

Depending on Evil

An Analysis of Late Antique Christian
Demonologies

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Preface

This thesis provides an analysis of the demonologies included in the writings of some of the early Church Fathers. They include: Justin Martyr's *Apology* (150 CE),¹ Athenagoras' *Legatio* (177 CE),² Tertullian's *Apology* (197 CE),³ Origen's *On First Principles* (218 CE)⁴ and *Against Celsus* (248 CE),⁵ and finally Augustine's *Concerning the City of God, Against the Pagans* (412) CE.⁶ Justin Martyr, Athenagoras and Tertullian were first pagans who converted to Christianity. Augustine was a Manichean but subsequently became that faith's fervent opponent after his conversion to Christianity. All of the Fathers aspired to orthodoxy, with the exception of Tertullian in his later life, when he became a Montanist. Justin Martyr of Samaritan Palestine moved to Rome, while Athenagoras from Athens relocated to Alexandria, and Tertullian resided in Roman Carthage. Chapter I will demonstrate that similarities within their demonologies, together with their geographic spread during the half-century period in which they wrote, suggest the ideas they expressed were commonly held views throughout the Roman Empire. Additionally, the writings of Origen of Alexandria and Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, were widely circulated in both the East and Latin West. As a group, the Church Fathers' influence over a period of nearly three centuries provides an opportunity to evaluate common themes and variations of orthodox Christian demonologies in late antiquity.

A Few Words Regarding Nomenclature

Diversity versus uniformity characterized the followers of Christ in the first centuries after his crucifixion. A fourth century report listed eighty heresies.⁷ While the term "heresy" had different connotations in late antiquity, for purposes of this thesis, I will use it to designate those followers of Christ whom orthodox Christians opposed. A few that are mentioned are

listed below. Gnostic Christians emphasized subjective knowledge of divinity versus adherence to doctrine and so were a threat to nascent Christian orthodoxy. Marcionites were dualists and named after their second century CE leader, Marcion, who believed the God of the Hebrew Bible was divine but evil, and that Christ was the good God.⁸ Late second century CE Montanists formed their own sect and voraciously asserted apostates, who had renounced their faith and agreed to participate in sacrifice to state-sponsored deities under threat of persecution, should not be re-baptized or allowed back into the Christian fold. Their leader, Montanus, together with his partners, Priscilla and Maximilla, declared a new prophesy inspired by the Holy Spirit. They anticipated Christ's imminent return, spoke in tongues, and stressed the importance of keeping one's virginity.⁹ These were just a few of the groups Christ inspired but there were many others which orthodoxy ultimately gained hegemony over.

Additionally, Manicheanism was a third century CE dualist philosophy founded by an Iranian prophet, Mani, and combined elements of Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism.¹⁰ Mani embraced an apocalyptic world view that regarded the world and the human body as primarily evil. That evil existed separate from God and was independent of him. Nonetheless, mortals, with assistance of a redeemer, could subjugate the body to the authority of the soul. Consequently, he advocated ascetism as the most efficient means of salvation.

For purposes of this thesis and unless otherwise noted, I will employ the term "Christians" to connote those followers of Christ who aspired to orthodoxy and "Christianity," that theology that was being shaped into orthodoxy. I will often use past tense to speak of what Christians believed in late antiquity. Although some present-day Christians continue to adhere to those beliefs, this thesis addresses the past, not the present.

¹ Miroslav Marcovich, ed., *Justini Martyris, Apologiae Pro Christianis* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1994), 11.

² Philip F. Esler, ed., *The Early Christian World*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 539.

³ Robert D. Sider, *Christian and pagan in the Roman Empire: The witness of Tertullian* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), xvii.

⁴ G.W. Butterworth, ed., *Origen, On First Principles* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1966), xxx.

⁵ Jeffrey W. Hargis, *Against the Christians, the Rise of Early Anti-Christian Polemic* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1999) 20.

⁶ Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God, a Readers' Guide* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 1.

⁷ Esler (2000), 154.

⁸ Esler (2000), 237.

⁹ Esler (2000), 933.

¹⁰ Mary Boyd, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 111.

Introduction

In the process of researching another project on late antiquity, the prevalence of texts addressing Satan and demons struck me as a subject worthy of further investigation. The apologies of the early Church Fathers proved to be fertile ground upon which to base my research. I estimate these pillars of the Church were attempting to accomplish two primary goals via their demonologies. The first is related to Christianity's apocalyptic foundation. Early Christians interpreted the world through an apocalyptic lens that adjusted or transformed pagan, Jewish and other resources and phenomenon to accommodate apocalyptic expectations. Satan and demons performed many functions mandated by those expectations. Hence, the Fathers formulated Satanic and demonic etiologies to reinforce and complete Christianity's apocalyptic narrative. Because Satan's creation was a mystery, their demonologies reflected the struggle to resolve it and changed dramatically.

Chapter I expounds upon Justin Martyr, Athenagoras and Tertullian's reliance on 1 Enoch the *Book of the Watchers*, a Jewish pseudepigraphical text, and pagan myth to solidify and advance their apocalyptic goals. Chapter II addresses the writings of Origen who was both an authority and an anomaly. As the *Book of the Watchers* became suspect, he looked to Scripture for passages that seemed to imply a creation narrative of fallen angels. One of these was Isa. 14. Origen designated the King of Babylon was *Lucifer*, a translation of the Hebrew word for light-bearer.¹ He also formulated his own demonology. His radical eschatology includes destruction of evil but in the form of God's forgiveness and reunification with demons versus their destruction. Chapter III illustrates how Augustine of Hippo, in an effort to avoid the perceived errors of the previous Church Fathers, deduced a demonology that relied exclusively

on Scripture. In the process, he explicitly rejected many of the conclusions of his predecessors. The *Book of the Watchers* is the primary source from which the premise that demons were the result of fallen angels was derived. Part I demonstrates that, even after its rejection, this assumption persisted.

Part II, Chapter IV focuses on the Church Fathers' goal of displacing pagan authority. In contrast to the patricians' demonic etiologies, their tactics in attacking pagan religion based on its association with demons remained primarily static over the almost three centuries in which they wrote. Demons served as the bedrock upon which the Fathers based their polemical strategy. This remained so throughout antiquity and beyond. Though the success of this strategy was limited at first, it was ultimately effective.

Additionally, the doctrine of free will animated the Fathers' efforts in achieving both goals and its prominence increased in the writings of Origen and Augustine as, I believe, a result of the rejection of the *Book of the Watchers'* demonic etiology. Free will may be a bit of a misnomer since Christianity offered only two choices, salvation through Christ, or damnation. However, the option of escaping one's fate must have appealed to a late antique world animated by a strong desire to avert evil. Free will, then, was both an olive branch offering the promise of salvation and a threat. Before moving on to Chapter I, some background information that lead up to the efforts of the first three Church Fathers will be illuminating.

In the process of defending their faith, early Christians were compelled to explain the components of it, one of which was their belief in Satan and demons. Pagans also believed in demons, and they agreed with Christians on many of their physical attributes and characteristics. For example, demons were believed to occupy the air, and depended on the smoke and blood of

animal sacrifice for nourishment.² Because gods did not interact directly with mortals, pagans looked to demons to act as intermediaries. Consequently, the air between the gods and earth was their natural abode.

Although pagans and Christians agreed on the physical elevation of demons, they differed in their views of how to interact with them. Whereas pagans regarded demons as ambiguous metaphysical beings who could be helpful or troublesome, protective or punishing, Christians classified demons as exclusively evil. They were preceded in this designation by Jews and Zoroastrians who incorporated demons or demon-like beings into their religions and categorized them as immoral. No longer ambiguous, demons were cast as seductive, chaotic and opposed to a deity who was all good and all knowing.

Christ in his role as Savior and Satan and demons were central figures in early Christianity's apocalyptic belief system. Other components included heaven and hell, and a judgment of individuals after death. Additionally, the present age would pass and a final judgment would occur at which time God would raise the dead, redeem the virtuous, and finally and completely vanquish all evil. Until then, Satan and demons would do their utmost to draw mortals away from God. Thus, Satan and demons were as indispensable to Christianity's apocalyptic eschatology as was God.

In the first millennium's first decades, followers of Christ believed that his second coming was imminent. Jesus himself had announced his immediate return.³ This occurrence was supposed to have catapulted the subsequent events of Christianity's apocalyptic vision in rapid succession as well as bring about its conclusion. Consequently, there was no incentive to formulate beliefs into doctrine. Early Christianity, then, in absence of a canon or orthodoxy, was

similar in some respects to other contemporary mystery cults. Mithraism, the Eleusinian mysteries and the cult of Isis were all popular and, indeed, may have competed with Christianity. The attributes mystery cults had in common were the formation of community, an indoctrination period and, after indoctrination, the promise of salvation.

Initiates in the earliest Christian communities were called *catechumens*. Rites during the period of their initiation included communion, the driving out of demons and baptism. In the final stages, daily ritual conjuration exorcisms were performed in the form of laying on of hands, breathing on the *catechumens* and making the sign of the cross.⁴ A bishop performed the final exorcisms just prior to baptism. Baptism was considered the final transformative exorcism, after which a Christian was free from fate and demons. Thus, Christianity's proponents asserted the advantages of its apotropaic powers.

The first followers of Christ were not identified as distinct from Jews. Rather, they were considered a Jewish sect that followed Christ. Small in numbers and spread throughout the Roman Empire in mostly urban settings of Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt and Rome, it's likely that they went largely unnoticed as there is little evidence that suggests otherwise. Aside from the New Testament *Acts of the Apostles*' documentation of Paul's mission in the 40s and 50s CE,⁵ one of the earliest accounts comes from the reign of the Emperor Claudius (41-54 CE). It mentioned an expulsion in Rome "because the Jews were constantly causing disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus."⁶ Shortly thereafter, in 64 CE, the Emperor Nero blamed the Christians for the Great fire of Rome.⁷

In time, Christian communities developed which were distinct from their Jewish predecessors. By the second century CE, the deviance of their practices became suspect to the authorities and their pagan neighbors. Their *love feasts*, the term they named their gatherings,

were convened at night, the time they anticipated Christ's second coming would occur.

However, Roman law forbade nocturnal gatherings due to their subversive potential. Rumors spread that participants engaged in Oedipian rites and Thyestean feasts,⁸ considered two of the most heinous offenses of antiquity, and alleged when shattering an opponent's reputation was the desired result. Charges of atheism were added to the list of purported crimes due to their refusal to sacrifice to the state-sponsored deities. Since the well-being of the state was thought to depend on the favor of the gods resulting from properly performed ritual sacrifice, refusal to participate and a propensity for recruiting others to do the same was a grave threat. As such, Christians became the targets of popular hatred in some locations. Mobs demanded retribution and the authorities gave it to them. Christians were martyred, sometimes spectacularly and gruesomely, to placate the public.

