

## **The Third Wave Worldview: Biblical or Pagan?**

*Pierre Gilbert*

In the last few years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the demonic in general and in how, more specifically, Satanic forces interface with the world of human affairs. This flurry of interest has particularly been fueled by a number of Christian leaders who have been closely associated with what is known as the Third Wave movement. C. Peter Wagner, of Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Mission, Tom White, founder of Mantle of Praise Ministries (now Frontline Ministries), John Dawson, Southwest U.S. Director of Youth with a Mission, and Frank Peretti, author of the popular novels *This Present Darkness* (1986) and *Piercing the Darkness* (1989), have been among the most influential leaders and spokespersons in the Movement.<sup>1</sup>

Along with other Evangelicals, Mennonite Brethren have shown broad interest in these matters. Not only have some Mennonite Brethren pastors and youth workers adopted beliefs and practices which are akin to those advocated by the Third Wave movement, but one Mennonite Brethren/General Conference school (Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, British Columbia) has officially recognized and sanctioned, within the institution itself, a ministry of spiritual deliverance for students who feel they may be under some form of demonic influence.<sup>2</sup>

It is no secret that Youth Mission International, a very fine and highly popular Mennonite Brethren youth organization led by Randy Friesen, has given, over the last few years, a high profile to the issue of spiritual warfare and deliverance. Until recently, demon possession and spiritual deliverance was the object of vigorous debate in the Quebec Conference of Mennonite Brethren churches.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, many Mennonite Brethren church members in Canada and in the United States seem to accept the basic validity of the underlying assumptions found in Frank Peretti's popular novels.<sup>4</sup>

What are we to think of this growing interest in the demonic and the increasing acceptance of the views presented by the Third Wave movement? Is there any possibility of evaluating these beliefs and practices when there appears to be no way of verifying whether they are true or false? There are indeed no scientific tests which could objectively determine whether a person suffering from chronic depression is struggling with a neurological disorder or is in fact the victim of demonic oppression.

### **WORLDVIEW: KEY TO INTERPRETING THE WORLD**

The reason behind the intrinsic difficulty of evaluating the Third Wave ideology is first and foremost linked to the issue of worldview. My basic premise in this essay is that ultimately our worldview—our basic conceptual framework—determines how we interpret the world and dictates to a great extent how we will behave. Thus where we end up on the spiritual warfare controversy will primarily depend on our starting point. For this reason, I will examine the issue of spiritual warfare and deliverance from a worldview perspective.

I will begin with a survey of the beliefs of the Third Wave movement through selected writings of C. Peter Wagner, John Dawson, Frank Peretti, and a few others. The underlying intent is to explore whether this movement's worldview may in fact be a manifestation, in the Christian

community, of a mode of thinking which is becoming more and more prevalent in postmodern society. The approach to which I refer is increasingly characterized by the use of magical categories and by superstition. I will limit my evaluation of the Third Wave belief system to the reconstruction of its cosmology.

Secondly, I will examine a few basic biblical texts, particularly Genesis 1-3, in order to discern the building blocks of what could be considered a biblical worldview or cosmology. Finally, I will reflect on the implications of Third Wave claims as compared to those of my proposed alternative.

## **TEACHINGS OF THE THIRD WAVE MOVEMENT**

As a means of focusing the major areas of concern I wish to address, it is important to outline some of the affirmations which both fuel the controversy around the spiritual deliverance debate and lie at the root of the teachings and practices of the Third Wave movement. These affirmations include the following:

- People can be possessed (or demonized) by evil spirits with or without their consent.<sup>6</sup>
- Some Christians have a special gift to discern demonic presence and exorcize it.
- There are beings called "territorial spirits" who hold a special kind of domination over neighborhoods, cities, and even countries. Some Christians have a special ability to identify and to challenge their control.
- Objects or places can project evil influence and act as conduits for demonic oppression.
- Traumatic events, either in our lives or in our ancestral past, can make us particularly vulnerable to demonic influence.

Although it is not my intention to address these affirmations in detail, my hope is to provide a frame of reference for evaluating statements such as those listed above.

