

yetser *ba-ra*, the evil inclination, of the rabbis.¹³ The New Testament is ambivalent on the subject of the body, sometimes regarding it as part of the material world and a source of temptation, in opposition to the spirit and the kingdom of God. The Gnostics were to carry this teaching to extremes, and though the Christian tradition avoided the extremes, it bore within itself a distrust of the flesh evident over the years in the Church's attitudes toward the body and sex.

The struggle between the old eon and the new is also expressed in terms of darkness against light. To some extent this language is metaphorical, but it goes beyond metaphor to draw upon the ancient tradition of the war of darkness against light. The darkness of Satan is not only figurative; it is also literal.¹⁴

The Devil is prince of a host of evil spiritual powers, who may be viewed as fallen angels or as demons. The distinction between the two, already hazy in late Judaism, becomes even hazier in the New Testament. Only rarely are the fallen angels mentioned (for example, in Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4). The powers that Christianity attributed to demons were similar to those the rabbis and the Apocalyptic literature gave them. By the end of the New Testament period, Christian tradition made no distinction between fallen angels and demons. This development is in line with the Hellenistic practice of dividing the beings situated on a level between God and men into good and evil spirits, the latter being called *daimonia*. The name given to the evil spirits in the New Testament is most frequently *daimonion*, though *daimōn* appears once (Matt. 8:31), and there are also *archai*, *exousiai*, *dynamis*, *kuriotētes*, *thronoi*, *onomata*, *archontes*, *kyrioi*, *theoi*, *stoicheia*, and, of course, *angeloi*.

Demons appear most frequently in the gospels. Saint Paul seldom refers to them.¹⁵ The usual view is that between God

13. See Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich, 1922-1969), IV, 466.

14. Cf. the *locus classicus*, John 1:4-5, and also 2 Cor. 4:4 (light vs. blindness); Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13; Eph. 6:12.

15. 1 Cor. 10:20-21 is a reference to Deut. 32:17; 1 Tim. 4:1 is the only other place in the Pauline epistles where the term appears.

and man are spiritual beings who, like men, have the freedom to do good or evil. The good spirits are the angels of the Lord; the others are the minions of the Devil. The New Testament for the most part assumes that these powers are hostile: "The angelic powers are the equivalent of one aspect of the larger symbol of Satan."¹⁶ On the whole the New Testament moves in the direction of consolidating the diverse demons of Near Eastern and Jewish tradition into one host under Satan's power. The distinction between the Devil and the demons who followed him, still clear in the New Testament usage of *diabolos* and *daimonion*, becomes blurred in later Christian tradition (probably owing to the identification of the Devil as one of the fallen angels). Most English translations of the New Testament also miss the distinction, rendering *daimonion* as "devil." In contemporary Rabbinical literature, demons are spiritual beings who have been given permission by the Lord to tempt us or to do us bodily harm for the punishment of our sins, and they play much the same role in the New Testament. In the latter, they are more clearly under the generalship of Satan, helping him oppose the kingdom of God.¹⁷ Again, demonology is central, not peripheral, to the teaching of the New Testament.

Possession is one of the most common means Satan uses to obstruct the Kingdom of God. Ordinarily, the demons, Satan's servants, do the possessing, though in the Johannine literature Satan does it himself.¹⁸ By exorcizing the demons, and by curing diseases sent by them, Jesus makes war upon the kingdom of Satan and thereby makes known to the people that the new eon is come: "If I drive out demons by the power of God, it is because the Kingdom of God is come among you." Contemporary magicians and healers also exorcized demons, but the gospels point out that only Christ exorcizes through the power of the Holy Spirit. The exorcism of demons is no quirk in the gospels, no strange and irrelevant accretion introduced from con-

16. Ling, p. 77.

17. Cf. Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 2:6; Matt. 9:34; 25:41; Rev. 12:10; 2 Pet. 2:4; and especially Matt. 12:28.

