

## GOD - MAN AND THE DEVIL IN MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY AND CULTURE

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The devil is a companion for every medieval historian. He is present in all aspects of medieval life, from the metaphysical heights of Aquinas to the gossipy depths of Caesarius of Heisterbach. He takes on many roles: he can be crafty or foolish, dangerous or harmless, important or trivial. When Erik Erikson, the American psychoanalyst-historian, chose to write about Luther, he had to admit that the great reformer's world was still populated by medieval devils. But Erikson chose to ignore the significance of these devils as cultural phenomena and to concentrate on them as manifestations of Martin's inner conflicts<sup>1</sup>.

It is indeed difficult for us today to take the legions of medieval devils all too seriously. We see the problems of life and death in terms of totally different factors, and devils can be explained away in terms of mass hallucination, poverty, ignorance, and plague. But, as H. R. Trevor-Roper has pointed out in treating the European "witchcraze" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, rationalistic explanations given by late nineteenth century liberal historians for Reformation demonology were based on a naive belief in progress and enlightenment. Since 1914 this explanation no longer convinces<sup>2</sup>. The twentieth century has brought

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- 1) *Young Man Luther. A Study in Psychoanalysis and History.* (The Norton Library: New York, 1962), p. 249.
  - 2) *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and Other Essays.* (Harper Torchbooks: New York, 1969), pp. 90-192, especially pp. 97-101. See also Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundation in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500.* (London, 1976). This book unfortunately appeared too late in the spring of 1976 for me to be able to use it.

innumerable witch crazes in various forms from both extremes of the political spectrum. And so Trevor-Roper had to dig deeper into the cultural and social history of the Reformation centuries in order to explain their bursts of demonology and persecution.

In moving back from the Reformation to the Middle Ages itself, I do not intend to provide the same type of broad social history that Trevor-Roper offered for his period. In trying to understand the medieval view of the devil, I will simply ask what that view was, what various shapes and forms it took on, and how these views might possibly be related to social class. This paper will be limited to the most articulate representatives of medieval thought: theologians, historians, and poets. In order to analyze their ideas in a fruitful way for the purpose of cultural history, I will make a large assumption that many historians and philologists would not allow. I am going to take my sources seriously and assume that they really mean what they are saying. This is extremely difficult to do because of the apparatus with which the medieval historian is trained: he is taught to be critical, to dissect passages, to look for phrases, clichés, patterns of thought received from other writers. This process of analysis can give rich results in determining how one medieval writer used another, but it can only provide a groundwork for dealing with the beliefs behind the shared language. Here one must make something like a leap of faith from the text, with all its nuances, to the human being behind it. There he sits, perhaps in a drafty monastery, and looks over his shoulder to see if the devil is watching him. We must take him seriously. Even his devil deserves our due consideration.

Such an approach is necessarily impressionistic and thus extremely dangerous. It can easily come to reflect the byways of the historian's own mind rather than to illuminate the world of emotion and belief which exists behind a text. In order to avoid the pitfalls of such a method, I will keep closely to the texts themselves and try to understand them in traditional terms of philology, theology, and social history. But in the final analysis, I will assume that the authors really mean what they are saying about God and the devil, that their statements reflect their views of life in general and their evaluation of man's situation in the universe and his relationship with higher powers.

More than twenty years ago, R. W. Southern in his outstanding book, *The Making of the Middle Ages*, provided a new understanding of the devil's role in medieval theology and life<sup>3</sup>. Southern showed how Anselm of Canterbury, in rejecting the traditional explanation for the devil's central importance in the Redemption, helped open a new period in which the old world of epic (loneliness, wandering, pessimism) gave way to a new world of romance (humanism, arrival, love in various forms). Southern's thesis received immediate recognition and applause from other historians, and his book became almost a primer of medieval history for university students<sup>4</sup>.

The most exciting aspect of Southern's thesis is his use of a theological breakthrough in Anselm in order to establish and explain changes of view in other aspects of culture. Commenting on the traditional view of the Redemption, which emphasized the devil's power over mankind and which Anselm rejected, Southern says:

...it is a striking thing that the intellectual shortcomings of this picture of Man's salvation only became clear at the moment when the heroic view of human life being lived between the mighty opposites of external powers was dissolving before a new romanticism, and when an intense commiseration for the sufferings of the Son of God was becoming a central fact in the religious experience of the time<sup>5</sup>.

The old view of the Redemption had emphasized the requirement that man escape from the devil's power over him. But man alone could not get away. Because of the burden of sin, the devil had a rightful dominion over him. But when the devil tried to extend his rule over an innocent man - Christ, he overreached the limits of his power and thus lost what legitimate power he did have over man. This view of the Redemption saw man's escape from the clutches of sin and the devil as primarily the result of the devil's own foolishness and blindness in not recognizing Christ as God's son.

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- 3) Originally published in April, 1953, by Hutchinson's University Library, London. Since then, many paperback editions in both Britain and the United States.
  - 4) It is only fair to point out that this book provided part of the inspiration that led me to study the Middle Ages. I read it in an introductory course on "Western Civilisation" taught by Robert Brentano at the University of California in Berkeley in the autumn of 1964.
  - 5) *The Making of the Middle Ages*, pp. 235-236, in original edition. Anselm's works are contained in F. S. Schmitt's *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera Omnia* i-vi (Edinburgh, 1938-1961). *Cur Deus Homo* is found in the second volume.

The drama of the Redemption, as Southern so aptly pointed out, appeared in literature and life as an epic battle between God and the devil in which man was a helpless, passive observer. Southern developed the historical significance of this idea more fully in his work on Saint Anselm from 1963:

Besides its rational claims, this view of the economy of the Incarnation was reinforced by the experience of the early Middle Ages. The empire of the Devil in nature and supernature was a matter of daily experience: the Devil's empire and the daily breaches made in it by Christ provided the framework of history...And if in this world view there was a strong element of dualism, this was no dis-recommendation in an age which saw the forces of God and the devil locked in continual struggle<sup>6</sup>.

Anselm's explanation for the Redemption eliminated the devil and thus concentrated on the relationship between God and man. Morally it was much more satisfying to think of man's salvation in terms of the satisfaction owed by man to God instead of in terms of a rabid devil raging against a God who had tricked him. But emotionally and also logically, it was difficult to imagine the new situation:

...if the Devil is eliminated, and if Man owes only to God the service which he cannot pay, what scope is there for a Mediator? Where there is only a debtor who cannot pay, and no third person to acquit the debt, commonsense and experience suggest that the creditor must forever forego his debt<sup>7</sup>.

Anselm tried to avoid these dilemmas by making his case for the God-man as cause of the Redemption as rigidly based on necessity as possible. His categories were so stringently constructed and so unyielding in the *Cur Deus Homo* that later theologians often ignored the work as a whole and maintained the more traditional explanation for the Redemption with the devil in a prominent role. Sometimes Anselm's language was borrowed, or even a few of his arguments, but throughout the 1100's Anselm remained an isolated figure among theologians<sup>8</sup>.

6) *Saint Anselm and his Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought*, 1059 -c. 1130. (Cambridge, 1963, reprinted 1966), p. 94.

7) *Saint Anselm*, p. 95.

8) I have traced the reception of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* in my unpublished Oxford doctoral thesis from 1970: "The History of Saint Anselm's Theology of the Redemption in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries". At the time of completion I felt this work was too esoteric to deserve publication and wrote in my introduction, "I hope that some day I will be able to justify more fully the past years of research by moving out from this history of theology and theologians to a more comprehensive social and psychological understanding of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries". Hopefully this paper is a beginning towards that goal.

And yet the arguments of the *Cur Deus Homo* did finally receive a limited recognition and acceptance at Paris among Franciscan theologians after about 1220<sup>9</sup>. More importantly, Anselm's elimination of the devil from the Redemption and his concentration on the relationship between God and man as effected by Christ influenced twelfth century theologians as far apart as Bernard of Clairvaux and Abelard<sup>10</sup>. By the end of the century practically no theologians were insisting on the rights of the devil in their unvarnished form. Lothar di Segni, who became Pope Innocent III in 1198, wrote, for example, that the devil can only be said to have "something of a right" over man after the fall<sup>11</sup>.

Thus the anselmian revolution, contained in a single chapter of the *Cur Deus Homo* (Book I, Chapter 7), took a long time to take effect among medieval theologians. Until the 1220's its influence can be traced only sporadically and indirectly. Anselm had to compete with the theologians of Laon, who were far more influential than he at the opening of the 1100's<sup>12</sup>. They had more students, a regularly functioning school, and their students became the intellectual and administrative leaders of Europe in the first half of the century. Laon's conservatism and preference for the traditional explanation of the devil's rights led to a theological dead end. From the fragments we have of the Laon masters'

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- 9) The first Paris master who used *Cur Deus Homo* extensively was the Franciscan Alexander of Hales, whose *Glossa in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi Magistri Alexandri* was published between 1951 and 1957 in Volumes XII-XV of the *Bibliotheca Franciscana Scholastica Medii Aevi* (Quaracchi).
- 10) See the relevant chapters in my Oxford thesis, as well as D. E. DeClerck, "Droits du Démon et Nécessité de la Rédemption", *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* (RTAM) 13 (1946), 150-184 and "Questions de Sotériologie Médiévale", *Ibid.*, 162-183, as well as D. E. Luscombe *The School of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought. Second Series, Volume 14, 1969). The most complete treatment of the development of the doctrine of the Redemption in the Middle Ages is found in the work of Jean Rivière, even if his books are sometimes marred either by polemic or by unclear language. See especially *Le Dogme de la Rédemption au Début du Moyen-Age*. (Paris, 1934).
- 11) *Patrologia Latina* (PL), ed. J. Migne, Volume 217, col. 320: Quia commisit manus in eum in quem nihil iuris habebat, iure amisit illos in quos *aliquid iuris videbatur habere*. (Italics mine.)
- 12) Fragments of school of Laon texts were collected by Odo Lottin in *Psychologie et Morale aux XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècles*, vol. 5: L'École d'Anselme de Laon et de Guillaume de Champeaux. (Louvain-Gembloux, 1959).

teaching, it seems as if they backed themselves into an uncomfortable corner in trying to explain what right exactly the devil had over mankind<sup>13</sup>.

The rivalry between Saint Anselm's explanation for the Redemption and that prevalent at the school of Laon expresses in summary form the much larger conflict between two views of the world. In the liberal or humanistic one, the devil has a limited role and individual persons are free to choose the life they want. In the traditional or conservative view, people are exposed to attacks and assaults from supernatural powers and, even if they have free will, are very much on the defensive. The first view is unitary, the second dualistic. It is the purpose of this paper to show how each view emerges in medieval writers and to suggest that just as Anselm's work reflects a fundamental cultural change, so too the thought of other writers bears witness to similar cultural developments. I shall try to show that the anselmian unitary view of human and divine affairs remained the minority view throughout the Middle Ages and lost all importance after the fourteenth century. The dualistic view not only totally dominated the period before 1100 but remained strong throughout the High Middle Ages (1100-1300) and finally triumphed in the fourteenth century. This victory provided the basis for the explosion of superstition and persecution that characterized the end of the Middle Ages and the Reformation. In this development, Martin Luther can be seen as a far more "medieval" figure than Anselm or Abelard.

The return of dualism expresses a loss of belief in the possibilities of choice and a growing feeling of individual helplessness and political impotence. This sense of human limitation in the later Middle Ages provided a powerful impetus to Martin Luther's personal realization that

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13) R. W. Southern's Gifford Lectures, which will be published soon, deal with the role of the school of Laon in the rise of scholastic thought. Meanwhile the best access to the role of Laon is Beryl Smalley's chapter, "Monastic and Cathedral Schools" in her seminal *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. (Oxford, 1952: Paperback, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1964).  
For an example of Laon's dilemma, see the fragment ascribed to Anselm of Laon's brother Ralph, from which Anselm took the words of the argument he discarded in *Cur Deus Homo* I,7 - Lottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-186. Here the defeat of the devil because of his forfeiture of justice becomes the major explanation for the Redemption.

salvation could be achieved by faith alone and that good works must be a secondary factor. The good works that changed the world of the High Middle Ages - scholasticism, the universities, church councils, more effective royal and ecclesiastical legislation and administration - all these factors failed to give individual human beings the sense that their own personal choices could make any concrete difference in the way of life they led. So men and women fled to overwhelming acts of faith.

Unfortunately for human happiness, this act of faith could often be made in terms not just of God's unlimited power but also in relation to their fear of the devil's constant activity and immediate threat to them. God's naked power and the devil's immediate intrusion go hand in hand in the fourteenth century. Ockham's doctrines and the first trials for sorcery appear almost simultaneously and are part of the same world picture, just as Anselm's redemption and the new view of the devil characterize the twelfth century.

*The Patristic Background: Augustine and Gregory the Great*

Although we find the foundation of later teaching about the devil already present in the Gospels and in the Epistles of Saint Paul, to say nothing of Old Testament books like *Job*, we can start with Augustine. His teaching on the devil and the Redemption formed the basis for the medieval view of these matters. Augustine sums up the Biblical and earlier Patristic heritage<sup>14</sup>. In his *City of God* he expressed most fully his views of the devil's role in human affairs. Commenting on the demonology of Apuleius and the Neoplatonists, Augustine accepted the world of demons that these writers has posited but warned that "they are in reality spirits whose only desire is to do harm, who are completely alien from any kind of justice, swollen with arrogance, livid with envy, and full of crafty deception"<sup>15</sup>. Already here we have the kernel of Augustine's thought:

14) See Jean Rivi re's *Le Dogme de la R demption.  tudes Critiques et Documents* (Biblioth que de la Revue d'Histoire Eccl siastique, fasc. 5: Louvain, 1931) for a full study of the Biblical and Patristic foundation (especially the chapter, "La Surprise du D mon: Saint Ignace", pp. 61-73).

15) *City of God* VIII, 22 - p. 329 in the excellent translation of Henry Bettenson in the Pelican Classics. (Harmondsworth, 1972). The Latin text is most easily available in the Loeb Classical Library, nr. 413, p. 100: ...sed esse spiritus nocendi cupidissimos, a iustitia penitus alienos, superbia tumidos, invidentia lividos, fallacia callidos.

instead of rejecting pagan folklore as trash, he took it seriously and fitted it into a Christian context. Augustine combined the story of Lucifer's fall from heaven with the hierarchy of pagan devils.

They do indeed dwell in the air, because they have been cast down from the upper heights of heaven as a reward for their irremediable transgression and condemned to inhabit this region as a kind of prison appropriate to their nature...the demons clearly hold sway over many men, who are unworthy to participate in the true religion, and they treat them as prisoners and subjects; and they have persuaded the greater part of them to accept the demons as gods, by means of impressive but deceitful miracles, whether miracles of action or of prediction.<sup>16</sup>

Augustine had spent most of the first five books of his long treatise in making fun of the Roman gods and showing their generally evil influence on Rome's history<sup>17</sup>. But here in the eighth book he considers such gods, as well as those of other pagan nations, dead seriously as living beings, demons, who are actively engaged in trying to fool mankind. And apparently they have a high rate of success, for wherever Augustine turns in looking at the course of history, he can find demons getting in the way of good men and giving evil people temporary triumphs. Even the enlightened minority of men who realized that the demons were not gods failed to see, according to Augustine, that it was only right to deny them any divine honour. Augustine castigates the philosophers for being afraid of shocking the public<sup>18</sup>. For him it is all or nothing: Christianity or demonology, and there is no chance for an enlightened skepticism in the middle. He had gone through it all himself. The effort of his conversion had been too overwhelming for him to respect or tolerate people who insisted on fence sitting. And now on the Christian side, Augustine felt

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16) Pelican translation, pp. 329-330, and Loeb, pp. 100-102: ...qui in hoc quidem aere habitant, quia de caeli superioris sublimitate deiecti merito inregressibilis transgressionis in hoc sibi congruo velut carcere praedammati sunt...

Sed multis plane participatione verae religionis indignis tamquam captis subditisque dominantur, quorum maximae parti mirabilibus et fallacibus signis sive factorum sive praedictorum deos se esse persuaserunt.

According to the Loeb editor's note "There appears to be a conflation here of the Hebrew idea of fallen angels with the pagan doctrine of demons". (p. 100).

17) See, for example, *City of God* IV, 26 - p. 168 in Pelican and II, 24-25 - pp. 79-81.

18) *Ibid.*, IV, 27 - p. 169.



himself, his fellow Catholics, and his whole world to be threatened by the activity of demons:

Those pretended and deceitful mediators, the demons...use every effort to distract us and divert us from spiritual progress, helped in their deceit by the distances of material space and by the lightness of their bodies of air<sup>19</sup>.

