

SOURCES OF MEDIEVAL DEMONOLOGY

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When most of us think of demons today, if we do think of them, some medieval imp undoubtedly comes to mind. The lineage of the medieval demon, and the modern conception thereof, can be traced to four main sources, all of which have links to the earliest human civilizations. Greek philosophy, Jewish apocryphal literature, Biblical doctrine, and pagan Germanic folklore all contribute elements to the demons which flourished in men's minds at the close of the medieval period. It is my purpose briefly to delineate the demonology of each of these sources and to indicate their relationship to each other.

Homer had equated demons with gods and used *daimon* and *theos* as synonyms. Later writers gave a different nuance and even definition to the word *daimon*, but the close relationship between demons and the gods was never completely lost from sight. In the thinkers of Middle Platonism the identification of demons with the gods was revived, and this equation is ever-present in Christian authors.

Hesiod had been the first to view demons as other than gods, considering them the departed souls of men living in the golden age. Going a step further, Pythagoras believed the soul of any man became a demon when separated from the body. A demon, then, was simply a bodiless soul. In Platonic thought there was great confusion between demons and human souls. There seems to have been an actual distinction between the two for Plato, but what the distinction was is impossible now to discern. It is uncertain whether or not he believed demons to be personal beings.

Several of Plato's dialogues contain brief discussions of demons, but perhaps the most important for later periods is the *Symposium*. Though the idea of demons in the *Symposium* is noticeably different from its presentation in the other dialogues, it is this dialogue which is most frequently discussed in later authors on demonology. In Plato's other dialogues demons are viewed as the souls of departed men, or as the guardians and guides of men. Though it is still maintained that the souls of men can to some degree ascend to the higher nature of demons, new elements of demonology are found in the *Symposium*. The basic subject of the entire dialogue is the nature of Eros. Diotima, Socrates' former instructor, says that Eros is not a god, rather he is between mortal and immortal. He is a great spirit (*daimon*), for the whole of the spiritual is between divine and

mortal.¹ When Socrates questions Diotima further on the power of these demons or spirits, she replies that they carry entreaties and sacrifices from men to the gods and ordinances and requitals from gods to men. She says the demonic is midway between man and the gods, supplementing and uniting them into one. Through the demonic are conveyed

all divinations and preistcraft concerning sacrifice and ritual incantations, and all sooth-saying and sorcery. God with man does not mingle; but the spiritual is the means of all society and converse of men with gods and of gods with men, whether waking or asleep. Whosoever has skill in these affairs is a spiritual (*daimonios*) man. . . . Many and multifarious are these spirits, and one of them is Love.²

In this single reply there are two new elements added to Greek demonology. The first is the mediating role of demons, the second is the clear connection of demons with religious cult and ritual.

Xenocrates forms the connecting link between Plato's demonology and that of the Middle Platonists. His demonology had a three-fold significance. Religiously, demons took the place of gods in the mythology and cults. By this means the immoral activities which the mythologies attributed to gods could now be assigned to demons. From a psychological perspective, Xenocrates conceived of demons as the bodiless souls of men before birth and after death. The ethical significance of the demon-world arose because the conflict between good and evil in this earthly life was carried on among the demons.³

Late antiquity saw an enormous spread of superstition, in great measure due to the increased prominence of the oriental religions. The existence of evil demons was made known to the Greeks and Romans largely through this oriental influx. Demons began receiving more attention in the philosophical works, especially among the Middle Platonists. For the Middle Ages the most important Middle Platonist was Apuleius. His demonology differs little from that of the more prolific Plutarch, but his works had wider influence. Few of Plato's works other than the *Timaeus* were directly available in the medieval period, but Apuleius and other authors preserved segments of Plato in their writings, often parts that were marginal and relatively unimportant to the entire Platonic corpus. The significance of these segments was increased, however, by their treatment in such authors as Apuleius.⁴

A matter of frequent discussion for the Middle Platonists was the demon of Socrates, and Apuleius fittingly composed a little work on the subject entitled "Concerning the God of Socrates." Much of the material was taken from Plato's *Timaeus*; but Apuleius went beyond the *Timaeus* in his description of demons, reading into Plato many oriental ideas more familiar to men of his own day than to Plato himself. Apuleius believed that Plato made a triple division of nature, so that there were gods of the highest, the middle, and the lowest station. It is with the middle nature that we are principally concerned. These middle divine powers were

situate in this interval of the air, between the highest ether and earth below, through whom our aspirations and our desires are conveyed to the Gods. These the Greeks call by name 'demons,' and being placed as messengers between the inhabitants of earth and those of heaven, they carry from the one to the other, prayers and bounties, supplications and assistance, being a kind of interpreters and message carriers for both. Through these same demons, as Plato says in his Symposium, all revelations, the various miracles of magicians, and all kinds of presages are carried on.⁵

Knowledge of future events is obtained by many means—dreams, entrails, flights of birds, prophets, thunders and lightning; but all these particulars are through the will and authority of the celestial gods (who cannot condescend to things of this earthly nature), administered through the obedience and services of demons. The gods who dwell in the air become intermediaries between these heavenly gods and earthly creatures, since their habitation borders on both.

