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Aulén's Demythologized Interpretation of the Demonic

The purpose of this present article is to attempt to correct a seemingly widespread misinterpretation of Gustaf Aulén's view of the demonic, and therefore to seek to make his attempted revival of the "classic" view of the atonement more intelligible to the contemporary Christian. That such an effort needs to be undertaken seems evident from an examination of recent theological writing concerning the Christian doctrine of reconciliation, much of which holds the notion that Aulén is operating out of the same mythological bag as were the writers of the New Testament, the Early Church Fathers, as well as Martin Luther. To illustrate and document this kind of interpretation of Aulén, the work of several theologians may be utilized.

In his *Principles of Christian Theology*,¹ John Macquarrie writes favorably concerning Aulén's rehabilitation of the classic view of the atonement: "In recent years this classic view of atonement has been rescued from oblivion and its merits brilliantly vindicated by Gustaf Aulén. It seems to me to offer the most promising basis for a contemporary statement of the work of Christ. . . ."² However, two paragraphs later, Macquarrie writes: "One defect in Aulén's rehabilitation of the classic view of atonement was his failure to come to grips with the mythological background of the principalities and powers."³ He continues: "However, our own earlier remarks on sin provide us with a way of demythologizing the classic view of atonement."⁴ The net effect of these comments by Macquarrie is, of course, that Aulén needs to demythologize the classic view, and that he has not done so in any of his writings on the subject.

Gordon Kaufman, in his *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective*,⁵ takes much the same negative attitude toward Aulén's "failure" to demythologize. He writes: "Since this view of salvation is the one most prominent in the New Testament and the church fathers, we may well refer to it, with Aulén, as the 'classic' [view] of the atonement."⁶ Kaufman continues:

"The classic view has some very obvious limitations, [one] of which we may consider here. It is heavily dependent on the mythology of the great battle between light and darkness . . . Unless it is possible to demythologize this understanding of God's mighty act so that it can be grasped

¹ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966).

² *Ibid.*, p. 286.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

also by those who no longer think in such terms, the whole Christian message appears a fantastic, if somewhat fascinating, product of man's all too fertile imagination."⁷

In a footnote, with direct reference to Aulén, Kaufman states:

"One cannot help but wonder what kind of perverseness or anti-cultural admiration for the primitive leads some theologians to regard man's attempts at disciplined thought to be somehow wrongheadedly 'speculative' in a way that his creation of fantastic mythologies is not."⁸

In the above quotation, Kaufman does not admit of even the possibility that Aulén has already engaged in a demythologizing program with reference to the classic view of atonement, and additionally, Aulén is accused of a "perverseness," and "an anticultural admiration for the primitive" of such nature that *he has actually created* the "fantastic [but fascinating] mythologies" involved in this view. These are, of course, strong words, especially from an admittedly disciplined theological thinker.

It should be indicated at this point that Kaufman, like Macquarrie, does find values in the classic view, and these at two points, namely, that the reality "of human bondage is taken seriously,"⁹ and that the "central contention of the classic view [is true], that victory is assured, God is indeed overcoming the powers of darkness."¹⁰

The black theologian, James H. Cone, is critical of Aulén at a point slightly different from Kaufman and Macquarrie. While they attack Aulén directly concerning his "failure" to demythologize, Cone's position is that the classic theory needs to be "radicalized politically,"¹¹ that is, "grounded in history"¹² in such a manner that "the principalities and powers of evil, mythically expressed in the figure of Satan [can then be seen to] represent not only metaphysical realities but earthly realities as well."¹³ As stated above, Cone's position is only slightly different from that of Kaufman and Macquarrie, for Cone's requirement that Aulén's mythically expressed principalities and powers should be made to represent "earthly realities" is, in effect, a call for Aulén to demythologize the classic theory of the atonement.¹⁴

In view of the current situation, it seems clear that the work of Aulén needs reexamination. In this article, space does not permit an exhaustive investigation of Aulén's views.¹⁵ However, the effort can

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 394-5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 394, note 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 399.

¹¹ James H. Cone, "Theological Reflections on Reconciliation," *Christianity and Crisis*, XXXII (Winter, 1973), 307.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ There are some additional difficulties in Cone's treatment of Aulén: 1) By his use of the term "metaphysical realities" (see the material quoted from Cone in the text), Cone seems unaware of what may be called Aulén's strong anti-metaphysical bias, and 2) by his effort to ground the doctrine of atonement in history, Cone seems not to recognize Aulén's insistence that it is, in fact, in the arena of history where the clash occurs between God's love (agape) in Christ and the forces of evil.