Christians interpreted these traumatic events as fulfillment of the apocalyptic prophecies they embraced. It was widely acknowledged that sacrifice, the central act of pagan state-sponsored worship, attracted demons.⁹ They depended on the smoke, blood and libations from sacrifice for nourishment. Christ's incarnation incensed the demons because the number of sacrifices would diminish as more adherents adopted Christian beliefs. Further, Christ's incarnation signaled the time of the final judgment was near, at which time demons would be finally and completely vanquished. Demons, in self defense and fulfillment of their apocalyptic function, inspired the crowds and authorities to persecute Christians. Thus, sacrifice, the perceived immorality of pagans, and their own persecution reinforced Christian belief in the devil's presence and the validity of their apocalyptic assumptions.

¹ Butterworth (1966), 50.

² See Chapter IV, 41-45, 48-49.

³ Mark 9.1.

⁴ Norbert Brox, *A Concise History of the Early Church* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 95-9.

⁵ Esler (2000), 139.

⁶ Valerie Warrior, *Roman Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 123.

⁷ Esler (2000), 874.

⁸ Oedipian rites connotes incest and Thyestean feasts, cannibalism.

⁹ See Chapter IV, 41-45, 48-49.

Chapter I - Justin Martyr, Athenagoras and Tertullian

While the Book of Revelations and other New Testament texts provided an explicit account of what could be expected of Satan during and leading up to the end times, they left Satanic and demonic etiology a mystery. The Hebrew Bible did as well. This Scriptural void created a quandary for the Church Fathers. As this thesis will demonstrate, the Church Fathers referenced every plausible Scriptural passage that appeared to substantiate the existence of Satan and demons. The lack of an explicit Scriptural account of Satan's creation, who was such an essential actor within Christianity's apocalyptic apparatus, suggests that the specific apocalyptic ideology that incorporated him was a relatively recent development to the earliest communities who followed Jesus of Nazareth. Due to the lack of an explicit Scriptural demonic etiology, early Christian apocalyptic beliefs changed and developed in the first centuries of the Common Era, and were likely informed by a cultural exchange of ideas.

Mary Boyd, in her book, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, states that Zoroastrianism "has probably had more influence on mankind, directly and indirectly, than any other single faith."¹ Zoroaster, an Iranian prophet, lived sometime around 1500 BC. Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the world's revealed religions and its sacred text, the Avesta, includes an apocalypse which explicitly prophesies a good god, Ahura Mazda, would vanquish his divine but evil twin, Angra Mainyu, at the end of time. Germane to this thesis, Boyd states that, particularly during the Parthian period (141 BCE – 224 CE), Zoroastrian apocalyptic ideology spread throughout the region from Egypt to the Black Sea. Those ideas included:

A supreme God who is the Creator; that an evil power exists which is opposed to him, and not under his control; that he has emanated many lesser divinities to help combat this power; that he has created this world for a purpose, heralded by the coming of a cosmic Saviour, who will help to bring it about; that meantime heaven and hell exist, with an individual judgement to decide the fate of each soul at death; that at the end of time there will be a resurrection of the dead and a Last Judgement, with the annihilation of the wicked; and the righteous will enter into it as into a garden (a Persian word for which is 'paradise'), and be happy there in the presence of God for ever, immortal themselves in body as well as soul.²

Jewish pseudepigraphical texts, that espoused a full range of apocalyptic beliefs not identical but with a full complement of components similar to those of Zoroastrianism, appeared in the centuries leading up to the birth of Christ. Further, distinct traces of Zoroastrianism have been found in 1 Enoch.³ Thus, Christianity's genesis fomented within a Jewish population whom embraced an apocalyptic world view which anticipated the messianic age.

Because the Hebrew Bible was older than these texts and the specific apocalyptic concepts they espoused, it's no surprise that no Satanic or demonic etiologies are to be found in it. Since Scripture couldn't provide them, the Justin Martyr, Athenagoras and Tertullian proffered various Satanic and demonic etiologies based on different sources of authority that changed dramatically over time. Despite their differences, the apologists remained steadfast in employing their demonologies to support Christianity's apocalyptic premise.

Jewish pseudepigraphical texts provided the touchstone for early Christian demonic etiologies through the mid-third century CE and informed Christianity's apocalyptic narrative as well. Christian reliance on these texts was based on the authority acquired from their divinely inspired status, but this did not stop the Church Fathers from significantly altering and expanding their premise. Coupled with Scripture, they formed the bedrock upon which the patricians, aided by their own speculations, projected their beliefs onto Jewish, pagan and other resources and phenomenon and transvalued those for their apocalyptic value.

The primary source referenced by Justin Martyr, Athenagoras and Tertullian was the *Book of the Watchers*, which consisted of Chapters 1 – 36 from 1 Enoch, and dates from the third century BCE. A significant corpus of Enochic literature, and parts of the *Book of the Watchers*, was recovered from among the Dead Sea Scrolls from cave 4 at Qumran near Jerusalem, attesting to its importance to the Qumran community who saw to its preservation.⁴ Later versions were redactions by both Jews and Christians.

Enoch, the son of Cain, as recorded in Gen. 4:17⁵, who “walked with God,” was the “scribe of righteousness,” and the “wisest of men,” received apocalyptic visions directly from the angels who compelled him to write as recorded in 1 Enoch 1-5. He entrusted his book to his son, Methuselah who, in turn, saved 1 Enoch from the flood via his passage on Noah’s ark and thereby preserved it for posterity. 1 Enoch was understood as an esoteric work whose account of the antediluvian descent of angels and apocalyptic secrets was only meant to be divulged to a select few. This designation, however, did not stop its wide circulation among Jewish, Christian and other communities of late antiquity. Despite its popularity, deference to its authority was based on the premise of its arcane knowledge.

The *Book of the Watchers* interprets Gen. 6:1-4’s “sons of God” as disobedient male angels who are identified as the Watchers. Finding mortal women, “the daughters of men,” attractive, the Watchers took them as wives then procreated with them.

And all the others together with them took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them, and they taught them charms and enchantments, and the cutting of roots, and made them acquainted with plants. And they became pregnant, and they bare great giants, whose height was three thousand ells: who consumed all the acquisitions of men. And when men could no longer sustain them, the giants turned against them and devoured mankind. And they began to sin against birds,

and beasts, and reptiles, and fish, and to devour one another's flesh, and drink the blood. Then the earth laid accusation against the lawless ones.⁶

The Watchers, in addition to charms and enchantments, instructed humans in all manner of wickedness through divine knowledge not intended for mortal consumption. They taught astronomy, astrology, and to women, the art of painting their eyelids, and to men, metalworking and the art of weaponry. The children born to their human wives were giants and their souls became demons.

And now, the giants, who are produced from the spirits and flesh, shall be called evil spirits upon the earth, and on the earth shall be their dwelling. Evil spirits have proceeded from their bodies; because they are born from men and from the holy Watchers is their beginning and primal origin; they shall be evil spirits on earth, and evil spirits shall they be called. As for the spirits of heaven, in heaven shall be their dwelling, but as for the spirits of the earth which were born upon the earth, on the earth shall be their dwelling. And the spirits of the giants afflict, oppress, destroy, attack, do battle, and work destruction on the earth, and cause trouble: they take no food, but nevertheless hunger and thirst, and cause offences. And these spirits shall rise up against the children of men and against the women, because they have proceeded from them.⁷

In the *Book of the Watchers*, due to the wickedness which disobedient angels, humans and their demonic offspring had descended into, God instructed Noah to build the ark in preparation for the retribution he would deliver. The flood destroyed sinful humans, and blinded and bound the Watchers but the souls of the giants, the demons, were left to wreak havoc against humanity until the final judgment. Until then, they sought nourishment from the smoke and blood of sacrificial offerings.

The *Book of the Watchers'* authoritative reputation was well established by the time of Christ⁸ and continued through the early third century. Afterwards, it circulated in some regions but was rejected by the orthodox Church. Prior to its rejection, it offered a comprehensive apocalyptic narrative that complimented other Scriptural apocalyptically incomplete sources,

such as the Book of Revelations, which contained no demonic etiology. Even after it became suspect and abandoned by orthodox Christians, the *Book of the Watchers'* narrative of fallen angels remained the accepted premise as the cause of demons.

Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, and Tertullian, wrote from the mid-second through the early third centuries. The horrific events that compelled them to speak out were the martyrdoms of their fellow Christians. Thus, their works are fervent pleas for justice while simultaneously asserting the superiority of Christianity and inferiority of pagan and other religions. In their apologies, many of the apocalyptic beliefs of contemporary Christians, including those regarding the origin of demons, are revealed.

Justin Martyr, originally from Samaritan Palestine, lived and taught in Rome until he was martyred sometime between 162 CE – 168 CE.⁹ He studied under different schools of philosophy prior to his conversion to Christianity. His *Apology*, written shortly after 150 CE,¹⁰ was a protest of Roman prosecution after the martyrdom of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna.¹¹ Justin addressed his apology to the Emperor Antonius Pius, the Caesar Marcus Aurelius and the Roman senate. He pleaded that Christians deserved a fair trial for the crimes of which they were accused, and elaborated on many other issues of early Christian faith as well. Regarding demons, he writes:

God, after creating the universe, entrusted its governance to angels. But they disobeyed God, fell into sin with women, and begot children who are called demons. Subsequently, these demons enslaved the human race, created the pagan religion and cults, and introduced murders, war, adulteries and every possible sin to mankind. Greek poets and mythologists, however, ascribed all this to Zeus, Poseidon, Pluto, and their children.¹²

It is apparent that Justin Martyr assumed the *Book of the Watchers'* demonic etiology; i.e., demons were the children of disobedient angelic males who had taken

mortal women as wives. However, Justin attributes the genesis of human sinfulness to the disobedient angels' demonic children whereas the *Book of the Watchers* blames the angels themselves. The increase in human sinfulness was a prerequisite of Christ's incarnation and would be to his second coming as well. Justin's free hand in editing the apocalyptic narrative typified the Church Fathers' efforts.

Justin also expands on the *Book of the Watchers*' claims by crediting the creation of pagan religions to demons, which at once discredits their validity but elevates their importance to Christianity's apocalyptic vision. As such, pagan religions are transformed into apocalyptic apparatus used by demons to draw mortals away from God. Marcion, who Justin deemed was produced by demons, also sought to deceive those who sought true salvation. Thus, Justin, aided by the *Book of the Watchers* but embellishing freely, appropriated pagan and heretical phenomenon to fulfill Christian apocalyptic expectations.

In another of Justin's work, *Dialogue with Trypho*, he attributes the fall of Satan, and therefore his creation, to the devil's deception of Eve.¹³ This would concur with his statement in *Apology* that the serpent is the "chieftain of the evil demons,"¹⁴ and indicates Justin identified the serpent in Gen. 1-3 as Satan. In still another work, Justin agrees with a widely held pagan belief that demons were the souls of the deceased.¹⁵ It seems that his orchestration of the *Book of the Watchers* and other sources of information regarding Satan and demons was expansive and innovative indeed.

