers”: resistance (Jas 4:7) and nonresistance (Mt 5:39). The motif of “resistance” is visible as Jesus resists the temptations of Satan (Mk 4:12-13 et al), “overcomes the strong man” (Mk 3:27 et al), and “heals all those who are oppressed by the devil” (Ac 10:38 et al). The motif of “nonresistance” is visible in Jesus’ passion as he is “handed over” (Mk 14:10 et al) and as he conquers the powers of evil through his death (Col 2:13-15 et al). For a comprehensive and balanced understanding of New Testament perspectives on confronting the powers of evil the motifs of “resistance” and “nonresistance” must be held in tension and in correlation with each other.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

To undertake a topic such as “The powers in New Testament perspective” is a task of no minor proportions. Walter Wink (1984:7) notes in the introduction to his book, *Naming the powers: The language of power in the New Testament*, that “(t)he language of power pervades the whole New Testament. No New Testament book is without the language of power.” This becomes clear very

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quickly as one begins to survey the wide range of “power” vocabulary found within the New Testament writings: δύναμις (power), ἐξουσία (authority), ἀρχή/ἀρχων (principality/ruler), στοιχεῖα (basic elements), κύριος/κυριότης (lord/dominion), ὄνομα (name), Σατανᾶς (Satan), διάβολος (devil), δαιμόνιον (demon), πνεῦμα (spirit), ἄγγελος (angel/messenger), βασιλεία/βασιλεύς (kingdom/king), χριστός (messiah), to name only some of the most important terms. Even beyond specific vocabulary, the “power” motif is likewise implicit in the narrative rhetoric of the Gospels and the Book of Acts as well as in the apocalyptic rhetoric of the Book of Revelation. In short, it is hard to imagine any New Testament topic more broad and encyclopedic in its scope. Framed in “power” terminology, the entire message of the New Testament as a whole might well be summed up in the proclamation of the seventh angel of John’s Apocalypse: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah; and he will reign forever and ever” (Rv 11:15b).<sup>2</sup>

But there is another reason that this topic presents special challenges to those who address it. As Wink (1984:7) puts it, “... the language of power pervades the New Testament, not so much as a consciously articulated set of doctrines but as a background belief held almost universally by the age .... What we are dealing with here is not so much the conscious reflections of a discrete author (or even a community or set of communities) but the unconscious presuppositions and worldview of an entire era.”

What this means for us is that we need to scour the New Testament writings for evidence of ideas and realities which the writers understand implicitly but see little need to define or explain. When having found such evidence, we need to assess the implicit communications as well as the explicit declarations made by the writers.

Over time, as I have been rummaging around in the New Testament, working now with this text and now with that, I have stumbled across a curious anomaly with regard to New Testament language about “confronting the powers.” On the one hand James exhorts the believers whom he addresses to “resist (ἀντίστητε) the devil and he will flee from you” (Ja 4:7; cf 1 Pt 5:8-9), a bold and assertive stance *vis-a-vis* this quintessential “adversary” who “prowls around ... like a lurking lion ... looking for someone to devour” (1 Pt 5:8). On the other hand Jesus issues a directly contrasting command to his disciples to equip them for their encounters with human antagonists: “Do not resist (μὴ ἀντιστῆναι) the one who is evil” (Mt 5:39, translation mine), a stance which appears at first glance painfully, perhaps even scandalously, passive. What is

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<sup>2</sup> All biblical citations within this paper are taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

striking about these contrasting commands is that they are set forth, each in its own context, as significant strategies for “confronting the powers”.

Until recently I had pondered this curious anomaly casually from time to time without devoting any major energy to resolving the questions that it raised. Now, with the present task in front of me, this New Testament anomaly has moved to the center of my thinking. Much to my surprise I have discovered that it has revealed a pervasive and paradoxical pattern within the New Testament texts. In the following exegetical reflections I offer the fruits of my discovery.

## 2. RESISTING THE DEVIL

To read the New Testament is to enter a world caught in the throes of an apocalyptic power struggle between the forces of God the Creator (see 1 Pt 4:19; cf Mk 10:6; 13:19; Rv 3:14) and those of the devil or Satan, the cosmic “adversary” (1 Pt 5:8) who is the agent of death (Heb 2:14), destruction (1 Cor 5:5), and deceit (see 2 Cor 11:14-15; Eph 6:11; 2 Th 2:9-10; Rv 12:9, 10; 20:3, 7-8). The outcome of this power struggle in the ultimate triumph of God is never in question,<sup>3</sup> a reality that is confirmed in advance by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (see, for example, 1 Cor 15:20-28; Eph 1:20-23; 1 Th 1:9-10). But in the present moment the New Testament writers know themselves and their readers to be living in that final turbulent era just before “the end” (see Mt 10:22; Mt 24:6//Mk 13:7; Mt 24:13//Mk 13:13; Lk 21:9) or “the consummation of the age,”<sup>4</sup> an era in which Satan’s “wrath” is intensified precisely because he “knows that his time is short” (Rv 12:12).

Within this present era, then, Satan, who has already “[fallen] from heaven” (Lk 10:18) and been “thrown down to the earth” (Rv 12:9, 13; cf Rv 12:10, 12), attacks with “great wrath” (Rv 12:12) all those whom he can reach. Principal among his targets is Jesus, Son of God (Mt 4:3, 6//Lk 4:3, 9), whose mission it is to inaugurate God’s reign on earth (see Mt 12:28//Lk 11:20; Mt 11:2-6; Lk 4:16-21). The Synoptic Gospel writers tell us that after Jesus’ baptism but before he begins his ministry in Galilee Jesus is “led” or “driven” by the Spirit into the wilderness, where he is then “tempted” by Satan/the devil (Mk 1:12-13//Mt 4:1//Lk 4:1-2). And it is in the face of this initial onslaught from

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<sup>3</sup> References to the present/proleptic and the future/definitive defeat of Satan are spread widely throughout the New Testament (see, for example, Mt 4:10-11//Lk 4:12-13; Mt 25:41; Lk 10:18; Jn 12:31; Ac 26:17-18; Rm 16:20; Heb 2:14; Ja 4:7; 1 Jn 3:9; Rv 12:7-12; 20:1-3, 7-10).

