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Thinking with Satan: Diabolical Inspiration and Human Agency in Late Antiquity

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1. Introduction

Intellectual historians have found that demons were and are 'good to think with', as exemplified by the very title of Stuart Clark's magisterial survey of early modern witchcraft and demonology: *Thinking with Demons*.[1] Clark justified the Lévi-Straussian quality of his title on the grounds that 'in many cases … the subject of witchcraft seems to have been used as a means of thinking through problems that originated elsewhere and that had little or nothing to do with the legal prosecution of witches.'[2] Such problems included the workings of nature, the processes of history, and the nature of political authority and order. Different early Christian accounts of Satan's influence over human actions could be similarly characterized as ways of 'thinking through' the issues of providence, the origin of sin, and human freedom which were raised by the sporadic persecutions of Christians during the first three centuries AD.

Of course, persecution presented Christian intellectuals and leaders with pressing practical problems. What attitude should Christians take to persecution - should they actively seek out martyrdom, merely acquiesce in it, or flee from it? After a phase of persecution had passed, how should the clergy deal with the *lapsi*, Christians who had lapsed or fallen from faith by sacrificing to pagan idols, swearing by the emperor's genius, eating sacrificial meat, giving up Christian scriptures, or even betraying fellow believers? What kinds of blame attached to different kinds of Christian failure, and how should this be reflected in the penitential discipline which integrated the lapsed back into the church? Christian responses to these problems were in turn influenced by their attempts to justify the occurrence of persecution philosophically, theologically, and scripturally to their fellow-believers. How to explain the existence of the evil and suffering of persecution in God's good creation? Where and how was providence operating in this terrible phase of history? If evil stemmed from the fall of the Devil and his contaminating effects in the world, did the existence of this powerful cosmic adversary not compromise God's omnipotence? What role did the Devil play in inspiring or

[1] S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (1997). See also D. Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Satanic Abuse in History* (2006), 13-15 on 'thinking with demons'.

[2] *Ibid*., viii.

goading men to persecute Christians, and in persuading or forcing Christians to fall from faith, and how far were humans responsible for and in control of their actions given the almost irresistible persuasion and violence of the Devil? What fate awaited the Devil, his demons, and his human minions? Christian thinking on these cosmic issues influenced their prescriptions for penitential discipline, and arguably their responses to the fact of persecution also shaped their views on providence, the sphere of diabolical action, and human agency.

Scholarly accounts of the development of early Christian thinking on human agency have tended to focus on later more formal theological treatises which develop the issues in recognizably philosophical form, such as those produced in the debate over free will, nature, and grace between Augustine and the Pelagians in the early fifth century.[3] By the time of Augustine, ways of thinking about providence and human agency had travelled some distance from responding to the urgent problem of the suffering of martyrs. Augustine did, on occasion, 'think with' martyrdom; his *On the Gift of Perseverance* explored the divine origin of the gift given selectively by God to suffer for the sake of Christ. But in general, as the memory of the persecutions faded, other ways of tackling and interpreting the workings of providence came to predominate, even though some of the heresies and schisms with which Augustine and his fellow-bishops had to deal, such as Donatism, originated in the era of martyrdom and stemmed precisely from rigorist attitudes to human weakness and sin in the face of persecution, and to forgiveness or reconciliation of those who had 'lapsed' under pressure from Roman authority.

This paper, which is part of a bigger project on the diabolical imagination, cycles back some way before Augustine to explore how, during the post-apostolic period, Christian writers integrated an account of the diabolical torture and execution of Christians into a defence, even a promotion, of God's providential action in and control over human history, and where and how far in this worldview humans were ascribed agency. I will begin by looking at how Christian intellectuals like Tertullian and Origen performed a delicate balancing-act in explaining how a diabolically-executed persecution was in fact providentially provided to test man. I will show that in practice the necessity of reconciling those who had lapsed back into the church and of providing a narrative explaining, if not excusing, their fall, produced rather different characterizations of persecution to these idealizing

[3] E. Stump, 'Augustine on free will', in E. Stump and N. Kretzmann, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (2001), 124-47.