A Cistercian historian has written that the early thirteenth century monk Caesarius of Heisterbach managed to make concrete the ideas about devils that were suggested by the Fathers<sup>20</sup>. But here in the *City of God* we can find many similar statements in which the devil already has taken on a personal identity and is a direct and immediate factor in human affairs. Caesarius needed only to fill in the details, but the outline is already clear to Augustine.

For the development of history writing, the central role of the devil in Christian thought meant a great potential disadvantage. From the time of Augustine onwards, every unhappy or unfortunate event, every human failure to choose God, every defeat in battle - all could be explained not just in terms of sin but on the basis of the devil's direct intervention. Augustine insisted that devils were behind the Romans' Civil War, as well as their theatrical shows<sup>21</sup>. In opposition to the *City of God*, which was "predestined to reign with God in all eternity", Augustine wrote that the earthly city "is doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil"<sup>22</sup>. Here he did not give details. He was broad enough not to identify this City with the Roman Empire, for he saw the devil at work in too many aspects of human affairs to limit him to one historical manifestation. The breadth of Augustine's approach, the clarity of his attack on Roman history and historians, his almost ethnological analyses of pagan history and folklore - this whole logical structure was undermined by his proclivity to insist on the devils behind human activities.

- 19) *Ibid.*, IX, 18 - p. 365 in Pelican; Loeb pp. 222-223: Falsi autem illi fallacesque mediatores daemones...per corporalium tamen locorum intervalla et per aeriorum corporum levitatem a propectu animorum nos avocare atque avertere moliantur....
- 20) Adam Wienand, "Heils-Symbole und Dämonen Symbole im Leben der Cistercienser-Mönche", pp. 509-552 in Ambrosius Schneider, *Die Cistercienser: Geschichte, Geist, Kunst* (Köln, 1974), especially pp. 522-523.
- 21) *City of God* II, 24-25 - Pelican, pp. 79-81.
- 22) *Ibid.*, XV, 1 - p. 595 in Pelican. Loeb, p. 412: "...civitates duas hoc est duas societates hominum, quarum est una quae praedestinata est in aeternum regnare cum Deo, altera aeternum supplicium cum diabolo."

Augustine realized the Manichean threat in giving such power to the devil. He tried to point out that the devil had chosen sin and that there was no principle of evil from the beginning of creation<sup>23</sup>. Despite Augustine's efforts to disassociate himself from the heretics whom he once had followed, his view of the world is essentially dualistic. This dualism provides a natural starting point for any understanding of the interpretation of life that we find in Augustine's successors, both in theology and in history. Augustine had asserted that the Roman Empire reached greatness because of the virtue and desire for glory shared by an elite of Rome's male population<sup>24</sup>. He thus gave a secular answer to the success of a secular state, even if he at the same time involved devils in Rome's history. Later historians, however, were relatively uninterested in Augustine's moments of rational explanation and preferred to see the course of history exclusively as a battle between the forces of God and those of the devil. Augustine was understood in a one-dimensional way, even if we today can find endless layers of interpretation and variety in the complex mould of his thought. But in the world of the early Middle Ages, with heretics abounding and exposing the true Catholic church to so many threats, and with human choice so feeble in comparison to the ravages of hostile nations, devils' shenanigans seemed far more important than human efforts. Perhaps such an explanation for patterns of thought and activity seems oversimplified. But the period from 500 to 1100 is a simplified age, in which contrasts between black and white are the only acceptable ones in theology, history writing, and poetry.

Thus there is no conflict between the views of life found in different types of writing. Answers given to most problems are based on the power of God and the helplessness of man. When Augustine wrote about the Redemption in the thirteenth book of his treatise *De Trinitate*, he could ask how the devil was conquered and answer: "Because he found nothing worthy of death in him [Christ], he killed him anyway."<sup>25</sup> And so it was just that the debtors whom the devil was holding were freely dismissed

23) *Ibid.*, XI, 13.

24) *Ibid.*, V, 17.

25) *De Trinitate* XIV, 18: "Quia in eo nihil morte dignum inveniret, occidit eum tamen." Oeuvres de Saint Augustin 16 (Bibliothèque Augustinienne: 16, Paris, 1955), p. 314.

because they believed in him whom the devil killed even though no debt was owed him by this man:

Et utique justum est ut debitores quos tenebat, liberi dimittantur, in eum credentes quem sine ullo debito occidit.<sup>26</sup>

Augustine's terminology is confused. He does not make clear whether the debt is owed to God or to the devil. Nevertheless Augustine gave the devil a role in the Redemption which corresponded to what later theologians like Gregory the Great needed in order to explain the devil's prominence in human affairs. With mankind bound to the devil for all the thousands of years before Christ, and still under his power every time a person rejects divine grace, the life of society as well as the life of the individual became a great battle between the forces of good and evil. Augustine's *City of God* exercised little direct influence on medieval thought, while Gregory's *Moralia in Job* became a primer of monastic theology<sup>27</sup>. For Gregory used the story of Job to represent both the victory of Christ over the devil and our personal conquest of sin. Job is a figure of Christ for Gregory, but he is also a representative of fallen man who must battle the devil but cannot win until Christ defeats him<sup>28</sup>.

Gregory's exposition of Scripture followed a method that became the basis for medieval theology: the tedious, careful analysis of books of the Bible according to their literal and allegorical content. The *City of God* contained too much material that quickly ceased having relevance for medieval theologians: the long discourses on various pagan religions that no longer threatened them were much less useful than Gregory's clear analysis of the way a book of the Old Testament foresaw the saving work of Christ.

Long before Gregory and Augustine in their own ways dealt with the devil and his influence in human affairs, the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* was composed, probably during the fourth century<sup>29</sup>. In the part concerning the harrowing of hell, the conflict between Christ and the devil

26) *Ibid.*

27) For the importance of Gregory's method in *Moralia in Job*, see Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, pp. 32-35.

28) For Gregory's view of the devil's loss of power, see the *Moralia*, PL 75, col. 615-616: "Et cum Satan ad feriendam Redemptoris carnem permittitur, ab anima separatur; quia cum corpus ejus ad passionem accipit, electos suos a jure suae potestatis amittit."

29) Translation and introduction contained in M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1960), pp. 94-144.

was given a dramatic content that drew on the last four verses of the twenty-fourth Psalm:

Attollite portas, principes, vestras, et elevamini, portae  
 aeternales et introibit rex gloriae. Quis est iste rex gloriae?  
 Dominus fortis et potens. Dominus potens in praelio.  
 Attollite portas, principes, vestras, et elevamini, portae  
 aeternales, et introibit rex gloriae.  
 Quis est iste rex gloriae? Dominus virtutum, ipse est rex gloriae.<sup>30</sup>

It is interesting that the account based on these lines is found in far more Latin than Greek manuscripts<sup>31</sup>. If this relationship is due to more than chance, it may well show the popularity of the drama in Western Europe. As M. R. James pointed out, the Latin versions became the "parent of versions in every European language", as we shall see in the case of the English poem *The Harrowing of Hell* from the fourteenth century<sup>32</sup>. There was something in the primal confrontation between the victorious Christ and the foolish devil that appealed to the popular consciousness in medieval Europe. It was a good story, in which good triumphs over evil, with the possibility for dramatic effects. But it also appealed because Christ could be seen in human terms as a conquering hero releasing people from a bondage to the devil that they apparently felt in their own lives.

In the original Latin version, Satan tells his minion, Hell, to get ready to receive Jesus, "who boasteth himself that he is the Son of God, whereas he is a man that feareth Death". Hell objects, saying that if Christ is so powerful, then there is no way to resist him. But Satan insists that Jesus will be in his power, even if he did bring Lazarus back from the kingdom of the dead. Hell refuses to be convinced and panics when he hears the cry of Christ, "Attollite portas, principes". Hell excoriates Satan: "...like a fool thou knewest not what thou didst". The devil's foolishness is explained by Hell:

O Prince Satan, author of death and head of all pride, thou oughtest first to have sought out matter of evil in this Jesus: wherefore didst thou adventure without cause to crucify him unjustly against whom thou foundest no blame, and to bring into our realm the innocent and righteous one and to lose the guilty and the ungodly and unrighteous of the whole world?<sup>33</sup>

30) For the use of this theme and its limited dramatic development in the Easter liturgy, see Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (Oxford, 1953) I, pp. 149-177.

31) James, p. 95.

32) James, pp. 128-129.

33) James, pp. 136-137.

Here, just as clearly as in Augustine's *De Trinitate*, we have the doctrine that the salvation of mankind from original sin is based just as much on the devil's abuse of power as on anything Christ offered for us. The form is totally different: a dramatized dialogue instead of a theological treatise. But the content is exactly the same.

In the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Satan is a central actor in the drama of the Redemption. Mankind cannot be freed until Christ has defeated him. Satan's defeat is based just as much on his stupidity as on his arrogance, and there is thus an element of the ludicrous in him that vernacular versions of the *Harrowing of Hell* would bring into the open. But the basic content of the narrative varies little from one version to the next: the dialogue between Satan and Hell (who is later substituted by devils), the coming of Christ, Hell's (or one of the devil's) accusations of Satan, the release of the souls of the just, and the naming of these various souls and their praise for Christ.

*The Early Middle Ages: Bede and Gregory of Tours*

Despite this emphasis on the power of Satan and his defeat by an even greater act of power by Christ, medieval theologians insisted on *liberum arbitrium*, man's ability to choose between good and evil. However much the devil was seen to intervene, the responsibility of the individual person was always insisted upon. Thus when Gregory the Great interpreted Job 16:14 "Circumdedit me lanceis meis, convulneravit lumbos meos" in terms of the devil's attacks on us, he insisted that the use of "con" with "vulneravit" showed that the devil "did not seize us without our will". The devil suggests to us an evil deed, but it is we who carry it out "from our own will...since we are led to committing evil from free will."<sup>34</sup> Gregory emphasized that the exterior attacks of Satan on us should make us aware of the interior battle between good and evil in our hearts.<sup>35</sup> In his attempt to balance the idea of Satan as an active force roaming the world

34) PL 75, col. 1026: Ubi notandum quoque est quod non ait: "Vulneravit", sed "Convulneravit lumbos meos". Sicut enim loqui aliquando unius est, colloqui vero duorum, vel fortasse multorum, sic antiquus hostis, quia nos ad culpam sine voluntate nostra non rapit, nequaquam lumbos nostros vulnerare, sed convulnerare dicitur, quia hoc nobis ille male suggerit, nos sequentes ex voluntate propria implemus et quasi cum ipso nos pariter vulneramus quia ad perpetrandum malum ex libero arbitrio ducimur. (Italics mine.)

35) PL 75, col. 521-522.

to man's detriment, Gregory did his best to preserve the concept of man's freedom to choose.

Yet even a Biblical commentator and historian as orthodox and loyal to Gregory as Bede sometimes was so aware of the exterior kingdom of the devil and his power over individual human beings that he failed to give due credit to mankind's free will. In the fifth book of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede tells two similar stories of deathbed failures to repent<sup>36</sup>. In both cases, the dying people despair of any hope for salvation because they feel overwhelmed by the burden of the sins they have committed. In the first incident, where the dying man sees two books of life, one tiny and beautiful containing his good acts, and one huge and hideous with his evil deeds, he tells his friends that the blows of devils "are now penetrating the inmost parts of my body with awful agony, and when they meet I shall die. The devils will be waiting to snatch me away, and I shall be dragged down through the gates of Hell."<sup>37</sup> According to orthodox theology, such a man still had a chance for salvation if he repented of his sins at this moment, even if only because of the fear of hell. And in a later age, many such men would avoid hell merely because they said a prayer to the Virgin<sup>38</sup>. But in Bede's strict and uncompromising age, the burden of guilt has apparently cancelled out the advantage of free will, and the man has despaired of hope.

Such an incident does not necessarily call into question Bede's orthodoxy, for he was probably aware of the correct doctrine. He is merely saying that this man, once his sins were made known to him, saw how overwhelming they were and gave up hope. But Bede's attitude suggests the streams of fate, predestination, and dualism that lie just below the surface of life in the early Middle Ages. Mankind's efforts are secondary

36) *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* V, 13 and 14 - pp. 311-315 in C. Plummer's edition, *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica* I. (Oxford, 1946).

37) *Ibid.*, ...qui videlicet modo cum magno tormento inrepunt in interiora corporis mei, moxque ut ad se invicem perveniunt, moriar, et paratis ad rapiendum me daemonibus in inferni claustra pertrahar. The translation of Bede used is that of Leo Sherley-Price in the Penguin Classics. (Harmondsworth, 1965 and later).

38) This new faith in the miracles and salvific power of the Virgin is an important part of the gentler world of the twelfth century that Southern associates with Anselm. *The Making of the Middle Ages*, pp. 245-254.

when it is a question of the outcome of a continuing cosmic battle between God and the devil. Once this battle is decided to a man's disfavour, there is nothing to be done. In the words of a brother in a monastery whom Bede knew personally, "There is no time left for me to amend my ways. I have already seen my judgment pronounced."<sup>39</sup>

In Bede, in Gregory the Great, and in Augustine, we find two interlocking attitudes. The first is that of the active devil as a primary threat to mankind. The second is that of the conquering Christ who is our only hope against the devil. The mingling of these themes can be seen in all types of early medieval literature, such as in a letter copied by Bede in which the seventh century Pope Boniface wrote to the Northumbrian queen Ethelberga. In urging her to exert her influence over her pagan husband, Edwin, Boniface reviews the story of the Redemption:

In his great providence, our loving Redeemer has offered a saving remedy to the human race, which he has saved from the devil's enslaving tyranny by the shedding of his own precious blood<sup>40</sup>.

The function of the Son, Boniface wrote to Edwin in another letter, is to "deliver you from the evil power of the devil" in which Edwin obviously was entwined<sup>41</sup>. In the great confrontation between Christian and pagan, it was easy and convenient to think in these terms, to dismiss one's enemies or opponents in faith as agents or slaves of the invisible enemy.

When Bede in another chapter tells the story of a man who was dead but revived and told what he had experienced, it is significant that the man tells vividly of heaven and hell, but not a word about purgatory<sup>42</sup>. The doctrine of purgatory is a product of the High Middle Ages, in which the

39) *Hist. Eccl.* V, 14. Plummer, pp. 313-314: Novi autem ipse fratrem, quem utinam non nossem, cuius etiam nomen, si hoc aliquid prodesset, dicere possem....Respondit ille desperans: "Non est mihi modo tempus vitam mutandi, cum ipse viderim iudicium meum iam esse completum."

40) *Hist. Eccl.* II, 11 - Plummer, p. 104: Redemptoris nostri benignitas humano generi, quod pretiosi sanguinis sui effusione a vinculis diabolicae captivitatis eripuit, multae providentiae, quibus salvaretur, propinavit remedia....

41) *Hist. Eccl.* II, 10 - Plummer, p. 103: Ereptos de potestate nequitiae diabolicae...

42) *Hist. Eccl.* V, 12 - Plummer, pp. 303-310. This is not just an early medieval phenomenon. It can also be seen in relatively isolated corners of Christian Europe in the later Middle Ages. Danish chalk murals in churches of all periods have almost no illustrations showing purgatory. See Niels M. Saxtorph, *Jeg ser på kalkmalerier*. (Copenhagen, 1970).

black-white dichotomy had given way to a growing awareness of nuance in life. An age of heroes and devils has no room for any chance of purification once the battle is over. Life is all or nothing, and the result is heaven or hell<sup>43</sup>.

Similarly Bede is willing to explain evil events in human affairs solely in terms of diabolic intervention. When bishops Germanus of Auxerre and Lupus of Troyes answer the Britons' appeal for help against the Pelagians, their expedition is resisted by devils, who want the heretics to thrive:

They had sailed halfway on their voyage from Gaul when they were suddenly subjected to the hostile anger of devils, who were furious that such men as they should dare to recall the Britons to the faith.<sup>44</sup>

In the cosmic battle that followed, Bishop Lupus called upon Christ, and the devils fled. In other words, the storm subsided and the ship reached port safely. But Bede sticks to his source, which insists that the trouble was due to devils: the devils themselves revealed their purposes when they were cast out of people whom they had possessed. Bede is thus not the type of superstitious writer like Caesarius of Heisterbach who assumes in advance that evil events are caused directly by the devil. But when Bede finds a tradition for blaming such events on devils, he willingly uses the testimony of devils themselves to back up his claim!

Devils bear witness to devils. Just as in Augustine's *City of God*, history is the story of the cosmic confrontation between good and evil, and Bede is so unsure of the triumph of good in his own time that he gives little space to contemporary history. He prefers to concentrate on the

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43) I would like to thank my friend, lektor, dr. Graham D. Caie, of the English Institute at Copenhagen University, for imparting to me his views on this and similar subjects. Caie's knowledge of Anglo-Saxon literature makes it possible for me to make such bald statements about the absence of purgatory. See his *The Theme of Judgment Day in Old English Poetry*. (Publications of the English Department II, University of Copenhagen, 1976).

