Preexistent Debate

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The question arises, if we decide to do things God's way will not all discussion cease? How could there be a discussion with God? Who would disagree with him? If we go back to our basic creation story we are neither surprised nor shocked to hear that there was free discussion in heaven in the presence of God at the time of the creation, when some suggested one plan and some another. "In the beginning was the Logos [counsel, discussion], and the Logos was in the presence of God, and all things were done according to it..." (John 1:1, translated by the author). Satan was not cast out for disagreeing, but for attempting to resort to violence when he found himself outvoted. If we cannot clearly conceive of the type of discussion that goes on in the courts on high, we have some instructive instances of God's condescending to discuss things with men here on earth. "Come, let us reason together," he invites the children of Israel. Accordingly Abraham and Ezra both dared, humbly and apologetically, but still stubbornly, to protest what they considered, in the light of their limited understanding, unkind treatment of some of God's children. They just could not see why the Lord did or allowed certain things. So he patiently explained the situation to them, and then they understood. Enoch just couldn't see the justification for the mass destruction of his fellows by the coming flood; he too was stubborn about it: "And as Enoch saw this, he had bitterness of soul, and wept over his brethren, and said unto the heavens; I will refuse to be comforted; but the Lord said unto Enoch: Lift up your heart, and be glad: and look" (Moses 7:44, italics added).

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The early Christian apocrypha are especially concerned with the opposition to the plan, which was also initiated at the foundation of the world. The combat between the powers of light and darkness enjoys a very conspicuous place in ritual, being one of the essential episodes of the world-wide creation drama of ancient times.75 In the scroll entitled "The War between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness" we have ample illustration of the ritual and doctrinal concern of the Jews for this motif, and the quotations just cited from that work show that the embattled hosts on earth were but a local version of the war in heaven.76 Satan, who opposed the plan, led a rebellion and was cast out of heaven with his followers, to become an unwilling agent in the carrying out of the plan upon the earth. The name Mephistopheles "... der stets das Böse will, und stets das Gute schafft," denotes the ultimate frustration of the Evil One, who with the worst intent in the world, can only contribute to the exaltation of man by providing the opposition necessary for testing him in the time of probation upon the earth.77 In the early Christian apocrypha Satan's rebellion in heaven begins not with a refusal to worship God, but with his refusal to bow down to Adam. "I have no need to worship Adam," he says in one early writing, "... I will not worship an inferior and younger being. I am his senior in the Creation: before he was made I was already made. It is rather his duty to worship me! When the angels who were under me heard this, they refused to worship him also...", and so the revolt was on.78

"Now the Prince," says the recently discovered Bodmer Papyrus X, "not being righteous wanted to be God," he had his own counter plan to propose, and the apostates of the Church "actually accept the plan of the serpent whenever they reject God's plan."79 The two plans represent the two ways that confront us in life, the devil himself having a definite mission on earth. "If I am a fisherman of men," says the Lord in the Gospel of the XII Apostles (a writing which Origen says is older than the Gospel of Luke),80 "the Devil is also a fisherman, who catches many in his nets..." If I have come to take for my kingdom those who are mine, why should not he do the same?81 "O Adam," cries the Evil One upon meeting him out in the dreary world after the fall, "I was cast forth from my glory because of thee, and behold I have caused thee to be expelled from paradise..."
. because thou didst cause me to become a stranger to my home in heaven. Know thou that I shall never cease to contend against thee and all those who shall come after thee. . . until I have taken them all down into Amente with me!"82

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The contrast and choice between the Way of Light and the Way of Darkness is made possible by Satan's presence upon the earth. "Horus has two heads," says the famous seventeenth chapter of the Book of the Dead, "the one is truth, the other is sin; he gives truth to whoever brings truth to him, and sin he gives to whoever sins."83 The concept of this world as a double sphere of light and darkness, good and evil, war and peace, meets us in the earliest meaningful human documents, the prehistoric palette, seals, "standards," reliefs on temples, and designs on clay vessels. On these we find in dramatic opposition to the happy and orderly banquet scenes, rural charm and religious processions opposing scenes of conflict, rapine, and military aggression.84 The contrast is shown on the shield of Achilles in the eighteenth book of the Iliad.85 And Hesiod in the eighth century B.C. reminds his wayward brother that two ways are always open to man: "O Perses, the better road of the two is that of Righteousness," the hard and narrow one.86 Evil upon the earth is not a dreadful mistake, as St. Augustine thought,87 for, as the Zohar says, "if God had not given men a double inclination to both good and bad, he would have been incapable either of virtue or of vice; but as it is he is endowed with a capacity for both.88 "All things have their opposites," says the old and mysterious Sefer Yeshira, "good and bad. It is the Good which is the foil and proof of the Bad, and vice versa."89 Hence in this world "we may live either by the Law of the Lord or the Law of Belial," according to the testament of Naphthali.90 And though the testament of Abraham announces the alarming news that "for seven thousand who walk the road of perdition, there is hardly one soul that takes the path of righteousness. . . to find salvation!"91 the presence of the two ways is a blessing, giving man a freedom of choice and opportunity for exaltation that makes him "envied of the angels." "Happy is the man," says Ben Sirach, "who could have fallen away and did not fall away; who could have inflicted injury but did not do so. . . . Pour out before thee 'are fire and water, stretch forth thy hand and take thy choice. . . . Life and death are before man, and that which he desireth shall be given him."92 This state of things, according to Fourth Ezra, was established "when the Most High made the world anti Adam," and is "the condition of the contest which every man who is born upon the earth must wage.93 . . . . The Manual of Discipline takes up the theme with zeal: "To these two ways all the children of men are born, and to these two divisions they are heirs; every one of them each in his generation, and in his time every man shares more or less in both of them."94 The whole human race, "all kinds of their spirits and their natures" are put to the same test, each in his own dispensation "until the final appointed end-time." The real issue is never lost from sight, for Satan himself remains actively engaged: "All man's afflictions and tribulations are in the dominion of Mastema (the Devil as a deceiver of men), and everything that makes the Children of Light to stumble is due to the operations of the angels of the Devil," while on the other hand "the God of Israel and his true angels will help every Son of Light, for He created both the spirits of the Light and of Darkness, and according to them he will determine all the deeds of their life. . . for a judgment that will last for all the eternities."95 The main idea of "the plan which God laid down. . . in the presence of the First Angels for an eternal universal law," according to the Clementine Recognitions, is that "there shall be two kingdoms placed upon the earth to stay there until judgment day. . . and when the world was prepared for man it was so devised that. . . he would be free to exercise his own will, to turn to good things if he wanted them, or if not to turn to bad things."96 In the Dead Sea Scrolls and the earliest Christian writings this is expressly designated as "the ancient Law of Liberty."97