<sup>4</sup> See Mt 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20, especially Heb 9:26, where the writer views the “consummation of the ages” to have been inaugurated already at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion (“the sacrifice of himself”).

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Satan that we first witness Jesus actively “resisting the devil” by repudiating the seductive schemes which Satan sets forth.

#### **2.1 Resisting temptation**

The “temptations” which Jesus faces in the wilderness are clearly messianic in character. The devil prefaces his propositions with the telling words, “If you are the Son of God” (Mt 4:3, 6//Lk 4:3, 9), a clear pointer to the fact that it is precisely Jesus’ messianic identity and mission which are at stake in the proposals which Satan is about to set forth. These messianic strategies include breadmaking (Mt 4:3//Lk 4:3; cf Jn 6:15), temple acrobatics (Mt 4:5-6//Lk 4:9-11), and allegiance to Satan himself (Mt 4:8-9//Lk 4:5-7). In each case, however, Jesus firmly resists the seductive proposal, responding each time with a word of Scripture (Mt 4:4, 7, 10//Lk 4:4, 8, 12), and finally dismissing the devil from his presence altogether with the words: “Away with you, Satan!” (Mt 4:10). And Satan, who has “come” to Jesus in the first place (Mt 4:3), is now forced by Jesus’ own resistance to “leave” him (Mt 4:11) or to “depart … until an opportune time” (Lk 4:13).

Jesus has effectively resisted the temptations of Satan; and he is now prepared to embark on the messianic mission for which he has just been ordained by God (Mk 1:10-11//Mt 3:16-17//Lk 3:21-22). But Satan’s “opportune times” will return in ever-recurring fashion throughout Jesus’ life and up to the very moment of his death. When Peter rebukes Jesus for speaking about the suffering and death which await him in Jerusalem (Mk 8:31-32//Mt 16:21-22), Jesus makes it very clear that Peter’s words are none other than a satanic temptation to be firmly resisted: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me. For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (Mt 16:23; cf Mk 8:33). Later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, in a statement which in this context is clearly as much self-disclosure as it is exhortation, Jesus pleads with his disciples to “stay awake and pray that you may not come [into temptation]. The spirit indeed is willing; but the flesh is weak” (Mt 26:41, alt; cf Mk 14:38; Lk 22:40, 46). Once again Jesus actively “resists the devil,” submitting himself to the “will” of his “Father” in the face of the agonizing temptation to avoid the “cup” of suffering and death which he is being called to “drink” (Mk 14:36; Mt 26:39, 42; Lk 22:42; cf Jn 12:27).

Nor is this the last of Satan’s temptations. In the final moments of Jesus’ life, as he hangs dying on a Roman cross, Satan hurls one final messianic temptation at Jesus, the most bitter of them all, this time in the words of Jesus’ human antagonists (Mt 27:40, 42-43; cf Mk 15:29-30, 32; Lk 22:35, 37):

You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross! .... He saved others. He cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel. Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him! He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son."

And once again, in that final and definitive moment, Jesus actively (and paradoxically!) "resists the devil" by suffering to the death rather than saving his own life (Mk 15:37//Mt 27:50//Lk 23:46; Jn 19:30). As the writer to the Hebrews concludes, Jesus is one who has been "in every respect [tempted] as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15, alt).

But if Jesus is called to a life of resistance to the temptations of the devil, Jesus' disciples share that same calling. As part of the model prayer he offers to them early in his ministry, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray: "Lead us not into temptation" (Mt 6:13//Lk 11:4). And as they are sharing their last meal together just before they depart for the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus offers a pointed warning to Simon Peter and to all his disciples of what lies just ahead: "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you [plural] like wheat. But I have prayed for you [singular] that your own [singular] faith may not fail. And you [singular], when once you [singular] have turned back, strengthen your [singular] brothers" (Lk 22:31-32). In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus repeatedly rebukes the disciples for sleeping;<sup>5</sup> and he pleads with them to "Stay awake and pray that you may not come into [temptation]" (Mt 26:41, alt; cf Mk 14:38; Lk 22:40, 46). But this is a plea that goes unheeded; and as succeeding events make clear, this is a warning that turns into "bitter" reality not only for Peter (Mk 14:66-72//Mt 26:69-75//Lk 22:54-62) but for all of Jesus' disciples (Mk 14:50//Mt 26:56; Mk 14:51-52). In contrast to Jesus who has "stayed awake and prayed" and in this way been empowered to "resist the devil", the disciples have slept through the time of preparation and, in the moment of temptation, failed the test. The Gospel writers leave their readers this brutally honest account as an ongoing word of warning.

And for the early Christians this warning is no minor matter. Faced with the awareness of Ananias' deceit in bringing money to the disciples, Peter confronts Ananias with the true significance of his actions: "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?" (Ac 5:3). And for this crucial failure to resist the satanic temptation of money Ananias pays the ultimate price, namely, his own life and that of his wife as well (Ac 5:5, 10). In the words of 1 Timothy: "Those who

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<sup>5</sup> See Mk 14:37//Mt 26:40// Lk 22:45-46; Mk 14:40//Mt 26:43; Mk 14:41//Mt 26:45.

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want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction" (1 Tm 6:9).<sup>6</sup>

For his part Paul is deeply concerned that the believers in the struggling new churches which he has planted will fall prey to temptation. To the Thessalonian Christians he confesses, "I was afraid that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor had been in vain" (1 Th 3:5). In similar fashion he offers a clear word of caution to the Galatian believers as they seek to restore those in their midst who have sinned: "Take care that you yourselves are not tempted" (Gl 6:1). Paul warns Corinthian husbands and wives not to "deprive one another" indefinitely of their respective conjugal rights, "so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Cor 7:5). But in a later context he goes on to assure them that "[N]o temptation has seized you except what is common to [humankind]. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor 10:13, NIV, alt).