In ancient theology the demons or attendants of the gods are often given the names of the gods they serve, since they do share their nature in part. Apuleius more specifically described the nature of demons in the following manner:

demons are as to genus animated beings, as to mind rational, as to feelings passive, as to body aerial, as to duration eternal. Of these five characteristics . . . the three first are the same as those which we possess, the fourth is peculiar to themselves, and the last they possess in common with the immortal Gods, from whom they differ in being subject to passion.⁶

Because of the passionate nature of demons, the ceremonies which they have organized for the gods are often characterized by extreme rejoicing or extreme mourning.

Like earlier Greek writers, Apuleius attaches several different significances to the word *demon*. We have already seen in some detail the mediating role which demons play between the gods and men. In another sense, the human soul even when it is in the body is called a demon. Apuleius here connects the Greek concept of demon with the Roman idea of genius. This connection, which seems to have first been made by Apuleius, continues into the earlier medieval period. However, Apuleius also recognizes that at times *demon* signifies the human soul only after it has quit the body. He sees yet another species of demons residing over certain powers, such as Sleep and Love. This species is perhaps met with in monastic writings where virtues and vices are sometimes described as spirits and demons. This latter group is of a more exalted dignity than the others, and it is from this more elevated order of demons that Apuleius believes the guardian demons are drawn. He recognized that Plato was of the opinion

that a particular demon is allotted to every man, to be a witness and a guardian of his conduct in life, who, without being visible to anyone, is always present, and is an overseer not only of his actions, but even of his thoughts. But when life is finished, and the soul has to return to its judges, then the demon who has presided over it immediately seizes, and leads it as his charge to judgment, and is there present with it while it pleads its cause...⁷

It is not stated by Plato, but Apuleius thinks this guardian demon which ultimately brings men to judgment dwells in the profound recesses of the mind, in the place of conscience. This is possibly what is meant by Socrates' demon.

The Alexandrian Jew Philo attempted to unite Platonic philosophy with Jewish theology. He seems to have been the first, though not the last, to make the identification between Greek demonology and Jewish angelology. By the use of allegory Philo changed the Genesis account of creation into a Platonic description of origins very similar to the *Timaeus*. According to Philo, during the creation period God made rational, incorporeal souls which He stored away in the air (the residence of demons among the Greeks). Unfortunately, some of these souls developed a craving after things of the earth and descended into bodies. Others maintained their more excellent constitution and were never sullied by contact with matter.⁸ Genesis 6, the story of the sons of God marrying the daughters of men, is an account of the fall of some of the angels into the material world. For Philo, souls, demons and angels are merely different names for the same thing; the functions of demons as described in Scripture are the same as the functions of demons as described by Plato.⁹ The only difference is one of nomenclature.

The Jewish apocryphal literature abounds in magic and a superstitious type of demonology. Many oriental and Persian elements are evident, apparently acquired during the Babylonian captivity. The apocryphal books introduced Satan as a seducer of man throughout Israel's history, but rarely placed him in direct contrast with God. Any concept of moral combat was lacking, and man could only stand in superstitious dread of Satan's power which, though not absolute, was yet awesome.¹⁰ Names of angels and demons became very important in magical incantations which were used for everything from exorcism to curing diseases.

Other evidence of the growing superstition concerning demons among the Jews at this time is the growth of material concerning the magical abilities of Solomon. *The Testament of Solomon*, probably written around A.D. 250, describes various incidents in which Solomon has numerous demons brought before him by means of a ring. He then compels the demon to tell him the name of the angel which has powers over him, for each demon is frustrated and subdued by one angel. Anyone who obtains the name of the angel is able completely to resist the assault of the demon.¹¹ In the first century Josephus mentions a book of incantations for summoning demons which was already in circulation under Solomon's name. The book was owned by a Jew named Eleazar, who, in the presence of the Emperor Vespasian, delivered those possessed of demons by applying a ring designed by Solomon to their noses. At the same time he would read incantations from his book. When the demon came out of the person he (the demon) would overturn a pot of water set down by Eleazar. This was done to prove that the demon had really departed.¹²

Whether one reads Greek philosophers or Jewish romances, one cannot avoid the conclusion that demons increasingly occupied men's thoughts in late antiquity. Though it was admitted that demons could be benign, increasingly they were viewed as malignant and as harbingers of evil for man. Astrology flourished, even philosophers were magicians, and people flocked to the oriental cults in hope of redemption from despair. A fear and despair, a feeling of weariness, had begun to spread over the ancient world about the second century B.C. Gilbert Murray called this the "Failure of Nerve."¹³ This hopeless despair continued into the first Christian centuries, and it was in the Christian message that many found hope of deliverance.