¹⁵ Cf. John C. Diamond, Jr., "The Interpretation of the Demonic in The Theologies of Gustaf Aulén and Karl Heim, (unpublished dissertation, Dept. of Systematic Theology, Boston University, 1969), pp. 8-104

be made to consider Aulén's thought at the following points:

1. Religious Dualism: "Legitimate" but "Limited"
2. The Motif-Form Distinction and Its Implications
3. The "Demythologization" of Gustaf Aulén
4. Concluding Definitions: "The Devil" and "The Demonic"

1. *Religious Dualism: "Legitimate" but "Limited"*

In the thought of Aulén, revelation must be seen as always giving knowledge against the background of evil, the "terrible reality of evil,"¹⁶ against which God stands in unremitting opposition. All existence, according to Aulén, "contains elements that are foreign to the divine will and in conflict with it."¹⁷ History is "the arena in which the divine will struggles against inimical forces."¹⁸ In the world of nature, there is "an abundance of phenomena which impress upon us the meaningless and the cold insensitivity of existence."¹⁹ In the human world, it is sin, personal and social, which forms the background. And, finally, the Christian life is both that of conflict with evil and service to God.

That such a background of evil is constantly to be emphasized is evident in Aulén's first proposition descriptive of revelation: "The divine revelation," he writes, "expresses itself in a struggle against that which opposes the divine will: . . ." ²⁰ Here, it is indicated that God's will is active, living, a "contending will."²¹ The divine love, *agape*, finds no easy, uncontested entrance into history; instead, it must break through into all existence in a radical manner. It must struggle against the bitter opposition posed by antagonistic elements in existence. Hence, the symbols utilized by Aulén as descriptive of the situation of revelation are drawn from man's experience of war. This world, Aulén writes, "is a battleground. . . ." ²² in which there are "hostile forces," "warriors," "victors," and "the vanquished." In point of fact, because of the appearance of divine revelation against this "background of enmity to God," ²³ Aulén finds it proper to speak of the "conflict motif," ²⁴ or the "motif of struggle and victory" ²⁵ as one of those which must be illustrated in close conjunction with that of *agape*, since it indicates a most important idea characterizing the entire content of the Christian

¹⁶ Gustaf Aulen, *The Faith of The Christian Church*. tr. Eric H. Wahlstrom (2d ed.; Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 175. This work originally published as *Den allmanneliga kristna tron* (Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsens Bokforlag, 1924). Cited hereafter as *Faith*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²² Gustaf Aulen, *Das christliche Gottesbild in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, tr. Gretel Jonsson (2d. ed. Gutterloh: C. Bertelsman Verlag, 1930), p. 30. This work originally published as *Den kristna gudsbilden genom seklerna och i nutiden* (Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsens Bokforlag, 1927). Cited hereafter as *Das christliche Gottesbild*. Translations from the German are my own.

²³ Aulen, *Faith*, p. 38.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

faith. Such emphasis upon the conflict and struggle of divine love gives to Aulén's entire theological presentation a strongly *dualistic* stamp.

Dualism is not a new or unusual emphasis in Swedish theology. Writing in *The Christian Picture of God*, Aulén notes that one of the earliest witnesses to the significance of the dualistic element in Christianity was the book, *The Nature of Revelation*, by Nathan Söderblom.²⁶ Insofar as the present discussion is concerned, Söderblom, in opposition to the prevailing theological atmosphere, distinguished between a *metaphysical* and a *religious, Christian dualism*, and stressed chiefly that the dualism of the gospels,

the contrast between God and the devil, between the Divine, victorious will of love and radical, inexplicable evil, between life and death, confidence and despair, heaven and hell, the single combat which we wage in the world between good and evil . . . is not the metaphysical contrast between spirit and matter, unity and multiplicity, indefinable being and the world. Is not the belief in devils recorded in the Gospels as shared by the contemporaries of Jesus, a black spot from the dark times on the bright picture of the joyful message of the gospel? The demand is made, that this dualism can and ought to be removed, as something which has come in from the outside and is essentially foreign and antagonistic. This perhaps is a very common view. I cannot see but that the deeper experience of sin, suffering and distress, which is the strength of religion, by necessity led from the monism of the prophets to the dualism of the gospels and that this development is one of the most significant within revealed religion . . . Jesus has sharpened this dualism, not weakened it. No one has penetrated further into the problem of evil than he with the words: "An enemy hath done this."²⁷