views of the providential goodness of persecution. In the core of the paper I will consider a rather blurrier set of evidence, the anonymous accounts of the trials and martyrdoms of Christians recounted in a miscellany of forms: court proceedings, passion narratives, dream visions, and letters. These texts may not be the identifiable work of named individuals, nor evince the sophisticated style or the philosophical engagement of Christian intellectuals formed by classical *paideia*, but they were widely disseminated and extremely influential on later Christian thought and writing on martyrs. An analysis of the texture of their language and the dynamic of their narratives allows us to recover a pre-Augustinian world-view of tense, complex, and often ambiguous relationships between providence, diabolical action and inspiration, and human sinfulness.

2. Theological and penitential accounts of persecution

Many Christian texts of the post-apostolic era - perhaps unsurprisingly given the backdrop of sporadic persecution and the apocalyptic interpretations of this phenomenon set up by scripture – address the question of how to accommodate or reconcile the evil of persecution within or with a good creation. This is particularly visible in various works on martyrdom by Tertullian, the first Latin Christian writer whose works can be relatively securely dated. Surveying this theme in his oeuvre will introduce the kinds of debates over and solutions to the question of if and how providence was operating in a time of demonstrable suffering for Christians. Tertullian's *Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting*, long dated to 211/12 but now re-dated to 203/4,[4] employs the metaphorical conceit that the Gnostics, specifically the Valentinians, are like a scorpion spreading poison in their dangerous denigration of martyrdom.[5] Tertullian's objection to the Gnostic position has various strands. Firstly, since God himself forbade idolatry, and since this prohibition of idolatry inevitably leads his people into conflict with idolaters with the result of martyrdom, it must be concluded that God willed martyrdoms. Secondly, martyrdom was appointed by God for the explicit purpose of enabling men to fight with (and crush) the Devil:

[4] T. D. Barnes, 'Tertullian's *Scorpiace*', *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 20 (1969), 105ff and G. Dunn, *Tertullian* (2006), 105.

[5] T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian* (1971), 171-6.

> But if, in the name of the contest, God had proposed martyrdoms for us, through which we might have been pitted against the adversary, in order that [God] may now strike the one [the Devil] by whom man willingly [*libenter*] was struck, here too the generosity rather than the harshness of God holds sway. For [God] wanted to make man, now plucked from the Devil's throat by faith [*per fidem*], trample upon him [lit. 'his trampler'] by strength [*per virtutem*], that he might not merely have escaped from, but also completely vanquished, his enemy.[6]

Tertullian ascribes a psychological astuteness to God in generously giving man the opportunity to exact an arguably disproportionate revenge on his opponent, that is, trampling the Devil to whose initial assault man had originally assented *libenter* (willingly, gladly); this elusive reference to Adam's damaging acquiescence to sin demonstrates how little time is devoted to explicating the dynamics and consequences of the fall in this context, compared to the importance the subject was to assume during discussion about 'original sin', nature, and grace between Augustine and the Pelagians.

This passage steers a difficult path between defending God's providence and allowing room for human freedom of action. In the first sentence, God is the main singular subject who appoints martyrdoms in order that *we* (plural) might fight with the Devil so that *he* (singular, God) might crush the Devil. In the second sentence, God wants man to trample on the Devil; not merely to escape from him, but to vanquish him utterly. Man is ascribed some capacity to do this through his own virtues, effecting his escape from the Devil *per fidem* (by faith) and his conquest of the Devil *per virtutem* (by strength, or courage). The only action of man to be explicitly characterized as performed *libenter* is, gloomily, found in the fleeting allusion to man's (Adam's) first masochistic assent to sin, but it can presumably be imputed to his other actions too. Thus Tertullian negotiates a relationship between God and man in which divine providence intends certain things for man and man is credited some capacity to effect these things himself. It is not clear whether man can take some credit for his own virtues, although as Tertullian goes on to argue that the contest provides an opportunity for men to display their strengths and weaknesses and for God to test, approve, and reject men accordingly, we