Biblical treatment of demons lacks the excesses found in the superstitions of the pagan systems and the demonology of rabbinic Judaism. Tales of demonic transformations, smoking devils and the like are noticeably absent. This is not to say, however, that demons had no place in the early Christian system. The Christians recognized the evil intent and power of demons, but they never, at least in the early days, had a fear and dread based on a fancifully developed demonology. The fear which possessed the pagan world was countered

by maintaining that Christ, sitting on the right hand of God, yet permeating the personality of the believer as a re-invigorating and fortifying power, was ever waging a victorious war with all and every spiritual power of evil—in the planetary spheres, in the middle air where demons roam, and in the cities and villages of earth.¹⁴

Both the pagans and Christians had a very personal view of the universe. Both believed that personal beings, often malignant, controlled the functioning of the universe as well as events in individual lives. The Christians, however, believed that these powers could be fought and that victory over them was assured. The Christians, then, believed in a cosmic conflict (religions derived from Zoroaster and Persian dualism also believed in a cosmic conflict, but victory of the forces of light was not certain). For the Christians, the central battle of this cosmic conflict was the Cross. The demons were the instruments of the crucifixion; but in crucifying Christ, they became the agents of their own destruction. They failed to observe the significance of the Cross, so that by the Cross they were conquered. In the moment when it looked as if the evil spirits had triumphed, they were defeated. Paul wrote that if the princes of this age, the demons, had known the results of the Cross, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."¹⁵ For though Jesus was nailed to the Cross by the demons, he nailed the ordinances against man to the Cross and thereby triumphed over the demons.¹⁶ The sovereignty of God was expressed even in Jesus' humiliation, so that the hostility of the demons served not their own ends, but God's. The resurrection was the proof that Death, the greatest weapon of Satan and his demons, was insufficient.¹⁷

The demons were cosmic spirits, and any deliverance from their power

meant that salvation had to be cosmic as well. For the early Christians salvation was not just psychological, it was a rescue of the whole world.¹⁸ Beginning with the later Middle Ages, theology has increasingly subjectivized the Christian message, "reducing it to a psychological internal experience of the individual, rather than seeing that message as an objective proclamation of God over all forces that stand ranged against men."¹⁹ The idea of "cosmic salvation" is difficult for the modern man to comprehend without some understanding of the solidarity between man and the physical universe which was axiomatic for the contemporaries of the early Christians. This correspondence was seen as early as Empedocles among the Greeks, and the Stoics later argued for the existence of demons on the basis of the structure of the universe. If there were living beings in the earth and the water, there must be beings in the clear air as well. This view was adopted by the Middle Platonists, as was seen in Apuleius, and continued in a modified form throughout the Middle Ages.²⁰ Demons were as necessary to the unity of the universe as was the air. There was no sharp dichotomy between the physical and spiritual worlds. This mingling of the spiritual and physical spheres became quite important in Hellenistic thought, so that the word *stoicheion*, element, came to mean a demon.²¹

For Paul, the demons are the elements and rulers of this world; they control this present creation. When they were non-Christians, Paul writes that the Galatians "were in bondage under the elements of the world," and he warns them to beware of returning again to that bondage.²² The context makes clear that returning into bondage would include returning into the religious system of Judaism, which the "elements of this world" control. Elsewhere Paul reiterates that not only are many religious rituals under the control of the elements, but so are the pagan philosophical systems.²³ The elements are at once physical and spiritual—the entire cosmos comes under their rule.

This view of the immense rule of the elements or demons is to be placed in contrast with Hebrews 2:5: "Unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come." Though the demons control this present age, they will have no position of rulership in the future kingdom. Though Satan and his company are rulers of this age, they have no future. Their influence passes with the passing of this world.²⁴ Thus, for the early Christians, demonology and eschatology were inextricably mixed. The two together gave significance to the Church and its history.²⁵ The earliest confessions of faith emphasize Christ's conquest over demonic forces because such conquest is the basis for the new age of eternal life.²⁶

Ignatius, one of the earliest of the Church Fathers, described this conquest and the hope it aroused in poetic terms:

A star blazed forth in the sky, outshining all the other stars, and its light was indescribable, and its novelty provoked wonderment, and all the starry orbs, with the sun and the moon, formed a choir around that star; but its light exceeded that of all the rest, and there was perplexity as to the cause of the unparalleled novelty. This was the reason why

every form of magic began to be destroyed, every malignant spell to be broken, ignorance to be dethroned, an ancient empire to be overthrown—God was making his appearance in human form to mold the *newness* of eternal life! Then at length was ushered in what God had prepared in His counsels; then all the world was in an upheaval because the destruction of death was being prosecuted.²⁷

Jesus Christ destroyed the ancient empire of the kingdom of darkness and so provided the basis for the future kingdom of light. Christ is placed at the very center of cosmic happenings, ushering in a new world which has its beginnings now, but whose ultimate realization is yet to come.