Annette Yoshiko Reed posits that Justin changed his demonic etiologies to suit his audience.¹⁶ His *Apology*, addressed to pagans, emphasizes the inherently demonic and

sinful nature of paganism when relying on the *Book of the Watchers*, while *Dialogue with Trypho*, addressed to Trypho, a Jew, likens perceived Jewish willful disobedience with that of Satan's. However, Justin could have used the same etiology for both audiences and still drawn parallels to paganism or Judaism.

Moreover, Justin's various demonic etiologies do not conflict. Rather, it appears that he envisions that Satan fell separately from the other angels when he tempted Eve in Gen. 2-3. This event preceded the *Book of the Watchers*' interpretation of Gen. 6:1-4, of which Justin relied on to account for the creation of demons but, it seems, not Satan. Additionally, separate creations for Satan and demons would not have precluded more demons resulting from the souls of the deceased. Athenagoras and Tertullian continued with the premise that Satan and demons had separate creations. As one of the first apologists compelled to clarify Christian views of the demonic, Justin's fluid reliance on Jewish, pagan, and Christian sources of demonic information provides evidence that Christians were attempting to assemble various established beliefs into a coherent system that supported Christianity's apocalyptic foundation.

Indeed, although the demonologies of Justin and his successors varied dramatically, their determination to conform available sources of information to their apocalyptic expectations remained consistent. The Christian apocalyptic narrative required both Satan and demons. The *Book of the Watchers* provided the cause of fallen angels and demons but not that of Satan. Neither did Scripture. Justin, presumably relying on precedent, assigned the serpent who tempted Eve in Gen. 2-3 as leader of the demons, Satan, and, in doing so, provided the actors required of Christian apocalypse. He concludes his apology by confirming that despite and because of their trickery,

demons and their followers would ultimately fulfill their eschatological function through God's punishment of eternal fire at the final judgment.¹⁷

Justin's reliance on the *Book of the Watchers* was adopted and repeated by other apologists until the early third century CE. Athenagoras, head of the Academy of Alexandria in the early second century, was a pagan philosopher adamant on disproving Christianity. However, in the process of studying Scripture, he became a convert and defender of the faith instead. His *Legatio*, written in 177 CE, was addressed to the co-rulers Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and Lucius Aurelius Commodus who he deems are "above all, philosophers."¹⁸ It was Athenagoras's attempts to exonerate Christians on the basis of a justice higher than the law. While addressed to Roman authorities, Athenagoras hoped that it would persuade the general public as well.

In speaking of angels, he states that God created angels as his deputies over certain matters to increase his own universal providence over all things. Some angels remained true to their assignment while others were untrustworthy.

These included the prince over matter and material things and others who are those stationed at the first firmament (do realize that we say nothing unsupported by evidence but that we are exponents of what the prophets uttered); the latter are the angels who fell to lusting after maidens and let themselves be conquered by the flesh, the former failed his responsibility and operated wickedly in the administration of what had been entrusted to him.¹⁹

Like Justin Martyr, it is clear that Athenagoras conceives of the disobedient angels who lusted after mortal women as separate from their wicked prince, Satan. Additionally, by establishing that the angels were present when God created the firmament in Gen. 1:6-8, Athenagoras also enables the validity of the *Book of the Watchers*' designation that the angels fell in Gen. 6:1-4. He defers to the authority of the prophets for this assertion so presumably it was a belief with

some currency though it would later be strategically rejected by Augustine. Unlike Justin, he is explicit that Satan, “the prince over matter,” was an angel himself together with the other angels who “violated both their own nature and their office.”²⁰ While Athenagoras does not provide his opinion regarding the specifics of when or how Satan fell, his designation of Satan as a disobedient angel set a precedent and anticipated the theories of his successors, Origen and Augustine.

Athenagoras, unmistakably relying on the *Book of the Watchers*, asserts the origin of demons, “Now from those who went after maidens were born the so-called giants,”²¹ and, “the souls of the giants are demons.”²² He continues, “the gods that satisfy the crowd and give their name to the images, as you can learn from their history, were once men. The activity associated with each of them is your assurance that it is the demons who usurp their names.”²³ The *Book of the Watchers* held that the spirits of the bound angels would take many forms and lead men astray to sacrifice to demons as gods. Athenagoras goes further. Not only did demons create pagan religions, but also stole the identities of the gods. Moreover, the gods were never divine to begin with but merely demons impersonating deities to deceive mortals into believing in their venerable status. Hence, Athenagoras both agreed with and expanded on Justin Martyr’s inversion of pagan religious resources to serve as apocalyptic resources for Christianity.

Tertullian followed Justin Martyr and Athenagoras by also relying on the *Book of the Watchers* for his demonic etiology. He wrote in the late second and early third centuries, and was the first Christian from whom we have a major literary corpus in Latin.²⁴ A former pagan, he converted to Christianity and wrote prolifically in its defense. Later in his life, he became a Montanist. Born in African Carthage, Tertullian was fluent in Latin and Greek, and educated in

literature, philosophy, rhetoric and medicine. His *Apology*, written at the close of the second century at a time when Roman imperial power was at its height, was a defense of Christians for a court of law. In it, his explanation for the origin of demons states:

As for the details of how some of the angels were corrupted of their own accord and then constituted the source of the even more corrupt race of demons, a race condemned by God together with the originators of the race and their leader Satan, the account is found in the Sacred Scripture.²⁵

Scripture here is to be understood as *literature*. Tertullian was aware that the *Book of the Watchers* was distinct from Scripture, but he unmistakably relies on it. Further, as already demonstrated, there is no scriptural passage that supports his expansive claims. Like his predecessors and in keeping with the *Book of the Watchers*, Tertullian designates the corrupt angels as, “the originators of the race,” and distinguishes them from the race of demons they spawned.

Further, he concurs that Satan is the leader of the disobedient angels but separate from them. While an angel in the *Book of the Watchers*, Semjaza, is portrayed as the leader of angels in their quest for mortal wives, his fate was different than that of the angels’ demonic progeny. He, like the other disobedient angels, was bound until the final judgment but the *Book of the Watchers* did not designate that *Semjaza* was demonic so presumably Tertullian did not identify him as Satan. Perhaps Tertullian, like Justin Martyr, believed the serpent in Gen. 2-3, was Satan. In another work, *Spectacles*, Tertullian states “Erichthonius is a demon monster, or, rather, the Devil himself, not a mere snake.”²⁶

Erichthonius was the semi-serpentine legendary king of Athens born from the semen of the god, Hephaestus, which the goddess, Athena, wiped from her thigh to the earth after he failed to seduce her.²⁷ It’s not likely that Tertullian’s reference to this myth indicates that he actually

believed that Hephaestus's semen resulted in the creation of Satan. Rather, he, like his fellow Christian apologists, probably perceived the myth of Erichthonius as just another ploy on the part of Satan to trick mortals into believing in his divine status. By identifying Erichthonius as Satan, Tertullian, like his predecessors, appropriated pagan myth for Christian apocalyptic ends. Additionally, Tertullian's identification of Satan as a serpent-like being, suggests he agreed with Justin Martyr that the serpent in Gen. 2-3 was Satan. If this is true, it provides further evidence that Tertullian believed Satan fell prior to the other fallen angels in *Book of the Watchers*.

Despite their idiosyncrasies, a consensus emerges from the demonologies of Justin Martyr, Athenagoras and Tertullian. First, all three primarily relied on the *Book of the Watchers* for their demonic etiologies so agreed that demons were the souls of the giants born to the mortal wives of the Watchers. Second, they categorized Satan as leader of the demons but conceived that his creation was separate from that of the other demons. They may have even agreed on the specifics of Satan's fall. If Satan was, as Athenagoras asserts, present, albeit in angelic form, when God created the firmament in Gen. 1:6-8, he could have fallen when he tempted Eve in Gen. 2-3 in agreement with Justin Martyr and presumably Tertullian. Third, the disobedient angels who took mortal women as wives were in still another, separate category of metaphysical beings who turned from God. Their agreement that fallen angels were distinct from demons and that Satan fell separately from the angels is significant because they were assumptions that would evaporate with the orthodox Christian rejection of the *Book of the Watchers*, though the presumption that Satan and demons were caused by fallen angels would persist. The geographic dispersion of Justin Martyr, Athenagoras and Tertullian throughout the Latin West and East in Alexandria, Carthage and Rome, within the approximate forty year time span in which they wrote, substantiates the widespread acceptance of these shared perceptions.

The opportunity provided by the persecutions of their fellow Christians compelled the Church Fathers to speak out, and they seized it to broadcast the tenets of the Christian faith in an attempt to persuade pagan authorities and the public of its merits and validity. Their demonologies, while an essential component of their message, primarily expressed commonly held Christian contemporary perceptions of Satan and demons and their apocalyptic functions. Thus, pagan gods were not divine but demons who fulfilled their apocalyptic roles by tricking mortals into falsely believing in their divinity until the final judgment when they would perform their final eschatological function of burning in eternal flames. The *Book of the Watchers* was highly suited to Christian apocalyptic goals since it was itself an interpretation of Gen. 6:1-4 written to create an authoritative source for apocalyptic beliefs. However, beginning in the third century, the *Book of the Watchers* was referenced far less frequently before it was rejected outright. There are several claims for this development.

Annette Yoshiko Reed suggests that Origen, whose writings are examined in the next chapter, shied away from reliance on the *Book of the Watchers* due to its rejection in the Jewish Canon, its questionable origins, its incorporation by pagans in their anti-Christian polemic, and the growing discomfort among learned Christians with its interpretation of Gen. 6:1-4's "sons of God" as male angels.²⁸ Indeed, Origen and Augustine include rabbinic rejection of *Book of the Watchers* as one reason why Christians should do the same. Others posit the use of the *Book of the Watchers* by Gnostic and other sectarian Christian groups²⁹ and Manicheans for apocalyptic claim to authority based on divine inspiration in opposition to those attempting to establish the authority of the orthodox Church as the reason for its rejection. There is another probable factor for the *Book of the Watchers* disuse related to the concepts of fate versus free will

which deserves some explanation.

The Greco-Roman conception of fate is well illustrated in the ancient writer Sophocles' play, *Oedipus Rex*. Oedipus is warned by an oracle that he will engage in sexual relations with his mother and commit patricide, two of the most heinous offenses of antiquity. Despite his virtuous character and best efforts to avoid committing these crimes, he is powerless to alter his fate and damned as a result. Further, his fate is a result of a previous offense committed by his father. Another oracle advises that the plague afflicting the entire community of Thebes is a result of the contamination caused by Oedipus's crime. Thus, fate was not only unavoidable, but inherited and suffered communally.

Late antique pagans believed that demons played a role in fate's administration. While, pagans did not conceive of demons as exclusively evil, one increasingly prevalent belief in late antiquity held that demons, as the deputies of the gods, were the executors of fate. Since Greco-Roman mythology held there was nothing one could do to alter one's fate, avenging demons came to be feared. Stoic contemporaries of the Apostles, promoted the view "that evil demons stalk about, whom the gods use as executioners and avengers upon unholy and unjust men."³⁰ Although Christianity offered only two choices, salvation through Christ or following demons and suffering the damnation of eternal fire, the option of escaping fate via free will represented a fundamental change.