According to Aulén, Söderblom's stress on the dualistic element in Christianity led naturally to a conception of revelation as dramatic. Thus, Aulén finds it proper to speak of the "dualistic-dramatic motif."²⁸ This emphasis upon the dramatic character of revelation Aulén traces to the early efforts of men like Einar Billing.²⁹ In contrasting the distinctively Christian view of revelation and history with the ancient Greek view of history as circular, and with the more modern evolutionary theories, Billing's position, according to Aulén, was that:

history is neither a circular course nor a continuous, progressive development, but a conflict between good and evil powers of will, a tension-filled drama, which proceeds by peculiar routes to its goal, the kingdom of God, ordained by God's own laws.³⁰

According to Aulén, Billing's stress upon the dramatic character of history and revelation led directly to two conceptions which, as have been noticed, form an integral element in his thought, namely,

²⁶ Tr. Frederic E. Pamp (2d. ed. New York: The Oxford University Press, 1933). This work originally published as *Uppenbarelsereligion* Uppsala: C. A. Thoren Bokforlag, 1903).

²⁷ Aulén, *Das christliche Gottesbild*, pp. 364-65. Cf. Soderblom, pp. 65-67.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 363.

²⁹ Cf. Edgar M. Carlson, *The Reinterpretation of Luther* (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 48: "While Billing stresses the dramatic character of revelation, he does not draw out the dualistic implications of this view. The drama, as he conceives of it, features God and man rather than God and the devil.

³⁰ Aulén, *ibid.*, p. 367.

the thorough-going view of revelation as active and the view of the history of revelation as continuous, connected and dramatic. Aulén writes, including a passage from Billing:

Two things are especially noteworthy, concerning the dramatic position developed by Billing, namely, the thorough-going, active character of revelation, and the continuous connectedness of the history of revelation. "The entire course of history is from inside out a series of God's acts by which all opposition is overcome. The entire course of the world is, to venture a final, daring hypothesis, an action, of the will of God breaking through all opposition."³¹

The dualistic view characterizing Christianity and introduced into Swedish theology by Söderblom finds, according to Aulén, powerful expression in the theology of Luther.³² Concerning this expression, Aulén writes:

In Luther, dualism appeared again with great power, just as it had since the time of early Christianity and the days of the ancient church. Luther was aware of a world in which the power hostile to God's will reached its peak. Man stood in a conflict between supra-individual powers. These hostile powers were sin, death, hell; but also aligned with them were the law and "wrath." The devil is a connected conception, an incarnation of the antagonistic power. Dualism in Luther was strengthened by the fact that the devil was not understood in the traditional demonological manner, but from a religico-ethical point of view as the incarnation of evil, supra-individual power of will separate from God. Man is involved in the conflict of these powers which fight over his soul.³³

Although Luther's dualistic orientation will again be considered in later stages of this discussion, it is here necessary to take note of his emphasis on the grace of God which "frees" man from the power of evil. To this effect, Aulén quotes this passage from Luther's *De servo arbitrio*:

The Christian knows that there are two spheres hostile to one another in this world, and that one is ruled by Satan. Accordingly, he is called by Christ the Prince of this world, and by Paul, the God of this age. He holds all captive under his will, who are not removed from him by the spirit of Christ. In the other sphere, which offers constant resistance and fights against the sphere of Satan, Christ rules. In this sphere, we do not become sufficient through our own power, but through God's grace, through which we are freed and can progress from the evil of the present world and from the power of darkness.³⁴

Aulén is firm in his conviction that such dualism is a *legitimate* part of the Christian faith,³⁵ an element which therefore must be reflected in the theological analysis of faith. The basis for this conviction Aulén finds in the New Testament itself, particularly in those passages which speak explicitly of "powers" of evil and Christ's victory over them. Concerning this dualistic element in the gospel, Aulén writes:

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 367-8.

³² The dualistic interpretation of Luther characteristic of Swedish theology has been treated by Carlson, pp. 48-55.

³³ Aulén, *Das christliche Gottesbild*, p. 169

³⁴ *Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar, 1883-), XVIII, 782, Quoted in Aulén, *Das christliche Gottesbild*, p. 170.

³⁵ Aulén, *Faith*, p. 175.