As the New Testament writers see it, resisting the temptations of the devil is an ongoing and active task for the followers of Jesus, a task which engages them in all aspects of their everyday living: finances, charitable giving, marriage relationships, church discipline. But it is at the same time a task which Christians can ultimately carry out only by the power of God. And when they do, as James assures them, they are "blessed" and "will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him" (Ja 1:12).

## **2.2 Overcoming the strong man**

For Jesus, as well as for his followers, there is much more to "resisting the devil" than repudiating the personal onslaughts and satanic seductions of the adversary. The apocalyptic resistance of the powers which is depicted in the New Testament calls for responses which reach beyond the personal to the entire surrounding community. Within Jesus' ministry this resistance means direct and ongoing confrontation with the satanic forces which inhabit (see Mt 4:24; 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22; Mk 1:32; 5:15, 16, 18; Lk 8:36; cf Jn 10:21), bind (Lk 13:16) and oppress (Ac 10:38) the people all around him. Jesus points to his own exorcistic activities through the "finger" of God as the definitive sign that the reign of God has arrived among humans: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Lk 11:20; cf Mt 12:28). When people come to warn Jesus about

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<sup>6</sup> Cf Ja 1:14-15, which uses the language of personal desire to define temptation: "But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it. Then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death."

Herod's murderous intentions, Jesus responds with an unflinching message in which he identifies his ministry as one of exorcism and healing: "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work'" (Lk 13:32). And Jesus defines the ultimate significance of his exorcistic ministry by portraying himself as a thief intent on "entering [Satan's] house" and "plundering his property": "But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man. Then indeed the house can be plundered" (Mk 3:27; cf Mt 12:29//Lk 11:21-22). Accordingly, Jesus views his ministry in fundamental terms as a frontal attack on the forces of evil, an attack which he carries out by "tying up" Satan, the ultimate evil power, and "plundering [Satan's] property," namely the lives of all those bound and oppressed by the devil and his minions.

The implications of this statement are of crucial Christological significance. If Jesus pictures his role as that of "tying up the strong man," this can only be because Jesus views himself as "the stronger one." And indeed he does so. As Luke recounts the story, Jesus clearly alludes to himself as "the stronger one": "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castles, his property is safe. But when *one stronger than he* attacks him and [overcomes] him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder" (Lk 11:21-22, alt, emphasis mine). And for their part the Gospel writers uniformly portray Jesus as one whose "authority" (*ἐξουσία*) and "power" (*δύναμις*) enable him to "attack" and "overcome" the forces of evil. As the onlookers in Capernaum proclaim in response to an exorcism by Jesus: "What kind of utterance is this? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come!" (Lk 4:36; cf Mk 1:27). The Synoptic Gospels are replete with the accounts of those from whom Jesus has exorcised "demons" and "unclean/evil spirits": a man in the synagogue at Capernaum (see Mk 1:23-28//Lk 4:33-37), a Gadarene demoniac(s) (see Mk 5:1-20//Mt 8:28-34//Lk 8:26-39), men who are blind and/or mute (see Mt 9:32-34//Mt 12:22-24//Lk 11:14-15), the daughter of a Syrophenician/Canaanite woman (see Mk 7:24-30//Mt 15:21-28), an epileptic boy (see Mk 9:14-29//Mt 17:14-21//Lk 9:37-43), Mary Magdalene (see Lk 8:1-3), and countless others (see the summary accounts of Mk 1:32-34//Mt 8:16-17; Mk 1:39; Mk 3:11-12//Lk 4:41; Mt 4:24//Lk 6:18; Lk 7:21). The magnitude of Jesus' "authority" over the evil spirits which he exorcises is reflected in the vivid details of the Gospel accounts. Jesus casts out the spirits "with a word" (Mt 8:16), and at a distance (Mk 7:24-30//Mt 15:21-28). He exorcises a "legion" of demons so "strong" that no one can "subdue" the man whom they possess (Mk 5:1-20) and so "fierce" that no one can "pass that way" (Mt 8:28-34). Jesus casts out a spirit which

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“convulses” an epileptic boy and leaves him “foaming at the mouth” (Mk 9:14-29; cf Mt 17:14-21//Lk 9:37-43a). He rebukes the unclean spirits and the demons when they recognize him as Son of God; and he prohibits them from speaking out and disclosing his identity (Mk 1:34; Mk 3:11-12//Lk 4:41). In this ongoing and brutal power struggle between Jesus and the foot soldiers of Satan, “the strong man,” it is clear that Jesus is indeed, and by far, “the stronger one.”

Nor is this the end of the matter. Just as Jesus calls his disciples to join him in resisting the temptations of the devil, so he calls them to participate in the task of “overcoming the strong man.” To equip the disciples for this task Jesus gives them the same “authority” which characterizes and empowers his own exorcistic ministry: authority “to cast out the demons” (Mk 3:15; cf Lk 9:1), authority “over the unclean spirits” (Mk 6:7//Mt 10:1), authority “to tread on snakes and scorpions” (Lk 10:19a), and authority “over all the power of the enemy” (Lk 10:19b). Having armed the disciples with his own “authority,” he commissions them and sends them out into the battlefield.<sup>7</sup> There they engage “the enemy” by “casting out many demons” (Mk 6:13). And when they return from their tour of duty, they report back with great amazement to Jesus on the success of their venture: “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” (Lk 10:17; cf 10:20).<sup>8</sup>

As Luke tells the story, the leaders of the early church continue the exorcistic ministry to which Jesus has called his disciples and for which he has empowered them. Luke recounts that the apostles in Jerusalem, and Peter in specific, are the agents through whom “those tormented by unclean spirits” are “cured” (Ac 5:12-16). In Samaria Philip exorcises unclean spirits, who come out of their victims “crying with loud shrieks” (Ac 8:4-8). In Philippi Paul orders a “spirit of divination” out of a young slave girl who is the source of revenue for her owners (Ac 16:16-19). And in Corinth as well Paul is the agent of liberation for “those who have evil spirits” (Ac 19:11-12).

