

# A DISCUSSION OF ADRIO KÖNIG'S VIEWS ON THE EVIL ONE, EVIL AND EVIL POWERS

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## *Abstract*

The article investigates demonic evil as a historic theme in König's theology, a theme that has been important to him but which, for the most part, has come to the fore indirectly. His high regard for Scripture and of what is said in the Bible about God and Jesus has also led him to take references to demonic powers seriously. Implications of his approach to these issues and his theology on the subject, as it has grown over three decades, are discussed. Some biographical data are linked to his theological viewpoints on these issues.

## **1 ON A PERSONAL NOTE**

During the course of 1973 I came across what is known as the church's ministries of healing and deliverance from evil (of which exorcism is a part). Having had – what I believed were – some awesome encounters along these lines I was also confronted with huge problems. Not only had I to explain to some church authorities what had happened to me but, for the sake of my own sanity, I had to gain some theological understanding of my experiences. As far as I could remember I had not listened to one lecture on the role of the 'Evil One' or demonic powers or the ministry to afflicted people during seven years of formal theological training or preliminary doctoral work. At the time I only remembered vaguely that in the book we had used 12 years earlier for catechism classes, it was stated that people who believed that the charismata mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 were still operational in this age, were under the influence of the devil. Because of my experiences I was very aware of the fact that I was now in the process of accepting theologically that the charismata actually belonged to the normal life of the church, that the ministry of deliverance from evil did exist and that it was necessary to re-think the Reformed position on these issues. I knew that I was in big trouble.

Coming from a Dutch Reformed background, I had nobody to turn to for help except Adrio König. He did help me and he has influenced my

life in many ways since then. It started with my reading of his doctoral thesis (cf König 1971) and a more popular version of an aspect of the same material in *Een wat sterker is* (One who is stronger) (1971). Since those early days we have had several follow-up discussions on the same topic. I have been continually encouraged by the content of his numerous publications. I am very thankful for that.

However, now it is 32 years later and he is approaching his 70th birthday in 2006. I thought it would be a good idea to do research into his views on the role of the 'Evil One' and his powers in our lives. Questions one could ask relate to what had influenced him to take up this theological position in the early seventies. Has he changed his viewpoint since then and on what grounds? What theological, political and societal factors have influenced his theology since then? What are the main themes that he has paid attention to during the last three decades and did reflection on the existence and works of evil powers also receive some attention? This article aims to respond to some of these questions. Three sources were used. The first consists of (some of) his numerous publications, the second is an unpublished paper of his read at the Annual Congress of the Theological Society of South Africa, Wellington, June 2000 (cf 2000). (An abridged version of this paper was later published under the title *My mind is changing continually, but ...* cf König 2001a), thus a literary research. The third source was the content of two in-depth interviews. The first one was electronically recorded in Pretoria on 2 September and the second one, a telephonic interview, conducted on 14 September 2005.

## **2 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA**

König's background is only partially linked to the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). Born on 5 May 1936 in Vereeniging he matriculated in Lydenburg at the end of 1953. He grew up very strongly under the influence of the CSV (Christian Student Movement) and the AEB (Africa Evangelistic Band), an Evangelical Holiness Movement. His parents originally belonged to the DRC but were disciplined for a number of years because of their support for this and other evangelical groups. So when the Nuwe Protestantse Church (New Protestant Church – the present Evangelies Gereformeerde Kerk) was “established” – “if such a thing is possible” (König 2000:1) – in 1944 by Dr Dirk de Vos, previously a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, under the motto 'Put new life into Reformed doctrine' his parents joined. However, as there was no local congregation of the New Protestant Church in Lydenburg, he still fairly regularly attended the DRC and for some time even taught a Sunday school class during his years at High School (König 2000:1).