Justin Martyr stressed, "man has free will and is therefore responsible for his actions."³¹ While Justin and his contemporaries believed mortals had the option of choosing free will, apparently the evil demons in the *Book of the Watchers* did not. Omission from the Jewish Canon, critique of its premise by pagans and deference to it by

Manicheans and others did likely inform Christians of the *Book of the Watchers*' contradictory premises. Nonetheless, its rejection by Christians is not likely to have resulted from use or disuse by those groups. Rather, their deference, disputation and rhetoric regarding the *Book of the Watchers* served to inform Christians how it was incompatible with their own doctrine of free will. If demons resulted from illicit relationships between disobedient angels and mortal women, they had no choice in becoming evil. Instead, they were born evil.

This fatalistic outcome worked well for Manicheans and some sectarian Christian groups but contradicted orthodox Christianity's essential premise of free will. Whether one was an angel or human, turning away from God was a choice. One could not be born evil, at least not according to aspiring orthodox Christians. Notably, Origen, in *On First Principles*, and Augustine, in *City of God*, amplify the primacy of the doctrine of free will within orthodox Christianity. Not coincidentally, both desist in relying on the *Book of the Watchers* for their demonic etiologies. However, the omission of, in place of previous reliance on, the *Book of the Watchers*' demonic exegesis resolved one problem but caused another.

In the absence of *Book of the Watchers* and no explicit Scriptural account of how and why Satan and demons were created, Christian theorists no longer had an explicit authoritative account of demonic creation. Indeed, one reason Christian theorists began rejecting the *Book of the Watchers* was their discomfort with its interpretation of Gen. 6:1-4's "sons of God" as angelic beings. Remarkably, although the *Book of the Watchers*' demonic etiology was rejected, Christian theorists continued to insist that Satan and demons were the result of disobedient angels who had turned against God. After all, the omission of the *Book of the Watchers* made no change to Christianity's inherent apocalyptic structure which depended on Satan and demons to

perform their essential apocalyptic functions. To compensate for this void, Origen, Augustine and other Christians constructed new Satanic and demonic etiologies, which conformed to their apocalyptic requirements, simultaneously advanced the doctrine of free will, and maintained the premise of fallen angels as the cause of demons.

¹ Boyd (1979), 1.

² Boyd (1979), 77.

³ David Winston, "The Iranian Component of in the Bible, Apocrypha, and Qumran," *History of Religions* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1966): 193.

⁴ James C. VandeKam and William Adler, eds., *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Van Gorcum, Assen Fortress Press, 1976), 33.

⁵ Mamre Institute. The Hebrew Bible in English, JPS 1917 ed. <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/about.htm> (accessed October 1, 2007, through January 21, 2008)

⁶ Wesley Center Online, Wesley Center for Applied Theology. 1 Enoch. http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/ot/pseudo/enoch.htm (accessed October 1, 2007, through January 21, 2008).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ VandeKam and Adler (1976), 33.

⁹ Esler (2000), 527.

¹⁰ Marcovich (1994), 1.

¹¹ Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 53.

¹² Marcovich (1994), 12.

¹³ Everett Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 108.

¹⁴ Marcovich (1994), 17.

¹⁵ Ferguson (1984), 109.

¹⁶ Annette Yoshiko Reed, "The Trickery of the Fallen Angels and the Demonic Mimesis of the Divine: Aetiology, Demonology, and Polemics in the Writings of Justin Martyr," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12, no. 2 (2004): 141-171.

¹⁷ Marcovich (1994), 27.

¹⁸ William R. Schoedel, ed., *Athenagoras: Legatio and De Resurrectione* (Oxford University Press, 1972), 3.

¹⁹ Schoedel (1972), 61.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Schoedel (1972), 65.

²⁴ Sider (2001), xii.

²⁵ Sider (2001), 46-7.

²⁶ Sider (2001), 93.

²⁷ Mark P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology, Fifth Ed.* (New York, Longman Publishers USA, 1995), 107, 224, 347, 449.

²⁸ Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 199.

²⁹ VandeKam and Adler, (1976), 19-20.

³⁰ Ferguson (1984), 50.

³¹ Marcovich (1994), 20.

Chapter II - Origen

Origen, unlike his predecessors, did not merely embellish commonly held beliefs regarding demons from established authoritative sources. Rather, he constructed a comprehensive Church doctrine of which a component was his demonology. In this endeavor, part of his motivation was identical to the earlier Fathers; i.e., to locate authoritative sources of information regarding the demonic and synthesize them into a coherent system which validated apocalypse. However, Origen attempted to refine the attempts of his predecessors by relying on Scripture and his own speculations versus the *Book of the Watchers* or other sources of spurious origins. While his analysis of Scriptural passages to support a demonic presence laid the foundation for future theorists, including Augustine, his speculations would, like the *Book of the Watchers*, be rejected.

As the third century dawned, the Christian population remained minuscule, less than 218,000 or about one-half of one percent of the population of the Roman Empire.¹ Hence, while the efforts of Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Tertullian and other Christians likely helped their own communities sort out their beliefs, they seem to have had little apparent impact outside of those communities. Despite the small Christian population, its opponents crystallized arguments against it and stepped up their opposition. Celsus, a contemporary of Tertullian and resident philosopher of Alexandria, ridiculed Christians but was clearly threatened by them. His vitriolic polemic titled *True Doctrine*, written around the beginning of the third century,² was the first concerted written attack against Christians.

Rather than attack Christians on the basis of those allegations employed in the second century of atheism, incest and cannibalism, Celsus ridiculed Christianity for its youth and association with Judaism, the divisiveness among its followers and its perceived illogic. *True Doctrine* is no longer extant but has been partially reconstructed from Origen's response to it titled, *Against Celsus*. Regarding Satan, Celsus writes:

The Christians are most impiously deceived and involved in error, through the greatest ignorance of the meaning of divine enigmas. For they make a certain being whom they call the devil, and who in the Hebrew tongue is denominated Satan, hostile to God. It is therefore perfectly stupid and unholy to assert that the greatest God, wishing to benefit mankind, was incapable of accomplishing what he wished, through having one that opposed him, and acted contrary to his will. The son of God, therefore, was vanquished by the devil; and being punished by him, teaches us also to despise the punishments inflicted by him; Christ at the same time predicting Satan would appear on the earth, and, like himself, would exhibit great and admirable works, usurping to himself the glory of God.³

It is incomprehensible to Celsus that a god, who is purported to be omnipotent, would have lost control over his own creation, and it's even more implausible that God would allow Satan to punish his son. Celsus reasons that it is the devil who should be punished by God. He also distinguishes between the being Christians call Satan and demons, and is familiar with Satan's eschatological function of creating great works in competition with God.

Celsus' lack of knowledge regarding Scripture versus his knowledge of contemporary Christian apocalyptic beliefs is an indicator that those concepts were familiar outside Jewish and Christian communities. Indeed, Celsus attacked Christian reliance on the *Book of the Watchers* by questioning the logic of its apocalyptic narrative. He accused Christians of lying in their allegation that Christ was the only divine incarnation as the *Book of the Watchers* includes an account of angels descending to earth. Origen countered that Enochic texts are not considered

divine by the Church. Thus, by Origen's time, the *Book of the Watchers'* authority was questionable and Origen was compelled to offer an alternative apocalyptic vision.

Origen, a founding Greek father of the orthodox Church, was a prolific and respected theologian. His writings were widely distributed in the East and Latin West, and he wrote to instruct his fellow-Christians as well as defend the faith from critics like Celsus. *On First Principles* (225 CE) and *Against Celsus* (248 CE) are two of his texts. *Against Celsus* was written a half century after *True Doctrine* and its purpose was to rebuke Celsus' claims. *On First Principles*, written in the early third century,⁴ was Origen's attempt to assemble Christian doctrine into a unified system of belief. This, he reasoned, would lay the foundation for orthodoxy and establish its legitimacy as the sole inheritor of Christ's mission, discredit Gnostics and other heretics, and defend the logic of Christianity to its critics.

Origen was posthumously excommunicated as some of his own theories came to be viewed as heretical, including his demonology. A summary of those, which fourth century theologians rejected, include:

that within the Godhead, the Son was subordinated to the Father and the Holy Spirit to both; that rational creatures fell from a heavenly, incorporeal preexistence to acquire bodies, identified with the "coats of skins" of Genesis 3:21; that the devil could resume his angelic status and be saved; that demons could be transformed into humans and vice versa; that since bodily substance was destined to pass away, there would be no physical resurrection; that a succession of worlds may have already existed and may exist in the future; that hellfire is not external to us, but the pangs of a guilty conscience; that Christ may come again to suffer for the demons.⁵

Most of these ideas were not formally anathematized until the Council of Constantinople in 554 CE.⁶ In Origen's own lifetime and beyond, his efforts, both geographically and in terms of scope, were widely impactful to early Christian orthodoxy. Due to the controversy which they caused, in the fourth and sixth centuries, many of his works were destroyed. However, Latin

translations of some works were preserved. Germane to this thesis, he posited an alternative demonology and eschatology that concluded salvation would be enjoyed by all rational beings, including demons, as opposed to eternal fire.

Origen is refreshingly candid concerning the lack of information provided in Scripture which addresses demons. He acknowledges Church teachings that demons exist but admits “what they are or how they exist has not been explained very clearly.”⁷ In spite of his uncertainty and after the demise of Christian reliance on the *Book of the Watchers*, Origen, deemed the necessity of finding new sources to provide Christianity’s apocalyptic belief system with its required players. Further, the rejection of the *Book of the Watchers* did nothing to change its premise that demons were angels who had turned from God.

Whereas Justin Martyr, Athenagoras and Tertullian differentiated between the origins of Satan, disobedient angels and their offspring whose souls became demons, Origen does not. He states that most Christians believe that the devil “was formerly an angel, but became an apostate and persuaded as many angels as he could to fall away with him.”⁸ Writing almost fifty years after Athenagoras, Origen agrees with his supposition that Satan was a fallen angel but departs from the *Book of the Watchers*’ inspired assumption that the other angels fell when they went after maidens. Rather, both Satan and demons fell from their angelic status when they *freely chose* to turn away from God. Further, it was not the souls of the giant children of disobedient angels who became demons but the angels themselves. Origen’s reductions of fallen angels and demons into one class of sinful metaphysical beings, and the separate falls of Satan and angels into one simultaneous event, set a precedent for his successors. Further, the premise that fallen angels were the cause of Satan and demons was maintained with no explicit Scriptural resource to support it and despite that its source of origin, the *Book of the Watchers*, was rejected.

Without the *Book of the Watchers*, Origen turned to Scripture's authority and his own speculations to formulate his demonology. While he fundamentally departed from the opinions of the previous Church Fathers, Origen continued their effort to support apocalyptic beliefs albeit via an altered eschatology, and new Satanic and demonic etiologies. In his quest, Origen located Scriptural passages that seemed to best substantiate Satan's previous angelic status, and that he fell of his own volition. For this purpose, he turned to the Books of Ezekiel's Prince of Tyre and Isaiah's King of Babylon from the Hebrew Bible.