For their part the New Testament writers, each in their own fashion, exhort their readers to ongoing vigilance *vis-a-vis* the spirit world. John calls his readers to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 Jn 4:1); and he uses the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the criterion by which to carry

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<sup>7</sup> Accounts of Jesus’ commissioning and of the subsequent mission of the disciples are found in Mk 6:7-13, Lk 9:1-6, and Lk 10:1-20 (cf Mk 3:13-15). Mt 9:35-11:1 offers an account of Jesus’ words of commissioning, but no mention of any subsequent mission by Jesus’ disciples.

<sup>8</sup> See also Mt 7:22 and Mk 9:38//Lk 9:49, where the Gospel writers portray Jesus’ disciples or others “casting out demons in Jesus’ name”. But note Mk 9:14-29//Mt 17:14-21//Lk 9:37-43, where the disciples are not successful in their attempt at exorcism and the father of the epileptic child must appeal to Jesus for assistance.

out this assessment (1 Jn 4:2). Paul assures the Corinthians that God has graced the church with those whose “gift” to the body of Christ is “the discernment of spirits” (1 Cor 12:10). Ephesians 6:10-17 offers its readers a detailed listing of “the whole armor of God” (6:11, 13)<sup>9</sup> which will enable them to “stand against the wiles of the devil” (6:13). This armor consists of the “belt of truth” (6:14), the “breastplate of righteousness” (6:14), shoes that “will make you ready to proclaim the Gospel of peace” (6:15), the “shield of faith ... to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (6:16), the “helmet of salvation” (6:17), and the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (6:17). There is urgent need for this armor, as the writer makes clear: “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (6:12). Such is the apocalyptic task of “overcoming the strong man.”

### 2.3 Healing the oppressed

But there is still more to the task of “resisting the devil.” If Jesus is the one who repudiates “the tempter” (Mt 4:3) and “overcomes the strong man” (Lk 11:22), he is also the one who “heals all those who are oppressed by the devil” (Ac 10:38). Without any question Jesus’ healing activities (along with his proclamation of the “kingdom of God/heaven) lie at the very heart of his public ministry.<sup>10</sup> As Luke tells the story, Jesus begins his public ministry with an “inaugural address” at the synagogue in Nazareth in which he cites the words of the prophet Isaiah to claim this healing ministry, along with his ministry of proclamation, as his God-given and Spirit-empowered calling: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. *He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor*” (Lk 4:18-19, emphasis mine). In accordance with this view of Jesus as “healer,” the Gospel writers characterize Jesus as a man endowed with “power” (δύναμις – Lk 4:14; 5:17; 6:19; Mk 5:30//Lk 8:46; Ac 10:38). Luke tells us that Jesus returns to Galilee “filled with the power of the Spirit” in order to begin his ministry (Lk 4:14); and he prefacing one of his healing accounts with the words, “... and the power of the Lord was with him [i.e. Jesus] to heal” (Lk

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<sup>9</sup> Ironically, the term πανοπλία (*panoplia*) used here for the “whole armor [of God]” is the same term as that used to describe the “armor” of the “strong man” which the “stronger one” succeeds in “taking away” from him (Lk 11:21-22).

<sup>10</sup> So far as the Gospel writers are concerned, these healing activities include Jesus’ exorcisms. Throughout the Gospels and Acts the language of “healing” and the language of “casting out demons” are closely connected and regularly interwoven within the narrative accounts.

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5:17).<sup>11</sup> As a result Jesus is recognized on all sides, by supporters and detractors alike, for the “deeds of power” ( $\delta\psi\nu\alpha\mu\epsilon\iota\sigma$ ) which are the hallmark of his public ministry (see Mk 6:2, 5, 14; Mt 11:20, 21, 23; 13:54, 58; 14:2; Lk 10:13, 19:37; Ac 2:22).

According to the Gospel writers, Jesus’ “powerful” healing ministry is encyclopedic in its scope, one which reaches out to “all the sick” (see Mt 4:24; 8:16; 12:15; 14:35; Mk 1:32; 3:10; 6:56) and heals “every disease and every sickness” (see Mt 4:23//9:35; cf Mk 1:34//Mt 4:24//Lk 4:40). The list of those whom Jesus heals is long and widely inclusive: epileptics (Mt 4:24); paralytics (Mt 4:24; 8:5-13; Mk 2:1-12 parr); lepers (Mk 1:40-45 parr; Lk 17:11-19); blind people (Mt 15:30; Mk 8:22-26; 10:46-52 parr; Jn 9:1-41); those who are lame (Mt 15:30; 21:14) and maimed (Mt 15:30); those who are deaf and/or mute (Mt 15:30; Mk 7:31-37); people with hemorrhages (Mk 5:25-34 parr), withered hands (Mk 3:1-6 parr), crippling “infirmity” (Lk 13:10-17), and dropsy (Lk 14:1-6); those who have suffered physical violence (Lk 22:50-51); and those who have died (Mk 5:21-24/35-43 parr; Lk 7:11-17; Jn 11:1-44).

And, as Luke tells us, it is precisely through these “deeds of power” that Jesus “heals all who are oppressed by the devil” (Ac 10:38) and “sets people free” from the “bondage of Satan” (cf Lk 13:16). Accordingly, Jesus’ healing ministry is revealed to be none other than a profound and massive act of “resistance” against Satan and the diabolical powers with which he “binds” his victims both in spirit and in body.