The dualistic element refuses to allow itself to be divorced from the gospels. The entire conception of life is woven through with the thought of the opposition between the will of God and the dark and mysterious evil powers which stand over against this will. Satan, as the representative of evil, is the incarnation of all that which is opposed to the will of God. He is the "enemy . . ." ³⁶

Similarly, in *The Faith of the Christian Church*, Aulén writes:

The gospels present the work of Jesus as a struggle against unclean spirits, concentrated and incorporated in the figure of Satan. The Kingdom of God is established by the defeat of those powers which are inimical to God. In this connection, it is said that the Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many. ³⁷

Dualism, however, according to Aulén, is not to be found restricted to merely one part of the New Testament, but is to be found, e.g., strongly expressed in Johannine writings as well:

In the Johannine writings the dualistic feature appears exceptionally strong and serves as a background to Christ's act of conflict and victory. Cosmos stands as an obscure power hostile to God; and the purpose of the revelation and work of Christ is to vanquish this power and dethrone the Devil. ³⁸

Again, dualism is evident in the Pauline writings, according to Aulén, especially in such passages where "sin, death, and the demonic powers" are regarded by Paul as "the enemies whom Christ has defeated." ³⁹

In this connection, Aulén particularly mentions Romans 8:38f:

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Finally, according to Aulén, dualism is evident throughout the other New Testament writings; e.g., in Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:17; 1 Tim. 2:6, II Tim. 1:10; Tit. 2:14; I Pet. 1:18 and in Rev. 1:5 and 5:5,12. However, the passage which can perhaps be considered the most decisive for Aulén occurs in I John 3:8, which summarizes the purposes of Christ's coming thusly: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." ⁴⁰

According to Aulén, from its basis in the New Testament, the dualistic theme persisted in the ancient church and dominated its view of Christ's work:

This fundamental [dualistic] theme dominates the viewpoint of the ancient church in regard to the meaning of the work of Christ. The thought of Christ's struggle with and victory over the destructive powers occurs in constantly new variations. These powers are almost always defined as the powers of sin, death, and the devil, and the relation of Christ especially to the last of these is pictured in lurid colors. ⁴¹

³⁶ Aulén, *Das christliche Gottesbild*, pp. 29-30.

³⁷ Aulén, *Faith*, p. 199.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

During the Middle Ages, Aulén finds that the dualistic theme was more or less supplanted by mysticism and Anselm's doctrine of the Atonement,⁴² yet dualism persisted, according to Aulén, in the preaching, hymns, and in the religious art of the Middle Ages. It, further, returned "with new power in the Reformation"⁴³ in the doctrine of the atonement of Luther.

Aulén insists that the dualism of which he speaks must be understood as religious in nature, or, perhaps better, as a religico-ethical dualism. Its purpose in the gospel and throughout the history of Christian thought and life, when properly understood, is to point to the antagonistic elements in existence, to indicate the conflict between the divine love and the terrible power of evil. It further reflects the thoroughly active character of God's self-disclosure, and gives the essential reason for such activity. Dualism, therefore, according to Aulén, must never be interpreted in a metaphysical sense: It is not a dualism between the Infinite and the finite, nor one between spirit and matter. Nor must dualism be given the character of Zoroastrianism, with its opposition between two eternal principles, Good and evil. Further, Aulén holds, dualism must never be understood in the sense of Marcion's "Creator-God and Savior-God."⁴⁴ Concerning such teaching of dualism, all foreign to Christianity, Aulén writes:

It is well to explain at this point, once and for all, the sense in which the word Dualism is used . . . It is not used in the sense of a metaphysical Dualism between the Infinite and the finite, or between spirit and matter; nor, again, in the sense of the absolute Dualism between Good and Evil typical of the Zoroastrian and Manichean teaching, in which Evil is treated as an eternal principle opposed to God. It is used in the sense in which the idea constantly occurs in Scripture, of the opposition between God and that which in His own created world resists His will: . . .⁴⁵

There are two prominent features of the Christian faith that are neglected in dualisms of the type noticed above. On the one hand, Christian faith always emphasizes that its dualism is not absolute, but "limited." Faith thus stresses the transcendent Sovereignty of God. In this connection, Aulén writes:

Just as faith is opposed to hiding the dualistic element so it is also opposed to an absolute dualism. As far as faith is concerned God is not a power coincident with other powers and stronger than these, but the power upon which all existence is absolutely dependent. In relation to evil he is *unconditionally* sovereign . . .⁴⁶

On the other hand, metaphysical dualism, with its impersonal principles such as the Infinite and finite, obscures the *personal* character of religico-ethical dualism. Thus, Aulén emphasizes that the dualism of the Christian faith is to be understood as a "radical antithesis between

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Aulén, *Das christliche Gottesbild*, p. 169.