Origen admits that the Book of Ezekiel's 28:11-19 account of the Prince of Tyre appears to be about a man but then states he must be some higher power. He relates that Scripture designates the Prince is 'among the holy ones' and 'without stain' and set 'in the paradise of God', 'adorned with a crown of honour and beauty'. Origen implores, "how, I ask, can we suppose such a being to have been inferior to any of the holy ones?"⁹ He continues,

Who is there that, hearing such sayings as this, 'Thou wast a signet of likeness and a crown of honour in the delights of the paradise of God', or this, 'from the time thou wast created the cherubim, I placed thee in the holy mount of God', could possibly weaken their meaning to such an extent as to suppose them spoken of a human being, even of a saint, not to mention the Prince of Tyre?¹⁰

Origen concludes that the prince of Tyre surely refers to an angel who, having turned away from God, was cast down upon the earth.

He similarly designates that the King of Babylon from the Book of Isaiah's 14:12-22 is Lucifer. *Lucifer* is the translation of the Hebrew word for light-bearer. To support his assertion that Isaiah's Day Star refers to Satan, Origen sites Christ's words from Luke 10:18, "Lo, I see Satan falling as light from heaven."¹¹ Because both passages refer to a being falling from heaven who was once light, Origen concludes they must refer to the same being.

Neither the Book of Ezekiel's Prince of Tyre or Isaiah's King of Babylon seem to be sufficiently expansive to support Origen's claims. There is nothing explicit to indicate the authorities they refer to were angelic beings. Moreover, neither character attempts to persuade others to fall away with them. Scholars are only now beginning to understand the true intent of the authors of the Books of the Prophets which, it seems, was to subvert authority.¹² Both passages to which Origen defers admonish human leaders to keep their arrogance in check, abstain from abusing their power and, most importantly, not to challenge God's authority. Warning against the offense of hubris was common in antiquity,¹³ and this, versus demonic etiologies, seem to be the purpose of the authors.

Nonetheless, Origen felt a great responsibility to provide authoritative Satanic and demonic etiologies to validate Christianity's apocalyptic structure specifically and, consequently, the general credibility of the nascent orthodox Church. His stated uncertainty regarding the origin of demons together with his strident insistence that Ezekiel's Prince of Tyre and Isaiah's King of Babylon provided that explanation of origin suggests he did so with some trepidation. Curiously, Origen is ambiguous on the subject of whether or not the Prince and King are figurative or actual accounts but concludes it isn't necessary to make a determination.

In another passage, Origen posits the serpent in Gen. 3:1-6, who tempted Adam and Eve, was inspired by the devil. Significantly, and unlike Justin Martyr and Tertullian, the devil inspires but is not the serpent in Origen's opinion. Perhaps, since the Book of Genesis was written centuries earlier than those of Isaiah and Ezekiel, he perceived the chronological conflict of an account of Satan tempting Eve which preceded those passages that supposedly accounted for his fall. If Satan had not fallen prior to or via his temptation of Eve, it's not logical that he would have inspired a serpent to tempt her prior to becoming evil. Perhaps this apparent

chronological conflict was precisely why Origen remained uncommitted to designating whether or not the Prince of Tyre and King of Babylon were literal or emblematic characters.

Nonetheless, the problem of chronology would have to wait until it could be addressed by Augustine almost two hundred years later. To Origen, they, more so than any other Scriptural passages, seemed to offer the most probable accounts of angelic beings who, through their own volition, fell from God.

Origen's emphatic pronouncement of free will is a central organizing principle that permeates *On First Principles*. Immediately before his examination of the Book of Ezekiel's account of the Prince of Tyre and Isaiah's passage regarding the King of Babylon, Origen states, "the position of every created being is the result of his own work and his own motives."¹⁴ By relying on these passages in place of the *Book of the Watchers*, Origen's preservation of free will, set a precedent for his successors. Christians continued to depend on Isaiah and Ezekiel as Scriptural accounts of Satan's willful fall throughout antiquity and beyond.

Having established authoritative accounts of Satan's fall and that of his followers, Origen felt compelled to further substantiate the existence of demons to bolster Christianity's apocalyptic foundation. Employing quintessential apocalyptic rhetoric, Origen warns, "the opposing powers and the devil himself are engaged in a struggle with the human race, provoking and inciting men to sin."¹⁵ Again deferring to the Hebrew Bible, Origen refers to Pss. 25:5-6, "an evil angel is said to persecute men,"¹⁶ who he concludes is the devil. The angel that spoke to Abraham in Gen. 12:12, and the being who wished to kill Moses in Exod. 4:24 and who is also called the destroying angel in Exod. 12:23 Origen likewise asserts are the devil. Scripture was not explicit that these creatures were demonic but Origen classifies them as such. He concludes

that the Hebrew Bible gives evidence of opposing powers and, in fulfillment of Christian eschatological expectations, that they will be punished in the future.

Origen next turns to the New Testament's temptation of Christ in Matt. 4:1-11, Christ's successful exorcisms in Mark 1:23, 32-34 and 5:1, as assurance that the devil does exist. Further, Paul's warning in Eph. 4:27, "not to give place to the devil,"¹⁷ and his admonition from Eph. 6:2, "put on the armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil,"¹⁸ confirms that Satan and demons will carry out their apocalyptic duties so mortals must prepare to perform theirs. Thus, with Biblical reinforcement, Origen affirms that there are "invisible enemies fighting against us, and it tells us that we must be armed to meet them."¹⁹ Origen's repeatedly stated purpose in substantiating the existence of demons, like the earlier Fathers, is to affirm Christianity's apocalyptic framework and provide Christianity with its required apocalyptic actors.

The above-listed Scriptural passages are only part of Origen's exhaustive list. Despite his thoroughness in establishing the creation and existence of Satan and demons and perhaps due to his own uncertainty, he was compelled to go beyond Scripture. His demonology, based on his own speculations, is one of the most remarkable of the early Church Fathers. In it, he posits that human beings, angels and demons all fell from an original unity with God, and demons fell the furthest. He writes:

Rational beings who grew cool in respect of the divine love and were in consequence called souls were for a punishment clothed with the grosser bodies possessed by us and were given the name of men, while those who proceeded to the extremity of evil-doing were clothed with cold and murky bodies and became what are called daemons or 'spiritual hosts of wickedness.'²⁰

Origen thus relied on a Platonic inspired theory of emanation and preexistence of souls to explain the creation of all rational beings, including demons. Remarkably, instead of designating

that sinners and demons would be damned to eternal fire, he envisions an alternate final judgment, “There is a resurrection of the dead and there is a punishment but not everlasting. For when the body is punished the soul is gradually purified, and so is restored to its ancient rank.”²¹

Origen also alleged that demons would ultimately be reunited with God because, like humans, God had created demons. Thus, Origen takes orthodoxy’s doctrine of free will to its logical conclusion. Any rational being who turns away from God, should also be able to turn back to him. Origen’s orchestration of his demonology elevating the doctrine of free will as its centerpiece provides compelling evidence that the lack of free will of those demons in the *Book of the Watchers*’ was of primary importance to its rejection.

In a radical departure from his predecessors’ form but with continuance of their apocalyptic goals, albeit a vastly altered eschatological vision, Origen unwaveringly promoted the doctrine of free will and formulated demonologies which conformed to it. Despite his good intentions, Origen’s speculative theories, as stated earlier, were later vigorously opposed and ultimately anathematized. Augustine of Hippo would become one of his most vocal opponents.

¹ Esler (2000), 296.

² Hargis (1999), 23.

³ *Arguments of Celsus, Porphyry, and the Emperor Julian* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1978), 27-28.

⁴ Butterworth (1966), xxx.

⁵ Elizabeth A. Clark. *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 11-12.

⁶ Church Fathers, “Second Council of Constantinople 553 CE,” New Advent, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04161.htm> (accessed October 1, 2007, through January 21, 2008).

⁷ Butterworth (1966), 4.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Butterworth (1966), 48.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Butterworth (1966), 50.

¹² Ed Greenstein, “The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job” (lecture, Pyne Hall, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, February 14, 2008).

¹³ Morford and Lenardon (1995), 107, 224, 347, 378.

¹⁴ Butterworth (1966), 47.

¹⁵ Butterworth (1966), 211.

¹⁶ Butterworth (1966), 212.

¹⁷ Butterworth (1966), 213.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Butterworth (1966), 126.

²¹ Butterworth (1966), 146.

Chapter III - Augustine of Hippo

Born in the North Africa coastal town of Thagaste in 354 CE, after Constantine's reign had brought a halt to the persecution of Christians, Augustine converted from Manicheanism to Christianity in 386 CE, and was christened Bishop of Hippo in 395 CE. He deeply regretted those he influenced to follow Manicheanism, and worked tirelessly to battle it as well as other heresies and paganism. In one of his most important works, *the City of God, Against the Pagans*, written in the early fifth century after the cataclysmic fall of Rome in 410 CE at the hands of the Arian Goths, Augustine defends Christianity to its opponents.

Many pagans blamed Christians for Rome's fall because fewer citizens were sacrificing to the gods. After all, the well-being of the state was thought to depend upon maintaining the favor of the gods through proper adherence to state-sponsored sacrifice. Augustine rejected their allegations. He asserted instead that the invaders tempered their barbarism and thereby spared many godless pagans precisely because of Christ's magnanimous intervention.¹ Pagans, Augustine threatened, ought to abandon their defiance and offer thanks for Christ's clemency, "so as to escape the penalty of everlasting fire."² Moreover, Christian basilicas and other holy sites were spared the barbarians' onslaught; further proof of Christianity's legitimacy. Thus, in *City of God*, Augustine interpreted the invasion of Rome and its related events as reinforcement of Christianity's apocalyptic narrative.

In agreement with Origen, Augustine asserts the primacy of free will's role in the cause of evil. In contrast, Manicheans asserted that evil was independent of God. After Augustine's rejection of Manichaeism, he became convinced that God had created all so evil could not exist

independently of him. Consequently, he perceived the necessity of developing a theory that explains the cause of evil but simultaneously compliments the doctrine of free will and furthers Christianity's apocalyptic and eschatological beliefs.

Additionally, Augustine deduces a demonology and consequent apocalyptic narrative which defer solely to Scripture. Relying exclusively on Scriptural authority, he reasoned, would eliminate the possibility of making errors similar to those committed by the previous Fathers. Shortly before Augustine began *City of God*, a council at Alexandria had condemned certain doctrines of Origen.³ Augustine joined in their criticism but must have been painfully aware that he must not fall into similarly perceived fallacies. Consequently, in the process of distinguishing his demonology and apocalyptic vision from the previous Fathers, he, by necessity, explicitly rejects their conclusions and formulates his own.