And here as elsewhere Jesus shares his mission of “resistance” with his disciples. The “power” and “authority” which Jesus gives his disciples (Lk 9:1) enables them not only to “cast out unclean spirits” (Mt 10:1) but likewise to “cure every disease and every sickness” (Mt 10:1), just as Jesus himself is doing. And when Jesus sends them out, they go out through the villages “anoint[ing] with oil many who [are] sick” (Mk 6:13) and “curing diseases everywhere” (Lk 9:6). Following Pentecost and the “empowering” gift of the Holy Spirit given on that day (Lk 24:49; Ac 1:8) the early church then gains a public reputation much like that of Jesus for its “deeds of power” (Ac 4:30; 8:13; 19:11) carried out “in the name” and “through the power” of Jesus (Ac 3:12-16; 4:8-10, 30). Outside the temple Peter and John call a lame man to “stand up and walk”; and he responds by “jumping up” and entering the temple with them, “walking and leaping and praising God” (Ac 3:8). Peter is likewise the agent of an ongoing healing ministry both in Jerusalem (Ac 5:12-16) and in Lydda (Ac 9:32-35). In Samaria those who are paralyzed and lame find healing through the ministry of Philip (Ac 8:4-8). And “God [does]

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<sup>11</sup> As the Gospel writers indicate, this is a proactive “power” which “goes out” of Jesus and in so doing heals the sick (Mk 5:30//Lk 8:46; Lk 6:19).

extraordinary deeds of power" (Ac 19:11; *my translation*) through Paul in Ephesus (Ac 19:11-12) and in Malta (Ac 28:7-10).

For his part Paul views "deeds of power" as one of the "signs of a true apostle" (2 Cor 12:12). But in fact these "deeds of power" are not the sole prerogative of the leadership of the church. In writing to the fledgling churches which he has planted around the Mediterranean world Paul makes it clear that "deeds of power," just as the "discernment of spirits," are none other than a "manifestation of the Spirit" for the "common good" of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:7, 9). And he simply assumes their presence in the life of the Galatian church (Gl 3:5). The call to "heal the oppressed" through "deeds of power" is a call to the entire church of Jesus Christ.

### **3. NOT RESISTING THE ONE WHO IS EVIL**

As the evidence makes clear, the motif of "resisting the devil" provides us with a prominent and pervasive New Testament rubric for understanding the significance of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the corresponding mission of the church. But alongside this motif stands a contrasting, and at first glance contradictory, motif which is equally prominent and pervasive throughout the New Testament, the motif characterized by the command of Jesus: "Do not resist the one who is evil" (Mt 5:39). This motif, which focuses attention not on cosmic powers and the spirit world but rather on antagonistic powers within human society, opens strikingly different but equally important windows for us onto the significance of Jesus' mission and that of the church (see Weaver 1992:32-71). It is only as we bring these contrasting motifs together, both in tension and in correlation with each other, that we approach a comprehensive and balanced understanding of "New Testament Perspectives on Confronting the Powers." As the New Testament texts make clear in numerous ways, the task of "confronting the powers" involves at the same time and by the same token both "resistance" and "nonresistance".

#### **3.1 Handed over to death**

Without question the single most prominent verbal motif in the Greek New Testament which illustrates Jesus' command "not to resist the one who is evil" is that of "being handed over," the passive form of the verb παραδίδωμι, to hand someone or something over to another. Within the New Testament this motif functions predominantly as a technical term for the delivery of a prisoner into the hands of those religious or legal authorities who will put that person

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on trial and condemn them to death.<sup>12</sup> This term provides a vivid image of those who, far from “resisting” the powerful forces which oppose them, instead exhibit complete vulnerability to the “evil” actions of their antagonists.

Within the Gospel accounts it is John the Baptist who leads the way in this regard. As the Synoptic Gospels relate, Jesus begins his public ministry only after John has been “handed over” (Mk 1:14//Mt 4:12; cf Lk 3:19-20) to imprisonment (see Mk 6:17//Mt 14:3//Lk 3:19-20; Mt 11:2 cf Lk 7:18-19) and ultimate death (see Mk 6:14-29//Mt 14:1-12//Lk 9:7-9; cf Mk 9:11-13//Mt 17:10-13). John meets this fate as a direct result of his prophetic mission, a mission which he has been carrying out not only among the Jewish people (Mk 1:2-8//Mt 3:1-12//Lk 3:1-18) but also among their leaders (Mk 6:17-18//Mt 14:3-4//Lk 3:19), the political powers of the Jewish world. Thus it is precisely as John “confronts the powers” through his prophetic rebuke of Herod that he finds himself subject to arrest, imprisonment, and death. It is in this same context that John meets his fate in peaceable and “nonresisting” fashion, as the accounts of John’s death imply through their narrative rhetoric. Within these accounts (Mk 6:14-29//Mt 14:1-12//Lk 9:7-9) the sole act attributed to John is his prophetic rebuke of Herod, while John’s antagonists consistently make him the object of their cruel, cowardly, and violent actions (see Weaver 1996:179-196).

Then it is Jesus’ turn to “be handed over.” The language of “handing/being handed over” is a prominent thread woven throughout the Gospel writers’ accounts of the life, death, and even the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Already as they recount the moment in which Jesus calls his twelve disciples, the Gospel writers put their readers on notice that one of these disciples, Judas Iscariot, is going to “hand [Jesus] over” (Mk 3:19//Mt 10:4 my translation). Throughout his ministry Jesus himself repeatedly warns his disciples that he is going to “be handed over” to the human powers within Palestine: “into human hands” (Mk 9:31//Mt 17:22//Lk 9:44); to the chief priests and scribes (Mk 10:33//Mt 20:18); to the Gentiles (Mk 10:33//Mt 20:19//Lk 18:32); “into the hands of sinners” (Mk 14:41//Mt 26:45; cf Lk 24:7). The Gospel writers likewise portray Jesus as not only “knowing” in advance who will hand him over (Jn 6:64, 71; 13:11) but also making public reference

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<sup>12</sup> The New Testament usages of παραδίδωμι are too extensive to cite within this context. Locating this verbal motif within any English-language translation is made virtually impossible by the range of terms used to translate the Greek verb (see a Greek concordance or an English concordance with cross-references to the Greek text).