⁴⁵ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor*, tr. A. G. Herbert (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), pp. 20-21, note 1. This work originally published as *Denkeistna forsoningstanken* (Stockholm: Diakonistysens Bokforlag, 1930). Cited hereafter as *Christus Victor*

⁴⁶ Aulén, *Faith*, p. 176.

. . . two wills."⁴⁷ Writing in *The Christian Picture of God*, Aulén speaks of these two powers of will: "The dualism is here not a metaphysical dualism, in which there is an opposition between the 'finite' and the 'Infinite,' but a dualism between good and evil, between hostile and opposing powers of will, and thus a religious, ethical dualism."⁴⁸

That religico-ethical dualism is a legitimate part of the Christian faith means that faith, and the science of faith which is theology, is in direct opposition to any kind of effort which seeks to dull and minimize God's continuous antagonism to evil. "The God of faith," Aulén writes, "is that God whose only purpose is to vanquish evil and thus realize the dominion of his love."⁴⁹ Therefore, Aulén insists that the theological attempt of the eighteenth century which sought to dismiss the dualistic, demonic theme in primitive Christianity by saying that Jesus "accommodated" himself to the views of his contemporaries represents a signal failure in understanding the faith.⁵⁰ Similarly, the nineteenth century attempt of theology to assign to this theme a place of secondary significance by showing its connection with Parseism represents another failure.⁵¹ However, by far the most important failure to understand the faith and its intrinsic dualistic element is according to Aulén, represented by the efforts of the idealistically influenced theology to incorporate the faith into a monistically conceived world-view.⁵² Such attempts do not give the power of evil the realistic place which it demands, according to the fundamental point of view of the Gospels, and, further, they tend to blot out the line of demarcation between the divine and the human.

Aulén insists that all attempts to explain evil rationally are essentially foreign to faith.⁵³ This is especially true of the view which seeks to utilize the legitimate Christian insight that God is able to make evil serve the purposes of his love in trying to find a rational place for evil in God's government of the world. Similarly, the insight that evil is in some sense a punishment for sin is insufficient as a rational explanation of evil. Both attempts, according to Aulén, "lead to an easy judgment of evil, which would be incompatible with faith."⁵⁴

Aulén's view of the incompetence of faith, and therefore of theological science, to attempt rational explanations of evil extends to the question of the origin of evil. Where faith is concerned, Aulén holds, "the problem of the origin of evil is . . . a question of the origin of sin."⁵⁵ Here, it is important to point out that, for Aulén, since the meaning of all existence is connected with the divine will, faith views sin essentially as meaninglessness and irrationality. Thus, "an attempt to give a

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴⁸ Aulén, *Das christliche Gottesbild*, p. 30.

⁴⁹ Aulén, *Faith*, p. 175.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

rational explanation of the irrational is obviously impossible."⁵⁶ Faith's primary concern with evil, Aulén insists, is with its conquests.⁵⁷

2. *The Motif-Form Distinction and Its Implications*

Throughout the above discussion, the attempt has been made to indicate the extreme importance of the dualistic motif in the thought of Aulén in defining the nature of God's will as active and contending, and in indicating the power of evil against which God stands in unremitting opposition. In so doing, it has obviously been necessary to include reference to the demonic in such concepts as the Devil or Satan, evil or unclean spirits, and the like. The question may now be asked: What is the status assigned to these conceptions in the theology of Aulén?

According to the very terms of Aulén's theological method, it is obvious that these conceptions are not to be understood in any metaphysical sense. With his emphasis upon faith and its decisive basis in revelation, and with his view that theology must restrict itself to an investigation of the objective affirmations of faith, Aulén views all speculative attempts at understanding as beyond the scope of theology and as unnecessary, indeed, dangerous tasks. Thus, answers to such questions as the metaphysical reality or ontological status of the demonic are not to be sought. Instead, Aulén's interpretation seeks to be religious; that is, it is an interpretation which describes the relationship of God to man and the forces which break asunder this relationship.