44) *Hist. Eccl.* I, 17 - Plummer, p. 34: Tum subito occurrit pergentibus inimica vis daemonum, qui tantos talesque vivos ad recuperandam tendere populorum salutem inviderent.  
Most of this chapter is taken from the Life of Saint Germanus by Constantius. According to Plummer (Volume II - *Commentarium*, pp. 31-32) Bede omitted a number of the miracles contained in this account. But he still accepted the prominent role of devils.



glorious age of conversion in the seventh century when, in his mind, the devil and his allies more clearly were being wiped out<sup>45</sup>.

Like Bede, Gregory of Tours found it easy to look at history in simplified terms by positing the direct intervention of devils. But even moreso than Bede, Gregory saw devils involving themselves in events of daily life, and references to them in the *History of the Franks* are more frequent than in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. When Count Palladius commits suicide, Gregory claims that he could have run himself through with a sword a second time only "with the help of the devil: for the first wound was enough to kill him, unless the devil came to his assistance to give him strength to carry his terrible plan through to the end."<sup>46</sup> Likewise, when Jews get angry with Christians and pour some rancid oil on a new convert, it is the devil that gives them the idea<sup>47</sup>. Even in the case of Aetherius, the bishop of Lisieux, who is accused of fornication, Gregory sees the devil behind those conspiring against him: "Only the devil could have put into their heads this idea of bringing such a charge against the bishop, for he was nearly seventy years old."<sup>48</sup> Here Gregory's wry sense of humour breaks through for a moment and reminds us that people a thousand years ago were not completely obsessed by a sense of pessimism and helplessness.

But the devil is still very prominent in the events that plagued men - and women - as when a faction of nuns at Saint Radegund's nunnery in Poitiers revolted. Gregory says that Clotild, daughter of King Charibert, "gave in to the blandishments of the devil."<sup>49</sup> Here he slightly alters a phrase contained in the convent's foundation charter which warned against any woman "who being deceived by the blandishments of the devil, should

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45) For Bede's doubts about his own times, see his *Epistula ad Egbertum Episcopum* (Plummer I, pp. 405-423), and the helpful article by J. Campbell, "Bede", in T. A. Dorey, *Latin Historians* (London, 1966), pp. 159-190, especially p. 172.

46) *The History of the Franks*, translated by Lewis Thorpe (Penguin Classics, Hamondsworth, 1974) - Book IV, 39 - p. 234. Latin text edited by René Poupardin in the series, *Collection de Textes pour servir à l'Étude et à L'Enseignement de l'Histoire* (Paris, 1913), p. 136: Quod non sine diaboli opere scelus perfectum mirati sumus; nam prima eum plaga interfecere potuit, si non diabolus sustentaculum praeuisset, quod hac nefanda perageret.

47) *History of the Franks*, V, 9 - p. 266 in Thorpe

48) *Ibid.*, VI, 36 - p. 368 in Thorpe. In Poupardin, p. 239: Et sane pars haec et consilium diaboli fuit, in tali aetate crimen inponere sacerdoti, qui erat fere septuaginta annorum.

49) *Ibid.*, IX, p. 526 in Thorpe. Poupardin, p. 391: "insidiante diabulo."

desire to marry a man."<sup>50</sup> Gregory finds the ensuing events so disturbing that he explains a riot in Saint Hilary's church at Poitiers as the result of the devil's intervention<sup>51</sup>. Finally, he ascribes to the devil's help the power to prophesy the future that a man at Bourges who claimed to be Christ seemed to possess.

Gregory's world is far more turbulent than Bede's<sup>52</sup>, and the devil is consequently far more active and evident in human affairs. But on the question of the Redemption, Gregory holds to the same viewpoint as other early medieval theologians and historians. In a debate with a Jew in which he himself engaged and then recorded in detail, Gregory says that it was necessary for our sake for God to be made man. Otherwise he could not have redeemed man from "the captivity of sin, or from his servitude to the Devil". Gregory describes the world as "sinking beneath the devil's rule", until Christ came and "accepted a new and unaccustomed domination over the people whom he had delivered from their servitude to the devil."<sup>53</sup> Here there is nothing about the devil's right or his abuse of it by exercising undue power, but this is secondary in comparison to the prominence given the devil and his central place in the mystery of the Redemption. Later medieval writers would follow Gregory in looking at the Redemption in such terms: the concept of the abuse of power is not always present, but the necessity that Christ defeat the devil in order to save mankind is almost always foremost in the explanations given for the Redemption.

Concentration on the doctrine of the Redemption and comparison of various explanations for it enables us to see a change after Anselm in the

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- 50) *Ibid.*, p. 529. Poupardin, pp. 394-395: "homine volueret nubere, diabulo captivante."
- 51) *Ibid.*, IX, 41, p. 533 - Poupardin, p. 399: Ut credo, diabulo cooperante. Again the phrase seems to be taken, with alteration, from the document on which Gregory constructs his account: p. 400 in Poupardin, "in(s)tigante diabulo."
- 52) But here we should be aware of J. Campbell's remark in his article "Bede", *op. cit.*, p. 182: The differences in the historiographical fortunes of seventh-century England and seventh-century Gaul, the one often being regarded as moving and edifying, the other as repellent and vicious, are attributable not so much to one society's being nobler, or nicer, than the other, as to Bede's aims and tastes being different from those of Frankish historians.
- 53) *History of the Franks*, VI, 5 - pp. 330-331 in Thorpe. Poupardin, p. 211: Nam captivam peccati homine et diabuli servituti subiectum redimere non poterat, ...super populum, quem diabuli servitute liberaverat, rudem regnum accipit.

general attitude towards the devil's power. But at the same time it is necessary to include writers and passages which do not deal with the doctrine of the Redemption at all. Here the devil appears in the guise of the disturber and spoiler of human affairs, as we can see him in Bede or Gregory of Tours. Such instances could be multiplied to the point of nausea, but they would only emphasize the same idea. If we take our writers seriously, on the evidence of what they say and what they want us to understand, and if we keep from forcing onto them any grand economic or social interpretation, then it becomes clear how much they fear the devil's involvement in human affairs.

*The Continuity of the Old Theme; The Appearance of the New*

Looking ahead to the twelfth century and Galbert of Bruges, we find the continuity of this conviction about the devil's immediacy. It is generally agreed that the notary Galbert was in minor orders and not a priest. He is often looked upon as the representative of a new rationalistic mentality<sup>54</sup>. At any rate his account of the murder of Charles the Good, Count of Flanders, marks the advent of history written by men who were not monks. By definition, one would expect a man so close to secular life, at the very centre of the new urban and potentially bourgeois culture of Flanders, to favour rational, human explanations for the events he describes so well. If we look at the day-by-day chronicle, we are not disappointed. Galbert has gained much from his training as notary, and his account enables us to follow the various factions inside and outside Bruges in their reactions to the duke's death. But once the first stage in disturbances was over, after 22 May, 1127, when Galbert apparently believed that peace had been restored to Flanders, he wrote an introduction to his chronicle. Here the devil appears as the major explanatory factor for events:

When the Devil saw the progress of the Church and the Christian faith, as you are about to hear, he undermined the stability of the land, that is, of the Church of God, and threw it into confusion by guile and treachery and the shedding of innocent blood.<sup>55</sup>

- 54) *The Murder of Charles the Good* by Galbert of Bruges, translated with an introduction and notes by James Bruce Ross (Harper Torchbooks: New York, 1967), pp. 65-67, and J. Dhondt, "Une Mentalité du Douzième Siècle, Galbert de Bruges", *Revue du Nord* XXXIX (1957), p. 102: "Les premiers balbutiements de la pensée rationnelle en lutte avec les traditions," as quoted in Ross, p. 72.
- 55) Ross, p. 81.

There are two common approaches for dealing with such a passage. Either the historian can ignore it as of no interest to any analysis of causes, or it can be classified as one more cliché in which a medieval writer copied a theme that by now has become almost too familiar. But if we remember who Galbert was and how his social background does not automatically place him amid those who would effortlessly attribute evil events to the devil, then such a preface points to a continuing conviction in the twelfth century that the devil is a central factor in human affairs. Galbert, like Augustine, Gregory of Tours, or Bede before him, meant what he said: the devil plagues men and the world, hates human success, peace, stability, and so does everything possible to muck up human affairs. Men are his agents or instruments, but the devil is immediately behind them in a literal and not at all figurative sense.

The pattern of explanation for both theology and history is thus consistent from the *City of God* to the chronicle of Galbert of Bruges. Galbert is at one with the theologians in not too distant Laon in their insistence on the devil's place in the divine scheme and in the power that he has been given by God to make mens' lives miserable unless and until they turn to Christ's help. The belief is the same, even if the mode of expression is different. It is not necessary here to worry about differences in literary genre. Theology at Laon and chronicle writing at Bruges are dealing with the same problems and giving the same solutions.

If we move less than a century forward in time from Galbert to the anonymous monk of Øm abbey in central Jutland who wrote a chronicle about the monastery's foundation, we detect immediately a shift in attitude. Here, shortly after 1200, the early days of the monastery in the 1160's and 1170's are described almost totally in terms of human agents<sup>56</sup>. There are a few brief instances of supernatural intervention, but the devil has dropped out of the picture. The monks have their problems and complain about the wrongs done them, but they do not blame their misfortunes on the devil. Even when Øm abbey came under attack from the bishop of Aarhus in the 1260's, the writers of the chronicle's continuation preferred to look at their ills in human terms. The title of the earlier chronicle, *Exordium Monasterii Carae Insulae*, suggests imitation of the Cistercian

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56) See my *Conflict and Continuity at Øm Abbey. A Cistercian Experience in Medieval Denmark*. (Museum Tusulanum: Copenhagen, 1976).

*Exordium Magnum* written at Clairvaux. But even a brief review of its contents shows that the Øm monks could not have borrowed their attitude from their French brethren<sup>57</sup>. The *Exordium Magnum* has its share of miracles and triumphs over the power of the devil, even though it is much more restrained than some of its sources in its description of Cistercian successes. But the Øm monks have apparently gained their rationalism from another source. What this source may have been in philological terms, I cannot say. It is at least possible to point out a parallel between developments in theology at Paris after the opening of the century, when Anselm finally had his breakthrough, and this turn in history writing in a Cistercian community. It is not a question of influence, more of common manifestations of the same cultural development.

As the achievements of the human intellect seem to grow with the flourishing of the universities, the Cistercians in a distant northern land try to use their intellects in order to define their hard-won gains. Human beings were having great success in making new forms of community function. Whether these communities were reformed monasteries that transformed the face of the land, or universities changing the shape of theology, they made the role of the devil in human affairs less central than before.

Even when the very existence of the monastery at Øm was challenged later in the century, its writers insisted on looking upon their opponents as human beings and only rarely as agents of the devil. Nowhere in the

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57) *Exordium Magnum Cisterciense* sive Narratio de Initio Cisterciensis Ordinis auctore Conrado (Series Scriptorum S. Ordinis Cisterciensis II, Rome, 1961). Note that the Øm chronicle was begun only a few years after the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* of William of Newburgh, which was written at the request of Ernald, abbot of the nearby Yorkshire Cistercian abbey of Rievaulx. William has the same rationalistic approach to history as the Danish Cistercian writer: he excoriates his predecessor Geoffrey of Monmouth for his falsified history of Britain and dismisses the knowledge of the future that devils are supposed to have: ...cum profecto et veris rationibus et sacris literis doceamur daemones, a luce Dei seclusos, futura nequaquam contemplando praescire: sed quosdam futuros eventus ex signis sibi quam nobis notioribus, conjiciendo magis quam cognoscendo colligere. (p. 12 in the Rolls Series: *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, Vol. I, ed. Richard Howlett, London, 1884). For an appreciation of William's work, and its limitations, see pp. 263-268 in Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England* c. 550 to c. 1307. (London, 1974).

account of the dispute with Bishop Tyge of Aarhus do we hear as in Galbert of the devil's direct intervention. At one point, when the bishop's men attacked an *Øm* monk and a lay brother at Horsens, these "servants of the said bishop" are called "satellites of the devil", but the phrase is merely used in order to indicate that the bishop is acting like the devil<sup>58</sup>. The devil himself in all his hideous concreteness is not called upon. Sometimes the writer can say that people act "by a diabolical instinct", but again the meaning is one of implied symbolism and not the literal insistence of Galbert<sup>59</sup>. Tyge himself is made out to be a diabolical character in a description of one of his fits of anger, but again the intention is only figurative. The Cistercian writer wants to undermine any credibility Tyge might have by showing his as a man who cannot control his rage<sup>60</sup>.

The devil is only present in a secondary and distant manner in the various parts of the *Øm Abbey Chronicle*. Even when the monks are prostrate and know they are defeated, they do not curse the devil for their fate. For them historical explanations are not the same as cosmic ones. The monks refuse to confuse their own monastery history with any primal confrontation between God and the devil. The writers at *Øm* may have had good, practical reasons for being so this-worldly in their explanations, but the result is that their monastery's history is more secular than Galbert of Bruges's account of his town.

One possible direct influence on this sober style of writing is the great Bernard of Clairvaux himself. However much he gave rise to miracle stories about his work in sending Cistercians to Scandinavia, Bernard had no affection for a view of the world in which devils were constantly plaguing people. He castigated monks who loved to decorate their cloisters with festive devils that attacked human beings. As is well-known, Bernard preferred a style of architecture that was simple and did not distract the

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58) *Scriptores Minores Historiae Danicae Medii Aevi*, M. Cl. Gertz (Sel-skabet for Udgivelse af Kilder til Dansk Historie, reprinted Copenhagen, 1970), II, 236: "...ministri dicti episcopi, immo satellites diaboli!"

59) As when the lay brothers panic and abandon *Øm*, taking the monastery's possessions with them, *Scriptores Minores* II, 262: "Quidam de conversis, instinctu diabolico furtive substrahentes..."

60) *Scriptores Minores* II, 254: "His perceptis episcopus cepit furere et insanire, ac si prius non insanivisset; fremens ac dentibus stridens venit ad regem querelans...."

mind from the ascent to God<sup>61</sup>. In this sense Bernard belongs to Anselm's unitary universe. On the doctrine of the Redemption, Bernard insisted on the devil's role because he was afraid of the consequences of Abelard's concentration on the exemplarism in Christ's death as an act of love for human beings that should inspire us to love God. Bernard was too much of a theological conservative to give up the long tradition demanding a place for the devil. But even here he gave way to the new view of the Redemption in insisting that the devil's defeat is not enough. Christ's death has to be looked upon as an act of satisfaction to God by man. Here we find a possible anselmian influence, and a certain indication that Bernard had left behind the obsession with the devil that characterized earlier thinking<sup>62</sup>.

The weak line that starts with Anselm and continues haltingly through the life and work of Bernard of Clairvaux just about disappears in the second half of the twelfth century. Peter Lombard's collection, the *Sentences*, solidified the authority of the school of Laon on the Redemption, even though the Lombard did not go as far as his predecessors on the devil's rights<sup>63</sup>. But he seems to have ignored Anselm almost completely. From about 1150 to 1220 Anselm was left out in the cold at Paris. Then with Alexander of Hales, the first Franciscan master, we once again find a theological manifestation of Anselm's thinking. This line, which leaves the devil out almost completely, can be easily followed through Bonaventure<sup>64</sup>. The triumph of the new attitude can be seen in the *Paradiso* of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Here the doctrine of the Redemption is explained without reference to the devil at all. It has been thought that most of Dante's theological speculations can be related directly back to Thomas Aquinas<sup>65</sup>, and so it would be of worth to turn for a moment to the great Dominican master in order to see his position regarding the devil's role.

61) See Wienand's article in *Die Cistercienser: Geschichte, Geist, Kunst*, pp. 519-522, "Der hl. Bernhard und die Dämonen".

62) See my Oxford thesis, and Bernard's *Tractatus Contra Quaedam Capitula Errorum Abaelardi*, PL 182, 1053-1072, especially col. 1067 A-B.

63) *Petri Lombardi Libri IV Sententiarum* (Quaracchi 1916), pp. 633-642.

64) See the twentieth distinction of his *Commentaria in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum*, contained in his *Opera Omnia III* (Quaracchi, 1887), pp. 416-432.

65) As in Charles S. Singleton's commentary on the seventh canto of *Paradiso*, where Dante's theology of the Redemption is related exclusively to the *Summa Theologiae* of Aquinas as "the theologian's typical answer", p. 137 in *The Divine Comedy III Paradiso. 2 Commentary* (Bollingen Series LXXX: Princeton, 1975).