Since the Church is the Body of Christ, the Church is a participant in the warfare against the malignant demon forces. The warfare has changed because of Christ's victory, yet the warfare continues. Christians still live in a demonic world, and the demons work invisibly in every area of life. Demons cause illnesses, most spectacularly through demon-possession. Since they are the "elements of the world" they are closely linked with natural forces, and they use their power in this area to enhance their authority over men. Even circumstances of history come under their influence.²⁸

The main battle is fought on a spiritual, not a physical level. The weapons the Christian should use against the demonic forces are spiritual—salvation, faith, truth, righteousness, the Spirit, the word of God, and prayer.²⁹ Satan is the prince of the power of the air; and in this position he controls the atmosphere or, to use Carl Becker's phrase, the "climate of opinion." The air

is the general spiritual climate which influences mankind, in which men live, which they breathe, which dominates their thoughts, aspirations and deeds. He (Satan) exercises his 'influence' over men by means of the spiritual atmosphere which he dominates and uses as the medium for his power.³⁰

Satan rules the atmosphere; but by the resurrection the power of God was made manifest in Christ, who becomes above all principality and power, including the power which Satan exercises over the air. Paul prayed that the Ephesians would have a better understanding of the future hope. In explaining this hope, the central factor is the triumph over the demonic forces and the union of Christ with the Church. The Church thus becomes a part of Christ's conquest over demons.

The early Christian writers continued to proclaim triumphantly Christ's victory over demons which was such an essential part of the New Testament gospel. The second-century Greek apologists derived their demonology mostly from the New Testament. Angels were spiritual beings with free will. Some fell from their exalted position of serving God and became evil; these were the demons. Demons for the Christians, in contrast with the Platonists, were always evil. In some ways the angels that kept their first estate can be likened to the good demons among the Greeks; but in orthodox Christianity, angels were never to attain the exalted and dignified position of the Greek *eudaimon*. The Christians, like many intelligent

Greeks, believed demons were the source of the pagan cults and religious practices. However, whereas the Greeks viewed this function of demons as service to the gods, Christians considered their activities as evidence of rebellion against the one true Lord and Creator of the Universe. Whereas the Greeks thought the demonic administration of the cultic rites was cause for the respect and worship of demons, Christians believed such deeds indicative of the demonic desire to draw men from worship of the one true God. Thus, all activities in the pagan religions were demonic to both Hellenistic Greeks and Christians. The Greeks saw these activities as a mixture of good and evil, after the nature of demons themselves. The Christians saw these activities as undeniably evil and antagonistic to the True Faith. It was demons who introduced men to idolatry in ages past. Magic, astrology, the mantic arts, the theater, games, and spectacles are all demonic in origin and content. Justin Martyr argued that since demons oppose the one true philosophy, Christianity, they must be irrational. Later Alexandrian Christians stressed even more strongly the demonic origin of all pagan religion and philosophy.

The Christians viewed their redemption as deliverance from demonic forces which controlled the world. Their lives and their deaths were to continue the warfare against demons. When Eusebius was writing his history, he promised to write about peaceful wars, fought for the peace of the soul. In contrast to secular histories, Eusebius described wars in which men fought for truth rather than for country. The monuments of the early Church are imperishable, for "it is the unshakable determination of the champions of true religion, their courage and endurance, their triumphs over demons and victories over invisible opponents, and the crowns which all this won for them at the last, that it will make famous for all time."³¹ Because of the early persecutions of the church, martyrdom soon came to be seen not simply as the surest way to earthly renown and heavenly reward, but as a struggle with the devil.

When the martyrs calmly went to their deaths and heavenly rewards, they thwarted the evil desires of the demons. Eusebius quotes a letter from Gaul which describes the persecutions the Christians were there undergoing:

The adversary swooped on us with all his might, giving us now a foretaste of his advent, which undoubtedly is imminent (II Thess. ii.7-9). He left no stone unturned in his efforts to train his adherents and equip them to attack the servants of God, so that not only were we debarred from houses, baths, and the forum: they actually forbade any of us to be seen in any place whatsoever.