## **A COSMOLOGY OF THE THIRD WAVE MOVEMENT**

Leaders of the Third Wave movement and those who espouse similar positions in regard to spiritual warfare and deliverance have developed a relatively clear and self-consistent cosmology, i.e., a way of understanding God, the universe, and humanity.<sup>7</sup> The following elements are submitted as a preliminary outline of that cosmology.<sup>8</sup>

### **Violence and Creation**

According to the Third Wave ideology, there has been a cosmic conflict between God's forces and the rebellious demonic powers originating even before the creation of the world and extending into human history. It is believed that some of these demonic beings have been left free to roam the earth as an opposing force to humankind. This was necessary, for only in conflict could humanity attain the fulfillment of its true destiny. But war and conflict are not only present at the eve of creation and necessary for the fulfillment of human destiny; it characterizes human existence. God created the human race as a warrior race. The logic of this perspective is that God's intentions for humanity to be a warrior race required an environment containing the opposition necessary for the human race to fulfill its true destiny.

## **Mythologization of the Universe**

According to the Third Wave paradigm, the universe is populated with millions of superhuman/supernatural beings bent on destroying humanity and God's designs.

## **The Universe as Subject**

The universe is given the status of subject. The spiritual beings which inhabit it adversely affect the lives of humans through the manipulation of the physical elements of nature. Thus, the basic validity and reality of magic is assumed: objects can have special powers, the spoken word is inherently efficient,<sup>9</sup> places and objects can mediate evil powers and influence, traumatic experiences (either in the life of an individual or in his/her ancestral history) can generate "open doors" through which demons can take possession or gain significant influence over that person.

## **Pantheon**

According to Third Wave ideology, there exists a highly sophisticated organization with a hierarchy of demonic beings. At the top of this demonic organization there is Satan. Satan is not omnipresent, but he delegates his authority and power to other spirits to accomplish his malevolent objectives. Three major categories of demons are identified: territorial spirits, middle-level spirits, and ground-level spirits. The extent of the spirit's power is directly proportional to its rank; the higher the rank, the more powerful that spirit is. These spirits are said to have specific names and well-delineated roles and territories.

## **Christian Experience is Characterized by War**

Since the warfare paradigm is suggested as the operative and normative principle, it is important to realize that the conditions usually associated with war are perceived as characterizing human life in general and the experience of the Christian in particular. The Christian is living under conditions of war and is therefore under the constant threat of being attacked and overcome by evil spirits. In fact, in terms of the church, the more effective a Christian leader is, the greater the likelihood that this person will specially be targeted by evil forces. The Christian must expect and will experience intense spiritual conflict.

## **Christian Experience is Characterized by Fear and Uncertainty**

The source of spiritual attack is manifold and ultimately impossible to identify with precision. Any negative feeling or emotion can be evidence of demonization. One can be demonized either by coming into contact with a person who is demon-possessed, by contacting an occult object, or by being present in a place inhabited by, or otherwise associated with, evil spirits. The extent of the fear, if not the terror, and the uncertainty inherent to the Third Wave ideology is particularly evident in Frank Peretti's novels which take to their logical conclusions the teachings of some of the Third Wave leaders alluded to earlier.

## **A New Priesthood**

The Third Wave movement has its cast of "specialists" who have the special knowledge needed to deal with demons. These specialists have a distinctive status, for we are said to be living in the "end times," i.e., on the brink of an all-out war with the powers of darkness. As the prospect of war becomes an increasingly imminent and unavoidable reality, it follows that the spiritual warfare specialists will be called to take on correspondingly critical roles. Although

these spiritual warfare "generals" liberally share their knowledge, the average Christian must be extremely careful in any attempt to deal personally with demons.

In fact, the assumption is that only those with the required spiritual qualifications should deal with higher-level demons. The higher ranking the demon may be, the more necessary it becomes to appeal to the knowledge and experience of the spiritual warfare specialist. Since an average Christian can never know whether he or she has reached a sufficient level of spirituality, and since it is virtually impossible to determine the type of demon one might be dealing with, the average person is left with little choice but to defer to the specialist. This is especially true when one considers the dire consequences of incompetent dealings with demons (such as demonization, death, and illness).

The spiritual warfare specialist plays a role equivalent to that of the priest, the prophet, or the diviner in primitive societies who alone have the special knowledge to manipulate the powers and protect the common people from evil entities.

