

## Pastor Stef's – November 2017

Every now and then I go on a reading *topic* binge. The one I'm currently on is about devils, demons and witchcraft. Up until now, I've actually not done much research on this topic. But there are two other reasons as well. My recent immersion into Martin Luther has caused me to wonder about his frequent battles with the devil. And the second is for personal reasons of my own continual battles with the devil. So the questions arise.

Was Martin Luther's "devil" what we today would diagnosis as depression? And what was going on at those Salem Witch Trials? Are any of the people in our mental hospitals today actually possessed? Can a demon of a possessed person be hindered if the patient is given anti-psychotic medication - which would show a phenomenal connection between the spiritual and physical world? Were the cases of demon possession in the Bible really episodes of mental illness? (This wouldn't take away from the miracle since Jesus still healed them). And how many devil ideas are rooted in childish images? When C.S. Lewis was talking about the devil once a skeptic asked him, "Do you really want to re-introduce our old friend the devil – hoofs and horns and all?" Lewis answered by denying knowing anything about his wardrobe. But the question we must each ask is, "Is my idea of the devil based on a childish wardrobe?"

In the midst of these questions I have been reading several books on the topic. One, whose subtitle caught my attention, is Richard Beck's ***Reviving Old Scratch: Demon and the Devil for Doubters and the Disenchanted (2016)***. Now, it is not particularly flattering to think of myself as a doubter and disenchanted, but I might as well deal with the shoe if it is on my foot.

Beck brings a number of positive things to the table on this issue. He is a Christian, a professor of psychology, and he leads a weekly Bible study for inmates at a maximum security prison. I figure this gives him at least three pairs of glasses to study from. A faith tradition, an academic discipline, and experience with people who have done some of the most evil things in society. And Beck draws from all three. The book is written in simple language although, beware sensitive ears, the book has occasional profanity throughout. That said, swearing at the devil was one of Martin Luther's favorite past times.

Beck is ambiguous as to whether or not he believes in a real personal devil. I certainly do. Beck does a great job, however, expanding our mind as to what the many evil "principalities and powers" are. I do agree we can hyper-spiritualize this demon stuff and miss the evil of politicism, materialism, racism, sexism, tribalism and other forces that cause misery between humans and towards God.

The book is a good introduction to understanding evil and how it manifests itself in the visible and the invisible realm. It is a good reminder for us as well, to recognize some of the subtle ways Satan tries to undermine our relationships with God and others and steal away our joy.

*I leave you with some good theology and psychology on dealing with the devil from Luther:*

*"I resist the devil, and often it is with a fart that I chase him away. When he tempts me with silly sins I say, "Devil, yesterday I broke wind too. Have you written it down on your list?" Then I remind myself and I remind Satan of the forgiveness of sin and of what Christ has done for me.*