The Grace of God made them unshakeable pillars against the enemies, but by this endurance they drew on themselves increased assaults by the evil one. Some of the Christians were eager to be the first Gallic martyrs, but others were untrained, flabby, and not in a "fit condition to face the strain of a struggle to the death." After the persecution had gone on for a time,

when the tyrant's instruments of torture had been utterly defeated by Christ through the endurance of the blessed saints, the devil resorted to other devices—confinement in the darkness of a filthy prison; clamping the feet in the stocks, stretched apart to the fifth hole; and the other agonies which wardens when angry and full of the devil are apt to inflict on helpless prisoners.³²

The majority of these Gallic Christians suffocated in prison. As the persecutions were seen as a struggle with the devil for the Christians, the thirst for Christian blood on the part of the pagans was considered by the persecuted as a form of devil worship.³³

The visions of Perpetua most clearly show how martyrdom was viewed as a struggle with the devil. In A.D. 202 at Carthage a young noble lady, Perpetua, was arrested along with two slaves. Perpetua's father was very much against her, and she had only recently been baptized when arrested. Two church officials bribed the authorities so the young girl (she was twenty-two) could have her baby boy with her in prison. When Perpetua's brother went to see her, she told him of the visions she had had. In one vision a prisoner was ascending a ladder, defying a dragon. He invited her to follow, and she climbed to the top where she met the Good Shepherd. The golden ladder stretched to Heaven from earth, and each of its steps was guarded with hooks and sharp knives. If a wicked man tread on one, cutters went to work, and he fell into the clutches of an enormous dragon which was coiled around the ladder's base. In another vision Perpetua was visited by her pastor Pomponius, who had come to lead her to the Amphitheater. He told her not to be afraid; he would be with her in the arena. She waited in the arena, expecting the wild beasts to be released, but instead a massive Egyptian came to fight with her. During the struggle Perpetua became masculine. When the Egyptian tried to grab her by the foot, she kicked him in the face with her foot. From then on Perpetua had the upper hand in the battle and finally killed the Egyptian by a blow on the head. Those who had been looking on blessed Perpetua for her great victory. When Perpetua awoke from her vision, she realized she was not going to fight with wild animals, but with the devil, and the victory was to be hers.³⁴

There are many allusions in Perpetua's vision which would be interesting and profitable to investigate, but for our study the conquest of Perpetua by wounding the Egyptian's head is most significant. Perpetua herself, on awakening, recognizes that the Egyptian was not any Egyptian, but that old serpent, the Devil himself. When the Egyptian tries to grab Perpetua by the feet and she in turn conquers him by a mighty blow on the head, the reference is undoubtedly to the protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15. There the Lord addresses the serpent in the Garden after man's fall:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed, he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

The early Christians recognized this as a prophetic announcement of Christ's future conquest over Satan on the cross. By alluding to this verse

in her vision, Perpetua sees her martyrdom as similar to Christ's death in that she too is victorious over the devil. A cluster of Scriptures were often referred to by the early Christians as amplifying this conquest over the serpent. The Christians were given power to tread on serpents and scorpions, which were symbols of demon-forces. These enemies were to be under the conqueror's feet, for placing the foot on the fallen head indicates that it can never more be exalted.³⁵

As Christianity spread throughout the Mediterranean and among the barbarians of the North, pagan practices were persistently attacked as demonic; yet at the same time, more and more of a kind of popular, in many ways pagan, demonology was accepted into the Church. This can first be most clearly seen among the ascetics of Egypt who did battle in the desert with the most grotesque demonic beings. The lives of the desert fathers are the earliest forms of the saints' lives which were so popular in the middle ages. There was a pagan complement to this type of literature in the lives of the sages—Eunapius wrote the *Lives of the Sophists*, Iamblichus wrote the *Life of Pythagoras*, and Philostratus wrote the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. In all these pagan works the sages tend to be faith healers and thaumaturges. They drive out demons, tame wild beasts and control the elements. When the Christians began to write saints' lives, they incorporated these pagan elements and the fantastic demonology into their tales. The popularity of these legends and lives enabled them to be vehicles for incorporating folk elements into the mainstream of Christian development.³⁶

About A.D. 250 a man was born in Middle Egypt whose life was to become a pattern for all saints' lives throughout the medieval period. Athanasius composed a biography of Antony about 357 which became greatly popular. Antony was born of well-to-do Christian parents, but decided to sell all and lead an ascetic life. Soon after Antony had resolved upon the ascetic life, the devil set about employing his tactics against him. The devil tried to make Antony desert the ascetic life by reminding him of his sister and property and the forsaken amenities of life. He represented to him the austerity and all the toil that must go with virtue. The Enemy saw, however, that he was being vanquished by Antony's steadfast faith. Therefore, he tried to attack him through the flesh by suggesting filthy thoughts or masquerading as a woman by night. Antony prayed, "filled his thoughts with Christ and reflected upon the nobility of the soul that comes from Him."³⁷ The entire experience put the devil to shame, and Antony thus had his first victory over the devil. Antony did not become careless as a result of this victory over fornication, however. He left the village and went to live in a tomb some distance from town. A man brought Antony bread at intervals and locked the door upon him. The devil was especially alarmed at Antony's strong continuance in asceticism, so he came one night with his demons and beat him so severely that Antony lay speechless. When the man came to bring Antony bread, he thought him

dead and brought him to the village church. About midnight Antony regained consciousness and persuaded the men to carry him back to the tomb.