*Aquinas and Dante: from syncretism to a new synthesis*

If we look first at Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles*, he has no trace at all of demonology in his description of the Redemption<sup>66</sup>. Here he treats essentially the objections of the Jews against the fittingness of God's becoming man. Aquinas tries to show that the Incarnation not only was not an insult to God. It was also necessary for our salvation. Here Aquinas is following the type of argumentation involving divine order, the need for satisfaction, and the tragedy of human impotence, that Anselm already had developed. It is impossible to find any phrases that can be related directly to Anselm, but the absence of the devil's claims on mankind and the insistence on the logical necessity of a God-man have faint echos of Anselm's way of thinking:

Oportuit igitur, ad hoc quod humanum genus a peccato communi liberaretur, quod aliquis satisfaceret qui et homo esset, cui satisfactio competeret, et aliquid supra hominem, ut eius meritum sufficiens esset ad satisfaciendum pro peccato totius humani generis. Maius autem homine, quantum ad ordinem beatitudinis, nihil est nisi solus Deus... Necessarium igitur fuit homini ad beatitudinem consequendam, quod Deus homo fieret ad peccatum humanum generis tollendum.<sup>67</sup>

Anselm's apparatus of necessitarianism seems present here, until we remember that Thomas's conclusion only concerns a necessity for man, while God's power to choose another way is left unaffected. The last line quoted here looks like a reflection of Anselm, but the *Cur Deus Homo* insists that anything which is reasonable in God is by definition also necessary for him<sup>68</sup>. Anselm's necessity for a God-man binds the whole universe together and includes God in its logical structure, while Thomas speaks of the necessary God-man only as a result of the need for human happiness. With phrases like "ordo divinae iustitiae" and "nihil est nisi solus Deus", we are rhetorically not far from the world of Anselm. But such phrases are being used in a different framework by Thomas.

Nevertheless the devil has no role in the *Summa contra Gentiles* on the Redemption, and so it is a great shock to move from this work to Aquinas's most detailed theological undertaking, the *Summa Theologiae*. Here we are

66) Editio Leonina Manualis (Roma, 1934), Liber IV, cap. 53-55, pp. 510-521.

67) *Ibid.*, p. 514, cap. 54.

68) *Cur Deus Homo* I, 10: Sicut enim in deo quamlibet parvum inconueniens sequitur impossibilitas, ita quamlibet parvam rationem, si maiori non vincitur, comitatur necessitas.



right back with the school of Laon on the rights of the devil<sup>69</sup>. Aquinas is faithful to the teaching on the Redemption contained in the thirteenth book of Augustine's *De Trinitate* and sees unredeemed man as subject to the devil's dominion. Because of Aquinas's apparatus of Aristotelian distinctions and his mastery of scholastic method, the doctrine of the Redemption receives a much more thorough and logical explanation than in Augustine. But in dealing with the devil's role, Aquinas is amazingly conservative. Answering the question whether through Christ's Passion we are freed from the devil's power, Aquinas says that we are liberated, "insofar as (the devil) in the passion of Christ exceeded the limit of the power given him by God, by causing the death of Christ, who did not deserve death since he was without sin."<sup>70</sup>

Aquinas follows this decisive statement with a quote from Augustine's *De Trinitate* (XIII, 4), so there can be no doubt about the matter. In one sense Aquinas has come a great distance from Augustine, for his questions that involve the devil's role in the Redemption are only a small part of his many articles on the subject. Nevertheless Aquinas prefers to gather together all the earlier traditions on the Redemption and thus follow the received theological tradition. He clearly respects the teaching of the Fathers, especially that of Augustine. Aquinas is often thought of as a theological innovator, and some of his theses were indeed condemned in the 1270's. But this is Aquinas the philosopher, while Aquinas the theologian is interested in a conservative, syncretic harmony. On the doctrine of the Redemption he does the school of Laon a great favour by putting its emphasis on the devil into the context of an exhaustive treatment of the Redemption's causes and effects.

If Dante had followed Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* in the *Divine Comedy*, he would have given the devil a prominent place. Aquinas had explained that even after the Redemption the devil still exercised his power over men whenever God allowed. The devil is actively present in the world and can "deceive men in regard to certain persons, times and places, according

69) Editio Leonina Manualis (Torino-Roma, 1948), Tertia Pars, quaestiones 46-49, pp. 283-313.

70) *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 49, a. II, p. 310: Quantum vero ad tertium, passio Christi nos a diabolo liberavit, in quantum in passione Christi excessit modum potestatis sibi traditae a Deo, machinando in mortem Christi, qui non habebat meritum mortis, cum esset absque peccato.

to the hidden reason of his (God's) judgments." Aquinas insisted that the passion of Christ provided men with a "remedy" by which men could be "protected against the iniquities of demons, even in the time of Antichrist."<sup>71</sup> Aquinas is a long way from the raging and omnipresent devils that Augustine described, but men are still at any time prone to their attacks.<sup>72</sup> There is no hint of unorthodoxy in Aquinas's defense of free will, but in giving the devil continuing importance for men's affairs, Aquinas is being faithful to the Augustinian tradition.

In regard to the Anselmian revolution, Aquinas must be looked upon in the *Summa Theologiae* as a reactionary, or at least an archaic, figure. He was not willing to ignore Patristic teaching about the devil. As we shall see, Aquinas was hardly alone in this conservatism and reflects the main tendency of high medieval culture. But Dante did not follow him here, and in the *Divine Comedy* provided an expression and development of the Anselmian view.

In Canto 7 of the *Paradiso*, Beatrice is in the course of explaining to Dante some of the difficult doctrines regarding divine justice that have been puzzling him. She sees that Dante cannot understand why God chose to redeem man in the way he did. It is all a question, she says, of divine goodness. God made the order of the created universe unchangeable, but at the same time gave us free will so that we come to be like him. Recounting man's loss of happiness in paradise, Beatrice says that there

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71) *Ibid.*: ...Deus permittit diabolo posse decipere homines certis personis, temporibus et locis, secundum occultam rationem iudiciorum suorum. Semper tamen per passionem Christi est paratum hominibus remedium se tuendi contra nequitias daemonum, etiam tempore Antichristi.

72) Trevor-Roper (*op. cit.*, p. 96) claims that Aquinas went into unprecedented detail in describing the devil's sexual activities as *incubus* and *succubus*. I find, however, only a single passage from the *Summa Theologiae* and one from the *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* in which Aquinas deals with the matter. In the first, Aquinas is merely clarifying a confusing passage in Augustine; in the second, the devil's proclivities provide only an illustration for Aquinas's point. See *Summa Theologiae* I<sup>a</sup>, q. 51, a. 3, ad 6 (p. 260) and *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* (cura et studio P. Fr. Raymundi Spiazzi, Editio IX, 1956) Quaestio X in Quodlibetum Sextum (p. 129). The result is the devil as a *succubus* picking up male sperm from human beings and then becoming an *incubus* distributing it to human females. Aquinas is led into such a corner because of his loyalty to Augustine and not because of any obsession with demonology, as Trevor-Roper would have it.

were only two possibilities for our salvation after the fall. Either God could dismiss man's sin, or man could make satisfaction for his folly. But man could not satisfy because he could not sufficiently lower himself by an act of obedience to the degree that he had tried to heighten himself in his disobedience.

In this image of height and depth, Dante tries to illustrate the distance man must cover before he can give proportionate compensation for his act of sin. This image symbolizes for Dante all that Anselm or Aquinas meant when they wrote of the necessity that man provide sufficient satisfaction for sin:

Non potea l'uomo nei termini suoi  
 mai sodisfar, per non potere ir giuso  
 con umilitate obediendo poi  
 quanto disobediendo intese ir suso;  
 e questa è la cagion perchè l'uom fue  
 da poter sodisfar per sè, dischiuso.

Never could man, in human bonds confined,  
 have paid his debt, because he could not stoop  
 low by obeying, after he had sinned,  
 so far as upward it was erst his hope  
 to mount by disobeying: this is why  
 man with his debt, unaided, could not cope.<sup>73</sup>

In this dilemma God shows his great generosity by raising man up through sending his Son. All other methods would have excluded divine justice, insists Beatrice, if God's son had not been humbled in the Incarnation. Beatrice can thus rejoice in the Incarnation and Redemption as unparalleled examples in human history of God's love for us:

nè tra l'ultima notte e il primo die  
 s' alto o s' magnifico processo,  
 o per l'una o per l'altra, fu o fie:

And, 'twixt the last night and first day of all,  
 deed so sublime, so glorious, no one yet  
 saw done by either way, nor ever shall.<sup>74</sup>

By using arguments based on human dignity or place in the universe, divine will, justice and benevolence, and in considering the humiliation of God which makes up for the degree to which man needed to humiliate himself, Dante conveys into sublime poetry the mechanism of satisfaction as the

73) *Paradiso* VII, pp. 97-102. Here I am using the Italian text and English translation contained in Geoffrey L. Bickersteth's edition (Oxford, 1965), pp. 566-567.

74) *Paradiso* VII, pp. 112-114 - Bickersteth, pp. 566-567.

means of the Redemption. He leaves open the possibility for a divine act of power, but he clearly looks upon the means that God did employ as infinitely better and more rewarding for mankind<sup>75</sup>. The language Dante uses excludes any possibility of a direct relationship between him and Anselm. But it is at least clear that Dante has not followed Aquinas's insistence on the role of the devil and God's tricking him by his over-extension of power. There is a chance that Dante is following the arguments developed in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, where Aquinas may well have been influenced at some points by anselmian categories<sup>76</sup>.

Whatever the influence may have been, Dante has championed the anselmian insistence that the devil has no important role in the Redemption. Other aspects of Dante's theology are in agreement with this approach. When the harrowing of hell is described in the *Inferno*, for example, the entrance of Christ is mentioned and his removal of the souls of the just is described in some detail. But there is no mention of Satan<sup>77</sup>. The *Gospel of Nicodemus* has not been rejected, but Dante is not interested in expanding the theme of the confrontation between Satan and Christ.

Similarly and most important of all, the picture of Satan in the last cantos of the *Inferno* is based on Dante's vision of hell as a place of punishment for people who themselves have chosen their appropriate suffering<sup>78</sup>. Satan is at the bottom of the pit, the core of evil, but is

75) Dorothy Sayers, in her otherwise excellent Penguin Classics translation of this passage (which I have not used because it is slightly less literal than Bickersteth's) translates the lines "Dunque a Dio convenia con le vie sue/riparar l'uomo a sua intera vita" (pp. 103-104) with the expression "Needs then must God". Here Dante is a better theologian than Sayers: Dante's term "convenia" has nothing of the necessitarianism imposed on God that Sayers' translation would imply. Bickersteth uses the archaic but much more accurate phrase "God it behooved". Unfortunately modern English has no term that precisely catches the sense of fittingness and appropriateness in the Latin "conveniens", of which Dante was probably thinking when he wrote "convenia".

76) Barbara Reynolds, in her commentary on the inclusion of Anselm by Dante in the Heaven of the Sun (*Paradiso* XII, p. 137), claims that Anselm's arguments (of the *Cur Deus Homo*) "are summarized by Beatrice in Canto VII" (p. 167 in Penguin Classics: Harmondsworth, 1962). I am grateful for this statement: it provided the immediate inspiration for this article. But the assertion is incorrect. The arguments in Canto VII may be derivative of Anselm, but only in a loose and indirect manner.

77) *Inferno* IV, pp. 52-63.

78) *Inferno* XXXIV.

himself almost passive. In profound silence he consumes the three worst traitors, but he is far from being an active threat to mankind. He is what Judas, Cassius, and Brutus themselves have chosen, but he is himself little more than an animal, who has willingly given up his free choice in rejecting God and consequently sunk to the lowest depths of hell. In Dante's words: "This was not life, and yet it was not death"<sup>79</sup>.

The contrast between Dante's view of the devil and traditional interpretations of his activity was noticed and commented on in an article by Augustin Valensin in 1948<sup>80</sup>. The writer pointed out that devils have an extremely reduced role in *Inferno* in comparison to similar literature. The popular medieval vision of devils inflicting all sorts of sadistic punishments on people has been replaced by an insistence that these people themselves have created their own punishments by the type of lives they have led. In the words of Dorothy Sayers, "the consequences of sin are the sinner's."<sup>81</sup> Hell is merely the place where the consequences are revealed in their true forms, and in such a view of human choice, devils are secondary or not present at all.

It might be contended that Dante's modified demonology is due to the fact that as an early Italian humanist, he had liberated himself from medieval superstitions and thus belongs to the dawning age of the Renaissance. This flattering picture of Dante ignores his deep attachment to medieval theology and culture. Dante expresses not just what is to come in the next two hundred years: his work summarizes in poetry some of the most optimistic and hopeful aspects of medieval Christian thought. Remembering Bede's despairing people, already damned before death, we should turn to Dante's Manfred in *Purgatorio*. Despite the church's excommunication, he still avoided hell because of his repentance. In some of the most beautiful lines of the whole poem, Dante can insist through Manfred that the church's decree is not final:

Their curse cannot so damn a man for ever  
That the eternal love may not return  
While one green hope puts forth the feeblest sliver<sup>82</sup>.

79) *Inferno* XXXIV, p. 25 - Penguin Classics, p. 285.

80) *Le Diable dans la Divine Comedie*, in *Satan* (Études Carmelitaines, 1948), pp. 521-531.

81) Introduction to *Purgatory* (Harmondsworth, 1959 and later), p. 17.

82) *Purgatorio* III, pp. 133-135 - Penguin Classics, p. 91.

Behind this correct dogmatic assertion lies Dante's whole outlook on human choice, which at one and the same time can be called medieval Christian and humanist: "...if the world goes now with crooked gait/ The cause is in yourselves for you to trace."<sup>83</sup> Appropriately enough, it is Vergil who in *Purgatorio* explains how the human passion of love does not eliminate man's ability to choose. But Vergil refers to Beatrice as the guide for Dante who will make the doctrine completely clear. Pagan humanism yields finally to the fruits of thirteenth century scholastic theology:

Grant, then, all loves that wake in you to be  
Born of necessity, you still possess  
Within yourselves the power of mastery;

And this same noble faculty it is  
Beatrice calls Free Will; if she thereon  
Should speak with thee, look thou remember this." (*Purg.* xviii, 70-75).

Thus the portrait of the devil's activity in the *Divine Comedy*, in being consistent with this outlook, considers him only as a punisher for the wrongs that men have themselves chosen.

Nevertheless Dante's description of Satan is both grand and unique. He is not Milton's crafty and active Satan who mixes himself up in human affairs but an "empty being, whose activity is exhausted, whose history is finished." There are "no interior life" in him, "no revolt", and "no passions"<sup>84</sup>. Valensin understood the huge difference between earlier and later descriptions of Satan and Dante's conception of him. Here, in the depths of the *Inferno*, we meet the logical consequence of the traditional Christian insistence that we are free to choose and thus to make our own heaven or hell. Once hell is our choice, we cannot point to the demons and feel that they have led us along the wrong path, deceived us, and triumphed over us in the end.

The *Divine Comedy* is often called a poem of choice. It is more than that. It is a poem of individual responsibility, the greatest statement of the Middle Ages concerning the basic fairness and rationality of the Christian universe. In it Dante's heroes and his villains all bear witness to the choices they have made in seeking salvation or damnation. In the midst of the worst punishments of hell, Dante maintains a humanism

<sup>83</sup>) *Purgatorio* XVI, pp. 82-83 - Penguin Classics, p. 190.

<sup>84</sup>) *Le Diable dans la Divine Comédie*, p. 529: ... c'est un être vidé, dont l'activité est épuisée, dont l'histoire est finie. Pas de vie intérieure. Pas de révolte en lui. Pas de passions.

that Anselm would have recognized and accepted. We make our fate; we decide for ourselves; we are responsible.

If we look at the immediate facts of Dante's life, it seems surprising that he could insist so uncompromisingly on the devil's limited role in human affairs and the chance for each person to decide. Dante as the exile and the outcast, going down another man's stairs and dreaming of a world empire that could not possibly come, is exactly the type of man whom one would expect to blame his misfortune on chance or circumstance. But the many dialogues on free will and necessity especially in the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* show how Dante reacted to his situation. Instead of pitying himself, he tried to see how things hang together<sup>85</sup>. He faced the same problems of chance, freedom, and necessity which Anselm told his pupil Boso required special consideration and which Anselm was working on at the end of his life<sup>86</sup>. However theologically incomplete some of the dialogues of the *Paradiso* may seem, they bear witness to a bold attempt at synthesis in the same style as that of Aquinas. But Dante went even further than Aquinas in ignoring the possible influence of the devil and his demons on human life and concentrating exclusively on the human choices involved.