## **A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW: THE CREATION ACCOUNT**

I suggested earlier that the theology of the Third Wave movement should be examined and critiqued at the level of its worldview and not simply in terms of the social acceptability of specific demon-casting practices in any one community. In an effort to outline the basic tenets of a biblical worldview, I have decided first to examine Genesis 1-3.

While such a limited sample of the biblical text may seem restrictive, it is justified because of the literary nature and function of these chapters. Although it is not feasible here to present a comprehensive proof, it is my contention that these texts are foundational and that biblical theology as a whole reflects the principles they contain. The following discussion is intended to clarify this assertion.

### **The Purpose of the Creation Story**

In order to understand the presence of the creation story in the book of Genesis, it is necessary to provide some background information about the role such stories played in the ancient world. Creation stories are not unique to Hebrew literature. We find many of them in the ancient Near East, particularly in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Beyond that, they are found in every period of history and in every culture. These stories are generally called *myths*. In popular language, myth usually denotes something which is false. When scholars refer to myths in ancient cultures, however, they refer to stories which essentially provide a comprehensive and coherent view of the origin of the universe, the nature of the divine, and the origin and destiny of humankind. These stories are extremely important for they give us an insight into the very heart of a people's worldview.

The creation story found in Genesis 1-3 plays a similar role and came into being in a very specific context. According to Exodus 5:22 through 6:8,<sup>10</sup> Moses was given a twofold mandate: 1) to deliver the Hebrew people from the Egyptians, and 2) to communicate to this new people the essence of who Yahweh was so that the Israelites might adopt him as their God. The first part of this mandate was relatively simple, but the second part was considerably more complex, for it involved a change of mind-set, a change of heart, and ultimately a change of worldview. This was necessary, for it appears that the Hebrews in Egypt had essentially adopted a pagan worldview.<sup>11</sup>

If this is the case, then one needs to realize that Moses had to transmit to his people much

more than a few truths about this new God. He had to communicate a new worldview which would in fact compete with the Hebrews' understanding of the gods, the universe, and themselves. In a real sense, the creation story is a polemical text; it is designed to persuade the recipients of the validity of the concepts associated with the new worldview which is being presented to them.

If the biblical creation story was in fact designed to provide an alternative worldview, then what was it competing against? What was the belief system the Hebrews had come to accept? It is very likely that the Israelites in Egypt had adopted the cosmology commonly found in Canaan and Mesopotamia in ancient times. The essential elements of the Mesopotamian worldview can be gleaned from different kinds of documents but are most readily found in ancient Mesopotamian myths.

The most widely-known creation myths of the Ancient Near East are the Atrahasis and the Enuma Elish.<sup>12</sup> These stories teach that the universe was created in conflict, war, and violence and that human beings were conceived to be slaves in the service of the gods. According to these myths, the gods are fundamentally evil and unpredictable. Furthermore, human beings have no ultimate value: their fate is determined by the gods and by anonymous forces in the universe; their existence is characterized by uncertainty and fear; there is hope neither in this life nor in the one to come. The life of the average Mesopotamian is ultimately devoid of meaning. It is significant to note that the biblical creation story is indeed *good news* in that it provides a revolutionary understanding of creation, the universe, God, and humanity.<sup>13</sup>

## Two Key Concepts from Genesis 1-3

There are two critical concepts in Genesis 1-3 which deserve to be highlighted.

**The Demythologization of the Universe.** By its constant emphasis on the nature and function of the physical elements of the universe, whether it is referring to the sun, the stars, the moon, the waters, or the other elements of nature, the creation story strongly affirms that the universe is "object" and not "subject." Whereas the physical universe is perceived as the medium of divine essence in Mesopotamian cosmology, in the biblical creation account, the physical universe is devoid of consciousness. According to the narrative, the universe is not populated by evil powers bent on the disruption of human life, and physical objects in no way represent the essence of the divine. In the biblical story, the universe is no longer an object of worship, fear, or terror. By its repeated reference to the "goodness" of creation, the author explicitly proclaims that humanity lives in a friendly universe.

The immediate implication of this text is that magic does not exist.<sup>14</sup> Further, objects have no power in and of themselves and thus cannot mediate conscious and sentient evil influence. The notion that magic can mysteriously influence human life was one of the beliefs the author of the creation account was attempting to counteract. Moses could not have been more explicit. By emptying the physical universe of its divinities, Moses was in fact destroying the very existence of magical power and the possibility of manipulating it. In effect he declares, "A piece of wood is just a piece of wood!"<sup>15</sup> (see Isa. 44:13-19).