After matriculating (grade 12) König studied theology for two years at the seminary of the New Protestant Church at Betschan, near

Bloemfontein. During that time he started a BA through the University of South Africa (Unisa). After the first year at Bethesda he changed to UOVS (University of the Orange Free State) in Bloemfontein where he joined the DRC in 1956, having been influenced by the ecclesiology of Calvin's *Institutes*, which was prescribed at the seminary. Having obtained his BA degree in 1957 he moved to Pretoria to do an MA in Philosophy (1960) and a BD degree (1961), doing his ecclesiastical year in 1962. In 1963 he was ordained a minister of the DRC in Lyttelton, close to Pretoria and in 1966 accepted a position at Unisa and a chair in 1976.

König chaired the Department of Systematic Theology and Theological Ethics for 17 years (1978-1995). During this period it became the biggest department in these disciplines that he was aware of – a truly ecumenical department in terms of creed, race and sex. This was an exciting experience for him since this sort of ecumenicity was regarded very differently by the authorities in the early eighties than since the middle nineties. He officially retired early (1995) and was appointed by contract for an indefinite time to supervise postgraduate students, a responsibility he still fulfils. He has proven to be Unisa's most publicised theological author with dozens of academic and popular books and articles under his name. He has been invited to lecture at numerous universities, schools and seminaries from various theological backgrounds all over the world – sometimes for extended periods.

### **3 MAIN THEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES**

König (2000:2) is convinced that the main influences in his life were religious ones. Even his interest in politics, which started very early, was motivated by religious sentiments and not by political ones. Even since his childhood he was conscious of (at least some of) the injustices in our society. He was the 'kafferboetie' (ie a derogatory term meaning something like a brother or lover of blacks) in his family and wrote his first letter in protest against apartheid and the National Government in the newspaper *Die Transvaler* in 1952, when he was in Grade 11.

König's main influences, in consecutive order, have been: Holiness Evangelicalism, Christian Philosophy ('Wysbegeerte van die wetsidee'), Berkouwer and Reformed theology in general, Barth, German Biblical Theology, Ecumenical Theology (on which he read his Inaugural lecture in 1977), Liberation Theology (Latin American, Black, Feminist, Womanist and Ecological) and recently to a lesser extent American Evangelical Theology. At present Messianic Theology has grasped his attention. Each of these has a very specific influence on his mind in an ongoing process of change. He feels that none of these ever lost its grip on his mind so that he may be something of a mongrel. He finds it exciting to

hold together and integrate these vastly different influences into what could be called a Reformed Theology of a sort.

Three of the above-mentioned influences and people concern us directly in this article. In spite of the danger of oversimplification we could say that Holiness Evangelicalism taught him to take the gospel very seriously, accepting that there is a real difference in life-style between a 'true' Christian and a 'worldly' Christian, and also that being a Christian might well cost one something. Berkouwer taught him that there is value in other traditions and theologies by which one can truly enrich one's own understanding and tradition and, from Reformed Theology, he inherited among other things the universal Lordship of Christ and the *solae doctrinae*.

## 4 THE CONFLICTING ROLES OF GOD, JESUS CHRIST AND THE EVIL ONE

### 4.1 Christ-centeredness implies taking the Evil One seriously

Did König ever in his writings pay attention to the person of the devil, to opposing cosmic and demonic powers and their activities? Did he take biblical references to these issues seriously? There are positive and negative answers to these questions. Negatively speaking it should be said that he never concentrated directly on the devil or evil forces as such. But there is also a positive answer to the questions raised. In his own words, "The more one pays attention to the teachings of Jesus and tries to understand what he did and accomplished, the more one is confronted with the Evil One and his powers" (Interview, 2 September 2005). Evidence of this kind of thinking is already to be found in his doctoral thesis – which decisively influences his theological approach to the present day (König 2000:4). The research problem that presented itself to him at that stage was motivated by his Holiness Evangelical childhood (which was Dispensationalist) and Karl Barth's theology. If it was true that Christ is the centre of every theological locus (Barth), how come people keep on arguing endlessly about specific events and their sequence and significance (Dispensationalism)? During the latter part of the sixties König anticipated that Barth would not come up with an eschatology so he tried to fill that gap to some extent. He ended up with a Christ-centred approach about which he has never changed his mind. The emphasis was on an eschatological covenant theology (König 2000:2).