In Dante the Christian concepts of choice, free will, and human participation in the divine scheme of salvation reaches its most complete medieval expression. It is impossible to extrapolate from the biographical data of Dante's life to such an outcome. Likewise it is not possible to see Dante as the poetic expression only of the teaching already contained in Thomas Aquinas. Dante is his own man in theology as well as in poetry,

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85) As when Cacciaguida tells Dante in *Paradiso* XVII that he will be exiled from Florence, the former starts by pointing out that divine knowledge and human contingency can exist in their respective modes:

Contingence, which doth exercise no right  
Beyond that frame of matter where you lie,  
Stands all depicted in the Eternal Sight.

Though suffering thence no more necessity  
Than doth the vessel down the river gliding  
From its reflection in the watcher's eye. (XVII, 37-42).

86) *Cur Deus Homo* I, 1: Est et aluid, propter quod video aut vix aut nullatenus posse ad plenum inter nos de hac re nunc tractari, quoniam ad hac est necessaria notitia potestatis, et necessitatis et voluntatis et quarundam aliarum rerum, quae sic se habent, ut earum nulla possit plene sine aliis considerari.

building up his own system and showing a remarkable independence of mind. Valensin points out that Dante's view of Satan in hell is within the bounds of orthodoxy<sup>87</sup>. But it must be added that Dante was still striking out on his own and following a tendency that was much less marked in medieval theology and life than the view which emphasized the devil's immediate threat to men.

From Anselm to Dante we can perhaps see a weak connection by way of Franciscan theologians and especially Bonaventure, who borrowed much from Anselm. Appropriately Dante had Bonaventure point out Anselm to him in the heaven of the sun among the greatest theologians<sup>88</sup>. But what is important here is not so much influence as the direction of thought. In Dante we have reached the logical consequence of Anselm's and Abelard's rejection of the rights of the devil. Satan has almost completely dropped out of the picture of salvation. He still has his place at the very core of hell, but he will never more emerge to tempt mankind. It is the inner human being who decides his own individual life. The early medieval world of externalized fiends and uncontrollable forces has given way to a world in which interior attitudes, decisions, states of mind, are decisive for human salvation.

*The Devil's Persistence: Caesarius of Heisterbach and Anders Sunesen*

At the very summit of medieval civilisation, where art and science meet in Dante, we thus find an alternative to a world full of devils. But below this momentary peak lies layer upon layer of the more traditional view of life. One of the best witnesses to this continuing attitude is the Rhineland Cistercian Caesarius of Heisterbach, whose *Dialogus Miraculorum* provides a demonology that is more detailed than anything in the Fathers<sup>89</sup>.

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87) *Le Diable dans la Divine Comedie*, p. 531.

88) *Paradiso* XII, p. 137. Dante shows how well he knows his theology by associating Aquinas in the Heaven of the Sun with Peter Lombard (Canto XI), while Bonaventure introduces Anselm. Not only did Bonaventure in his own work borrow much from Anselm: he summarized his predecessors by pointing out his debt to Anselm "in ratiocinatione" (*Opera* V. 321. Quoted by D. Luscombe in *The School of Peter Abelard*, p. 184).

89) *Caesarii Heisterbacensis...Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. Josephus Strange, I-II. (Cologne, Bonn, Brussels: 1851, republished 1966, Ridgewood, New Jersey).



Caesarius must have been a good listener, for he collected stories from his own and neighbouring Cistercian abbeys as well as distant places. The Rhineland abbeys were probably a crossroads for monks and others travelling north-south or east-west through the heartland of Europe<sup>90</sup>. Thanks to the stories he heard, Caesarius was able to translate the general warnings of the Fathers about devils into concrete instances of their involvement in human affairs. Many of the stories are crude and even silly, and it is difficult to accept the fact that Caesarius is a son of Bernard and a brother to the *Om* writer, who was contemporary with him. But his obsession emphasizes the fact that even if some Europeans by now had left behind the world of demonology, it still had a strong hold on most people.

Caesarius wrote the *Dialogus*, he claims, because some of the brothers had asked him to maintain the record of miraculous events<sup>91</sup>. What follows is clearly in the mainstream of Cistercian literature. Its purpose is edification through pious stories which tell us much about contemporary patterns of thought and social practices<sup>92</sup>. Indeed, many of Caesarius's tales have been utilized by historians in dealing with thirteenth century monasticism or even in order to trace developments in the obscure late twelfth century period at Paris<sup>93</sup>. But such nuggets of information as do appear are only incidental for Caesarius. He is mainly concerned with providing a guidebook for salvation by narrating uplifting or horrifying stories about all kinds of people. "Because demons are the authors or incentors of temptations,"<sup>94</sup> he gives to them the sixth of his twelve distinctions which provide a program of salvation. In the first part of this distinction, he proves that demons are very much active in the world

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90) For the mother abbey of Himmerode in the time of Caesarius, see Carl Wilkes, *Die Zisterzienserabtei Himmerode im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert* (Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens, Heft 12 - Münster in Westf., 1924).

91) *Dialogus* I, Prologus, p. 1.

92) See the section on Caesarius in Schneider's chapter in *Die Cistercienser*, "Die Geistigkeit der Cistercienser", p. 137: eine wahre Fundgrube für die Kultur- und Sittengeschichte, für Sagen- und Legendenforschung des Hochmittelalter.

93) As in John W. Baldwin's *Masters, Princes, and Merchants. The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and his Circle*. (Princeton, New Jersey, 1970).

94) *Dialogus* I, p. 3: ...quia daemones tentationum auctores sunt sive incentores.

by showing what happened to some people who doubted their existence. There was the knight Heinrich who "whatever he heard or might hear of them he considered to be groundless"<sup>95</sup>. So he visited a certain clerk, Philip, who was well known for his expertise in magical arts, and asked him to be shown the devil. Philip warned Heinrich not to give the devil any of the things he might ask for when he appeared. But when Heinrich followed Philip's instructions despite the pleading and cajoling of the devil, the latter threatened Heinrich. The knight cried out so loudly that Philip came, and then the devil disappeared. From that hour the knight always had a pale colour and lived a reformed life. He believed in devils now and died soon after. This first devil has characteristics that are repeated in the following stories. He is crafty, dangerous, and uses physical or psychological forms for coercion. In Heinrich's case, the devil reveals to him knowledge about intimate details of his life, such as the exact time in Heinrich's life when he had lost his virginity<sup>96</sup>. Such knowledge gives the devil enormous power over men.

In the next story the physical threat is more prominent<sup>97</sup>. A priest who managed to arrange through Philip to see the devil was told to remain inside a protective circle that Philip drew. But the devil succeeded in luring him out of it and then attacking him so ferociously that he died three days later of his injuries. Caesarius does not give these stories as mere hearsay. He claims he himself saw the famous Philip, who a few years after these events was killed "by his master and friend the devil". In giving precise names and places for the events which he recalls, Caesarius tries to make his stories all the more convincing. This is a completely different type of literature from the vague and universally applicable stories to be found in the miracles of the Virgin from the same period or slightly earlier. Caesarius is perhaps influenced by the Cistercian passion for documentation which resulted from the monks' zeal to justify the claims of the Order and its monasteries. Whatever the cause,

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95) *Dialogus* I, p. 276: quicquid de illis audiret vel audisset, quasi frivolum reputaret.

96) *Ibid.*, p. 278: Dixit daemon: Nihil fit mali in mundo, quod me lateat. Et ut hoc scias verum esse, ecce in tali villa et in tali domo virginitatem tuam perdidisti, ibi et ibi peccata illa et illa commisisti. Et non potuit contradicere miles, quin verum diceret.

97) *Ibid.*, pp. 278-279.

the result is that Caesarius writes in his sixth distinction a chronicle of contemporary events in which history is the story of man's meeting with the devil.

Caesarius sees the devil everywhere: in his own monastery, in nearby religious houses, or in exotic places abroad. He writes of a whole school for necromancy in Toledo frequented by scholars from every land<sup>98</sup>. A group of Swabian and Bavarian students became dissatisfied with hearing about the art of magic and demanded to see something. One of them, a cleric, was lured away by the devil from the magic circle during the ensuing revelation. His comrades were furious and threatened to kill their teacher unless he arranged with the devil that the cleric be returned to them. The master, "sciens Bauwaros esse furiosos", took them seriously and managed to get the devil to deliver back the man. As in the first incident, the man's face was wan and pale. He decided that magical arts were "hateful to God" and, to provide an example for the others, became a Cistercian monk. The last bit of the narrative gives it a grain of credibility. Caesarius is drawing on stories circulating among Cistercian monasteries about noteworthy converts to the Order. But the assertion of a school for necromancy in Toledo shows how Caesarius looked out on Europe and especially the non-Christian areas on its fringes as places ruled by the devil. Satan could still, in the first years of the thirteenth century, draw young Christians to him like a magnet.

The section of the *Dialogus* on devils is full of repetitious stories, but a final one that contains much precise detail deserves retelling<sup>99</sup>. Hermann, who became abbot of Marienstatt, was first a canon at a secular church. Then he was professed as a monk at Cistercian Himmerode and finally abbot. At Himmerode, he once heard the confession of the lay brother Heinrich, who was master of one of the granges. Heinrich told Hermann that he frequently saw devils loose in the choir of the monastic church. This was too much for Hermann. He asked God for the same gift of seeing devils. The first time the devil appeared to him in the form of a peasant<sup>100</sup>. In

98) *Ibid.*, pp. 279-281.

99) *Ibid.*, pp. 281-285.

100) *Ibid.*, p. 282: In proxima vero sollempnitate sancti Martini cum staret in matutinis, contemplatus est daemonem unum in forma rustici quadrati inferius iuxta presbyterium intrare. Habebat enim pectus latum, scapulas acutas, collum breve, capillum in fronte satis superbe tonsoratum, crines reliquos sicut haristas dependentes.

other instances, Hermann saw devils trying to distract novices praying in choir. The devils could be so bothersome that the brothers would be unable to concentrate on what they were singing. Or they would incite the two sides of the choir to compete with each other in singing louder and thus confuse the liturgy completely.

The devils are described in almost loving detail. Their appearance is hideous: "Reliqui daemones umbrosa habebant corpora, infantibus maiora, quorum facies ferro de igne extracto erant simillimae."<sup>101</sup> The novice with whom Caesarius as master is conversing (thus the "Dialogus" name, even though the dialogue is more a literary convention than a real exchange of ideas) cries out after this narration: now he understands, if so many devils can plague a single monastery, then they must be innumerable. Caesarius says that Abbot Hermann had not wanted him to use these stories, but Caesarius felt it was worthwhile to have such an authority in order to warn monks against neglecting their choir duties and competing with each other in the chant<sup>102</sup>.

In such stories, Caesarius builds up what he calls instances of "terror" in order to show that devils are an immediate threat to human virtue. He uses his stories in constructing a theoretical framework for understanding the devil's activities. Caesarius insists that bad men should not console themselves in the probability that at the Last Judgment there will be more evil men than devils. The natural power of a single devil is so great that it can plague many thousands of men<sup>103</sup>. Thus the revelation of devils to Abbot Hermann is only an indication of what goes on in every monastery: a daily battle between the forces of good and evil in which monks must guard themselves against the everpresent enemy. A momentary distraction, a note sung falsely, a sense of irritation with the singing of the monks on the other side of the choir: any of these slips can be an entranceway to eager devils who can arrive on the scene and immediately corrupt first the divine office and then the monastery as a whole.

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101) *Ibid.*, p. 283.

102) *Ibid.*, p. 285.

103) *Ibid.*, p. 289: Nec in hoc mali homines aliquam recipient consolationem, quod numero longe plures erunt daemonibus, quia tanta est illorum naturalis potentia, tanta contracta malitia, tanta torquendi industria, ut unus multis millibus hominum in poenis adhibendis sufficere possit.

Anselm once spoke of life in this world in terms of the difference between the laity, who live in a town and are exposed to the enemy's attacks, and the monks, who are sealed inside a castle and thus are protected from the rages of the devil<sup>104</sup>. But for Caesarius, the devil penetrates right into the innermost sanctum of the monastery. Clearly he wants to warn his brethren in order to improve their lives. This purpose of moral uplift and admonition warns us against assuming that Caesarius himself believed every detail in every one of the stories he told. It is open to doubt whether Caesarius lived day and night in fear of the devil, but it is clear from Caesarius's stories that some monks really were afraid. In Caesarius we can see how the monastic way of life gave a great deal of room for the presence and activity of the devil. Caesarius suspected lay brothers of dealing in diabolic arts and even indicates that when a lay brother learns to read, he is risking undue arrogance and thus the devil's involvement in his life<sup>105</sup>. Caesarius's world is full of rich detail of a kind we rarely get in earlier medieval hagiographies. He presents us with names and places, facts with which his predecessors would not have bothered in describing the battle between good and evil. But I can find no change in general outlook and attitude from the Early to the High Middle Ages. Caesarius is just as coarse and simplistic in his view of the world as Gregory of Tours.

Caesarius of Heisterbach thus opens to us the popular world of folklore and demonology in which Christian beliefs and pagan myths had never quite been separated from each other<sup>106</sup>. His work would today be classified as trivial literature, for it is meant to be read by as many people as possible and reflects the beliefs and fears of people with limited education or sense of discrimination. In writing in Latin, Caesarius of course kept himself to a clerical and monastic audience. But when we come to fourteenth century Middle English literature, which had a greater potential for a mass audience, we find the same outlook on the devil's feverish activity in the world.

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104) *Saint Anselm and his Biographer*, p. 101.

105) *Dialogus*, pp. 294-295: ...conversus quidam fuit qui a monachis, cum quibus loquebatur, in tantum literas didicerat, ita ut textum legere sciret. Huiusmodi occasione illectus et deceptus, libellos sibi ad hoc idoneos occulte fecit conscribi, coepitque in vitio proprietatis delectari.

106) *Dialogus*, pp. 296-309.

In looking at the development of the doctrine of the Redemption at a similar cultural level - that of the half-educated clerical audience that can read Latin but is not in contact with scholastic theology - we can turn to the little-known *Hexaëmeron* of the early thirteenth century Danish archbishop of Lund, Anders Sunesen. This poem in twelve books was probably meant as a primer in theology for young men being trained for the priesthood at Lund. We can never be completely certain about the purpose of the work, for it only survives in a single manuscript, and there are very few references to it in any other sources<sup>107</sup>. Nevertheless the contents themselves indicate that Anders Sunesen wanted to provide an easily-digestible summary of theology. In the words of M. Cl. Gertz's fine Latin preface to the work from 1892: "ita Andrea Hexaëmeron quasi quidam 'Lombardus abbreviatus' est."<sup>108</sup>

The poem was probably composed between 1196-1206, for it was listed among the works of Anders Sunesen by Saxo when he wrote the preface to his work on Danish history shortly after 1200. He called it "mirificum reverendorum dogmatum opus complexum", and here we may have an indication as to why we hear so little in later sources about the *Hexaëmeron*<sup>109</sup>. It is a rather difficult work and certainly demands a good knowledge of Latin. Many of the words are unusual for medieval Latin. Even though the poetic style is not quite as demanding as Saxo's artificial prose, a beginning student in theology might have had enormous problems in using the work.

In any case, Anders Sunesen's work is likely to be a product of his years at Paris in the second half of the twelfth century<sup>110</sup>. It is a

107) M. Cl. Gertz, *Hexaëmeron Libri Duodecim*. (Copenhagen, 1892). See Gertz's introduction for relevant details about the purpose and distribution of the work.

108) *Hexaëmeron*, p. xii. The most recent work on *Hexaëmeron* is Sigvard Skov's "Anders Sunesen's *Hexaëmeron*", *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger* 7 Raekke, Andet Bind (Copenhagen, 1954-1956), pp. 281-331. Skov rightly criticizes Gertz for "stamping *Hexaëmeron* as an unoriginal work" (p. 310 - my translation of the Danish).

109) J. Olrik and H. Raeder, *Saxonis Gesta Danorum* I (Copenhagen, 1931), p. 3.