<sup>13</sup> While English translators uniformly use the term “betray” for the actions of Judas, I have “retranslated” all forms of παραδίδωμι below which refer to Judas to correspond with those referring to the religious leaders and Pilate, who are said to “hand Jesus over.”

to the identity of these people: Judas Iscariot (see Mk 14:18-21//Mt 26:21-25//Jn 13:21-30 cf Lk 22:21-23; Mk 14:42//Mt 26:46; Lk 22:48; cf Jn 21:20), the chief priests and scribes (see Mk 10:33//Mt 20:18-19 cf Lk 18:32; Jn 19:11; cf Jn 18:30, 35), and, by implication, Pilate himself (see Jn 19:11 cf 19:10, 16). And as the Gospel writers recount the story, each of these individuals and groups in fact participates in the joint action of “handing Jesus over” to his death: Judas (see Mk 14:10, 11, 44; Mt 26:15, 16, 48; 27:3, 4; Lk 22:4, 6, 48; Jn 13:2; 18:2, 5); the Jewish religious establishment, variously identified as the “chief priests,” “elders [of the people],” “scribes,” “the whole council,” and “the Jews” (see Mk 15:1, 10; Mt 27:2, 18; Lk 20:20; Jn 18:30)<sup>14</sup>; and Pilate himself (see Mk 15:15//Mt 27:26//Lk 23:25//Jn 19:16). As the Gospel writers tell the story, Jesus’ ministry is imprinted from its very inception by the reality that Jesus himself will eventually (and necessarily<sup>15</sup>) “be handed over to be crucified” (Mt 26:2).<sup>16</sup>

Nor is there any question concerning the reason for Jesus’ fate. As the Gospel writers collectively bear witness, Jesus is “handed over” in the midst of his ministry and in direct response to his compassionate and prophetic activities: “casting out demons and performing cures” (Lk 13:31-33); healing people on the sabbath (Mk 3:1-6//Mt 12:9-14//Lk 6:6-11); raising a man from the dead (Jn 11:45-57); overturning the tables of the moneychangers in the temple and challenging the very operation of the temple enterprise (Mk 11:15-19//Lk 19:45-48); and speaking prophetic parables against the religious leadership (Mk 12:1-12//Mt 21:33-46//Lk 20:9-20). Like John the Baptist before him, Jesus suffers “in the line of duty,” as he is carrying out the mission which he has received from God.

And like John, Jesus “does not resist” the forces of violence and destruction arrayed against him. When one of his disciples draws a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane and strikes out in defence of his master, Jesus rebukes the disciple and firmly rejects the use of all violence on his behalf. As Luke tells the story, Jesus responds, “No more of this!”; and he heals the slave of the high priest, whose ear has been severed by the vicious blow of the sword (Lk 22:49-51). In John’s account Jesus rebukes Simon Peter with

<sup>14</sup> Cf the designations used by other characters in the various narratives: “chief priests and leaders” (Lk 24:20); “you Israelites” (Ac 3:12-13); and “your own nation and the chief priests” (Jn 18:35).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example the following texts in which Jesus refers to the divine necessity of his upcoming death: Mk 8:31-33//Mt 16:21-23; Mk 10:35-40//Mt 20:20-23 cf Lk 12:50; Lk 13:31-33; Mk 14:32-42//Mt 26:36-46//Lk 22:39-46; cf Jn 12:27; Mt 26:54; Jn 10:17-18; Jn 18:11). A fuller discussion of this question lies well beyond the scope of the present paper.

<sup>16</sup> See also 1 Cor 11:23, where Paul prefaches his account of the Last Supper with a reference to the “night when [Jesus] was handed over” (my translation).

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the words: “Put your sword back into its sheath! Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?” (Jn 18:10-11). In Matthew’s narrative Jesus offers a third response: “Put your sword back into its place! For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?” (Mt 26:52-54). Finally, in John’s account of the interrogation by Pilate, Jesus explains the underlying reason for his “nonresisting” stance towards his own arrest: “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here” (Jn 18:36). The overall picture is unambiguous. Jesus refuses all options, both earthly and heavenly, to retaliate against the “evil ones” who “hand him over” to torture and death.

And this refusal to “resist those who are evil” characterizes the narrative rhetoric of Jesus’ passion just as it does that of John the Baptist. Throughout his trial Jesus takes virtually no actions, while his antagonists for their part make him the object of an ongoing and vicious barrage of mockery and violence which comes to its climax in a brutal execution (see Weaver 1996:191-195). Even more striking, in those agonizing moments as he hangs on a Roman cross, Jesus calls on God to forgive those who are responsible for putting him there. As Luke tells the story, Jesus’ cry from the cross is “Father, forgive them! For they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34). In the words of 1 Peter 2:23, “When [Christ] was abused, he did not return abuse. When he suffered, he did not threaten. But he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.”

Then it is the turn of Jesus’ disciples. If John the Baptist and Jesus have been “handed over” on account of their respective ministries, Jesus’ disciples can expect no less. As Matthew tells the story, Jesus warns his disciples of this sobering fact even as he first commissions them to go out in ministry (Mt 10:17-19a, 21-22a; cf Lk 12:11):

But beware of people. For they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues. And you will be led before rulers and kings on account of me as a witness to them and the Gentiles. But when they hand you over, do not be anxious ... And brother will hand over brother to death, and father the child. And children will rise up against parents and have them put them to death. And you will be hated by all people on account of my name.