It is precisely these points that should occupy our attention because they relate directly to the main focus of this article. In chapter two of the thesis (König 1970:142-169) the biblical problem regarding the work

of Jesus Christ is highlighted. In chapter three (1970:178-243), eschatology is based on Jesus Christ. Christ is discussed as the Beginning, the First, the Alpha, and the End, the Last, the Omega (1970:178-188). In all of these descriptions God's covenant plays an important role (1970:220-242). In the second part of the thesis focus is on the structure of the eschatology. Here chapters are dedicated to his viewpoint that Jesus Christ attains the eschaton *for us* (chapter 4), *in or through us* (chapter 5) and *with us* (chapter 6). It is obvious in the discussions of these topics that König has a high regard for Scripture. For instance, he takes *all* the data seriously and does not discard some sections as others would do. But there is more than that to be said. Thus the message of Jesus and his preaching about his kingdom as referred to in the Gospels, directly confront the work of the Evil One. Actually the coming of the kingdom is directly related to Jesus' exorcisms (cf König 1970:327). His exorcisms are seen as an important part of Christ's cosmic reign (1970:329). König (1970:330-338) elaborates on this by discussing several of Jesus' miracles. In line with the Gospel of Mark the miracles and exorcisms are seen as the breaking down of the work of the devil. But there is more to it. Jesus' reign over the 'powers' also draws his attention (1970:340-359). This not only means that Jesus was the conqueror of evil forces some 2000 years ago but that the biblical teaching about the danger that these powers still have for the church, as well as their future and final defeat should also be taken seriously. In this regard it is necessary to discern the manner in which the New Testament speaks of the subjection of the devil in Jesus' time and later on (1970:345-349). In another section this thinking is taken further when the possible existence of the charismata in our day and age is discussed (1970:392-397). He asserts that there is no reason – based on data from the New Testament – to conclude that the time of wonders has elapsed. It is therefore wrong in principle not to take the charismata into account in the life of the church and not to ask the living God for them to be operational in our lives (1970:393). It should be obvious by now that in König's mind the same pattern should be looked for in the present works of Christ. Thus if what Christ is doing and what He is about to do is taken seriously, the works and efforts of his Adversary should also be taken seriously. There is no way in which we as Christians can celebrate the life of Christ, his present activities or his future reign without considering the present influence and the future defeat of the devil, his demons and his powers.

These thoughts confirm our thinking. König has a very high regard for Scripture. He feels that the more one contemplates the redemptive deeds of Christ, including his birth, cross, resurrection, ascension, present and future reign – the more one should acknowledge the existence and the activities of the Evil One. He feels that we do not need the figure of the devil to make Jesus triumphant. Jesus *is* the triumphant one. We need to acknowledge the defeat of his adversary.

Actually it is not only in the life and works of Jesus that the defeat of the enemy is exposed. In *New and greater things: Re-evaluation the biblical message on creation* (König 1988, cf the original Afrikaans version 1982), it is obvious that König interprets the concepts of creation in the Bible as well as the way in which references are made to other gods, as of importance to our topic (König 1988:20). The God of Israel is seen as different to other gods. What is more is that God can create new things. He can also do more and greater things. Ultimately he is able fully and finally to destroy all opposing forces, so that the sea and the darkness and the monsters of chaos no longer exist and creation which began as a (threatened) garden becomes a city (with nothing to menace it), a symbol of peace, of safety, of joy (König 1988:78). Once again, König's attention to God and what He does implies that the existence of threatening powers of chaos and evil and destruction receive full acknowledgement and theological treatment. König does not want in any way to demythologise references in the Bible to the Evil One or demonic powers.