Basic to an understanding of Aulén's religious interpretation of the demonic is the distinction that he makes between *religious motifs* and *forms of expression*. This is an important distinction and, one that must now be seen specifically in relation to the demonic. A motif is the broadest context in terms of which a religion is to be understood. Where Christianity is concerned, its fundamental interpretative context is the *agape* motif. In order to bring out the full meaning of the Christian faith, however, the dualistic motif must stand closely conjoined with that of *agape*, since it attests to the real struggle encountered by the divine love in its purpose to actualize itself in the world of men, to establish its kingdom or dominion. *A form of expression* is a *formula* or a *figure of speech*, which itself may or may not be meaningful, but which must point to the motif which undergirds it and gives to it its *raison d'être*. Insofar as theology is concerned, a form of expression is *meaningless* without its basic motif.

By way of illustrating Aulén's distinction between motifs and their forms of expression with reference to the demonic, the statement given in Luke 11:20 may be utilized: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon

⁵⁶ Aulén, *Faith*, p. 178.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

you." In this passage, according to Aulén's distinction, the phrase, "by the finger of God," is a form expressive of the divine will and its power, which is the power of love. Thus, the fundamental Christian motif, *agape*, underlies this form. Similarly, the reference to demons is a way of expressing the hostile powers of evil in opposition to the power of divine love. Thus, this is a reference to the dualistic motif. Finally, the phrase, "the kingdom of God," refers again to the *agape* motif, but now specifically to the victory over the power of evil, a victory wrought by Christ who "casts out demons."

When it is emphasized that the primary concern of theology is to *push beyond* the forms of expression to the fundamental religious motifs underlying them, it is clear that the conceptions of the demonic in question stand as *peripheral* elements in the theology of Aulén. In this connection, he writes:

A theological investigation which is not impelled by the effort to push beyond forms and formulas to the underlying driving powers, to the decisive religious motifs, will inevitably stop at the periphery in its efforts to interpret the content of the Christian faith. The inner quality of the questions relating to faith would then be concealed.⁵⁸

This point is borne out in a more specific manner by Aulén at the close of his work on the atonement, *Christus Victor*. Here, with reference to the use made by Luther of such conceptions as the Devil, hell, and God's "deceit" in depicting Christ's work as the payment of a "ransom for many," Aulén writes:

It is . . . of the first importance to distinguish between the classic idea itself and the forms in which it has been expressed. Some of the forms in which it has clothed itself have been the actual provocation and main cause of the harsh judgments which have been passed upon it; and, indeed, when the crude and realistic images which are to be found in the Fathers and in Luther are interpreted as if they were seriously intended as theological explanations of the Atonement, it is only to be expected that they should provoke disgust. But this is to miss the point. The images are but popular helps for the understanding of the idea. It is the idea itself that is primary.⁵⁹

Not only are the demonic conceptions to be seen as representing peripheral elements in the thought of Aulén, they must also be understood as being *replaceable* forms of expression. This is especially evident in two statements made by Aulén. On the one hand, he notes that the same form may be utilized in the expression of different religious motifs, in which case the forms must be seen as having completely different meanings.⁶⁰ On the other hand, Aulén notes that while the forms have a changeable character, the religious intention or motif remains the same. Writing with reference to this latter alternative, Aulén states:

The latter alternative may be exemplified in the "dualistic" approach, the struggle between the will of God and the demonic forces. This motif

⁵⁸ Aulén, *Faith*, p. 63.

⁵⁹ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, p. 158.

⁶⁰ Aulén, *Faith*, p. 63.

has often been presented in an extreme form, but it is not inevitably connected with such an expression. The motif can be separated and nevertheless continue to exist with uncurtailed power.⁶¹

Further, with reference to the replaceability of conceptions of the demonic, Aulén notes that it is to be expected that, in the future, these forms of expression will be replaced by others. This expectation appears in the thought of Aulén in conjunction with the possibility of a reinstatement of the classic idea of the atonement to a position of influence in the sphere of Christianity. Aulén writes:

If the classic idea of the Atonement ever again resumes a leading place in Christian theology, it is not likely that it will revert to precisely the same forms of expression that it has used in the past, its revival will not consist in a putting back of the clock. It is the idea itself that will be essentially the same. . . .⁶²

Aulén's view, that the conceptions of the demonic are peripheral and replaceable forms of expression rather than central and indispensable elements of the Christian faith, must be understood in conjunction with his view that the New Testament conceptions of the demonic are, in fact, *mythological in character*, rather than realistic. Writing with reference to such representative New Testament passages as Mark 8:33,⁶³ Luke 10:18f.,⁶⁴ and 13:11,⁶⁵ in which there are specific references to "Satan," Aulén states: "The mythological character of this way of thinking is obvious."⁶⁶ Further, with reference to such passages as Romans 8:34f.,⁶⁷ Colossians 2:15,⁶⁸ and Ephesians 6:12,⁶⁹ passages in which reference is made to "powers and principalities," Aulén states that these are "more or less mythologically formulated expressions,"⁷⁰ for the powers of evil. Finally, Aulén writes: "It is not a demonic mythology which is important, but an insight into the nature of evil, its power, and extent."⁷¹

3. The "Demythologization" of Gustaf Aulén

Against the background of the two factors mentioned above, it is clear that Aulén accomplishes a "demythologization" of the demonic conceptions of the New Testament, and consequently, of the Christian

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Aulén, *Christus Victor*, pp. 158-59.