18. John 6:70-71; 8:44; 13:2, 27; 1 John 3:12.



Exorcism, medieval Bilderbibel, Germany, fifteenth century. Christ drives out the demons who have possessed the woman: they emerge from her black and with wings that signify their power over the air. Courtesy Jan Torbecke Verlag.

temporary superstition. It is central to the war against Satan and therefore an integral part of the gospels' meaning. "In each act of exorcism Jesus saw a defeat of Satan, a presage of the final triumph that was soon to come to pass. . . . Jesus actualized Satan, just as he actualized God. Just as he treated with full earnest the coming Divine Kingdom, so he treated also the present dominion of Satan."¹⁹

The Devil is prince of evil humans as well. Evildoers are called followers or sons of the Devil.²⁰ Peter himself is called Satan when he tempts Christ to waver from his appointed path to the cross.²¹ Curiously, Christ calls Peter the Devil for attempting to avert the Passion and Judas the Devil for working to bring it about. What these two apostles have in common is thrusting their own personal fears into the path of the divine plan of salvation.²² Judas is most commonly associated with the Devil, and Luke says that Satan actually enters into him.²³ Judas is such a close counterpart of Jesus that one senses an analogy between their relationship and that of the doublets so often found in mythology. The Lord chooses Jesus and sends his spirit upon him, just as Satan chooses Judas and sends his spirit to enter him. The analogy may even be closer: in the great scheme of salvation the God knew from all time that Jesus would be the savior and Judas the betrayer; and as the betrayal of Judas was necessary for the Passion of Christ, the God might

of Judas was necessary for the Passion of Christ, the God might

19. Anton Fridrichsen, "The Conflict of Jesus with the Unclean Spirits," *Theology*, 22 (1931), 127. Fridrichsen also suggests, p. 128, that the word *biastai*, "The violent ones" in the difficult passage of Matthew 11:12 that says that the violent will bear away the kingdom of God, is best understood as applying, not to human, but to spiritual, powers, the *biastai* being Satan and his demons. For Christ exorcizing through the power of the Holy Spirit, see Matt. 12:28 and Luke 11:20.

20. John 8:44; Acts 13:10; 2 Thess. 2:3-9; Rev. 2:9; 3:9; 1 John 3:8; 3:12.

21. Matt. 16:23; Mark 8:33; Luke 22:31; cf. Matt. 4:10, where the same words Jesus uses to Peter are used to Satan himself.

22. Henry Ansgar Kelly, "The Devil in the Desert," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 26 (1964), 218.

23. Luke 22:3; cf. John 6:70; 13:2, 27.

be said to have chosen Judas for his part in the act of salvation as well as Jesus for his.²⁴

The New Testament Devil is a tempter, a liar, a murderer, the cause of death, sorcery, and idolatry; he hurts people physically, and he blocks and obstructs the teaching of the Kingdom of God wherever he can, assailing us, possessing us spiritually, and tempting us to sin.²⁵ In all this he is the enemy of the Kingdom of God. He also retains some of his old characteristics as an agent of the God in the accusation and punishment of sinners.²⁶ In this respect, he has almost the same function as the Mosaic law, and Saint Paul applies similar terminology to the two.²⁷

In later Christian tradition, dramatized by Dante and Milton, Satan came to rule hell, to punish people there, and to suffer there himself. None of these activities appear in the New Testament, where references to hell are both few and unclear. The two most common New Testament terms for hell are *hadēs* and *geenna*. In the Septuagint, *hadēs* usually translates the Hebrew Sheol, and the New Testament understanding of this place is similar to the Hebrew: it is under the earth, and it is the abode of souls temporarily separated from their bodies until the time of resurrection. *Geenna*, the location of which is not specified in

24. John 6:64. This irony never becomes explicit in Christian tradition, which rejects the notion that Judas was chosen, attributing his sin to his free will. Yet the implications are there to be drawn.

25. Tempter: 1 Thess. 3:5; Acts 5:3; 1 Cor. 7:5; Mark 4:15; 1 Tim. 5:15; 2 Tim. 2:26; 1 Pet. 5:8; tempter of Christ: Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:1-3; liar: John 8:44, and implied in 2 Cor. 2:11 and 2 Tim. 2:26; murderer: John 8:44 (here there is possible reference to Cain, who in later tradition became a demonic figure); as cause of death (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 2:24 and rabbinic tradition): Heb. 2:14; cause of sorcery and idolatry: Acts 13:10; implied in 1 Cor. 10:20; hurts people physically: Luke 13:11-16, 2 Cor. 12:7; blocks and obstructs: 1 Thess. 2:18.