While acknowledging that Origen was a learned and experienced theologian, Augustine nevertheless attacks his emanation theory for the creation of humans and demons. Augustine states that Origen:

should have seen that if there were truth in the idea that the purpose of the world's creation was that souls should be enclosed in bodies, as in prison, in accordance with their just deserts, the minor offenders receiving higher and lighter bodies, the greater sinners lower and heavier, then the demons, as the worst characters, ought to have the lowest and heaviest bodies, earthly bodies that is.⁴

Augustine assumes, in agreement with his pagan contemporaries, that demons inhabit the air. Consequently, it is nonsense to assume they fell furthest from God. Origen's other error, according to Augustine, is his theory of the preexistence of souls of angels, mortals and demons. Origen's theory assumed mortal bodies were a punishment whereas Augustine held that God created only goodness. Of course, not all Christians agreed. Origen's theories continued to

influence Christianity for centuries, perhaps most significantly in the demonologies of the monastic movement of Evagrius Ponticus.⁵

Although he attacks his emanation theory of demonic creation, Augustine followed the precedent set by Origen for other components of his demonology but with some important differences. From Ezekiel 28:13, he sites “you have been among the delights of God’s paradise: you have been decked with every kind of precious stone,” and from Isaiah 14:12, “what a fall was that, when Lucifer fell, who rose in the early morning.” Augustine is certain these Scriptural passages indicate the Prince of Tyre and King of Babylon refer to the devil but concludes they are figurative characters whereas Origen stated their actual or figurative status was unimportant. Nearly two hundred years after Origen, he relies on the same Scriptural passages for the same reasons; i.e., they are the only passages that seem to offer a Scriptural account of Satan’s fall. Augustine concludes these passages designate that the devil “*was* in the truth, but did not continue in it.”⁶ Like Origen, by relying on the Prince and the King, Augustine is able to maintain that offending angels turned away from God of their own volition.

Despite his parallels with Origen and earlier Church Fathers, Augustine nonetheless assembles his demonology more logically. First, Augustine acknowledges that Scripture is not explicit regarding the creation of angels but sites Job 38:7, “when the stars were made, all my angels praised me with a loud voice.”⁷ He reasons that if the angels were present on the fourth day when God created the stars, they must have come into being when God created light; i.e., in Gen. 1:3. He explicitly rejects the assertion, held by Athenagoras, that the angels were created, at the time God created the firmament. Accordingly, Augustine calculates the time of the creation of angels at the very beginning of God’s creation.

Establishing the time of the angels' creation is essential because it likewise establishes the earliest possible time of their fall. By designating that angels were created in Gen. 1:3, Augustine enables the possibility of Satan's fall at any time from that point forward. Further, by categorizing the Prince of Tyre from the Book of Ezekiel and the King of Babylon from Isaiah as emblematic versus literal accounts of Satan's fall, he attempts to remove the problem of time. Though Augustine does not specify the specific time of the angels' fall, he deduces it must have been prior to the temptation of Eve, "those who revolted from God and fell with the devil, their leader, who in envy brought the first man to his fall by the deceit of the serpent."⁸ Augustine, following Origen's lead, concludes that Satan and other demons fell simultaneously in a one-time episode. He also, like Origen, stops short of designating the serpent *was* Satan but orchestrates his demonology so that Satan fell in time to tempt Eve and thereby cause Adam's fall. By maintaining some ambiguity regarding the details and time of Satan's fall, it's obvious that Augustine was attempting to protect his and thereby Christianity's apocalyptic narrative from further assault.

Augustine was also a staunch defender of orthodox Christianity's doctrine of free will. He thus rejects the claim by Manicheans that the Devil was evil from the beginning and their reliance on the passage from 1 John 3:8, "the Devil sins from the beginning," to substantiate this claim. If the devil sinned from the beginning, this necessitated that he was born evil. An innately evil Satan fit well within fatalist Manichean rhetoric but not that of orthodox Christianity's doctrine of free will. He counters that 1 John 3:8 should be understood to connote that Satan did not sin from the moment of his creation but "from the first beginning of sin."⁹ Significantly, Augustine credits Satan with the creation of, not only his own sin, but that of

mortals as well. Thus, the genesis of human sinfulness was Satan's temptation of Eve, not the Watchers instruction of mortals.

In fact, Augustine explicitly rejects *Book of the Watchers'* interpretation of Gen. 6:1-4. He professes disbelief that the angels could have fallen at this juncture. Rather, he concludes Satan and the other angels did indeed fall prior to the serpent's deceit of Eve. Further, Augustine believed the sons of God in Gen 6:1-4 had special attributes but were no doubt human beings and not angels. Additionally, he states that antediluvian giants were common upon the earth and those in Gen. 6:1-4 were not demons. Gen. 6:1-4 then was not, as Justin Martyr, Athenagoras and Tertullian had supposed, a narrative that explained the causes of demons and human sinfulness. Finally, Augustine posits that there is good reason that the Books of Enoch were excluded from the canon of the Scriptures and they consequently cannot be considered reliable.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, Augustine also disagreed with Origen's eschatological vision of salvation for demons. Rather, he concludes a scripturally authorized version which dictates their total destruction. Deferring to the New Testament Book of Peter 2:4, "God did not spare the angels who sinned. He thrust them into the prison of darkness below, and handed them over to be kept for punishment at the judgment."¹¹ Further, unlike Origen's conclusion that final punishment would be temporary, Augustine vociferously asserts God's punishment of demons would have no end, again with Scriptural reinforcement; from Matt. 25:41, "Out of my sight, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the Devil and his angels,"¹² and from Rev. 20:10, "the Devil, who seduced them, was consigned to the lake of fire and sulphur, into which the beast and the false prophet had been cast; and they will be tortured day and night forever and ever."¹³ Though Origen and Augustine differed on the means via which evil would

be finally and completely destroyed, both depended on Satan and demons to complete their apocalyptic narrative.

With Augustine, we conclude our investigation of the Fathers' demonologies relative to apocalypse. Theologians continued to debate the particulars of Christianity's apocalyptic narrative but Augustine's version remains primarily intact to this day. As the chapters to this point have demonstrated, the Fathers varied widely in their opinions on the cause of Satan and demons and in their apocalyptic and eschatological narratives. In fact, many of their beliefs stood in stark opposition to one another. They remained, however, united in their goal of supporting apocalypse and in the belief that Satan and demons were caused by fallen angels.

¹ Betty Radice, ed., *Saint Augustine, Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans* (England, Penguin Books, 1984), 6.

² Radice (1984), 7.

³ Radice (1984), 455.

⁴ Radice (1984), 456.

⁵ Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus* (Oxford University Press, 2003), xxxviii.

⁶ Radice (1984), 447.

⁷ Radice (1984), 439.

⁸ Radice (1984), 638.

⁹ Radice (1984), 447.

¹⁰ Radice (1984), 641.

¹¹ Radice (1984), 468.

¹² Radice (1984), 1001.

¹³ Ibid.

Chapter IV - Taking Aim, the Role of Demons in the Polemical Arsenal of the Early Church Fathers

Supporting Christianity's apocalyptic foundation was not the only goal advanced by the demonologies of the Church Fathers. Often employing the very same words used to reinforce and solidify their apocalyptic vision, they also sought to discredit and displace the hegemony of pagan authority through their attack on pagan religion and culture. While the Church Fathers changed their demonic etiologies and apocalyptic narratives dramatically, they adhered to a remarkably similar approach when utilizing Satan and demons to critique the pagan world which enveloped them.

To aid in their defense, Christian apologists appealed to normative cultural aspirations and values in their rhetoric and conflated those by incorporating demons. Thus, although the Church Fathers challenged pagan authority, they simultaneously sought respect by assuring their detractors that they intended to uphold and continue what was most noble to the Roman elite. Indeed, Christians asserted that they, and only they, were capable of virtue and therefore authority. This strategy was part of what Averil Cameron termed a "totalizing discourse"¹ which comprised a comprehensive view of reality that attempted to subordinate or exclude other interpretations. Like many attributes of Christianity, its polemical strategy was, in part, informed by its predecessor, Judaism.

A popularly accepted theory among many pagan philosophers of late antiquity was that truth, if it could be discerned at all, could be found only via the authentic primitiveness of a philosophical movement's origins. Additionally, Platonists asserted that Plato *had* uncovered *the* truth through his exegesis of ancient philosophies.² Animated by these assumptions, some

attacked Judaism for its perceived lack of authenticity. Jewish philosophers, such as Philo of Alexandria, countered, but in agreement with the premise that there was an ancient truth, by arguing that Judaism was older, more authentic and purer than paganism. Further, it was pagans who had strayed from their authentic roots as evidenced by pagan idolatry. Instead of worshipping the creator, pagans had somewhere gone wrong and began paying homage to the created.

In time, Christian communities developed which were distinct from their Jewish predecessors. Second century CE pagan authorities and elites leveraged a similar polemical strategy against these communities which they had employed against Jews. Platonic philosopher, Celsus of Alexandria, argued that Christianity was an aberration of Judaism and that Judaism itself had strayed from its authentic Egyptian roots and thereby departed from a path of truth. Writing at the beginning of the third century CE, he states, “Jews originating from the Egyptians deserted Egypt through sedition, at the same time despising the religion of the Egyptians. Hence the same thing happened to Christians afterwards, who abandoned the religion of the Jew.”³ Christianity was deemed even more aberrant than Judaism for being a corruption of its supposed corrupt parent.

Because contemporary thought emphasized that a philosophy’s credibility derived from its authentic primitiveness, Christianity, as a newcomer, was automatically disqualified. Only an authentically primitive philosophy could lead to *the* truth. Because Christianity was an innovation, it wasn’t possible for it to be authentic or true. Further, the divisiveness among Christians was to be expected as the inevitable result of a new movement and its consequent lack of authenticity.

In response, Christians adopted and expanded the polemic of their Jewish contemporaries by agreeing that the Hebrew tradition was an ancient, authentic and pure path of truth. However, they, by virtue of Christ's mission, deemed themselves the rightful and sole inheritors of that tradition. Jews, Christians asserted, were guilty of willful disobedience in refusing to recognize Christ as Savior in fulfillment of Scriptural prophesies.⁴ Though late antique Christians depended tremendously on Jewish authority, as they gained hegemony, they increasingly vilified it.

In *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy*, G.R. Boyes-Stone states that Christians countered pagan attacks with a three-prong approach: 1) isolate heretical positions from Orthodoxy, 2) appropriate and reinterpret Hebrew tradition and thereby establish the primitive antiquity of Christian orthodoxy, and 3) demonstrate the essential corruption of pagan modes of thought.⁵ Chapters I – III have addressed how the Fathers achieved the first two prongs. This chapter will elaborate and expand on the third prong, which, it seems, had three prongs of its own, all of which incorporated demons. In fact, inclusion of demons in the polemical arsenal of the early Church Fathers was one of their most steadfast tactics.