⁶³ "But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men.'"

⁶⁴ "And he said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you.'"

⁶⁵ "And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

⁶⁶ Aulén, *Das christliche Gottesbild*, p. 24.

⁶⁷ "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

⁶⁸ "He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him."

⁶⁹ "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

⁷⁰ Aulén, *Faith*, p. 244.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

faith. Further, Aulén's purpose is, "to secure for theological interpretation the necessary freedom in regard to conceptions connected with a view of the universe different from our own."⁷² That Aulén's motif-form distinction is actually a process of demythologization has been obscured by the frequent occurrence in his writings, especially in *The Faith of the Christian Church* and *Christus Victor*, of forms of expression such as "the Devil,"⁷³ "Satan,"⁷⁴ and the "demonic power of sin,"⁷⁵ and the failure to understand that such expressions are not to be interpreted in a literal sense, but as indicative of the dualistic motif. At this point, it is important and instructive to notice the several reasons that account for the presence of such terms in Aulén's work. Generally speaking, the terms "the Devil," or "Satan," which are interchangeable, appear in conjunction with Aulén's discussion of the "classical" idea of the Atonement. In showing that this idea is really the classic idea, Aulén finds it necessary to investigate and to present the relevant portions of the writings of the Church Fathers, particularly those of Irenaeus.⁷⁶ Similarly, since the Lundensian theology finds a strong statement of the classic idea in Luther's thought, reference is frequently made to his writings. In both, the conception of the "Devil" appears. In both, too, as has been indicated, Aulén regards this image as "grotesque," "extreme," and "crude."

Insofar as the term "demonic" is concerned, there are several factors which must be noted in the attempt to account for its presence in Aulén's demythologized account of the Christian faith. In the first place, it must be recognized that the term "demonic" is, on occasion, not a direct translation of the Swedish original, but occurs as a substitute for the word *överindividuella*. In order to clarify this observation, it is necessary to indicate certain features concerning Aulén's view of sin. Aulén's doctrine emphasizes the grip of sin upon the entire human race, a grip which is *non-atomistically* conceived. Where the individual is concerned, his specific acts of sin are interrelated by their common rootage in the voluntary, evil inclination of the human will.⁷⁷ Similarly, where the race as a whole is concerned, individual sinners and their acts of sin are not unrelated but "interdependent" and "interrelated."⁷⁸ Aulén refers to this individual and mass *involvement* in sin as the *syndens överindividuella sammanhang* — a phrase which is translated into English as "the solidary interrelation of sin." When it is a question of indicating the *power* of this solidary interrelationship of sin, the Swedish reads *syndens överindividuella makt* — a phrase translated as the "demonic power of sin."⁷⁹ While it must be indicated that such renderings of *överindi-*

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 200, 202, 244. Cf. *Christus Victor*, especially Aulén's discussion of Luther and Irenaeus.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 143, 167, 196, 244, 245.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁷⁶ Cf. Aulén, *Christus Victor*, pp. 16-35; *Faith*, p. 200.

⁷⁷ Cf. Aulén, *Faith*, p. 240.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 240, note 1.

duella are authorized translation, it is important for the purposes of this present discussion to recognize the term "demonic" *is not*, as stated above, a direct translation of the actual words of Aulén.