26. Rev. 12:10; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20.

27. See the argument of G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 36-44. Trevor Ling (p. 41) argues that Paul's sending to Satan in 1 Cor. 5:5 may best be taken as expulsion from the Christian community. If the world outside Christianity is under the power of the Devil, then removal from the Christian community places one under that power.

the New Testament, is a place of eternal fire and punishment for the wicked. These two concepts, related but originally distinct, merge quickly in post-New Testament thought. The relationship of Satan to hell is also ill defined in the New Testament. In Revelation 20:10 the Devil is cast into a lake of fire and brimstone, and in the later, Apocryphal works he appears both as a prisoner of hell and as a jailer of the question of eschatology: what happens at the end of the world, and when does the end of the world occur? To the extent that the world, the *kosmos* or *aion* of the New Testament, is identified with the Kingdom of Satan, it would appear that the end of the world and the defeat of Satan are simultaneous. But the New Testament speaks notoriously unclearly about when and how the ruin of Satan is effected.

One errs in reading back into primitive Christianity the notions of Dante or Milton centuries later. Several different interpretations of the fall of Satan and his fellow angels have at one time or another been put forward. The first set of differences has to do with the nature of the fall: it has been viewed as (1) a moral lapse; (2) a loss of dignity; (3) a literal ejection from heaven; (4) a voluntary departure from heaven. The second set of differences has to do with the geography of the fall: (1) from heaven to earth; (2) from heaven into the underworld; (3) from earth (or air) into the underworld. The third set is chronological: Satan fell (1) at the beginning of the world before the fall of Adam; (2) from envy of Adam; (3) with the Watchers about the time of Noah; (4) at the advent of Christ; (5) at the Passion

28. Montague Rhodes James, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1924), pp. 117-146. Note that the English word "hell" is a Germanic word relating to the underworld; Teutonic and other medieval concepts of hell should not be read back into the early Christian period. The New Testament uses *geenna* twelve times and *hadēs* ten; the name Tartarus seems to be behind the odd verb in 2 Pet. 2:4; and Matt. 25:41 speaks of the eternal fire prepared for the fallen angels. For the tradition of the descent of Christ into hell, see Josef Kroll, *Gott und Hölle* (Leipzig, 1932).

of Christ; (6) at the second coming of Christ; (7) a thousand years after the second coming.²⁹

It is possible to find various accounts implicit in the New Testament. (1) At the beginning of the world there was war in heaven, and Michael cast out the Devil and his angels. They were plunged into the underworld, from which, however, they issued forth to tempt and persecute mankind. (2) The angels fell long after Adam, when they lusted after the daughters of men; they were cast down from heaven into the underworld but issued forth again for our harm. (3) The Kingdom of God arrives on earth with the advent of Christ; his casting out of the demons shows that the power of Satan is presently being crushed. A variant of this chronology is that the Passion of Christ on the cross hurled Satan down. (4) The Kingdom of Satan has been weakened but not finally toppled by the coming of Christ. Christ will come again, and at the last judgment Satan will be destroyed, or else cast forever into hell. This last chronology, found in Revelation, indicates the shifting faith of the Church after the first century, when it had become clear that Christ's first coming had not removed evil from the world. As his second coming was delayed further, another postponement of the ruin of Satan occurred, this also visible in Revelation: (5) At the second coming, Christ will bind Satan for a thousand years; at the end of a thousand years, he will issue forth to our harm one final time, and then finally will be destroyed.³⁰ The inconsistency of these stories is inherited from

29. Luke 10:18; Matt. 12:28; 25:41; John 12:31; 16:11; 2 Pet. 2:4; Rev. 9:1-3; 12:7-9; 20. The spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3:19) are fallen angels.