Emboldened by a sincere belief in demons, the Church Fathers incorporated three strategies in their effort to unseat the authority of Greco-Roman paganism. First, the apologists demonstrated that pagan religion had gone astray from its path of ancient truth as evidenced by its incorporation of demons. It was demons, not gods, who benefitted and depended on the smoke and blood of sacrifice, the central act of state-sponsored pagan religion. In contrast, the patricians represented Christianity as the only authentic ancient truth. Second, Christians attempted to exploit the self-doubt that pagan authorities and elites had regarding the perceived contemporary lack of virtue and prevalence of vice. Demons again were at the root of the

problem as evidenced by the vulgar, base and depraved aspects of some pagan rituals. Pagans and paganism were consequently deemed guilty by association even if the rites they emphasized were anomalies. Third, the Church Fathers exploited the late antique fear of evil and demons by threatening damnation to those who attempted to halt Christianity's mission. Additionally, they insisted the doctrine of free will and salvation was a superior apotropaic alternative to the Greco-Roman conception of fate. Conversion to Christianity equaled freedom from fear of fate and demons. The late antique desire to avert evil was ubiquitous, so this last component of the Church Fathers' mission was powerful indeed.

Greco-Roman pagans didn't completely disagree with the Christian conception of demons. Instead, they expressed inconsistent and ambiguous beliefs regarding them.⁶ One view held that demons occupied the air between heaven and earth, a concept which Christians adopted. Tertullian said, "Every spirit is winged. Both angels and demons have this property. Therefore, they are everywhere in a moment."⁷ Augustine argued that, although demons live in the air, this in no way indicates they are superior to mortals. Rather, mortals have the potential of God's salvation and immortality to hope for versus the certainty of eternal fire demons were damned to.⁸

Conversely, regarding demons, Plato states, "it is necessary to honor them particularly in our prayers in order to secure favorable mediation."⁹ Appeasement, then, was advisable to obtain a demon's assistance and favor of the gods. Alternately, demons were sometimes viewed as a person's guardian spirit. Those mortals who had lived particularly exemplary, virtuous lives were thought to become demons, and could act on behalf of the mortal whose interests they protected. Perhaps the most famous was Socrates' demon¹⁰ who acted as his constant guardian and advisor.

In contrast to these views of demons as benevolent, a third late antique perception held that they were the deputies of the gods and executors of fate. Since Greco-Roman mythology held there was nothing one could do to alter one's fate, avenging demons came to be feared. Stoic contemporaries of the Apostles, promoted the view "that evil demons stalk about, whom the gods use as executioners and avengers upon unholy and unjust men."¹¹ Hence, early Christianity grew in parallel with an increasingly prevalent conception of demons as malevolent, which likely aided the Church Fathers in their mission.

Pagans attempted to appease demons through sacrifice and other means to secure their favor and avert their vengeance. In fact, the role of demons was woven into many rites of pagan religion. The *Book of the Watchers* prophesied that the demons would hunger and thirst but take no food. Christians and pagans agreed, then, that sacrifice was essential for the nourishment of demons. Because pagans themselves acknowledged that demons were lesser beings than gods, Christians seized on what seemed to be an obvious flaw and evidence of paganism's corruption.

Pagans, of course, conceived of their practices differently but concurred with Christians in some respects. Xenocrates, a companion of Plato, wrote:

As for the festivals and sacrifices, which may be compared with ill-omened and gloomy flesh, rending of victims, fasting, and beating of breasts, and again in many places scurrilous language at the shrines performed for any god, but are soothing and appeasing rites for the averting of evil demons.¹²

Xenocrates, not unlike the Christians, states participants were in fact appealing to demons versus paying homage to the gods. The utterance of vulgarities, a feature of some pagan rites, was specifically intended as an apotropaic mechanism to placate demons. For example, a component of the cult of the Eleusinian Mysteries was a moonlit procession from Athens to the town of Eleusis. At specific stages of the march, participants heaped abusive profane jests on one

another.¹³ Christians advised complete abstinence from demons in contrast to pagan appeasement of them. Further, ritualized vulgarity was attacked by Christians as evidence both of the depraved nature of demons and, by association, those who attempted to supplicate them.

Celsus, like Plato, thought it sensible for mortals to appease demons via sacrifice because doing so would assist in one's good fortune and well being but he also advised caution, "he, however, who invokes their powers ought to be careful, lest being conglutinated [as it were] to the worship of them, and the love of the body, he should turn from and become oblivious of more excellent natures."¹⁴ Much like his Christian contemporaries, Celsus states demons, "are delighted with the odour and vapor of flesh, with melodies and other things of the like kind to which being bound, they are unable to effect anything superior to the sanation of the body."¹⁵ Thus, while Celsus advocates for the appeasement of demons, he simultaneously warns that becoming preoccupied with them will adversely affect one's health and well being.

Origen, in a strikingly similar portrayal of demons wrote that "earthly demons, who delight in frankincense, and blood, and in the exhalations of sacrificial odours, and who, like the fabled Titans or Giants, drag down men from thoughts of God."¹⁶ While they characterized the actions of demons related to sacrifice almost identically, Origen of course declined Celsus's advocacy of the practice. He warned instead, "If the demons fear and tremble, the cause is again nothing else but the cross: the blood that flows down from it does not appease their thirst but destroys their power. It is the cross that has vanquished them and by which we shall vanquish them in our turn."¹⁷

Later, the third century Neo-Platonist, Porphyry, an opponent of Christianity and Origen, posits that there are beneficial and avenging demons. Porphyry, who Augustine called, “the most notable pagan philosopher”¹⁸ advised against appeasing harmful demons.

Magicians on the other hand are informed about the nature of evil demons whose chief they worship, and by their love potions inspire base passions. Greed for wealth and fame, and every deceit, originate from those demons, who feed off libations and the smoke of sacrifices, so as to fatten their aerial and yet corporeal being. Hence such sacrifices must be omitted; they attract demons. But demons cannot touch the pure soul. It is only where material goods are valued, in the cities of men, that the cult of demons is practiced.¹⁹

Porphyry, like the Church Fathers, conceives of malicious demons as deceivers with a leader, and instigators of evil who falsely blame misfortune on the gods. Celsus and Porphyry’s depiction of demons seeking nourishment from the libations, blood and smoke of sacrifice is in many respects indistinguishable from their Christian contemporaries. Nevertheless, Augustine refuted Porphyry’s claim that there were good demons.

The points of agreement between pagans and Christians were essential to the ultimate success with which apologists argued in Christianity’s favor. Those agreements are summarized and expanded upon here. There was an authentic, ancient truth. Contemporary lack of virtue was evidence that society had somewhere strayed from that path of truth. Virtuosity of character was important because it was the means by which men of the Roman Empire claimed authority and by which elite women maintained respect.²⁰ Successful character assassination was often dependent on the ability to successfully prove an opponent’s lack of virtue and self-control.

In *Abandoned to Lust*, Jennifer Wright Knust writes that late antique Christians asserted that they alone were capable of virtue and pagans, by contrast, were guilty of

uncontrolled lust and depravity. In this allegation, Christians “participated in a long-standing polemical strategy familiar to Greeks, Judeans and Romans alike: vilifying outsiders and defining insiders on the basis of sexual virtue and vice.”²¹ Thus, pagans agreed with the assumptions underlying this argument. The Church Fathers attempted to conflate these normative aspirations and values by alleging that pagan culture had failed to live up to its own standards due to its association with demons. Demons, and the pagan customs associated with them, were contaminated by depravity and uncontrolled excess and, therefore, so were pagans. If Christians could *prove* pagan authorities were not capable of virtue and only they were, they could legitimately claim to be the only worthy inheritors of the authority of the Roman state.

Lastly, Christians and pagans agreed on the physical attributes of demons. They were lesser, potentially dangerous, metaphysical beings, who occupied the air and depended on sacrifice for nourishment. Having established the common ground upon which the Church Fathers based their attack on paganism, we can move on to specific examples of how they utilized these in their polemical strategy.

If demons, as Justin Martyr alleges, created the pagan religions and rites, it follows that those practices couldn’t possibly have had a genesis of ancient truth. Demons, Christians and pagans agreed after all, were less than divine and created versus creators. In contrast, Christians worship an all-creator God. Because this Creator preceded the created, its God must be older than paganism.

Justin also alleges that Greek myths are only imitations of prophecies from the Hebrew Bible and the work of evil demons. Since Greek myths are only imitations of prophecies

Christians inherited, Christianity's truth, via its Hebrew heritage, must have preceded pagan religions and therefore must be older and more authentic. Further, even after exposure to Hebrew prophecies, rather than correct its trajectory to one of truth, pagan religions were hijacked by demons who adulterated those prophecies for their own benefit.

Additionally, Justin accuses demons of attempting to imitate baptism in the form of sprinklings and lustrations which are part of the rite of pagan sacrifice.²² Since they imitated it, baptism must have preceded sacrifice and is therefore further proof that Christianity was a predecessor of paganism. Thus, pagan prophecies, cults and religions were merely deceptions conceived by demons who tricked hapless pagans. Christianity, in contrast, was older, pure and the only authentic truth.

The *Book of the Watchers* held that the fallen angels, through imparting forbidden knowledge, taught mortals to sin whereas Justin credits the transmission of sin to their demonic offspring. A component of the contemporary theory that held there was an authentic ancient truth was that mortals had strayed from it. The perceived prevalence of vice and the lack of virtue was the result. Justin, seizing on pagan self-doubt and in total agreement with this assumption, blames contemporary debauchery on demonic infiltration of pagan religions. He asserts that pagans are prone to vice by virtue of their practice of pagan religions because its practices have been contaminated by demons. In contrast, only Christians can be and are virtuous because only Christianity has come from an uncorrupted truth. Justin asserted, "Christians alone grasp the entire Logos."²³

Justin also attempted to draw parallels between Christianity and what was considered best about Greek culture. "Socrates tried to draw men away from the demons, but they put him to

death through men delighting in evil who accused him of “introducing new divinities.”²⁴ Hence, Socrates’ ambitions were similar to Christ’s. Both tried to draw mortals away from evil and both were executed for doing so, and Justin implies that his fellow Christians are attempting the same feat. He continues, “Logos spoke through Socrates then, and Logos (in the form of Jesus Christ) teaches us now that these are evil demons at work indeed.”²⁵

According to Justin, only Christians possess the Logos through Christ. Christians are the only mortals not tainted by association with demons and thus they offer a valid remedy to contemporary lack of virtue. Christians, “like the athletes or Heracles, are men of Virtue.”²⁶ Because men of the late Roman empire claimed their authority and privilege by proving their virtuous character, establishing that only Christians were capable of virtue was tantamount to claiming only Christians were worthy of authority.

Lastly, Justin asserts Christian invincibility against demons, “All the demons can do is to cause evil men to hate and kill us.”²⁷ But not even death is a concern to Christians since they have been promised eternal salvation. Justin amplifies both Christianity’s superior apotropaic power over evil and a warning to those who oppose it, “eternal punishment of the wicked await all men.”²⁸ “It is for the Christians’ sake that God delays the end of the world. But eventually the world will be destroyed by fire.”²⁹ Justin’s incorporation of demons in his polemical strategy against paganism was a pattern repeated by his successors.