**The Nature of Humanity.** In Mesopotamia, human existence has no ultimate significance. Humanity is created in order to be slaves of the gods. The Genesis account states the exact opposite. According to Genesis 1, the creation of the universe is the result of the peaceful and benevolent intention of God. There is no hint whatsoever of conflict, violence, or war. Human beings are not created to serve as mindless slaves but to be God's representatives

(Gen. 1:26-31) and his partners in shaping and managing the world (Gen. 2:15-17). Far from being the victims of the powers of the universe, the account of the "Fall" in Genesis 3:1-24 proclaims humanity's freedom and ability to shape its future. Once again, we have concepts in these chapters which run deeply against the Mesopotamian ideology.

### **An Alternative Worldview**

It will be helpful to present briefly some of the basic worldview implications of Genesis 1-3.<sup>19</sup> The portrait which follows also borrows from the biblical wisdom tradition, a tradition which exhibits both worldview issues and creation theology.<sup>20</sup>

1. The universe is created good by a benevolent God. The universe is ordered, predictable, and meaningful. The environment is not something to fear but the very expression of a generous God.
2. The creation of the universe finds its origin in the intention of a good God and not in a primordial, violent cosmic conflict.
3. Human beings are created with fundamental dignity and basic freedom with respect to God.
4. Human beings are responsible for their actions.
5. Human fate is in the hands of God but also in our capacity to choose that which leads to life or death.
6. Sin and the results of sin are the consequences of human choice. If sin affects us both at the level of our humanity and of human existence, it does not, however, rob us of our basic human dignity and our ability to choose God (see Gen. 4:6-7).
7. Human beings are called to embrace life.
8. The authority to determine what leads to life or to death resides in the discernment of the community of God's people. Human beings do not discern that which is true from false by consulting some guru, by drawing a precise list of dos and don'ts, by some magical formula, or in the realm of some unverifiable esoteric experience. Discerning the true from the false is more often the result of an intentional, conscious, and reasonable process.<sup>21</sup>
9. Prayer. Genesis 2:15-17 teaches that human beings are created to be in partnership with God. Humanity is given the mandate to be God's "image," i.e., to represent the suzerain God on the earth (Gen. 1:26). As such, men and women are expected to be in constant consultation with God; this I take to be the basic purpose of praying. This consultation must be present at all the levels of human experience, such as the discernment of our role and sustenance in God's projects, and special strength and wisdom in times of crisis. The Bible recognizes the possibility of conflict, opposition, and difficulties in regards to life in general and the work of the kingdom in particular. That is probably what the New Testament authors mostly refer to when they allude to spiritual warfare (e.g., Eph. 6:12; 1 Pet. 5:8). The constant response to this in the biblical text is prayer to God, not rituals designed to "bind" or "limit" the work of evil spirits in our affairs (Phil. 4:4-8).
10. Prayer or Healing Ritual. Human beings have a basic need for some form of ritual in their lives, particularly in the difficult periods. My suspicion is that many people who practice deliverance ministries plug into this fundamental human need. James provides one such ritual in 5:13-16 which can be used in cases where there is an urgent need to invoke God's

special intervention. The formula suggested by James for dealing with these kinds of situations could perhaps be adapted for dealing with suspected cases of demon possession or oppression. The approach would not presume on the real cause of the illness, but it would involve the community (such as the elders) and a rational and sincere conversation about one's spiritual condition ("if he has sinned, he will be forgiven," Jas. 5:15 NRSV).

### THREE WORLDVIEWS COMPARED

The ideology of the Third Wave movement reproduces many of the elements of the old Mesopotamian worldview in contrast to the biblical view (see Table 1). I am not suggesting, of course, that the Third Wave leaders consciously borrowed from the Mesopotamian cosmology! My hypothesis is that human societies have an innate tendency to reproduce, generation after generation, ideological structures of "death," i.e., ideologies which promote war and violence as a fundamental construct of human existence, and, on a deeper level, ideologies which forever recreate the structures of dehumanization and human exploitation with which we are too well familiar. All human cultures throughout history have tended to reinvent in ever new forms what might be called the "Old Myth."