In a later popular work *Versoening: Goedkoop? Duur? Verniet?* (1995), König (1995:17-32), having first dealt with theories of reconciliation as offered by Anselm and Abelard, discusses a third option based on the thoughts of Irenaeus, namely the interrelationship between Christ's death and the conquering of the evil powers (König 1995:33-40). In his evaluation of this theory he mentions the viewpoint of some people who say that after the Enlightenment one can no longer accept the biblical worldview regarding the devil and evil powers. But then he replies to that notion himself by asking if what Jesus accomplished really makes sense if there were no dangerous powers to overcome. From what did He redeem and deliver us then? Is sin no more than a moral issue just consisting of wrong deeds? Should we then ascribe all the horrible injustices and suffering on earth to human beings alone? And then he reiterates his previous thoughts as discussed above by asking if the enormous influence of ideologies is not an example of the evil power which we tangibly experience – even we who do not have much experience of supernatural beings (König 1995:39).

#### **4.2 Evil on different levels: structural and personal**

Did this pattern of thought remain the same in König's later works? This question should be answered in the affirmative. This is borne out by a shortened version of his doctoral thesis (1980 – published ten years after the acceptance of his thesis) as well as by the adapted English version, *The eclipse of Christ in Eschatology: toward a Christ-centered approach* (1989). In a discussion on the broadness of Jesus' reign König (1980:150-161) asserts his position by saying that it was the devil with his evil powers (1980:159; cf the English translation of 1989:110-121) who

distorted the natural order, meaning that Jesus through his miracles, started to restore the natural order (1980:160). He continues by saying that Jesus's victory (1980:161-168; 1989:121-127) over evil powers plays an important role in the coming of the kingdom. König (1980:161) says that we need to pay special attention to these powers. This should be done not only by trying to help people who as individuals are caught up in the webs of demonic powers and who need deliverance or exorcism, but also by identifying and fighting these powers who are working on a very broad level (1980:162). There are powers appointed by God (cf the thinking of Berkhof) in order to guide society (family, public opinion, tradition and others) but if and where anyone of them develops independently and away from God's authority, the inevitable consequence is chaos and suffering. In this regard he refers to capitalism which could lead to the exploitation of people, to communism, to slavery (1980:163) but also to Nazism and Apartheid (Interview 3 September 2005). The Germans (including Hitler) were not in themselves such bad people. They were highly educated people but, under the influence of demonic powers, the whole system came under the control of the Enemy. The same happened to Afrikanerdom. Afrikaners were not that different from other people. But because the system of Apartheid was not subject to the reign of God it came under the control of demonic powers. Eventually it controlled and humiliated millions of people and devastated lives in horrible ways.

Actually one can detect the same kind of thinking in König's first publication *Hier is Ek!* (1975), in his series entitled *Gelowig nagedink*. Note that the name of the series is: *Gelowig nagedink* (Reflecting as a believer on ...). The first volume is on God, the second one on The End, and so forth (cf the English version of the first book translated as *Here am I: a believer's reflection on God* – 1982). A whole section is devoted to describing how Old and New Testament scriptures are used to ridicule evil powers. What is of interest here is that König (1982:53) again fully acknowledges the existence of cosmic and structural evil powers and that he (1982:52-53) also takes reports by other people (for instance those of the Blumhardts & Koch) on experiences with regard to demonic possession and exorcism in our age seriously.

This pattern of thought can be found in his other publications as well. For instance, König (1983:86) emphasises that sin is a power and classifies it along with the fall, death (cf König 1985:33, 40), the law, the devil and a host of other evil powers within the same categories. The power of sin manifests itself in different ways in that individuals can become slaves of specific sins while slavery as such is (an example of) the manifestation of the power of structural evil (König 1983:87; see also pp95-100). And as always he applies these insights not only to conditions in other countries or in far-away places but also to concrete situations in South Africa. In this way the fact that blacks could not own

property and the system of migrant labour are specifically dealt with (cf 1983:98). (These comments should be seen against the backdrop of prevalent Apartheid laws, a strong Nationalist government and much political pressure from supporters of the system at the time.) Added to this is his reference to the ministry of Jesus who spent a great deal of his life helping people to free themselves from the power of sin as manifested in evil powers influencing their lives to various degrees. Once again the notion that the early church continued with this ministry and that the church today should investigate the possibilities that this ministry could offer, is voiced (1983:87:88).