110) Sigvard Skov (p. 328) points out that the Paris theologians Stephen Langton and Lothar di Segni, who became Innocent III, were friends at Paris in their student days and were about the same age as Anders Sunesen. On the basis of the abundant papal favours that Innocent bestowed on Sunesen as archbishop, Skov tries to establish that the three may have shared a friendship as well as theological and political views. But Sunesen's theology needs more careful comparison with that

conservative work that sticks closely to the texts of the Fathers and prefers moral meaning behind the doctrines and Biblical commentary instead of a close analysis of the contents of dogmas. In the tenth book, the *Hexaëmeron* devotes a great deal of space to the Redemption, both as a divine act of love for us and as a release from the "chains of the enemy". The doctrine of the devil's rights over humanity as a result of the fall is clearly formulated. The devil lost his claim because Satan caused the death of Christ and thus unjustly exercised his power:

Nil Satan invenit in Christo, quod cruce dignum  
 esset, quando sine meritis fuit in cruce Christus  
 et nullam causam de culpa mortis habebat;  
 hinc Satanae mortem suadenti iure potestas  
 est prior ablata reserataque ianua caeli...<sup>111</sup>

Sunesen points out that the price paid by Christ was given by Satan to the Father and not to "the Enemy", but he goes on to enlarge the idea of the devil's loss of power by borrowing from the Fathers. From Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job*, he takes the theme that the devil got caught by the bait of Christ's flesh, for the hook inside was Christ's divinity<sup>112</sup>. From Augustine follows the image of Christ's flesh as the bait in a mouse-trap:

Adversus Satanam pro muscipula cruce Christus  
 est usus carnemque suam posuit velut escam;  
 attractus carne Satanas fuit et cruce captus;  
 ut, quos possedit captivos, perderet, ex quo  
 Auctori nocuit, in quo nil iuris habebat.<sup>113</sup>

Gertz has traced this use of Augustine to Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, which is the theological work that Sunesen used most frequently and faithfully. Thus the *Hexaëmeron* is not a work of original synthesis but a former Paris student's poetic rendering and rearrangement of his textbook knowledge from the schools. It is all done apparently for the sake of candidates for the priesthood in Denmark whom Anders knew would never get a chance to study in Paris but whose level of learning he wanted to secure.

The victory over the devil is only one theme among many in Sunesen's celebration of the Redemption. He also devotes many lines to the idea of

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of his Paris contemporaries. Thanks to John Baldwin's work on Peter the Chanter and his circle (*op. cit.*), such an analysis is now possible.

111) *Hexaëmeron* X, 6132-6136, p. 215.

112) *Ibid.*, 6141-6144. See Gertz's commentary, p. 357.

113) *Ibid.*, 6145-6149.

humanity's victory over death through Christ's death<sup>114</sup>. But Anselm's idea that satisfaction is only possible through a God-man is completely missing here, just as it is lacking among other followers of Peter Lombard in the second half of the twelfth century. Anders Sunesen's *Hexaëmeron* deserves closer analysis for its dependence on Paris theology and of its originality in form. But at least on the doctrine of the Redemption Anders maintains the traditional approach that guaranteed the continuing centrality of the devil in human affairs.

*New Variations on the Old Theme: The Harrowing of Hell and Piers Plowman*

Moving from the opening of the thirteenth century to the start of the fourteenth, we enter at last the world of vernacular literature. The Middle English poem on the harrowing of hell has been dated to the first quarter of the fourteenth century, even though we only have four fifteenth century manuscripts<sup>115</sup>. But all of them seem to go back to the same original. A Latin version of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* gave rise to this poem, which follows closely the events of the original. Going directly to the scene in hell, we find that instead of a confrontation between Satan and a personalized Hell, it is the demons who castigate Satan for his carelessness in killing Christ. We asked you to let him go, they say, but now he will take away those who were ours<sup>116</sup>. When you provoked the Jews to hand over Jesus to death, the demons insist, you should have first asked if he were worthy of death. The devils insist that because Christ had done no evil, Satan should have stopped the Jews. But in failing to do so, he

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114) *Ibid.*, 6201-6209 (p. 217).

115) William Henry Hulme, *The Middle English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus* (Early English Texts Society. Extra Series, nr. 100 - London, 1907), pp. xv-xix.

116) *Ibid.*, p. 114:

Then said the fiends that with him was  
 full of anger and of ire  
 "Satan, thou has us lorn (lost), alas,  
 thou did not our desire  
 we bad thee let him go  
 and not to come herein  
 ours he fetches us from  
 our court (dominion) waxes full thin...

Note that I have modernized the spelling. •



lost everything they had had: "all has thou lost now by this skill"<sup>117</sup>. The devil has forfeited his dominion over mankind because of his abuse of power. Other themes are present, just as in Anders Sunesen, such as that of death destroyed by death<sup>118</sup>. As in the Latin version of the *Harrowing of Hell*, Jesus comes and speaks to his children, first Adam, then the patriarchs and prophets, who each say how their prophecies and hopes have been fulfilled in him<sup>119</sup>.

It is a dramatic and convincing scene whose appearance in Middle English shows how immediate and meaningful the idea of the devil's defeat might have been to a secular audience. Karl Young, in his magisterial *The Drama of the Medieval Church* has traced the liturgical origins of the harrowing of hell scene and shown how the chance for dramatization of the event was never fully realized in the liturgies he can find. Most importantly, the devil and his helpers are never given parts in the responses that centre on the events in hell<sup>120</sup>. This is perhaps not too surprising. It would be strange to invite the devil into church in the persona of an actor in such a liturgy. But even without liturgical support, the theme of the harrowing of hell and the devil's defeat, which helped keep the devil at the centre of the Redemption, can be traced directly from the fourth century *Gospel of Nicodemus* to the Middle English poetic version. There are minor role changes, but the contents are essentially the same in celebrating Christ's entrance into hell, when he overpowers the Satan that has abused his power over men.

From the Middle English version of the *Harrowing of Hell* we can see a direct line of influence to the B version of William Langland's *Piers*

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117) *Ibid.*, p. 114:

why should thou bring a man us to  
in whom was seen no sin  
all has thou lost now by this skill...

Again, my modernization.

118) *Ibid.*, p. 118.

119) *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

120) Only in the service-book of Bamberg for 1587 does Young find a liturgical dramatization of the harrowing of hell in which Satan appears as a character who is impersonated and given a speaking part (Volume I, pp. 176-177); cf. note 30.

*Plowman*, which was completed in the late 1360's<sup>121</sup>. Again we find a dialogue between Satan and other devils, but this time the idea of the devil's abuse of power and consequent loss of it is not so clear. In order to see the development of Langland's thought on the problem, it would be best to begin with Passus 16, in which the devil first takes on a significant role.

Here Piers explains to the dreamer that when the fruit on the tree of charity begins to ripen, the devil will try to destroy it. But Piers' deputy Free Will guards the tree and resists the Devil. Here we have the same doctrine as in Gregory the Great: despite belief in the power of the devil, it is necessary to assert that man's free will can conquer him<sup>122</sup>.

In the Old Testament, the devil succeeds in carrying off fruits from the tree, which are the souls of the just. He makes a hoard of holy men in the Limbo of Hell "where there is darkness and terror and only the Devil is master"<sup>123</sup>. Here is a weak reflection of the school of Laon's teaching: before Christ's advent, the devil had full dominion over mankind, including the just, even if he only had that power through God's permission.

Piers seizes a stave, which represents the Son, and goes to fight the devil, for he is determined to snatch the fruit from him. Piers in this instance is a Christ figure, and in the context of this battle is contained the traditional view of the Redemption as a battle between devil and Christ in which helpless man (here represented by the souls in Limbo) must sit on the sidelines as spectator. The mystery of the Redemption is here explained in terms of a cosmic conflict, and this theme is developed more fully in

- 121) I have used J. F. Goodridge's excellent modern translation of the B-text in the Penguin Classics series, *Piers the Plowman* (Baltimore, 1966). For the original text of the first eight books or passus together with a more thorough commentary on them, see J. A. W. Bennett, *Piers Plowman* (Clarendon Medieval and Tudor Series: Oxford, 1972). W. W. Skeat's parallel text of all versions from 1886 was reprinted in 1954. For the poem's interpretation, I have been guided by Elizabeth Salter, *Piers Plowman, An Introduction* (Oxford, 1963) and Robert J. Blanch, editor, *Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman. A Critical Anthology*. (Knoxville, Tennessee, 1969).
- 122) Goodridge, pp. 199-200.
- 123) Goodridge, p. 201.

the eighteenth passus<sup>124</sup>. But there is also the idea of ransom. Christ has to be able to offer something which no man alone could give. Langland does not make it clear to whom the ransom is offered, God or the devil, and the poem is theologically woolly here. Nevertheless the dramatic buildup in the sixteenth passus prepares for the climax of the eighteenth passus when Christ finally comes. The need for Christ is expressed in the dreamer's conversation with Abraham as the representative of Faith. Abraham shows him the Old Testament souls, the "priceless gift" which he holds clutched in his bosom. There is no doubt that Christ will come to their aid; as Abraham says:

"It certainly is a precious gift...but alas, the Devil has claimed it for himself! Yes, and me with it! What is more, he won't accept any pledge to buy us back nor let anyone get us out of his power by standing bail. No ordinary ransom can buy us out of the Devil's pound, not until the Christ of whom I was speaking comes to fetch us. But one day he will deliver us and lay down a better pledge than we could ever deserve - His life for ours. But unless such a Lord comes to fetch us, these folk will lie like this, lolling about in my lap for ever.<sup>125</sup>

Here Langland has effectively utilized and expanded the traditional image of the just souls in Abraham's bosom. In the conversation the Redemption is seen first as Christ's victory over the devil, and second as his ransom of the souls of the just. Even though there is nothing here about the devil's abuse of power, he is still a central character in the drama.

In the eighteenth passus Langland starts with a military image of Christ as the knight that he already had introduced earlier. The comparison is made more precise. Christ is described as a young fourteenth century squire on his way to the ceremony of dubbing, where he will "receive his golden spurs and cut-away shoes"<sup>126</sup>. The image of the tree of charity is

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124) The identity of Piers has been disputed and discussed endlessly. The best general understanding of his role in the poem in relation to that of the dreamer is given by Edward Vasta in *The Spiritual Basis of Piers Plowman* (Studies in English Literature, 18: London and The Hague, 1965), p. 134: "Piers is Langland's model and highest norm. It is for this reason that he gives the poem its title and can be said to be the subject of Will's vision. Piers is *ideal earthly perfection* that, because it is always beyond what can be achieved in this life, is a standard that can only be envisioned." (Italics mine).

125) Goodridge, p. 206.

126) Goodridge, p. 217.

revived, and Faith tells the dreamer that Jesus will "win back Piers' fruit, which the Devil has claimed"<sup>127</sup>. In Langland's filmlike allegory, one set of symbols often disappears for a while only to reappear in unchanged form. The battle between Christ and the devil is also described in terms of a battle between Life and Death. In Langland's ever-shifting allegory, symbols are supplementary to each other. We move quickly from one to the other.

There is a long passage in which we meet the maidens Mercy and Truth, who tell of the great light they saw before the gates of hell. This debate of the daughters of God is a theme that goes at least as far back as twelfth century sermon literature. Langland makes it lively and relevant for his action because Truth insists that no one ever can get out of hell<sup>128</sup>. But Mercy insists that death will destroy death. Moreover, just as man was fooled by the devil's guile, so Christ will beguile the devil in turn<sup>129</sup>. Here we have an echo of the theme concerning the abuse of power, in which the devil fails to recognize the Son of God for what he is. Another maiden, Peace, appears, and says she expects a pardon for all the lost souls. But Righteousness refuses to believe.

With these quarrelling maidens unable to settle the matter, another character appears, Book, who provides yet another attempt to interpret the work of Christ. He insists that the elements of nature themselves bore witness to the power of the child born in Bethlehem. Book speaks of Christ's Redemption in terms of a naked victory of power over the devil:

And now even Lucifer shall believe the truth of this, however he may hate it. For the Giant Jesus has forged a weapon with which to break and beat down all that stands in his way.<sup>130</sup>

Here we approach the harrowing of hell theme and the passage from Psalm 24 in which the conquering king orders the doors to be opened for him. It is fascinating to see how Langland in his kaleidoscopic images looks at

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127) Goodridge, p. 218.

128) Goodridge, pp. 220-223, 228-230. See J. Rivière, *Le Dogme de la Rédemption au Début du Moyen-Age*, Appendice II, "Le Conflit des Filles de Dieu", pp. 300-324.

129) Goodridge, p. 221: "Just as man was deceived through the Devil's guile, so Grace, which was with man in the beginning, will beguile the Devil in turn."

130) Goodridge, p. 224.

Christ's death first in terms of ransom, then as the tricking of the devil, and now as a victory of naked power. Langland is a poet, not a theologian, and he is free to use all the themes that the Church's rich tradition can offer him. There is no single interpretation for Christ's work, but it is at least clear that Langland places the devil very close to centre stage.

Instead of confronting Hell and Satan, Langland makes Lucifer and Satan into different identities. It is Lucifer who has been deceived and Satan who excoriates him for his stupidity. Satan is convinced that "if this king comes in, he will seize mankind and carry them off where he lies," but Lucifer insists that he has a legal right over mankind. No, answers Satan, such a right cannot be "won for sure if it is founded on guile"<sup>131</sup>. Satan is backed up by "an ugly demon" among the crowd of those devils waiting around anxiously:

You can't catch God out that way. He won't be fooled...We haven't a leg to stand on - they [mankind] were damned through treachery.<sup>132</sup>

Langland is thus suggesting through his devils that the idea of *ius diaboli* over mankind has no validity. He seems to be rejecting the concept of the Redemption for which the school of Laon had fought so hard. The devil explains that it would have been better to let Christ live. But the reason he gives is not based on the abuse of power but on the fact that in entering the kingdom of the dead, someone like Christ "could never endure the sight of sin like ours". As a human being Christ had fought against sin, and now he will come and save the sinners of the underworld just as he had absolved sins while he lived.

Here we have a whole new synthesis for understanding the Redemption. Christ is seen no longer as the passive sinless man being snatched up by the devil and only then revealing his true identity (as in the Gregorian image of the fishhook). Langland emphasizes the activity of Christ as a man and the proofs he already then gave of his mission. This treatment of Christ is much more centred on the Gospels than on the interpretation that the school of Laon and its followers tried to defend. But Laon had lost itself in a maze in placing so much emphasis on the devil's abuse of power.

The dramatic climax comes, just as in the Middle English *Harrowing of Hell*, with Christ's approach. Satan castigates Lucifer:

<sup>131</sup>) Goodridge, p. 225.

<sup>132</sup>) Goodridge, p. 225.

It is you, Lucifer, with your lies, that have lost us all our prey.  
It was your fault that we fell from the heights...And now, thanks to  
your latest invention, we have lost Adam, and more than likely, all  
our dominion over land and sea.<sup>133</sup>

In the word "invention" is suggested the abuse of power, but the idea is not specified nearly as clearly as in earlier versions of the *Harrowing of Hell*. Satan has hardly finished when Christ bursts open the gates of hell and insists to Satan that he has a right over the souls whom Satan has been keeping. The scene combines various themes: the ransom theory of the Redemption and the idea of God's naked power revealed in his Son who smashes down hell's gates.

Through his Christ figure, Langland insists that the devil never had any justice, for he won the human race "by guile without a semblance of justice". In Christ's triumphant declaration to Satan, he rejects totally the idea that Satan has any rightful claim over mankind:

What Death has destroyed in them, my death shall restore; it shall raise them to life, and pay for all whom sin has slain...You in falsehood and crime and against all justice took away what was mine, in my own domain; I in fairness, recover them by paying the ransom and by no other means.<sup>134</sup>

The idea of Christ's death as ransom for the sins of men is thus the dominant theme of Christ's address and explains his conquest of Satan. There is still something of the old abuse of power, however, when Christ goes on to say to Satan, "I...have come like a man and graciously repaid your guile, guile against guile!" So the devil has been tricked, but just as in the statement of Lucifer that Satan's "invention" had been the cause of the devil's defeat, the idea is not clarified. Langland is writing poetry, not theology, and he therefore feels no need to integrate all his themes into a harmonious logical structure.

After this scene, the maidens Truth, Peace, Mercy, and Righteousness are reconciled. They dance until daybreak when the bells of Easter morning ring out for the Resurrection<sup>135</sup>. We have to a certain extent been following the liturgy of midnight mass with its celebration of Christ as the light of the world. Langland transmits us from the meeting of Christ with the demons in hell to his own home, where he awakens and calls his wife and daughter to mass:

133) Goodridge, p. 226.

134) Goodridge, p. 227.

135) Goodridge, pp. 229-230.

And so these maidens danced till daybreak, when the bells of Easter morning rang out for the Resurrection. And with that sound I awoke, and called out to my wife Kitty and my daughter Kate, "Get up, and come to honour God's Resurrection. Creep to the Cross on your knees and kiss it as a priceless jewel! For it bore God's blessed Body for our salvation, and such is its power that the Devil shrinks from it in terror, and evil spirits dare not glide beneath its shadow."<sup>136</sup>

Langland's harrowing of hell in all its aspects is a magnificent scene, generally recognized as the climax of the whole poem. Far more subtle and detailed than anything in its predecessors, Langland's version combines many layers of thought and action. We find here the church, the liturgy, the story of salvation, together with Langland's own personal exodus represented by the dreamer and with *Piers Plowman's* guidance. All are brought together in a cosmic confrontation. The passage is longer, more complex, and more speculative in its various elements than either the Latin or Middle English versions of the theme<sup>137</sup>.