For example, today the "Old Myth" finds expression in the theory of evolution with its emphasis on violence and the notion of the "survival of the fittest" (read, the strongest) and in the New Age movement with its focus on the manipulation of magical/cosmic powers and its reductionist assimilation of human dignity and identity into the realm of nature. The Christian community is unfortunately not immune to the temptation of giving in to the "Old Myth," and in fact many aspects of the Third Wave ideology represent such a manifestation.

The following observations represent some of the important points of similarity between the Third Wave ideology and the Mesopotamian worldview:

- Creation is born out of violence and war.
- The universe is populated with a great number of evil entities bent on humanity's destruction.
- The physical universe is subject and not object.
- There exists an organization of evil beings with a supreme leader and a hierarchy of underlings.
- Human life is characterized by conflict, war, and uncertainty.
- Normal life depends on the ministrations of a cast of "priests" who have special abilities and knowledge to manipulate the powers of the universe.

The creation account attested in Genesis 1-3 was designed to provide both a critique of and an alternative to the Mesopotamian worldview and may therefore be considered to be foundational for biblical theology. It follows that Genesis 1-3 can and should be used to evaluate the basic assumptions of the Third Wave ideology, especially its perception of the interaction between the physical universe and demonic entities, the unconscious demonization of people, the "magical" connection between demon-possession and violence, and human beings' utter vulnerability to demonic influence.<sup>17</sup>

The Genesis creation account proposes to the reader the notion of a friendly universe in which human beings can live with confidence, joy, and certainty.<sup>18</sup> This is not to say that the world does not present real and difficult challenges for human life. Human beings are indeed faced with a wide range of difficulties, but these challenges are in the realm of reason. The notion

of a universe with a substratum of occult forces mysteriously affecting human beings or manipulated by them, à la the television series "The X-Files," is foreign to the creation account. Any ideology, "Christian" or non-Christian, which suggests the existence of such an occult substratum flies in the face of creation theology.

## **MATTERS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION**

In this section, I submit for consideration some thoughts and intuitions on a number of issues which deserve further reflection, research, and debate.

### **Redefining Spiritual Warfare**

I am inclined to believe that the New Testament addresses the issue of spiritual warfare mostly to refer to the tensions, the conflicts, the ethical options, and the worldview choices which Christians must face. Using the notion of warfare as the only paradigm to define the Christian experience, particularly when it comes to the interaction between our sphere of existence and the demonic world, may be going beyond what the authors of Scripture intended. It may be more accurate to understand spiritual warfare as simply one of many metaphors Scripture uses to characterize different aspects of the Christian life.<sup>22</sup> Each one of these metaphors has its usefulness but also its limitations. The metaphor of spiritual warfare can be useful, but it can lead to a gross distortion of our perception of life if it is sublimated or turned into an absolute representation of the Christian life.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Danger of Paranoia**

One of my great concerns regarding the uncritical acceptance of the Third Wave paradigm by many of our pastors and youth workers is the fundamental unverifiability and total subjectivity inherent in diagnosing whether one is oppressed by a demonic presence or not. According to C. Peter Wagner and other such specialists, there is no way to ever be certain that one is *not* being attacked, possessed, demonized, or otherwise influenced by evil spirits. In fact, one must live under the assumption that Satan and/or his minions are constantly active in one's life in one fashion or another. I am convinced that such a worldview can lead, in certain cases, to forms of mental illness. Young people who are going through profound physical and psychological changes in their teens can be particularly vulnerable if they are led to adopt the fundamental premises of the spiritual warfare paradigm as held in the Third Wave movement.

### **Manipulation and Spiritual Abuse**

Another concern I have about the Third Wave ideology is related to the critical importance given to leaders who claim to have a special gift of discernment regarding the presence of evil spirits in someone else's life or in some given location. Consciously or unconsciously these leaders put themselves in a position of authority over people who may be at a particularly vulnerable point of their lives. Psychological or spiritual manipulation and abuse is an ever-present danger.

### **Propensity towards Reductionism**

Third Wave theology, like many systems of belief, is profoundly reductionistic. It is reductionistic of Scripture; it is reductionistic of human nature; and it is reductionistic of God.