### **4.3 Development in understanding the role of the Evil One**

There has been a development in understanding the role of evil and the Evil One in the Bible (cf König 1985:45-52; 2001b:242-247). In the older parts of the Old Testament health as well as sickness, life as well as death, come from God. The idea of the devil is a later development. This situation changes in the New Testament. Sickness and death are now related to the devil. This was a result of the catastrophe of the two exiles and Israel's experience of suffering and misfortune in that, after the return from Babylon, a new period of glory and freedom as anticipated did not emerge. This was the time frame in which the apocalyptic literature developed. The notion that the devil is not the blameless servant of God as portrayed in Job 2-3 but God's big adversary, that he stole the total creation from God and that he wanted to wreck it completely, took root. The New Testament puts the emphasis on the work of the devil as one who is the origin of sickness, suffering and death. König (2001b:209) asserts that our understanding of Satan has changed dramatically after Job, to such an extent that we cannot use his case as a model for our dealing with the problem of evil. König (2002:73-85) convincingly shows that Calvin missed these insights and thereby made Satan God's willing servant in his theology of providence. Therefore our response should be to take the ministry of Jesus as a model. He fought against the evil powers and conquered them. The breaking through of the kingdom of God, the miracles and exorcisms of Jesus in his ministry (and in ours) are of paramount importance (König 2001b:245,246).

When asked about the theory that Israel got most of its apocalyptic ideas from its time in exile and from Persia (Zoroastrianism) (cf Boyd 1977:146, 173-176; Pagels 1995 and Arnold 1997:99, endnote 34) and that the later apocalyptic thinking on the Evil One was thus tainted in many ways, König (Interview, 2 September 2005) reacted more or less as he had done previously when explaining the concept of creation (König 1988). The point is that there were many explanations, concepts and stories with regard to the creation of the universe that Israel came into contact with. But the Israelites did not readily accept any one or

any number of them. They only accepted and adapted those that were in concordance with their own understanding of God and their experience of his uniqueness and what He had done. These choices exerted by Israel are very important and their impact cannot be ignored. Thus the devil and his demons are not just the remnant of an apocalyptic worldview incorporated by Israel after the return from exile and which now should be discarded because of so-called modern insights. Not at all! König's point is that Jesus aligned himself much more with the apocalyptic tradition than with the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. That is the main thrust of Jesus' ministry. Actually his ministry is best understood against this background. König feels that it is a pity that Luther and Calvin opted only for the content of the Jewish Bible. The result of that is *inter alia* that Protestant churches in general are not steeped in the apocalyptic literature of the early church as other generations have been (Interview 2 September 2005). As indicated above König (2002:74, 77) is also convinced that Calvin does not take the radical opposition between Christ (God) and the devil seriously enough.

So once again we end up with König's strong position that, in taking the words and acts of Jesus seriously, we should also take the Evil One and his works seriously. In Jesus we see how evil is conquered and dealt with and his is the model to follow. In his miracles and exorcisms Jesus started to re-establish the reign of God (cf König 2001c:103-105).

#### **4.4 Two other personal notes**

##### **4.4.1**            *The liberty to speak his mind*

König never felt himself part of an 'in' group – either religious, or political. Somehow the fact that he was not born in the DRC had an impact on him. "Having not grown up in the DRC but in a 'sect', I never became part of the 'inner' group in the DRC or Afrikaner establishment. Add to this my being at Unisa, and the result is that I never really felt trusted, only borne in/by the DRC." This contributed to the privilege he feels he has "of never having been identified with any specific power group or captured by any ideology (unless the Gospel of Jesus Christ be called one)" (König 2000:1). However, this very issue contributed to his experience of freedom to speak his mind and not to look over his shoulder. It also directly relates to his understanding of his task as a theologian. Two of thousands of references to substantiate this will suffice to illustrate this point. The one has actually already been referred to with regard to his voicing his opposition to the system of Apartheid and its laws and migratory labour issues. The other one deals with his opposition to the stance in the DRC during the seventies namely that unless something is 'certified' by the general synod it is not valid and should not be accepted.