Langland wants to celebrate the mystery of the Redemption in all its aspects, even bringing in the Last Judgment, but also placing it right in the centre of the liturgical year as he experienced it himself with his family. The levels of interpretation in the various allegories together with the many theological approaches make it difficult to focus on any one single statement as the key to Langland's thought about the Redemption. Thus it has been necessary to review the actual events of the two passus, 16 and 18, in a detail that may seem tedious and unnecessary. But Langland's thought has many more layers than Dante's: he is perhaps more ambitious in trying to combine so many different levels. Certainly the ideas behind his images are more difficult to follow and to interpret than

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136) Goodridge, p. 230.

137) Although the centrality of this passus has been accepted, I have been unable to find any careful comparison of Langland's version of the harrowing of hell with earlier versions. Goodridge in his notes (p. 308) claims that Satan and Lucifer in Langland are two different persons "as in the Gospel of Nicodemus". This is incorrect. Here it is Hell and Satan. Langland's distinction gives him dramatic possibilities that the original Gospel of Nicodemus did not develop. Even D. W. Robertson and Bernard F. Huppé in their important *Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition* (New York, 1951. Reprinted 1969) fail to analyze the theological content of the passage and dismiss it with the sentence (p. 213): "The meaning of the episode is self explanatory; in splendid, glowing poetry the climax of the poem is achieved."

what we find in Dante. But we can at least see here how Langland took a familiar and beloved theme and added to it his own touch and development so that the dramatic and theological content were greatly enriched.

Langland has left behind the doctrines of the devil's role that characterize patristic thought and which Aquinas to a certain extent accepted. Similarly Langland does not reveal any sense of the devil's immediate threat to mankind as we find it in early medieval writers. Nevertheless, the devil is still very powerful in Langland. His place in the Redemption is undiminished, even if Christ's death is looked upon in terms of ransom rather than of abuse of power. We know that Langland was read in the fourteenth century by churchmen, while in the fifteenth a new lay literacy apparently opened *Piers Plowman* with all its symbols and doctrines to a group of people who never could have read Caesarius of Heisterbach<sup>138</sup>. It is likely that Langland reflects the mentality of a class of lesser clerics who never rose very high in the church, while at the same time he lived in close contact and economic dependence on relatively well-heeled town dwellers in London<sup>139</sup>. But Langland's "Do-well" and "Do-bet" figures also seem to have penetrated the popular consciousness in the priest John Ball's appeals to "Peres Plowman" in letters sent to discontented groups in various towns<sup>140</sup>. One can think of the dissemination of Langland's thought from priest to laity as seen in Ball as a process which happened so easily and naturally because Langland knew the poor, lived among them, and this sympathy was understood and taken out of context by priests like Ball:

The poorest folk are our neighbours, if we look about us - the prisoners in dungeons and the poor in their hovels, overburdened with children, and rack-rented by landlords. For whatever they save by spinning they spend on rent, or on milk and oatmeal to make gruel

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- 138) J. A. Burrow, "The Audience of *Piers Plowman*", *Anglia* 75 (1957), pp. 373-384. "We must think, then, of *Piers Plowman* reaching two kinds of audience - the old audience of clerks, and the new one of prosperous, literate laymen."
- 139) For a discussion of Langland's place in a "clerical proletariat", see W. A. Pantin's very helpful *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1955), pp. 28-29. For "an 'autobiographical' passage from the C text", see Goodridge, pp. 257-259.
- 140) Texts included in R. S. Dobson's source collection, *The Peasant's Revolt of 1381* (London, 1970), pp. 379-381. For John Ball, pp. 372-373.



and fill the bellies of their children who clamour for food. And they themselves are often famished with hunger, and wretched with the miseries of winter - cold, sleepless nights, when they get up to rock the cradle cramped in a corner, and rise before dawn to card and comb the wool, to wash and scrub and mend, and wind yarn and peel rushes for their rushlights. - The miseries of these women who dwell in hovels are too pitiful to read, or describe in verse.<sup>141</sup>

Langland, as member of a clerical proletariat, an unbeneficed churchman lacking a patron and who never got beyond minor orders, was in daily proximity to the lowest classes of English society. He knew their hunger and their hopelessness. And yet at the same time he had to make a living by serving the spiritual needs of the rich. He would sing at the religious services they financed for themselves. In such a wandering, uncertain way of life, Langland absorbed the folklore of religion. But at the same time he combined it with a solid framework of theology. Just as Dante's *Divine Comedy* provides a synthesis of high art and scholasticism, *Piers Plowman* unifies the fantasies of the popular religious consciousness with clerical theology<sup>142</sup>. Langland's drama of the Redemption reveals not just his mind's creative process but also a contemporary vision of Christ as the God-man of power who came to deliver his people from the devil's false power.

When I began work on this paper, I thought it would be possible to distinguish Langland's view of the Redemption from Dante's simply by contrasting the elite culture of a Florentine from a good family, who frequented the courts of Italy during his exile, with the popular culture of an underprivileged member of the church, who always lived in proximity to the masses and showed great understanding for their dilemma. But the contrast is not nearly as simple as it first appeared. The elite scholastic and university culture which leads to Dante and his rejection of the devil's centrality in the Redemption also includes Thomas Aquinas, who carefully maintained everything Augustine wrote about the devil's abuse of power and subsequent loss of it. And Langland, without any formal

- 141) Goodridge, p. 260. For a sympathetic and sensitive account of Langland's "social teaching" that considers the fourteenth century milieu, see Christopher Dawson's "The Vision of Piers Plowman" in his *Medieval Essays* (London, 1953), pp. 239-271.
- 142) Greta Hort, in her pioneering *Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought* (London, no date, but c. 1937) claimed in her chapter "The Atonement" (pp. 118-129) that Langland used the arguments of *Cur Deus Homo*. I cannot agree: Langland's ransom theory of the Redemption has little to do with Anselm's strict necessitarian structure of satisfaction.

university training, could move a certain distance away from the abuse of power towards a much more balanced view of the Redemption. Langland shows a subtlety and a sophistication in dealing with the devil which no early medieval theologian or historian allowed himself. Langland's devil is confused about his rights and is in the end shown up as a fake who never had any prerogative over the human race. Even though there is a great difference between the views of mankind's situation in Dante and in Langland, this gap cannot be ascribed to differences in class and milieu. Dante's achievement in asserting so boldly man's freedom of choice and the consequences of that choice is essentially an individual achievement. We can see the intellectual background for Dante in the theology of the Redemption starting with Anselm. But there is another, much stronger tradition within the theological elite that formed at Paris which manifests itself in Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas.

Despite the unexpected and complex result that our comparison of different views has created, one generalization is possible that hopefully can illuminate the course of medieval culture in terms of free will and choice. There is a clear line of thought from the Fathers through the early Middle Ages in which Anselm appears as an innovator and a harbinger of a cultural shift of great importance. Thus Southern's thesis concerning the change from epic to romance at the opening of the twelfth century remains as strong and viable as ever. But Anselm's new teaching on the Redemption and the subsequent reevaluation by both Bernard and Abelard concerning Christ as a loving human being provided cultural explanations that still existed parallel to the old views. The traditional view of the God-man never really disappeared, even in the thirteenth century. The epic conception of life may have gone, but the feeling of exposure to the onslaughts of the kingdom of evil remained. It is easiest to measure this continuing theme in terms of theological doctrine, as in the school of Peter Lombard and his follower Anders Sunesen. But also broader works that only can be classified under the vague heading of cultural history, such as Langland's *Piers Plowman*, bear witness to the continuing conviction that the devil must be defeated, and only Christ can do it.

Langland was at least confident about the devil's defeat and could make him into a ridiculous figure. But this strong element of trust in the unmitigated power of Christ is not typical for developments during the late Middle Ages. If we turn to the pulpit literature so carefully and

voluminously analyzed by G. R. Owst, we find statements about the Redemption that repeat the timeworn phrases concerning the devil's abuse of power<sup>143</sup>. The preacher John Myrc says in his *Festial* that if the devil had known who Christ really was, "he wold never have tysut (enticed) mon to have don hym to deth."<sup>144</sup> Myrc goes on to explain that this is the reason why Mary was married to Joseph, not for her sake, but "to deseyve the fende", who then would think Christ had a human father and had not been conceived of the Holy Ghost. Owst uses this sermon of Myrc's to illustrate how immediate the devil was to the pulpit - and thus to the terrified congregation:

Little need be added...to point the connection between the demons of the pulpit and those of the sacred pageant. So real and vivid a person was the Prince of Darkness to both sets of expositors, that their imagination conceived of him in a hundred homely pranks and catastrophes, ceaselessly spying, scheming, fighting against the sons of men with every ingenuity, almost as one of their own flesh and blood, an arch villain upon the stage of daily life.<sup>145</sup>

Owst's phrase, "almost as one of their own flesh and blood", conveys superbly the feeling in late medieval literature that the devil is much more than an abstract concept. In the sermon literature as well as in the miracle plays, the devil has the same prominence as in Caesarius of Heisterbach. There is no difference among monastic, clerical, or popular imagination in this respect. Owst has rightly seen that the conviction of the devil's involvement in human affairs stems from a confusion of Christian doctrine with local superstition: "...we seem carried back to an even more primitive stage in the development of religion with the ceaseless descriptions and stories of the devils themselves in sermon literature."<sup>146</sup> As Owst insists, preachers would condemn people who told stories of magic and demons, but they were forced at the same time to concede that such incidents could have been inspired by the devil. In a later age, as Trevor-Roper shows, it was almost impossible to fight the growing hysteria concerning the devil and witches because the orthodox but tolerant-minded had to concede that church doctrine, whether Catholic or Protestant, left ample room for the devil's intervention in human

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143) *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*. (Oxford, 1933. Second revised edition, 1961).

144) Owst, p. 512.

145) Owst, pp. 511-512.

146) Owst, pp. 111-112.

affairs<sup>147</sup>. In the fourteenth century, even if the church succeeded in making the Christian concept of God, creation, and salvation relevant for all lay groups in the miracle plays, it was still impossible to distinguish between Christian and pagan concepts of the devil. Demonology was a phenomenon with infinite growth potential. It merely needed the right combination of poverty, plague, and social discontent to bring it to the surface of society in the great witch scare that darkened the end of the Middle Ages and the Reformation. But long before that, belief in the devil reflected a strong sense of dualism in life and the helplessness of human beings in determining safe boundaries for their own lives.

*The Devil in Late Medieval History, Art and Drama: Doberan, Denmark and England*

We can find three significant witnesses to this feeling, one a historical source from a North German Cistercian monastery, Doberan, in the early fourteenth century, the second from the chalk murals found in many Danish parish churches painted in the fifteenth century, and the third from the English miracle plays of the same period. At Doberan the flight to the occult was touched off by rivalry between factions of Slavic and Saxon monks. Apparently the mother abbey of Amelungsborn in Saxony favoured its own monks and tried to guarantee them the ruling posts at Doberan, despite that fact that much of its recruitment came from its surrounding Baltic area, which was Slavic. When the Saxon brothers could not get their way by poisoning their rivals, they were accused of having used charms and incantations with the help of a certain woman. This woman, who came from a nearby village and was named Margareta, is supposed to have made a wax figure for the Saxon lay brothers. When seized by the Count of Mecklenburg, Albert, she confessed that she together with the lay brothers had baptized the wax image of a man in the name of the devil. The image could be burned down so that the person represented by it slowly grew weaker as the fire melted it, and the victim would die when the fire reached the heart. The Saxon brothers were out to kill the Slavic lay brothers at Doberan, as well as Count Albert. The image was displayed, and even though the woman had confessed her deed, she was burned alive.

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147) *The European Witch-Craze*, pp. 160-161.

All this happened in the 1330's, and the only record we have of it is a legal brief drawn up in about 1345 by the Slavic faction at Doberan containing their accusations against the Saxons<sup>148</sup>. We are without any other sources except some official documents by the abbot of Amelungsborn and other Saxon abbots from 1334 which refer to a great scandal and revolt in the abbey but do not give details<sup>149</sup>. Some of the names given in the legal brief, however, match those provided in the contemporary documents, and the silence of the Saxon abbots about what exactly had happened may indicate their desire not to contribute to future quarrels by drawing up a contentious document. Even with only one side of the story in the legal brief, whose later use is unknown to us<sup>150</sup>, it is clear that the Saxon monks appealed to the powers of darkness because they felt their position in the abbey endangered. The local population apparently had no great love for these Saxons or their abbot Conrad. When the abbot was celebrating mass at the neighbouring town of Rostock, a certain priest caused a tumult by presenting him with a wax candle in the image of a man in order to insult him<sup>151</sup>. This priest's brother had been a monk at Doberan, and our source asserts that this monk had been killed by black magic. The monks got such a bad reputation for their necromancy that, again according to our single source, whenever a monk appeared in public, lay people would taunt him by crying out, "Monk or lay brother, do you have a wax image under your habit?"<sup>152</sup>

The following stages of the quarrel, which is one of the most savage and detailed from a Cistercian monastery that I know of, brought more blood and violence, but apparently no more episodes of necromancy. In the sad story of the Slavic lay brother, Johannes Cruse, there appears in summary

148) *Meklenburgisches Urkundenbuch* IX (Schwerin, 1871), nr. 6596, pp. 715-735. I have yet to find a full treatment of this dispute. It deserves more attention, for Cistercian accounts of internal problems in monasteries and relations to other monasteries are extremely rare in the fourteenth century.

149) *Mekl. Ur.* IX, nr. 5768, 5769, 5770.

150) The editors of *Mekl. Ur.* assumed (IX, p. 735) that the document was a rough draft of a "Klageschrift" intended for the Cistercian General Chapter.

151) *Mekl. Ur.* IX, nr. 6596, p. 723.

152) *Ibid.*, pp. 722-723: ...populus et pueri clamabant et contra ipsos insultabant dicentes: Monache vel converse, numquid habetis vos sub vestra cappa vel cuculla manoleken? Quod in illo ydiomate interpretatur ymago cerea, facta ad sortilegium.

form the hatred that existed between the two factions<sup>153</sup>. He captured and imprisoned the abbot, because he had been treated so badly by him. The abbot managed to escape, and Johannes repented of his deed and gained absolution for it at the papal court. He returned to Doberan and sought reentry to the monastery, but Abbot Conrad secured, apparently from the Cistercian General Chapter at Citeaux, a decree barring not only him but also his offspring to the fourth generation from entering the monastery as lay brothers.

The composer of our source gives this background in order to explain Johannes's "apostasy", which put the Slavic faction in a bad light. The abbot and his monks threatened Johannes with punishment and prison unless he left them. He did so but returned shortly after with eighteen armed men, captured some monks, but failed to catch Conrad himself. Later he released the Saxon monks, but they lived afterwards in a state of terror and insisted on transferring all the monastery's valuables to Rostock. In March of 1337, Johannes and his companion Heinrich attacked the prior and "because he had inflicted on them many injuries and disturbances through imprisonments and other unowed punishments...they cruelly cut off his leg below the knee."<sup>154</sup>

The events at Doberan are symptomatic of the violence and confusion of the fourteenth century and of the impotence of both secular and ecclesiastical powers to provide fair and lasting solutions to a dispute. It is rare that we can look inside the structure of an abbey and see how racial considerations could play a primary role in the ordering of daily life. Langland had criticized the church and especially the monasteries for abandoning the original principles on which they were founded. Here at Doberan we can see one explanation for this failure to live up to the old

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153) *Ibid.*, pp. 724-725.

154) *Ibid.*, p. 727: ...quod plures iniurias et perturbaciones per incarcerationes et alias castigationes indebitas eisdem irrogasset... sibi crus sub genu atrociter amputarunt...

This event seems to have provoked the coming of the abbot of Amelungsborn in April (p. 727) and the attempt to reach a reconciliation as reflected in the documents drawn up in May of 1337 (nr. 5768-5770), especially nr. 5769, where Johannes Cruse and "his ally Heinrich" were excluded from the monastery. In general the information given about events by the polemic of the mid-1340's agrees with that provided in the documents of 1337.

idealism: a constant, exhausting tension between different factions of monks that sometimes led to spectacular explosion.

