

perfectly reasonable

SATAN IS ONE OF THE CHARACTERS IN MY PLAY, *The Surrender*. To be sure, it is a small role—and then, only the voice. But it comes at a pivotal moment in the story: Christ’s temptation in the wilderness.

Along with directing the inaugural performance of this play, I also took the role of Satan, delivering the lines into a microphone from the front pew. In that production I gave Satan a menacing, gravelly, other-worldly voice, having great fun with the over-the-top interpretation.

It was great fun—and dead wrong.

The Dark Hermit

One Easter Sunday evening, Linda and I watched the 1965 film, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, the four-hour epic about the life of Christ (Max von Sydow). For the most part this venerable production is reverent, and true to the Bible. I was especially taken with the interpretation by actor Donald Pleasence of his character called “The Dark Hermit.” The hermit is, in fact, Satan.

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

In the movie, Satan’s first scene is the wilderness temptation of Jesus. He is, indeed, portrayed as a dark hermit, living in a high cave. But he pleasantly offers Jesus a place by the fire and something to eat. His offers and arguments are soft-spoken—and perfectly reasonable. His demeanor is thoughtful, inviting, gracious. He is portrayed as a harmless, lovable old man. Once his enticements have been rejected by Christ, however, he turns up in subsequent scenes in the movie at just the opportune time to rouse the rabble against Jesus. His is often the first voice of dissent, and his is the first to cry, “Crucify Him!” when Jesus stands before Pilate.

Now *this* is a more familiar Satan. My interpretation in *The Surrender* was way off the mark. No one in his right mind would be the least bit tempted by someone so vile and repulsive, so sarcastic and rude. The natural response would be either to flee from him, or double over with laughter at such an obnoxious, cartoon creature.

The interpretation in the film was more true.

If our antennae were not raised, and our radar not switched on, we could easily be taken in by Satan’s pleasant, agreeable personality. He portrays himself as someone who is reasonable, attractive; he wants to be our friend, someone who supports our free-thinking decisions. After all, he wants only the best for us, right?

The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Genesis 3:4-5

Standing Firm

One of the more frightening aspects of the adversary is that he is a chameleon. He identifies our area of weakness and presents himself (or one of his minions) as someone sympathetic to that weakness. He was more than happy to reassure Eve that there was nothing wrong—and everything right—about her partaking of the forbidden fruit. Likewise today, he is ever eager to support our decision to do wrong; he carries with him at all times a rucksack full of rationalization, innuendo, and outright lies.

So long as we give him our attention, so long as we consider his arguments quite reasonable, he continues to whisper sweet nothings in our ear. He will win us over with syrup, if he can. But once spurned, the Devil turns nasty, showing his true colors, and the battle is engaged.

The lesson for us is that our foe—the foe of the believer—is determined and unrelenting. God hates sin; Satan rewards it—but the reward has about it the stink of death. Because Satan is unrelenting, the need to resist him is not optional. It is a predetermined part of every believer’s life.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

Ephesians 6:10-13