### **Demonic Existence and Power**

Why do demons seem to have so much power? My suspicion is that the power demons have is the power we attribute to them. In nearly all, if not all, of Jesus' encounters with the demonic, the purpose of the story is to demonstrate the demons' powerlessness. The Gospels dispel the lie communicated by the old pagan religions that human beings live in a universe filled with evil powers that they must exorcize at all costs. In the Gospel of Mark, for example, it is not demons or even Satan that constitute a real obstacle to Jesus' authority, but human beings.

**Table**  
**A Comparative Outline of Three Worldviews**

<b>Mesopotamia</b>	<b>Third Wave Movement</b>	<b>Creation Account</b>
Creation originates in war	Creation originates in war	Creation originates in peace and the benevolent intention of God
Mythologization of the universe	Mythologization of the universe	The universe is demythologized
The gods are evil	The "powers" are evil	The primordial "power" (Spirit of God) is good.
An organized pantheon	An organized pantheon	There is only one God
Human experience is characterized by conflict with the gods	The Christian experience is characterized by conflict with demonic powers	The human experience is defined as a partnership with God.
Human experience is characterized by fear and uncertainty	The Christian experience is characterized by fear and uncertainty	Human experience is characterized by knowledge
The Mesopotamian's fate is contingent on the gods	The Christian's fate is contingent on the demonic world	Human fate is contingent on a relationship with God
Mesopotamians are dependent on diviners to exorcize their world	Christians are dependent on spiritual warfare "special-ists" to exorcize their world	There is no need to exorcize the universe

## NOTES

1. For an excellent comparative survey of the various traditions pertaining to the issue of spiritual warfare, see Thomas H. McAlpine, *Facing the Powers: What Are the Options?* (Monrovia, CA: Marc, 1991).
2. See Doug Barkman, "Deliver Us from Evil: A Ministry of Demonic Deliverance," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 26 June 1998, 4-6.
3. These discussions have resulted in a publication entitled, *Commission sur la délivrance. Travaux et recommandations de la Commission. Recueil de textes* (Saint-Jérôme, PQ: Église chrétienne de Saint-Jérôme, 2000).
4. There are no hard data to substantiate this affirmation, but calls for study papers and conferences by the General Conference Board of Faith and Life and Mennonite Brethren Missions and Services International evidence interest in the Third Wave paradigm within Mennonite Brethren circles.
5. Much work has been done in the area of worldview in the last two or three decades. The following works provide a basic primer on the question: James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 3d ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997); Ninin Smart, *Worldviews: Cross-cultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995); Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984). Those who wish to pursue this theme further should consult Brian Walsh, J. Richard Middleton, and Ian Ritchie, *A Bibliography We Can't Live Without*, rev. and exp. ed. (Winnipeg, MB: Concord College, 1997).
6. In this paper I have used the expressions "demonized," "oppressed," and "demon-possessed" interchangeably.
7. In this kind of exercise, there is the constant danger of caricaturing a position by either misrepresenting it or by referring to inadequate representatives of the particular position one wishes to examine and critique. In terms of the representatives of the Third Wave position, I have specially relied on Thomas H. McAlpine's book, *Facing the Powers*, for describing the different traditions of interpretation regarding the powers and for identifying some of the key thinkers in the Third Wave tradition (cf. pp. 43-56), e.g., C. Peter Wagner, Tom White, John Dawson, and Frank Peretti. In addition, I have examined influential authors such as Ed Murphy (*The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare* [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992]) and others who identify with the Third Wave theology. Some readers may question the relevancy of consulting Peretti's novels in the course of researching a movement. Although Peretti himself may not necessarily agree with this assessment, his novels are perceived as being much more than simple science fiction/fantasy stories. According to an important Third Wave leader, Peretti's novels are said to contextualize the conflict that Paul describes in Eph. 6:12: "These fictionalized accounts tell how packs of demons have taken over complete towns, infesting government, education, even churches. And they depict how Christians fight back with prayer and how angels clash with evil principalities" (Steven Lawson, "Defeating Territorial Spirits," in *Engaging the Enemy* [Ventura, CA: Regal, 1991], 31). While this paper attempts to critique the basic assumptions of the Third Wave movement as it relates to spiritual warfare, I do not wish to question the personal integrity of those who

espouse these positions. There is reason to believe these leaders are sincere followers of Christ who are motivated by the desire to bring healing to a broken world and to further the kingdom of God.