It would be glib to posit a direct connection between the disputes at Doberan and the monks' resort to diabolic power in order to resolve their problems and get rid of their enemies. But the two are found together in the same crisis, and one can at least assert that the monks' feeling of impotence and inability to reach fair solutions to their dilemmas provided a seedbed for extreme solutions. We can see the Doberan dispute and resort to witchcraft in a much larger context if we remember that Pope John XXII was a great believer in the power of black magic. He died in 1334, just two years before Margareta is supposed to have fabricated her waxen images for the Doberan monks. John's predecessor, Alexander IV (1254-61), had insisted that the papacy did not intend to use the Inquisition in order to fight magicians. But John did. He was so obsessed with his fears that they boomeranged on him in the popular myth that he was an alchemist, who manufactured gold for the papal treasury. In historical fact he burned at the stake one of his own bishops, Hugues Géraud, bishop of Cahors, whom he accused of bewitching his favourite nephew and causing his death. At Avignon, just as at Doberan, the accusations centre on the making of wax images of the victim<sup>155</sup>. Thus the view of the Danish legal historian, Ernst Andersen, that Pope John's campaign against sorcery was an isolated incident is undermined by the very similar events at Doberan<sup>156</sup>. Almost simultaneously with Dante's completion of the last cantos of *Paradiso* and his experience of "The love that moves the sun and the other stars", witches were appearing at opposite ends of Europe. And behind them was the devil.

In late medieval sources, just as in early medieval ones, the devil is very close to the surface of everyday life. Men resort to him when they feel they cannot cope with their own problems. In the chalk paintings of fifteenth century Danish village churches, especially on the island of Zealand, the devil maintains a flourishing existence. He is a necessary and central character when artists and the patrons behind them try to

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155) Ernst Andersen, *Traek af Juraens Udvikling I* (Copenhagen, 1970), pp. 272-284. G. Mollat, *The Popes at Avignon* (Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1965), pp. 12-13.

156) Andersen, pp. 277-278.

explain the mysteries of religion<sup>157</sup>. It is significant that so many scenes with devils give them an active role in pursuing the souls of the damned. At Mørkøv church in Northwest Zealand, whose chalk murals are in an exceptionally fine state of preservation, a devil whips a woman on whose back he rides towards the mouth of hell. Nearby a woman with prominent breasts is being transported in the same direction in a wheelbarrow pushed by a devil. In the same scene, a terrible devil with ears like bats, horns, and faces on his knees, has managed to tie up an assembly of notables, including a king and a bishop, and is dragging them into the fire<sup>158</sup>.

The sadistic traits in such popular art obviously respond to the conviction that such scenes will speak directly to the congregation which views them. In the same church is a representation of the harrowing of hell, in which the risen Christ is leading Adam and Eve out of the gates of hell. Here the Redemption is represented as a pure act of power: the devil has been conquered by Christ's overwhelming strength. Likewise at Undløse church, a few miles south of Mørkøv, Christ appears in the same scene. He bends down to pick up the dead while powerless devils, now chained forever, writhe in their fury. One of them is trying to catch a soul that is being released, but it is clear he has no hope at all<sup>159</sup>. The devils here are momentarily defeated, but we need merely remember the Last Judgment scene at Mørkøv and similar ones in other Danish churches in order to remind ourselves that the devil is still a threat to mankind.

In twelfth century scenes of Christ as judge in Danish churches, he was pictured as the calm, impassive judge sitting on the rainbow, with the symbols of the four evangelists around him<sup>160</sup>. This Byzantine concept, so well known to us from mosaics in Norman Sicilian churches, was imported to Denmark by an aristocratic culture that prided itself on being in

157) I would like to thank Søren Kaspersen at Kalkmaleriregistranten, Institut for kirkehistorie in Copenhagen, for his helpful suggestions on how to treat the chalk murals as indications of religious consciousness. According to Kaspersen, the latest research tends to look upon the murals as commissioned (even in the late Middle Ages) by wealthy churchmen and lay patrons. But it is still thought that the themes reflect the religious conceptions of average parishioners.

158) See the description in Niels M. Saxtorph's excellent *Jeg Ser på Kalkmalerier*, pp.138-139. Also Saxtorph's "Kalkmaleriernes Kildeværdi", *Fortid og Nutid* XXIV, Hefte 3 (Odense, 1970), pp. 211-229.

159) *Jeg Ser*, pp. 151-153.

160) As at Sæby church in West Zealand, the oldest murals on the island, from about 1150-1175; *Jeg Ser*, p. 144.



contact with international art styles. But in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Danish village churches' interiors were covered with chalk murals which herald the expression of popular culture in religious art. It is no accident that so many of these murals are concerned with showing the devil's intervention in human affairs. In one situation, the devil stands aside with pen and paper and records what gossiping women are saying<sup>161</sup>. He will present them with their slander on the Day of Judgment.

Another indication of the devil's power is evidenced in scenes showing the weighing of souls: in some churches' representation of this scene, the devil tries to tip the balance in his favour by putting a finger on the weight<sup>162</sup>. But almost always the outcome is favourable for the sinner, an optimism that could indicate a late medieval confidence in man's conquest of the devil and thus a change of attitude from the earlier period. Nevertheless the devil is still a central and essential figure in events involving decisive moments in salvation or damnation.

If we turn to the art within Cistercian churches themselves, we find that in Doberan at the end of the 1200's, just before the explosions of the next decades, choir stalls were being carved where the devil was shown tempting not a monk but a lay brother. The devil says to him, "What are you doing here, brother? Come with me." The brother answers, "You will find no evil in me, cruel beast!"<sup>163</sup> We have come right back to the demonology of Caesarius of Heisterbach; but at the same time we look forward to the conflicts of the 1330's, when lay brothers did hand themselves over to evil acts.

German Cistercian iconography thus reflects earlier literature and anticipates later uses of witchcraft. Similarly Anders Sunesen's theological poem in Denmark, meant for the denizens of high culture in the church, finds popular representation for its thought on the walls of many Danish parish churches. Finally, the confrontation between Christ and the devil that we find in simple form in the Middle English poem and then more subtly in *Piers Plowman* finds its way into the miracle play cycle's

161) As at Fanefjord church on Lolland - *Jeg Ser*, p. 217.

162) See Tom W.Petersen, "Budskabet til menigheden - om sjælevejningen i dansk Kalkmaleri", *Den iconografiske Post* (Copenhagen, 1975: I), pp. 16-23. Also Knud Banning, "Michael Sjølevejejer. Et bidrag til forståelsen af sjælevejnings sceneri på danske kalkmalerier fra middelalderen", *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger* (Copenhagen, 1971), pp.25-45.

163) Schneider, *Die Cistercienser*, p.543.

harrowing of hell plays at York and at Chester<sup>164</sup>. In the York play, Satan is deceived. He has failed to recognize Christ's true identity. The abuse of power is more implied than specified, but a new theme enters that is not present in Langland. Christ promises the devil that the latter will have some dominion. Only the souls of the just will be taken away to heaven, while the others will be left behind with Satan. Because of this, Satan can even express joy. He can look forward to ever-increasing numbers of the damned with him in hell:

Now here's my hand. I hold me glad  
 This plan will plain our profit save.  
 If this be sooth that thou hast said,  
 We shall have more than now we have.<sup>165</sup>

Satan has clearly misunderstood Christ's intention, for he thinks he will be able to wander the world in order to collect more souls. But in conformity with the original harrowing of hell in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Satan is at this point cast forever into hell. Nevertheless, the audience to the play has been warned. The Redemption does not automatically open heaven to us. Men are still giving themselves over to the devil's power all the time.

The devil is not as powerful in the York play as he can be in Caesarius of Heisterbach, but he is still essential to the story of the Redemption. He may be stupid or silly in his misjudgment of God's intentions and purposes. But in all his comic behaviour, he is still a threat to mankind. In the words of E. Martin Browne, who spent much of his life in reviving the miracle plays in England, "The devils have a comic aspect, but this is not as strong as has often been supposed and must never be allowed to obscure the terror of which they are also vehicles."<sup>166</sup>

*The Devil on the Offensive: The Reformation and Luther*

This sense of diabolic terror unleashes itself in the later Middle Ages in the first manifestations of the witchcraft hysteria. In the 1400's we find respected churchmen trying to fight the spread of belief in witches

164) For the defeat of the devil in the Chester plays, see the edition of Dimling in Early English Text Society, Extra Series (London, 1892), nr. 62, p. 154. Also the harrowing of hell sequence in the Towneley plays. Here Jesus alludes to his tricking of the devil: EETS, Extra Series, nr. 71, ed. A. W. Pollard (London, 1895), p. 310.

165) Modernized text contained in E. Martin Browne, ed. *Religious Drama 2, Mystery and Morality Plays* (Meridian Books: Cleveland and New York, 1966), p. 233.

166) *Ibid.*, p. 13.

and ending up themselves being branded as sorcerers<sup>167</sup>. This could not have happened in the thirteenth century, when even Aquinas expressed a certain skepticism as to the real powers of witches. The age of the devil is not the early Middle Ages but the Reformation itself. At the opening of the sixteenth century all the fear and superstition of a thousand years concentrated itself into an orgy of persecution. We have seen early manifestations of this fear at Doberan and Avignon. By the second half of the fifteenth century, helped by an infamous papal bull and the work of German Dominicans, the pursuit of witches accelerated. But as Trevor-Roper and others have shown, this was but a preview for the bloody and tragic "auto-da-fé" of the next two centuries.

Thus the great age of the Reformation emerges as more "medieval" than the Middle Ages themselves, if by this term we mean a period of darkness and superstition. No man better represents this surrender to superstition in mixing Christian theology with folk beliefs than Martin Luther himself. Luther's table talk is full of references to the devil. He grieved over the fact that we are not equal to the holy Fathers of the church in their ability to resist the devil. We lack the wisdom, power, and holiness they had. We must fight the devil all the harder because of our stupidity<sup>168</sup>.

Erik Erikson has dealt at length in psychoanalytic terms with the images of excrement and bodily functions that characterize Luther's thought about the devil<sup>169</sup>. Such sophisticated interpretations should not distract from the fact that Luther was a child of a long, rich tradition reaching back to the Fathers according to which men could blame their misfortunes on the activity of devils. As Luther told his disciples:

The devil often plagued me with these things crying out: Who ordered you to teach against the monasteries? And (he would say) "Before there was beautiful peace, but who told you to disturb this?"<sup>170</sup>

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167) Emile Brouette, "La Civilisation Chrétienne du XVI<sup>e</sup> Siècle devant le Problème Satanique", *Satan*, pp. 352-385, especially p. 357.

168) Otto Clemen, *Luthers Werke in Auswahl* 8: *Tischreden* (Berlin, 1930), nr. 522.

169) *Young Man Luther*, pp. 245-250, as p. 247: ...Luther's use of repudiative and anal patterns was an attempt to find a safety-valve when unrelenting inner pressure threatened to make devotion unbearable and sublimity hateful.

170) *Tischreden*, nr. 525: Diabolus me saepe vexavit haec voce: Quis iussit te docere contra monasteria? Item: Ante erat pulcherrima pax; hanc tu turbasti quo iubente?

It would be right to dismiss such a passage as figurative if it were not for the fact that the devil is such a tangible presence in so much of Luther's conversation. Beware of having the devil as guest, he says, "for he sees and hears everything" which we do<sup>171</sup>. Luther was obsessed by "Sathanae potentia" and warned that the church handed over the wicked and the impenitent to Satan "who killed them with God's permission or afflicted them with other lesser calamities." So far we have good Christian doctrine of which Augustine would have approved. But in the next sentence, Luther claims that demons still dwell "in many regions." "Prussia is full of devils," he insists. Also Switzerland, and Luther names a certain mountain with a lake located in the area where he grew up. "if a rock is thrown into it so that it is disturbed, a great storm rises up through the whole region."<sup>172</sup> It is obviously the devil at work. In a moment of relaxation, Luther confuses his childhood folklore with church doctrine.

At such a moment we penetrate to the very heart of the problem. Even in its greatest reformers, the Christian church had such a strong belief in the devil and his devices that it was impossible to distinguish between superstition and religious truths. Yet this confusion would not have existed if the experiences of childhood and adult life had not confirmed the feeling that men's individual choices do not necessarily determine their happiness. In the manifestations of the devil is reflected the feeling of medieval people that they could not decide for themselves. It is no accident that the early and the late Middle Ages managed to portray the devil's work in the most tangible ways, while the High Middle Ages, from about 1100-1300 produced a theology and a literature in which the devil's role was limited and defined.

We can end our long voyage through medieval culture with Luther's sermons on the Catechism from 1539, when he is explaining the mystery of

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171) *Tischreden*, nr. 3840: Man sol in gleich wol nicht zu gast laden, den er ist ein starcker feindt, den es sicht und horet alles, was fur uns ist...

172) *Tischreden*, nr. 3841: Deinde iterum fiebat mentio Sathanae et illius potentiae, qui sua superbia sese Deo et omnibus creaturis opponeret: Ideo ecclesia impios et impenitentes nemini quam Sathanae affligendos tradidit, qui eos permissione Dei occidit aut ad minus variis calamitatibus afflixit. Ideo adhuc sunt, in multis regionibus habitationes Daemonum. Prussia est plena Daemonibus. Ita in Helvetia. Et dixit Lutherus in sua patria in altissimo monte Pubelsberg esse lacum; si moveretur lapide iniecto, magna oriretur tempestas per totam regionem.

the Redemption. Here we have the traditional Augustinian doctrine of our liberation from the devil:

This is what happened: He was conceived by the Holy Spirit without any sin whatsoever in order that he might become my Lord and redeem me. He did it all in order to become my Lord, for he must be so holy that the devil could have no claim on him.<sup>173</sup>

Luther does not continue from here and formulate the abuse of power idea, but it is clearly essential to his concept of the Redemption that a sinless Christ be outside the devil's domain. Freedom for mankind is thus synonymous with deliverance from the devil: "now Christ frees us from death, the devil, and sin and gives us righteousness, life, faith, power, salvation, and wisdom."

Luther is here merely rephrasing Paul, but his table talk reveals how little of Christ's redemptive power he at times felt and how exposed he saw his life to the devil's doings. Today we have other explanations to provide for our sense of impotence and inability to realize the lives we want. In the 1960's in the United States it was "the system" in a vague sense that was at fault. In the 1970's in Europe the devils are "society", "environment", or "class". Each age fabricates its apparatus of explanation in order to compensate for the incompleteness that men feel. In the European Middle Ages, I have been unable to relate extreme versions of expressions of human limitations solely to members of the lower classes. Nevertheless, it is probably symptomatic that the highest expression of individual choice comes from a man who lived in contact with Italy's upper class culture and shared in the first manifestations of Christian humanism. Similarly, the onslaughts of the devil's power can be found in the writings of people like Martin Luther, who rejected the elite culture and educational system of their time. At least to a certain extent and for a limited period, they chose to embrace movements of popular culture. In Langland we find an attempt to reconcile all these various elements, the worlds of the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant, the saved and the damned, in an optimistic Christian vision. Langland gave the devil his due, but he insisted that men could make themselves better. In his combination of idealism and what we today call realism, we find the most balanced medieval expression of the belief that through Christ's activity in us, we are more than helpless victims of the devil.

173) Contained in John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings* (Anchor Books: Garden City, New York, 1961), p. 210. Original text in *Luthers Werke in Auswahl* 4 (Berlin, 1935), p. 55.

## LEGENDS TO THE ILLUSTRATIONS

1. One devil, above Leviathan, summons the damned with his trumpet. He sits on the parapet of hell, which contrasts as a building to the dwellings in the heavenly city of Jerusalem, shown on the other side of the church's vault. The damned include two bishops, two kings (one already inside the hell fire), and a queen. Notice the bishop being whipped, and in the lower left hand corner, the long-haired women being pushed towards hell's mouth in a wheelbarrow. The devils have faces on their knees and stomachs, probably in order to emphasize their closeness to the sins of the lower regions of the body.
2. The "social realism" of Mørkøv is replaced here by a nightmarish trance in which the damned are absorbed. The image of the city of hell is missing. Basically there is the same intense mixture of sadism and eroticism: one devil whips, while another blows his trumpet with one hand and prongs the damned like cattle into hell with the other hand. A man is mounted and ridden by the devil, while a woman is carried in her unconscious-dreamlike state towards hell. Her body is contorted so that we can see both her breasts.
3. Saint Lawrence identifies himself through his grate in his right hand (on which he was roasted). In his left hand he holds down the weight with a chalice, probably an allusion to the story (contained in Jacob de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*) that the German emperor Henry II was saved "in articulo mortis" because he offered a "very heavy chalice" and a church to Saint Lawrence, who therefore intervened in his favour. Thus this time the devils are in pain, not the people involved. On the right we are probably being shown the outcome: the angel with its sword wards off the angry devil, who is making a last-ditch effort to keep Henry out of Heaven.



1. THE DAMNED ENTER THE MOUTH OF HELL (c.1450-1475); Mørkøv church, Tudse herred, Holbæk amt, Denmark (Photo: Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen).



2. THE DAMNED ENTER THE MOUTH OF HELL (c.1425-50); Tybjerg church, Tybjerg herred, Præstø amt, Denmark (Photo: Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen).





3. THE WEIGHING OF A SOUL; Tybjerg church (Photo: Nationalmuseet).