30. It is from Rev. 20 that all Christian millenarian dreams have come. Christian millenarianism reflects the change in late Jewish Messianic thought. Until about 150 B.C., the Jews believed that the Messiah would usher in a reign of eternal happiness on earth, and vestiges of that belief still existed at the time of Jesus. But during the terrible events of the period after 150 B.C., the Jews came to believe that the world was too evil for the Messiah to reign here and that it would have to be purified for a time before the kingdom was established. The length of time was specified as a thousand years for the first time in Slavonic Enoch 22-23, which dates from about 50 A.D. For the fire and brimstone of hell, see 1 Enoch; Test. Jud. 25:3; and the Sibylline Oracles, 3:73.

Apocalyptic Judaism, and it is irresolvable. The fall of the Devil and his angels may be a fall from heaven to earth, or a fall from heaven or earth to the underworld; the fall into the underworld may mean the destruction of the Devil or merely his imprisonment; Christ has the power to destroy the kingdom of Satan, the old eon, but it is unclear whether the old eon perishes with the first coming of Christ or lingers until the second. These ambiguities allowed for the development in subsequent Christian thought of a variety of legends and doctrines regarding the overthrow of the Devil, all consistent with one or another teaching of the Bible. The essential point, one on which there is complete consistency, is that the new eon brought by Christ is irreconcilably and eternally at war with the old eon of Satan.

Other eschatological adversaries of the Kingdom of God are mentioned, whose origins and characters are even more unclear. Toward the end of the world, when Christ is about to come again, Antichrist will appear and lead the people of God astray. Antichrist may be one person or a plural entity. He may be a spiritual or a human adversary. The ambiguities of the New Testament on the subject of Antichrist arise from the multiple sources of his nature. In part, the figure is drawn from Beliar, who in the Apocalyptic literature is the equivalent of Satan, the spiritual general of the forces of evil. In part it also draws upon the image of the tyrant at the end of the world in the Book of Daniel and, more specifically, upon more recent political enemies of the Jewish people, such as Antiochus Epiphanes, Nero, and Caligula.³¹ Associated with Antichrist in Revelation are the beasts and the dragon (Rev. 11-19), who again have mingled and ambiguous characteristics. The dragon is to be identified as

31. See Josef Ernst, *Die eschatologischen Gegenspieler in den Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (Regensburg, 1967), and Béda Rigaux, *L'Antéchrist* (Gembloux, 1932), for a critical evaluation of the proposal put forth by R. H. Charles that Antichrist is a composite of three figures, Beliar, Nero Redivivus, and the false prophet. The association with Caligula may be implied in 2 Thess. 2:1-4, where the Antichrist takes a place in the temple and pretends to be God. Caligula had ordered a statue of himself erected in the Temple. Though he was assassinated before the order was carried out, the memory of the proposed blasphemy endured.



The De Quincey Apocalypse, "The Worship of the Beast," England, thirteenth century. Satan's last and greatest ally, the enthroned Antichrist orders the execution of the saints who will not adore the apocalyptic beast. From O. E. Saunders, *English Illumination* (1969), courtesy Hacker Art Books, New York.

the Devil himself, and the beasts as his servants. The beast from the sea is generally agreed to be the power of Rome, although it has mythological resonances going back to Leviathan and Tiamat.³² The Antichrist and the two beasts are best understood as helpers of the Devil in his last struggle against Christ at the end of the world. Their close association with the Devil, given the ambiguity of the passages, permitted an assimilation of their characteristics into the image of the Devil himself. And this is proper. Together they are the old eon, the world, the force of evil that blocks and obstructs the Kingdom of God. The beast and the false prophet are cast into a lake of

32. Cf. John 3:8; 40-41; Ps. 74:14; 104:26; Isa. 27:1; Ethiopic En. 60:7-9.

re (Rev. 19:19-20), and with the Devil are tormented day and night forever (Rev. 20:10).

The iconography of the beasts is of minor importance in the formation of the iconography of Satan. Both the dragon and the beast from the sea have ten horns and seven heads, attributes never assigned to the Devil in later tradition. The later Devil is hardly ever polycephalic, though he may have a face on his belly or buttocks, and he never has more than two horns. Revelation (13:11) says, however, that the beast from the land has two horns and speaks like a dragon. Of all the possible pictures of the Devil—no horns, one horn, many horns—why did the two-horned image become fixed in the iconographic tradition? The answer is that the figure of the beast from the land matched other two-horned figures. The Devil was associated with horned wild animals, with Pan and the satyrs, with fertility and the crescent moon. And the *qeren*, the horns of power assigned to Moses and other numinous figures, are two. On an unconscious level, these images blended together in primitive Christianity to fix two horns upon the head of the Devil forever.