The Enemy, seeing he had availed neither with the spirit of fornication nor with blows, realized he must use other tactics. That night the demons came making such a noise that the whole place seemed to be shaken by an earthquake. It seemed

as though demons were breaking through the four walls of the little chamber and bursting through them in the forms of beasts and reptiles. All at once the place was filled with the phantoms of lions, bears, leopards, bulls and of serpents, asps, and scorpions, and of wolves; and each moved according to the shape it had assumed. The lion roared, ready to spring upon him, the bull appeared about to gore him through, the serpent writhed without quite reaching him, the wolf was rushing straight at him; and the noises emitted simultaneously by all the apparitions were frightful and the fury shown was fierce.³⁸

Antony was still sore and bruised in body, but he was alert in spirit. He mocked the demonic apparitions, saying that if they had any real power it would have been enough for just one of them to come against him rather than trying to scare him with their numbers. Their aping the form of brutes he took to be a sign of their helplessness, and he encouraged them if they had any power against him to go to it. The demons gnashed their teeth at Antony because of their impotence. The Lord helped Antony by shining a beam of light down through the roof, and the demons fled. The Lord promised to help and be with Antony and to make his name renowned everywhere. Antony arose quite strengthened and felt more vigorous in body than ever before. On the next day Antony decided to go into the desert.

The devil unsuccessfully tried to dissuade Antony from his purpose by tempting him with gold and silver. Antony found a deserted fort which had become infested with creeping things. There he settled and the reptiles left at once. Two times a year Antony received bread; otherwise he never left the place. Friends came, but Antony would not let them come in. They heard "what sounded like riotous crowds inside making noises, raising a tumult, wailing piteously and shrieking: 'Get out of our domain! What business have you in the desert? You cannot hold out our persecution.'" ³⁹ At first the visitors thought these were men, but when they peered in and saw no one, they realized they were demons. With the sign of the cross the visitors escaped unharmed, while Antony himself never suffered any harm from them. Antony never grew weary of the contest, receiving help from heavenly visions and the singing of psalms. For twenty years Antony practiced the ascetic life, never going out and seldom seen by others. Some friends, hoping to imitate him, came and broke down the door of the fort. Antony came out as from a shrine. He was neither obese from want of exercise nor emaciated from fastings and struggles with the demons. Athanasius records that the state of Antony's soul was pure, neither distracted by grief nor dissipated by pleasure. He "had himself completely

under control—a man guided by reason and stable in his character.”⁴⁰

The demonology portrayed in Athanasius's *Life of Antony* is no different from contemporary pagan romances. Philostratus's *Apollonius of Tyana*, written at the request of Septimius Severus's wife, vividly describes several incidents of demon possession, exorcism, and demon-appearances similar to those found in Christian saints' lives. It is truly remarkable how closely these accounts accord with similar stories in the later Middle Ages. If some fragments of *Apollonius* were found in a monastery, it would be difficult to date them from content alone. For example, one time when the Ephesians had a plague, they came to Apollonius to seek help. Apollonius led the youth of the town to the theater:

There they found an old man who looked like a beggar; his eyes were closed—on purpose; he carried a wallet, with a morsel of bread in it; he was clad in rags, and his face squalid and filthy. Apollonius made them stand around and said, “Pick up all the stones you can, and smite the abominated of Heaven.” The Ephesians were amazed at what he could mean, and horrified at the notion of killing a wretched stranger; for the beggar besought them with many piteous entreaties. But still Apollonius urged and exhorted them to lay on and not spare. Somebody began with a few skirmishing shots. And when the pretended blind man suddenly stared full at them, displaying a glance of fire, they perceived that it was a demon, and stoned him so heartily that a mound of stones was heaped over him.⁴¹

When they removed the stones, a dog, like a big lion, was found crushed beneath—spluttering like a mad dog. One can almost visualize the medieval grotesque howling among the stones.

The early Church had been forced to take a stance on demonism because of the Hellenistic world's preoccupation with the demonic. Oriental mysticism and the philosophic systems of the ancient thinkers had compelled Christians to form an attitude towards the demonic, witches, and magicians. At times the Christians absorbed some of the pagan attitudes towards demons; at times they vigorously opposed the pagan conceptions. When the barbarian invasions increasingly brought the Germans into contact with Roman Christendom, the material was already formed which could be used by the young Germanic church against demonic paganism. The Christians absorbed pagan Germanic notions as well, and several elements and motifs of later medieval demonology, the demonology most familiar to us, have their source in Germanic influences which began to be particularly noticeable by the sixth century.