8. The following represents a partial list of the most important sources used to analyze the movement and to reconstruct its cosmology: Peter Wagner, "Spiritual Warfare," in *Engaging the Enemy*, 3-27; Steve Lawson, "Defeating Territorial Spirits," in *Engaging the Enemy*, 29-41; John Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God: How to Break Spiritual Strongholds* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1989); Larry Lea, "Binding the Strong Man," in *Engaging the Enemy*, 83-95; Vernon Sterk, "Territorial Spirits and Evangelization in Hostile Environments," in *Engaging the Enemy*, 145-163; R. K. Bufford, *Counseling and the Demonic* (Waco, TX: Word, 1988); P. Wagner and D. Pennoyer, *Wrestling with Dark Angels* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990); Fred Dickason, *Angels, Elect and Evil* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1975); Ed Murphy, *The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992); Timothy Warner, *Spiritual Warfare* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991).
9. For example, a curse uttered will have a detrimental impact simply by virtue of the power of the spoken word.
10. On the significance of this text for biblical theology, see Elmer Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology*, 3d ed. (N. Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 1998 [1981]), 3-19.
11. This is particularly well illustrated in the incident of the golden calf in Exod. 32.
12. Translations of these myths are found in James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969).
13. For more details on the polemical character of the creation story, see Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 60-63; Jean Bottéro, "Le Dieu de la bible," in *La plus belle histoire de Dieu: Qui est le Dieu de la bible?* (Paris: Seuil, 1997); *Naissance de Dieu: la Bible et l'historien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).
14. Magic may be defined as the ability to influence natural or human events through ritual performances which are believed to provide access to an external mystical force beyond the normal range of human experience.
15. In that sense the creation account represents one of the most revolutionary concepts in the history of human thought. In fact, it may well be the very foundation of the scientific method and the development of an advanced technological society. See Pierre Chaunu, *Histoire et foi: deux mille ans de plaidoyer pour la foi* (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1980).
16. For a summary of wisdom theology, see Walter Brueggemann, *In Man We Trust* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1972), 13-28.
17. Ibid., 17-20.
18. I suspect Jesus' repeated warnings against the temptation to use the means of this "world," i.e., power and violence, constitute a profound allusion to the reality of this "Old Myth." John's references to the "world" also point to the presence of a persistent system of beliefs which ultimately produces death in human cultures (John 7:7; 1 John 2:15-16). One needs also to mention René Girard whose thesis on violence as a founding principle of human society and institutions has identified regular patterns of human behavior generalized in literature (see particularly *La violence et le sacré* [Paris: Grasset, 1972], *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* [Bernard Grasset, 1978], and *Le bouc émissaire* [Paris:

Grasset, 1982]). In English, Girard's classic exposition of his thesis has been published under the title, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. P. Gregory (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). In addition, the reader may also consult *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Y. Freccero (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965) and *The Scapegoat*, trans. Y. Freccero (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

19. It is interesting to observe Paul's response to concerns expressed by the Corinthians in regard to meat sacrificed to idols/demons and the appropriateness of consuming such meat (1 Cor. 10:14--11:1). Within the Third Wave paradigm, any association with something which might have been in close contact with the demonic world would be considered a risk of exposure to demonic oppression. If the Third Wave ideology truly reflected reality, one would expect Paul to express equal concern in respect to meat sacrificed to demons. Paul's only caution in this case, however, is ethical not ontological. Note Paul's direct appeal to creation theology in 1 Cor. 10:25-26 to justify his decision: "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, for 'the earth and its fullness are the Lord's'" (NRSV).
20. This notion of a friendly universe is certainly not unique to Gen. 1-3. Brueggemann, in his book, *In Man We Trust*, identifies a similar discourse in wisdom literature.
21. For example, Ps. 1 uses the metaphor of the tree to describe the life of the righteous. Paul uses such images as the sacrificial system to describe devoting our lives to God (Rom. 12:1), the court of law to denote the idea of forgiveness and justification (Rom. 5:1), and the institution of slavery to express the notion of unconditional service to God (Rom. 6:17-18).
22. Sydney H. T. Page's survey of Satan and the demonic in the Bible is a helpful, balanced, and hermeneutically sound study of the issue of spiritual warfare (see *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995]). His analysis of Satan in apostolic teaching is particularly interesting (see pp. 183-221).