Demons in the New Testament are associated with a number of animals: locusts, scorpions, leopards, lions, and bears, for example; but the Devil himself has direct associations with only two animals, the serpent and the lion.³³ The lion never became a strong part of the iconographic tradition, because it was also connected with Christ himself and with the Evangelist Mark.³⁴ Saint Paul refers in passing to the serpent as Eve's tempter and when taken with Romans 16:20, this would imply its identification with Satan. Revelation 20:2 makes a threefold identification of Devil with dragon and serpent. But Satan's connection

33. 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:9. The image of the lion with Christ. The image

34. See Rev. 5:5 for the identification of the lion with Christ. That it could be used with great success by C. S. Lewis in his Narnia series; that it could be so used without any ambivalence indicates that the metaphor of the Devil as roaring lion did not become dominant in Christian tradition. The Christian Apocrypha would associate the Devil with a number of animals, e.g., the wolf and the dog (see James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 35, 36, 82), probably through a blurring of the distinction between the Devil and the demons.

with the serpent is never emphasized in the New Testament. Later Christian tradition affirmed it, but, with the one exception of the primordial scene in Paradise, seldom portrayed Satan as a serpent. The forked tongue eventually assigned him may proceed as much from his role as father of lies in John 8:44 as from his association with the snake.³⁵

The wings so often associated with the Devil in later tradition do not appear in the New Testament, but they are implied in his power over the air. This power derives from two sources. In Jewish Apocalyptic the fallen Watchers are cast down from heaven into the air, where they wander about doing mischief. In Pythagoreanism and Middle Platonism, an order of spirits (angels or demons) exists between God and men, their abode being in the air. The air, with its winds and storms, was always a dangerous element, as the Babylonian demon Pazuzu indicates. The Devil rules the air, and wings naturally become part of his navigational equipment.³⁶

In the New Testament, as in the Old Testament, the salt water of the sea is generally considered evil. In Revelation, where the beast rises from the sea, where the serpent looses a flood against the mother of Christ, and where the Great Whore sits upon the waters, the ancient evil of the waters of chaos appears. Fresh water, on the other hand, is powerfully good. It cures bodily infirmities and through baptism cleanses the soul. In later Christian folklore, water offers protection from the Devil, who often is said to lack the power of crossing streams or bodies of water.³⁷

In later Christian tradition, the color of the Devil is either red or black. Of the books of the New Testament, only Revelation renders the color red as evil; there it is the color of one of the dread horses, or of the Whore, or of the beast that the

35. Cf. 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12; 13:2. The serpent motif is stronger in the Christian Apocrypha: see James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 44, 80-82.

36. Eph. 2:2: "the power of the air."

37. One of the many passages emphasizing the goodness of water: John 3:5. For water as evil, see Rev. 12:15-16; 13:1; 17:1. The Great Whore who sits upon the waters in Rev. 17:1 certainly counts the fertility goddesses of the Near East among her progenitors.

Whore rides, or of the dragon. Its connection with evil passed most easily into tradition from the red dragon of Revelation 12:3.³⁸ The blackness of the Devil arises naturally from his role of lord of darkness in opposition to the Kingdom of God and from his association with the underworld or pit where he is imprisoned after his fall. The conflict between the two kingdoms, between light and darkness, is so central to the New Testament that it permanently fixed the image of Satan as lord of darkness.³⁹ Although red is ambiguous, the New Testament never refers to darkness or blackness as a good color.⁴⁰ Yet nowhere does it describe Satan as actually black. Satan is a spirit, not a body; he has the power of changing his shape to suit his purposes, and he can even transform himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Only in the later Apocryphal literature is blackness specifically assigned to the Devil.⁴¹