(My translation)

When Jesus speaks with his disciples about the future turbulent days just before the coming of the Son of man, he repeats these same essential warnings (Mk 13:9-13//Mt 24:9-14//Lk 21:12-19; cf Jn 15:21). The message is unambiguous. Those who follow Jesus into ministry will be “handed over” to trial and death on account of this ministry, just as happened with Jesus himself. In fact Luke’s account of the life and the ministry of the early church bears out Jesus’ predictions in this regard. Early in Acts Saul is depicted as “ravaging the church by entering house after house, dragging off both men and woman [and handing them over] to prison” (Ac 8:3, alt; cf 22:4). In similar fashion King Herod later “seizes [Peter], puts him in prison, and hands him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him ....” (Ac 12:4). And as an intrepid missionary for the Christian cause Paul himself is “handed over” by those who do to him what he formerly did to other believers. As Paul is on his way to Jerusalem, Agabus comes to Caesarea to warn Paul of what lies ahead (Ac 21:8-10). Taking Paul’s belt and binding his own hands and feet with it, he announces to Paul: “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘This is the way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles’” (Ac 21:11; cf 27:1). Paul himself, in one of his letters to the Corinthian church, reflects on the life of the apostle of Jesus in similar language (2 Cor 4:8-11, alt):

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being [handed over] to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.

Just as with Jesus and John the Baptist before him, the disciples who are “handed over” for their participation in the mission of the reign of God respond by “not resisting the ones who are evil.” After Peter and the apostles have been arrested, imprisoned, tried before the Sanhedrin, flogged, and finally released with a strict warning against further proclamation in the name of Jesus (Ac 5:17-40), their immediate response as they leave the Sanhedrin is to “rejoice that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name” (Ac 5:41). In a striking parallel to his account of Jesus’ own passion, Luke tells his readers that Stephen’s final words as he lies dying from the stones of a Jewish mob call on God’s forgiveness for all those throwing the stones: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Ac 7:60).

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In his correspondence with the Corinthian Christians Paul reflects with vivid realism on the life of an apostle and on the “nonresistance” with which he and his fellow apostles face persecution (1 Cor 4:11-13; my emphasis):

To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. *When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly.* We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.

As Paul faces his upcoming passion, instigated by those who will “hand him over to the Gentiles” (Ac 21:11), he responds to his friends and supporters: “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Ac 21:13). As the New Testament writers make clear, the disciples of Jesus not only face the same attacks from human antagonists as Jesus himself and John before him have faced; but they also offer the same striking and utterly counter-intuitive response, that of “not resisting those who are evil.” In these “nonresisting” responses the early Christians exhibit the extraordinary strategy set forth by Jesus for “confronting the powers”: “But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil” (Mt 5:39; my translation).

### **3.2 Conquering through death**

A second prominent New Testament motif which undergirds Jesus’ command “not to resist the one who is evil” focuses on the paradoxical idea that death at the hands of the “powers” is itself the means by which Jesus and his disciples not only confront but also conquer the forces arrayed against them. This motif is widely visible across the spectrum of New Testament texts – the Pauline letters, the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John, Hebrews, the Apocalypse of John; and it is deeply embedded within the narrative rhetoric of these writings.

Within the Pauline literature, the picture is unambiguous. In the early Christian “Christ hymn” embedded in Paul’s letter to the Philippians (Phlp 2:5-11), it is Jesus’ radical willingness to submit himself to “death on a cross” (Phlp 2:8) which leads to his ultimate “exaltation” by God with a name “above every name” (Phlp 2:9) and a position of preeminence over all created beings “in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Phlp 2:10). In Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthians he refers to “Christ crucified” as “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23-24) and at the same time “foolishness [which] is wiser than human wisdom” and “weakness [which] is stronger than human strength” (1 Cor 1:25). And in his letter to the Colossians

Paul points to the death of Jesus as God's specific means for defeating the "powers" (Col 2:13-15, alt; my emphasis):

And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with [Christ], when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, *nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in [the cross].*

The writer to the Hebrews draws the same stunning and counter-intuitive conclusion in regard to the actions and intentions of Jesus himself (Heb 2:14-15): "Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he [that is, Jesus] himself likewise shared the same things, so *that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.*"

What Paul and the writer to the Hebrews communicate explicitly in their letters to the early churches, the passion narratives of the four Gospels communicate implicitly through their portrayal of the words and the actions of Jesus' opponents. In profoundly ironic fashion it is precisely as Jesus is put on trial, mocked, and finally executed by his enemies that they themselves proclaim, repeatedly and to the entire world, the true identity of this man whom they hold temporarily in their grasp. From the time of his arrest until the moment of his death Jesus is charged, mocked, executed, and taunted, in unbelieving fashion, with words and with symbolism which ironically proclaim his true identity: Messiah (see Mk 14:61//Mt 26:63//Lk 22:67; Mt 26:68; 27:17, 22; Lk 23:39); Messiah of God (see Mk 15:32//Lk 23:35); Chosen One (see Lk 23:35); King of the Jews (see Mk 15:2//Mt 27:11//Lk 23:3//Jn 18:33; cf Jn 18:36-37; Mk 15:9//Jn 18:39; Mk 15:12; Mk 15:16-20//Mt 27:28-31//Jn 19:1-15; Mk 15:26//Mt 27:37//Lk 23:38//Jn 19:19-22; Lk 23:37; cf Lk 23:42); King of Israel (see Mk 15:32//Mt 27:42); Son of the Blessed (see Mk 14:61); Son of God (see Mt 26:63//Lk 22:70; Jn 19:7; Mt 27:40, 43; Mk 15:39//Mt 27:54). As a result, for the Gospel writers as a whole Jesus' crucifixion, the apparent success of Jesus' opponents in their attempt to put him to death, is instead, paradoxically, nothing less than Jesus' public "coronation" as King of the Jews and Son of God and the unmistakable pointer to his ultimate victory over the "powers" arrayed against him. The Gospel writers then complete their collective portrayal of "crucifixion as coronation" with the depiction of cosmic signs which accompany the death of Jesus: darkness at midday (Mk 15:33 parr); the rending of the temple curtain (Mk 15:38 parr); and, for Matthew, a powerful earthquake which "shakes" the earth, "splits" the rocks, "opens" the

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tombs, and, following Jesus' own resurrection, "raises" the bodies of many "saints" (Mt 27:51-54). As the Gospel writers see it, the "nonresisting" death of Jesus is clearly that event in which and by which Jesus both confronts and conquers the "powers" of his world.