With the introduction of Christianity among the German tribes, native words were used to express new religious conceptions. The Germanic view of the world was a convenient vehicle for transmitting the Christianized Stoic view of the universe with beings at every level. *Middangeard* was a mythological word common to all the ancient Germanic languages. It was the middle dwelling, the abode of men, the world in a physical sense, and was basically equivalent to the Latin *mundus* and the Greek *cosmos*. The Germans conceived of the earth (*midgard*), the abode of men, as seated in

the middle of the universe, bordered by mountains and surrounded by the great sea. On the other side of this sea was the *Utgard* (out-yard), the abode of the giants. The midgard was defended by As-gard, the yard or burgh of the gods, which was lying somewhere in the middle. Both earth and mankind were thus conceived as besieged by threatening powers from without and defended by the gods.⁴² The Germanic world-view, though not possessing demons, could easily assimilate them when necessary.

The assimilation and amalgamation of Christianity with the older pagan beliefs was not a process which took place in the few decades when the two cultures first met. Throughout the medieval period, and indeed into modern times, forms of pagan belief persisted, though sometimes covered with a cloak of Christianity. In the eleventh century *Corrector* of Burchard of Worms, numerous penances for pagan practices are given—and this several centuries after Christianity had made its entrance into the area. Fear of the Fates; use of medicinal herbs with evil incantations; love potions; eating offerings to idols made at springs, trees, stones and at cross roads; observation of the Kalends of January were all vestiges of paganism which strongly persisted and were labelled diabolical by the Church. The practice of making tiny arrows and shoes for the enjoyment of satyrs and goblins that they might bring riches to the giver was still present as late as the eleventh century. Burchard several times condemns the Wild Ride, one of the strangest of these persistent beliefs, and at least one passage deserves to be quoted at some length:

Hast thou believed or participated in this infidelity, that some wicked women, turned back after Satan, seduced by illusions and phantoms of demons, believe and affirm: that with Diana, a goddess of the pagans, and an unnumbered multitude of women, they ride on certain beasts and traverse many areas of the earth in the stillness of the quiet night, obey her commands as if she were their mistress, and are called on special nights to her service? But would that these only should perish in their perfidy and not drag many with them into the ruin of their aberration. For an unnumbered multitude, deceived by this false opinion, believe these things to be true, and in believing this they turn aside from sound faith and are involved in the error of the pagans when they think there is any divinity or heavenly authority except the one God. But the devil transforms himself into the form and likeness of many persons, deluding in sleep the mind which he holds captive, now with joy, now with sadness, now showing unknown persons, he leads it through some strange ways, and while only the spirit suffers this, the unfaithful mind thinks these things happen not in the spirit but in the body. . . .⁴³

As early as the fifth century B.C., if not earlier, there was a belief in Hecate or Diana as a leader of souls through the sky. The belief of demons or souls led by a divinity, usually Diana, riding through the sky continued into the medieval period. During the early Middle Ages the new idea arose that those who followed in the wild hunt were human beings, not simply spirits. Women were especially prone to night flight, and flying through the air to the sabbat became a characteristic of a witch in the sixteenth century. The idea of demonic flight through the air (or, in the case of humans, demonically-inspired flight) had ancient origins; but was re-enforced by

the Christian belief that the demons were residents of the air, having been cast down from heaven. Burchard of Worms recorded the belief that some were afraid to venture from their houses before cock-crow because only the cock-crow would cause the demons to vanish from the night air.⁴⁴

Cybele, as Magna Mater and the mother of the gods, was on occasion considered the mother of demons (if gods are demons, then this comes quite naturally), but more frequently Diana was considered the leader of the wild hordes through the sky and the particular leader of demons. In several passages Diana is identified with the demon of mid-day (*daemonium meridianum*) and the particular cause of demonic possession. One time when Caesarius, the sixth century bishop of Arles, was visiting his diocese, he came to a castle called Luco. There was a lady called Eucyria by name. She fell at Caesarius's feet, supplicating the Lord with great tears. When Caesarius asked the cause of this he was told she had a demon which the rustics called Diana. She was especially afflicted at night, dashing things against each other and becoming terribly weakened. Sometimes it took two strong men to lead her to the church where she might be somewhat relieved. All the time a strange voice spoke from her which some could hear while others could not. Caesarius rid the poor woman of her demon.⁴⁵

In Roman times Diana had been the goddess of the moon. Her close association with those who were demon-possessed, and ultimately her leadership of the demonic horde, is made more understandable when one recalls the words *lunatic* and *moon-struck*. Why Diana, the moon-goddess, should be called the demon of noonday at first seems less reasonable; but according to ancient Babylonian belief, the demons of mid-day and mid-night were twins and merely varying expressions of the same person.⁴⁶