In the second place, but in conjunction with the above observation, the term "demonic" occurs in the definitive work of Aulén as a word deliberately chosen to express the obscurity, the inscrutability, and the mysteriousness inherent in the view of sin as a solitary interrelationship. Aulén writes:

At the same time that sinfulness in human life is defined as always volitional, it also appears to faith in the *form* of a demonic spiritual power which commands and subjugates the human will. The solitary interrelationship of sin concretizes itself in inscrutable and obscure powers, a mysterious complex which cannot be accurately delimited or defined, and which slips away and becomes shadowy as soon as one tries to grasp and comprehend it. Nevertheless, it shows its power in the most fearful manner and by the most cruel oppression of human life. Evil shows itself to be in possession of a sphere of relationships . . . "In the last analysis Christian faith perceives this evil as concentrated in the Satanic power in conflict with the divine will. Man is placed in conflict between two powers: the kingdom of God and the kingdom below."⁸⁰

It is in connection with the above statement that the best clue is offered to the sense in which the aforementioned term, *överindividuella*, must be interpreted; that is, in a manner that accentuates the evil sphere of power transcending individuals, and because of such transcendence, having a possessive or subjugating influence beyond the control of the individual, so that sin is inevitable.

Although the term "demonic" may thus be understood as, in this sense, a technical term pointing to the obscurities and mysteriousness involved in the effort to grasp intellectually the sphere of evil, it must also be recognized that Aulén is not rigid, but utilizes alternate terms and phrases, either to express the above idea, or to express various aspects of this evil power, i.e., hostility, opposition, destructiveness, and especially the threatening power of evil. This attests to the view, noted earlier, that the forms of expression are replaceable. Thus, in the writings of Aulén, are found formulations such as "the inimical forces,"⁸¹ "the powers of chaos,"⁸² "everything that threatens creation with calamity and ruin,"⁸³ and "the hostile spiritual powers which tyrannize."⁸⁴ However, the phrase most frequently used to convey the idea that the demonic nature of sin renders it inevitable is the concept of "original sin." In this regard, Aulén writes:

Individual man as a member of society participates in the sinfulness of the race. This brings to the fore the idea of the inevitability of sin. Man stands by inner necessity under the power of sin. The context of sin surrounds him and determines his life. If, from this point of view, we use the expression "original sin," it must be said that this expression is de-

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 244. (emphasis mine).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

signed to emphasize this total view of mankind. The word "original sin" tells us that the solidarity of the race is solidarity in sin. There is in humanity a sinful inclination which is reproduced from generation to generation. This context of sin lies as a heavy burden on the life of humanity, and, in relation to the individual man, appears as a demonic power.⁸⁵

4. *Concluding Definitions: "The Devil" and "The Demonic"*

Against the background provided by the above discussions, it is now possible to offer the following definitions:

1) "The Devil" in Aulén's thought is a *form of expression* or *figure of speech* that does not have reference to an individual, superhuman, evil being who exists objectively, but is a *collective* figure utilized to express the many forces of evil in conflict with the divine love. The fact that this is a *personal* term, whereas such terms as "powers" and "forces" are essentially impersonal, is useful in giving expression to Aulén's conviction that evil is essentially personal in character, i.e., evil is a matter of individual and collective human wills in opposition to the will of God basically characterized as *agape*,

2) "The Demonic" is a technical term having only a linguistic relation to the demons or evil spirits of the New Testament. The term is further to be distinguished from the New Testament view of demons in that they are viewed as individuals, whereas the demonic in the thought of Aulén is a collective expression pointing to the *inevitability* of sin due to the solidary involvement of world-society in sinfulness. This involvement is of such extensive and terrifying proportions that, viewed from the vantage point of faith, it appears as a spiritual power, i.e., a demonic power, that dominates the individual. Thus, in Aulén's thought, the term demonic conveys the New Testament idea of "possession." The individual is possessed or controlled, at least to a large degree, not by the devil or a demon, but by the context of sin in which he lives, a context to which he makes his sinful contributions to humanity as a whole. The individual man of faith recognizes this context of sinfulness with increasing clarity only insofar as his recognition of, and response to, the divine revelation in Christ deepens. Thus, if the weakness of the New Testament idea of demonic possession is its emphasis on the *external* evil forces which enter into and dominate an individual, the strength of Aulén's view of the demonic power of sin must be seen in its emphasis on the *internal* evil forces, i.e., the perverted inclination of the human will, multiplied to world-wide scope and power. Thus, sin, even though inevitable, is related to man, and because of such relation he is responsible. It should be noted that Aulén is concerned that the distinction made above, that between the *external* nature of demonic power in the New Testament and his view of demonic power as essentially *internal* in character, should be maintained. With reference to modern, scientific technology, for example, Aulén insists that a phrase such as "demonic technology"

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 242-43.

must be rejected, since it is not the case that technology is, in itself, demonic. Rather, that technology becomes demonic in the uses to which it is put by man. To him, therefore, the term "demonic ideology" is a correct expression, since its emphasis is internal.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 244, note 3.