In his *Apology*, Tertullian states that Saturn, the Roman equivalent of Cronus, was merely mortal and not a god at all.³⁰ Part of Tertullian’s polemic incorporates the theory of Euhemerus, a Greek Mythographer, which “states that the gods were originally men who had been kings or otherwise distinguished men.”³¹ However, Tertullian employs Euhemerism to denigrate pagan

religion. By denying that the father of the gods was divine, Tertullian, Athenagoras, Augustine and other Christians attempt to unseat the very foundation upon which the supposed divinity of the pagan pantheon rests. If Saturn wasn't divine, none of his progeny were endowed with the capacity for divinity either. Rather, Tertullian asserts that it is the demons who are "the very ones who set themselves up as gods, doing things that make people believe in gods."³²

He warns, "Of these delusions, the greatest is that whereby those gods are foisted upon the seduced and ensnared minds of human beings so that they may procure for themselves a proper diet of fumes and blood offered to their statues and images."³³ Tertullian's transformation of the pagan pantheon into demonic impersonators who had duped mortals into worshipping them eliminates the possibility that Greco-Roman paganism had as its genesis an authentic ancient truth. Rather, it is evident that sacrifice was an artifice invented by demons, necessary for their own sustenance, which diverted mortals from the path of truth. Like Justin Martyr, Tertullian employs demons to chip away at the foundation upon which the credibility and authority of paganism rests by attempting to dispossess it of its assumed authenticity.

Athenagoras also doubts the divinity of pagan gods. He, like Tertullian, insists that they are instead demons and points to the depravity of pagan rites as evidence.

It is these demons who drag men to the images. They engross themselves in the blood from sacrifices and lick all around them. The gods that satisfy the crowd and give their names to the images, as you can learn from their history, were once men. The activity associated with each of them is your assurance that it is the demons who usurp their names. For some – I mean the devotees of Rhea – castrate themselves; others – I mean devotees of Artemis – make incisions and gash their genitals. And Artemis among the Taurians slaughters strangers! I shall not discuss those who mutilate themselves with knives and knuckle-bones and what form of demons they have. For it is not God's doing to incite men to things contrary to nature.³⁴

Athenagoras chooses to amplify the foreign and exotic aspects of the rites of the cults of Rhea and Artemis precisely to exploit contemporary discomfort with them. Moreover, he appeals to that discomfort by alleging that demons are at the root of the problem. Rhea was associated with the mother goddess Cybele, whose cult from Asia Minor was introduced at Rome in 202 - 201 BCE after an oracle prophesied that she would aid in defeating foreign invaders.³⁵ Foreign priests of the cult were sometimes eunuchs and rites included frenzied dancing and practices which Roman citizens viewed as exotic. Indeed, the more alien core practices of the cult were forbidden to Roman citizens.

Augustine describes a cult with similar rites, “One man cuts off his male organs: another gashed his arms. If this is the way they earn the favour of the gods, what happens when they fear their anger? The gods do not deserve any kind of worship, if this is the worship they desire.”³⁶ Augustine, like Athenagoras and in agreement with contemporary normative values, defines outsiders as those whose practices are characterized by depravity and excess. They imply that if paganism is contaminated with such practices, inspired by demons, all of pagan polytheism is guilty by association.

Since virtue of character is proven by self-control, the Church Fathers demonstrate that pagans aren't capable of that requisite control. Instead, they are participants or at least accomplices, via their polytheism, of alien, demon-tainted practices antithetical to idealized Roman virtue. In contrast, Christianity is pure and triumphant over demons. Since Christianity is the only authentically ancient practice capable of vanquishing demons and consequent depravity, Athenagoras and Augustine imply that only Christians are capable of virtue and self-control. Being that virtue was a prerequisite for claim to authority within the Roman state, the Church Fathers attempted to undermine that authority and claim it for themselves. The fact that

the Fathers employed the same tactic for nearly three centuries attests both to the widespread and steadfast Christian belief in it and, presumably, its effectiveness.

In fact, Augustine describes demons in almost identical terms to those of his forbearers.

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 predictions. But there are others who have observed the viciousness of these demons with rather more careful attention. The demons have failed to persuade them of their divinity; and so they have pretended that they are intermediaries between gods and men, securing for mankind the benefits of the gods.³⁷

Like Athenagoras and Tertullian before him, Augustine concludes that the demons persist in impersonating gods and, when that fails, deceive mortals into believing they will intercede on their behalf with the gods. Additionally, Augustine deems the pagans at the mercy of demons and unworthy of Christianity, *the* true religion. Only an authentic ancient truth could claim legitimacy. Pagan religion, as Augustine demonstrates, is merely an artifice invented by demons and therefore disqualified from being authentic.

Because of and as evidenced by its incorporation of demons, pagan religion had become an enabler of the contemporary proclivity for vice and consequent lack of virtue. Pagans were consequently neither worthy of the truth or capable of virtue. Both were prerequisites of legitimate claim to authority. By demonstrating that only Christianity had a genesis of authentic, ancient truth and that only Christians were capable of virtue, Augustine *proves* only Christians are worthy of authority. Displacing pagan authority, then, was at the root of the Fathers' polemical strategy which wholly depended on demons for its success.

Augustine wrote *City of God* more than a century after Constantine came to power so Christianity's political hegemony was, by that time, a *fait accompli*. The previous Fathers had no such advantage. In fact, the effectiveness of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Athenagoras and their contemporary Christian polemicists was limited, and Christianity was firmly rejected by pagan authorities and elites. From 150 CE to 200 CE, the Christian population of the entire Roman Empire is estimated to have grown from only about 40,000 to 220,000, which represented less than one percent of the population.³⁸ Moreover, the Emperor Marcus Aurelius ordered further executions at Lyons and Vienne in 176 CE.³⁹ Additionally, the majority of converts at this time were disenfranchised women, slaves and youths.⁴⁰

Still, the Christian population was growing versus contracting. Additionally, even some opponents of Christians expressed admiration for some of their reputed attributes. For example, Galen, a physician and contemporary of Marcus Aurelius, opposed Christianity but admired the manner in which Christian men and women exercised self-control, self-discipline and advocated for justice. As stated previously, the perceived virtue of Christians was critical to establishing their legitimacy and consequent claim to authority.

To achieve this sought after legitimacy, the Fathers persisted in juxtaposing the authentic purity of Christianity against the demon tainted depravity of paganism. During Origen's life, the Christian population increased to over one million and, by the beginning of the fourth century, it had grown to over six million, representing over ten percent of the population.⁴¹ The large growth was due in part to the edicts ending persecution issued by the Emperor Gallienus.⁴² However, Gallienus's policies didn't provide economic or political incentives to become

Christian as did Constantine's. While important to Christianity's growth, they afforded only tolerance.

Becoming Christian in the late third and early fourth centuries prior to the rise of Constantine, then, was still a choice motivated by personal, familial and community considerations. The exponential growth in the Christian population at this juncture suggests that converts were being won over by the arguments of the Church Fathers and other Christians. Further, the role of demons within that polemic remained static. The ultimate success of the Fathers' mission was due in part to the persistence with which they adhered to that polemical strategy. More importantly, however, were the agreements between Christians and pagans upon which that strategy was founded.

¹ Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: the Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

² G.R. Boys-Stone, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 134.

³ *Arguments of Celsus, Porphyry, and the Emperor Julian* (1978), 17-18.

⁴ Marcovich (1994), 18.

⁵ Boys-Stone (2001), 154.

⁶ Ferguson (1984), 58.

⁷ Sider (2001), 47.

⁸ Radice (1984), 320.

⁹ David G. Rice, John E. Stambaugh, *Sources for the Study of Greek Religion* (The Society of Biblical Literature, 1979) 52.

¹⁰ Radice (1984), 318.

¹¹ Ferguson (1984), 50.

¹² Ferguson (1984), 34-35.

¹³ Morford and Lenardon (1995), 267.

¹⁴ *Arguments of Celsus, Porphyry, and the Emperor Julian* (1978), 41.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Origen. *Contra Celsus*. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04161.htm> (accessed October 1, 2007, through January 21, 2008).

¹⁷ Butterworth (1966), xxi.

¹⁸ Andrew Knowles and Pachomios Penkett, *Augustine and His World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 71.

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- ¹⁹ Frank R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization C. 370-529*, Vol.1 (Leiden, New York, Koln: Brill, 1993), 100.
- ²⁰ Jennifer Wright Knust, *Abandoned to Lust: Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 47.
- ²¹ Wright Knust (2006), 63-64.
- ²² Marcovich (1994), 23.
- ²³ Marcovich (1994), 28.
- ²⁴ Marcovich (1994), 26.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Marcovich (1994), 28.
- ²⁷ Marcovich (1994), 22.
- ²⁸ Marcovich (1994), 15.
- ²⁹ Marcovich (1994), 26.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Morford and Lenardon (1995), 559.
- ³² Sider (2001), 48.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Athenagoras, *Legatio*, Chapter 26.
- ³⁵ Warrior, (2006), 82.
- ³⁶ Radice (1984), 249.
- ³⁷ Radice (1984), 330.
- ³⁸ Esler (2000), 296.
- ³⁹ Grant (1988), 110.
- ⁴⁰ *Arguments of Celsus, Porphyry, and the Emperor Julian* (1978), 20-21.
- ⁴¹ Esler (2000), 296.
- ⁴² Esler (2000), 247.

Conclusion

As historical documents, the demonologies of the Fathers are remarkable for the confluence of Zoroastrian, Jewish, pagan and Christian concepts and phenomenon found within them, and how those are wrought to serve Christian goals. As such, they cemented Satan and demons' requisite roles within Christianity's apocalyptic eschatology. The legacy of the Fathers' efforts was the increased importance and pivotal role Satan and demons continued to serve in further establishing the authority of the Church. Not surprisingly, demons, in fulfillment of their apocalyptic function, persisted in their attempts to deceive the faithful.

In the fourth century, the monastic movement began and flourished in the deserts of Egypt. Monks, such as Antony of Egypt, established their authority, in part, via their ability to successfully battle demons.¹ Augustine, upon hearing of Antony's piety, was shamed and converted to Christianity as a result.² Origen, for his part, had a great influence on the development of monasticism via his demonologies. He designated that demons specialized in particular vices upon which they attempted to draw monks away from their goal of union with God. Both male and female monks turned to ever more severe forms of ascetism in their quest to resist the temptations of demons. Sometimes they succeeded. Thousands flocked to the Egyptian desert to have contact with the monks who overcame evil. As the monastic movement moved eastward into Syria and Asia Minor, it in turn encouraged the development of the role of holy men who, like the monks, derived a portion of their authority from their power over demons.³

Even as they attacked pagan gods as demons, the Church Fathers, in fact, relied on them to complete Christianity's apocalyptic narrative and prove the inherent corruption of paganism. Incremental achievement of both goals furthered the Church's credibility and authority. Consequently, the existence of pagan religious resources, deities and other metaphysical beings were not generally denied by Christians. Rather, they incorporated them within the Christian belief system but adapted or inverted the purpose they served to pagan religions. Ironically, instead of abolishing belief in pagan deities and metaphysical beings, Christians ensured their continuance in their new role as demons. Christianity's increasing hegemony in late antiquity was thus dependent on evil.

¹ David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 16-17.

² Knowles and Penkett (2004), 76.

³ Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61, (1971): 80-101.

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