The New Testament does not move the tradition of the concept of the Devil strikingly beyond the position of late Jewish Apocalyptic; the two literatures are almost contemporary and arise from the same Hellenistic Jewish milieu. But it does fix many of the elements of Hellenistic Jewish tradition firmly in the concept. The Devil is a creature of God, the chief of the fallen angels, but he most of the time acts as if he had far greater power. He is lord of this world, chief of a vast multitude of powers spiritual and physical, angelic and human, that are arrayed against the Kingdom of God. Satan is not only the Lord's chief opponent; he has under his generalship *all* opposition to the Lord. Anyone who does not follow the Lord is under the control of Satan. In this capacity Satan appears very much the principle of evil. Christianity, like Apocalyptic Judaism, refused to embrace dualism, but Satan's power, attri-

38. Cf. Rev. 6:4; 17:3-4. 39. John 1:4-9; Acts 26:18; Rev. 22:5.

40. For red (or purple) as good, see Mark 15:17.

41. For the Apocrypha, see James, pp. 22, 55, 323, 345, 451, 468. As early as about 120 A.D. the Epistle of Barnabas designated Satan as *ho melas*, the black one, and by the time of the Apostolic History of Abdias and the Acts of Philip he is completely limned as black, winged, and reeking of smoke. See also the early Christian treatise, *The Shepherd of Hermas*.

butes, and ultimate fate are very similar to those of Ahriman in Mazdaism. As Satan is the opponent of the good Lord of Judaism, so he is the opponent of Christ, the Son of the Lord. As Christ commands the armies of light, Satan commands those of darkness. The cosmos is torn between light and darkness, good and evil, spirit and matter, soul and body, the new eon and the old, the Lord and Satan. The Lord is the creator of all things and the guarantor of their goodness, but Satan and his kingdom have corrupted this world. Christ comes to destroy this old world, this evil eon, and to establish a new one in its place. In the end, Satan and his powers will be defeated, cast down, and perhaps annihilated, and Christ's other world, the kingdom of goodness, of light, of spirit, will be forever established. The dualism of this view is mitigated in at least three important ways. The good God created the world, which, though corrupted by Satan, remains intrinsically good. Satan himself is a creature of God. The meaning of the created world is itself ambiguous: it is not clear whether the struggle between the two kingdoms is on a truly cosmic level or whether it occurs in human society alone. And at the end of time, Christ will win a final victory over Satan. The dualism of the New Testament is thus not the extreme dualism of Gnosticism. Yet it is even farther from monism. New Testament Christianity is best perceived as a semidualist religion, in which both the unity and goodness of the Lord are preserved, however precariously, while Satan is given almost as vast a scope as Ahriman.

Wide powers were assigned to Satan for two reasons. The first is simply that the traditions of Mazdaism, Orphism, Hellenistic religion and philosophy, and late Judaism were passed on to New Testament Christianity. But, second, these traditions were eagerly accepted and reinforced because they allowed a partial answer to the question of theodicy. To the corruption of the cosmos by Satan can be assigned natural ills, such as death and disease and storm, whether they are simply sent upon us as diabolical afflictions or are meant as punishment for our sins. Moral evil might exist in mankind without Satan, but he constantly abets it through temptation, and all

those who sin are automatically under his power. Every day, in every place, in every life, Satan and his powers are working to block the kingdom of God. The Devil is the source of lies, of murder, of wars; he tempts us, accuses us, punishes us; he afflicts us with disease and even possesses us. The horns and darkness of the Devil, his association with the air and the underworld, his ability to change shapes, and the other iconographical features assigned him in the New Testament are all mere symbols of this immense power. The Devil of the New Testament is not a joke, he is not taken lightly, he is not merely symbolic, and he is decidedly not peripheral to the New Testament message. The saving mission of Christ can be understood only in terms of its opposition to the power of the Devil: that is the whole point of the New Testament. The world is full of terrible grief, suffering, and pain. But somewhere, beyond the power of Satan, is a greater power that gives meaning to that pain.⁴²

42. I regret that an excellent article appeared too late for me to use it: Roy Yates, "Jesus and the Demonic in the Synoptic Gospels," *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 44(1977), 39-57.