The wild horde which Diana or Hecate led through the German night skies was composed of the most grotesque demonic forms. Demons were capable of changing their forms at will, and most frequently they took on fantastic animal shapes. When humans joined in the night ride, they were carried on the backs of these animal-demons. The anchorites in Egypt seem to have been the first to bestow such animal forms on demons. Anubis the jackal god, Sekhmet the lioness and Sabek the crocodile were all essentially zoomorphic divinities. The gods of Egypt were often hybrids, half animal and half human, and the demons became hybrids as well. Pagan festivals, such as the Kalends of January, brought men closer to these demonic forms by pageants in which men dressed as animals and all kinds of monsters. A motif especially seen in northern art was that of Man between two animals, which became a symbol of Man threatened by demonic nature forces. In some of these portrayals Man is shown being devoured by these bestial demons.⁴⁷ The fantastic forms of the gargoyles of medieval cathedrals had been in the imagination of the people for several centuries. The more grotesque the form, the more was the abnormal and evil nature of demons depicted.

Some animal forms came to be particularly associated with the devil and evil spirits. Many of these animals had previously been associated with one or more of the pagan gods. Representations of the devil as a he-goat go back to remote antiquity, and later witches all imagine their masters as a black he-goat to whom they pay divine honors. The he-goat was the sacred beast of Donar, and perhaps the goat sacrificed by the heathen was transferred to the false god by the Christians. The boar was an animal frequently mingling in the march of the wild horde. The animal was sacred to Fro and afforded food to the heroes in Walhalla. The monstrous jaws of Hell were those of the wolf, reminiscent of the Greek Cerberus, and frequently the devil is described as a soul-snatching wolf. The laws which King Canute issued one Christmas at Winchester stated that

the shepherds whose duty it is to guard the people against this spoiler, namely the bishops and priests whose duty it is to protect and provide for the safety of the divine flocks with wise precepts, must be very active, and keep earnestly crying out, in order to prevent this ravening wolf from inflicting excessive injury and from making very frequent depredations upon the divine flock.⁴⁸

Perhaps the raven's old connection with Wotan caused it to be accepted as a demonic form, but in any case the black, cunning and vulturous bird was a frequent emblem of Satanic maliciousness. The most frequent animal-form taken by the devil was the serpent, worm, or dragon. The dragon as a Satan-symbol had a more Biblical base than some of the other emblems, from the tempting serpent of the opening pages of Genesis to the apocalyptic dragon described by John. Early Church Fathers had interpreted the Leviathan of the closing chapters of Job and of folk-belief as the great Enemy of mankind, and as a dragon the devil appears in numberless folk-tales.⁴⁹

In tracing through an idea as has here been done, there is a danger of developing a rather unbalanced view of the period under study. Many things transpired during the first centuries of the present era—the Empire was divided and finally disintegrated, doctrinal controversies split the Church, and the barbarian invasions brought new blood into the Mediterranean. Yet, amidst all the turmoils of the declining Empire and the Dark Ages, demons did have an important place in the thoughts of the people. There really were no great debates, doctrinal splits, or even Church councils devoted to the subject. That would occur later, but was really not necessary yet. Demons were part of the cosmic order (or disorder) and impinged on the world of everyone.

NOTES

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4. C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 43.
5. Apuleius, "God of Socrates," *The Works of Apuleius* (London: H. G. Bohn, 1853), pp. 356-357.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 362.
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8. Henry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo* (Harvard University Press, 1947), pp. 360-366.
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13. Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955).
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15. 1 Cor. 2:8.
16. Col. 2:14-15; 1 Cor. 15:12-19, 54-57. The whole epistle to the Colossians explains the connection between the ordinances against man and the world-rulership of demons.
17. Heb. 2:14; 1 Cor. 10:10; Martin Dibelius, *Die Geisterwelt im Glauben des Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1909), pp. 114-115.
18. Col. 1:19; Rom. 8:21; G. H. C. MacGregor, "Principalities and Powers: the Cosmic Background of St. Paul's Thought," *New Testament Studies*, 1:23-25; R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi* (Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 123-124.
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20. Arthur O. Lovejoy in *The Great Chain of Being* (Harvard University Press, 1936) describes this "Principle of Plenitude" which said that all probabilities of being must be actualized. This principle logically peoples every corner of the universe.
21. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951), p. 246.
22. Gal. 4:3, 9.
23. Col. 2:8, 20.
24. 1 Cor. 2:6, 8; II Cor. 4:4.
25. Kallas, *The Satanward View*, pp. 22-24; Dibelius, *Die Geisterwelt im Glauben des Paulus*, pp. 78-84; MacGregor, "Principalities and Powers," 18.
26. 1 Cor. 15:24-25; Heb. 10:12-13; 1 Pet. 3:22.
27. Ignatius (trans. James A. Kleist), "To the Ephesians" (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1961), 19:2-3.
28. 1 Thess. 2:18; Rom. 8:35, 38; Rev. 2:10, 13.
29. Eph. 6:11-20.
30. Heinrich Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (Edinburgh and London: Nelson, 1961), 31; Eph. 2:2, 15-23.
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