What the Gospels writers as a whole portray graphically through their Passion Narratives, John the Gospel writer makes explicit through the words of Jesus himself. From the perspective of John's Gospel Jesus views the "hour" of his death as, by the same token, the moment of his "glorification" (Jn 12:23-25, 27-33): "The hour has come for the Son of Man *to be glorified*. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth *and dies*, it remains just a single grain; but *if it dies*, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:23-24, emphasis mine). Even more to the point, Jesus depicts his death not only as his "glorification" but likewise as the very event by which the powers arrayed against him meet their demise: "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am *lifted up* from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (Jn 12:31-32, emphasis mine; cf 3:14; 8:28; 12:34). In sharp contrast to Luke's Gospel, where the Risen Jesus speaks of the "necessity" for the Messiah to "suffer these things *and then enter into his glory*" (Lk 24:26, emphasis mine), the Johannine Jesus is "glorified" precisely as he is "*lifted up* on a Roman cross and exposed to the untold humiliations and agonies of death by crucifixion.<sup>17</sup> Even more importantly, from the perspective of John's Gospel, Jesus' "nonresisting" death at the hands of his enemies, far from a sign of weakness or defeat, is rather the very means by which Jesus "judges," "drives out" and in this way "conquers" the powers of "the world." As Jesus says to his disciples just hours before his death on a Roman cross at the hands of the world power of the day, "In the world you face persecution. But take courage: I have conquered the world!" (Jn 16:33b).<sup>18</sup>

For John the Revelator the message is the same. According to John's vision, the "Lion of the tribe of Judah", the one who has "conquered" and is therefore "worthy" to "open the scroll and its seven seals" (Rv 5:5, emphasis mine), turns out to be none other than a "Lamb *standing as if it had been slaughtered*" (Rv 5:6, emphasis mine). When John looks and listens, an astonishing hymn of praise is sung to this "slaughtered Lamb": "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, *for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God* saints from every tribe and language and people and nation ..." (Rv 5:9-10, emphasis mine). As John the Revelator

<sup>17</sup> That John intends this reference to Jesus "being lifted up" (or "exalted"; cf Ac 2:33; 5:31; Phlp 2:9) to point to Jesus' crucifixion is made explicit by the unambiguous editorial comment which follows: "He [Jesus] said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die" (Jn 12:33).

<sup>18</sup> For a more extensive study of John's perspectives on the death of Jesus, see Weaver (1995:404, 406-408).

bears witness, it is precisely the brutal and bloody “slaughter” of the Lamb by which he “ransoms” saints for God and, as a result, “conquers” and is acclaimed “worthy” to “open the seals” and reveal the course of history and its meaning. Here, as elsewhere throughout the New Testament writings, Jesus “conquers” not by destroying others but rather by means of his own “nonresisting” death at the hands of his opponents.

What is true for Jesus is likewise true for Jesus’ disciples. In the Gospel tradition Jesus instructs his disciples that “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it” (Mk 8:35//Mt 16:25//Lk 9:24//Jn 12:25). In John’s Apocalypse the victorious saints of God are those who have “come out of the great ordeal” (Rv 7:14; cf 7:9-17) and those who have “conquered [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, *for they did not cling to life even in the face of death*” (Rv 12:11, emphasis mine). For Jesus’ disciples, just as for Jesus himself, confrontation with “the powers” is not a matter of inflicting death on one’s enemies but rather one of suffering to the death, in “nonresisting” fashion, at the hands of those same enemies. And in that “nonresisting” death, paradoxically, lies ultimate and cosmic victory over Satan, “the deceiver of the whole world” and the “accuser” of the saints of God (Rv 12:10; cf 12:10-12).

#### **4. RESISTANCE AND NONRESISTANCE: A PARADOXICAL STRATEGY FOR CONFRONTING THE POWERS**

As the evidence shows, the New Testament texts lay out two prominent yet apparently contradictory strategies for “confronting the powers”: “resisting” and “not resisting.” But as a closer examination of this evidence makes clear, these strategies do not in fact contradict each other but rather create a profound and paradoxical tension within which both Jesus and his disciples are called to live out their lives and their mission. On the one hand confrontation means the call “to resist the devil” (Ja 4:7), that call to bold and powerful action which catalyzes the overall ministry of Jesus and his disciples, as they resist the seductive temptations of Satan, their cosmic enemy, break Satan’s hold on the lives of others, and heal those whose bodies Satan has afflicted with disease. On the other hand confrontation means the call “not to resist the one who is evil” (Mt 5:39), that call to radical perseverance which challenges Jesus and his disciples to respond peaceably and without retaliation in the face of the persecution and suffering inflicted on them by those earthly “powers” who oppose them and their mission to proclaim the reign of God. It is only as Jesus and his disciples live deeply and persistently

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into both halves of this paradoxical tension that the New Testament task of “confronting the powers” is brought to its completion.

As the New Testament witness makes abundantly clear, “confronting the powers” is a task which is neither simple nor safe for those who undertake it. But the ultimate success of the venture is assured from the outset and at the highest levels: “The kingdom of the world has [already!] become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah; and he will reign forever and ever” (Rv 11:15b, alt). Let the disciples of Jesus Christ in all ages and all places take courage!

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