The Afrikaans edition of his *Here am I* (1975) was of particular interest at the time because of his comment that the ministry of exorcism ought to be a normal part of the task of the church where the Holy Spirit imparts a special gift to believers for that purpose. The significance of this statement should be evaluated against the background of the fact that the upcoming general synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (1978) at the time was tasked to compile a report on the possible existence of the gifts of the Spirit in our age and the fact that a regional synod (Transvaal South: 1975) (cf Theron 1996:221; Minutes, see 'Handelinge' 1975:751-752, 861, 873) of the same church prohibited its members from taking part in any form of ministry along these lines until the final reports of the general synod were accepted. While other people were afraid to come up against the church establishment, König (1982:52-53; cf 1975:61) in his own straightforward way at the time said:

It is a mistake to lay down as a condition, as is sometimes done, that the church must first attain theoretical clarity about the many problems which (do indeed) arise concerning special spiritual gifts and their existence (particularly apart from the established churches). The church did not begin to function and proclaim the gospel only after the message had been theoretically explored and refined and formulated in creeds! The Lord lives and works in and through the church that received the gospel from apostles, and in pursuing this task problems do arise which then must be theoretically resolved. Theological reflection is essentially a follower, not a leader. In fact, how can a matter be reflected on theoretically if it has not been carried out and experienced in practice? ... For this reason the church is the sphere in which the Spirit distributes and directs the exercise of special gifts. Only after that must the church look for theoretical clarifications.

Interestingly enough, König was later instrumental in changing the DRC's position on spiritual gifts by contributing to a 'new' report which was tabled at the general synod of 1978. Thus the report which was originally prepared for the synod was published under the name of its compiler. After that König continually contributed to reports accepted by synods on the positive evaluation of charismatic gifts in our day and age and to a much more open stance toward the ministry of exorcism in the DRC.

#### 4.4.2 *Dealing with his own sickness*

Reference has already been made to his accepting a position at Unisa in 1966. In his own words: "This move might never have taken place were it not for a fairly serious health problem" (König 2000:1). In the light of what was said above with regard to the influence of evil on ill-health and sickness and implicitly on the ministry of healing, the question arises as to his understanding of his own situation, living with diabetes. The answer, I believe, is in accordance with the rest of his theology (Interview, 14 September 2005).

His first point of reference is that he grew up in a context in which people who suffered from various illnesses were often prayed for. Second, way back in the past he often prayed for the improvement in his own health. This has not materialised but he knows that God knows what the situation is and if and when God will heal him that will be fine. Otherwise he accepts that his whole life is in the hands of God. Third, a case could be made for the fact that because of his illness he needed to structure his life very systematically – something which was not in accordance with his character, especially when he was much younger. This new lifestyle served him well and influenced his academic growth in positive ways. His family history testifies to numerous deaths because people did not follow such strict guidelines as he and his wife (Hermien) did. In the fourth place he has not experienced miraculous healings or deliverances from demonic influences such as some others speak of. However, the point is that he believes the Bible and thus such stories are not in themselves foreign to him. His own insights are more related to his studying of the Bible and theological theories that he reads and tries to formulate. Lastly, he is convinced that in numerous ways the devil tried to ruin his life but that the power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit protected him again and again. Thus, once again, if one believes the Bible and takes seriously what Jesus said and accomplished, one should also take the devil and his works seriously!

## **5 CONCLUSION**

From what has been said above the replies and conclusions to the original questions are obvious. Adrio König is a person who as a believer constantly reflected on the data that he gathered from the Bible. In this endeavour he consistently showed a very high regard for Scripture. This focus on Scripture as well as the experiences of his own life led him to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Lord. In honouring God and Jesus he also realised that the work of the Evil One, his demons and evil forces in general, should be taken seriously. In following Jesus Christ the possibility opens up for Christians in this life to reap the fruit of what He has accomplished and to a certain extent participate in building the kingdom of God by resisting and fighting the forces of evil. In his own small way he believes that he is doing just that.

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