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[6] Tertullian, *Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting* 6: *Sed si certaminis nomine deus nobis martyria proposuisset, per quae cum aduersario experiremur, ut, a quo libenter homo elisus est, eum iam constanter elidat, hic quoque liberalitas magis quam acerbitas dei praeest. Euulsum enim hominem de diaboli gula per fidem iam et per uirtutem inculcatorem eius uoluit efficere, ne solummodo euasisset, uerum etiam euicisset inimicum.*

might imagine this is the case. He pursues the analogy between the *agōn* of martyrdom and athletic contests with macabre enthusiasm: no contender in a boxing match or a race protests about 'discolouration, gore, and swellings', because through them he will win fame and glory; so too, it is suggested, should the persecuted Christian deal with his suffering.

In another work written either shortly before or shortly after the *Antidote*, *On Flight in Time of Persecution*, Tertullian exhorts his friend Fabius to stand firm in the face of persecution and attacks those who have been counselling Christians to flee. He weighs very carefully the question of whether persecution comes from God or the Devil and thereby introduces the vexed question of the Devil's freedom to act:

> If, because injustice is not from God, but from the Devil, and persecution consists of injustice (for what more unjust than that the bishops of the true God, that all the followers of the truth, should be dealt with after the manner of the vilest criminals?), persecution therefore seems to proceed from the Devil, by whom the injustice which constitutes persecution is perpetrated, we ought to know, as you have neither persecution without the injustice of the Devil, nor the trial of faith without persecution, that the injustice necessary for the trial of faith does not give a warrant for persecution, but supplies an agency [*ministerium*]; for the will of God goes first with respect to the trial of faith, which is the reason of persecution, but the injustice of the Devil follows as the instrument of persecution, which is the reason of the trial.[7]

So the Devil acts as the *instrumentum* (instrument) of God's *voluntas* (will). Tertullian continues to clarify this relationship by explaining that the Devil's execution of persecution is not done through his own *arbitrium* (free will, judgement, decision) but as *servitium* (servitude); that persecution occurs

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[7] Tertullian, *On Flight in Time of Persecution* 2.1: *Si, quod iniquitas a deo non est, sed a diabolo, persecutio autem ex iniquitate consistit - quid enim iniquius quam veri dei antistites, omnis sectatores veritatis, nocentissimorum more tractari? - ideo videtur persecutio a diabolo evenire, a quo iniquitas agitur, ex qua constat persecutio, scire debemus, quatenus nec persecutio potest sine iniquitate diaboli nec probatio fidei sine persecutione propter probationem fidei necessariam, iniquitatem non patrocinium praesentare persecutioni, sed ministerium; praecedere enim dei voluntatem circa fidei probationem, quae est ratio persecutionis, sequi autem diaboli iniquitatem ad instrumentum persecutionis, quae ratio est probationis.*

because of the *arbitrium* of the Lord for the purpose of *probatio fidei* (testing the faith); and that it is only administered by the *ministerium* (agency, service) of the Devil. This distinction is summarized with credal confidence: 'We believe that persecution comes to pass through the Devil [*per diabolum*] but not from the Devil [*a diabolo*].'[8] Tertullian then expands on what this means for Satan:

> Satan will not be allowed to do anything against the servants of the living God unless the Lord grant leave, either that he may destroy Satan himself by the faith of the elect [*per fidem electorum*] which proves victorious in the trial, or that he may show publicly that those who have defected to [the Devil] have been in reality [God's] men.[9]

Once again we find that man's faith is the *means by which* God is going to destroy Satan; Satan is only allowed to persecute man insofar as this will allow man to demonstrate his faith in withstanding pressure, which will in turn destroy Satan. Tertullian's works are underpinned by the conviction that Satan is God's instrument and is not free to act other than how God wills. This idea derives ultimately from the Hebrew idea of the *satan* as an agent of God tasked with prosecuting and trying man, on the model of Satan's trials of Job.[10] Indeed, Tertullian goes on to cite Job in support of his argument. This undermining of the independent action of Satan is profoundly anti-Gnostic at root.

The whole point of Tertullian's *On Flight* is to argue that persecution is good because it is appointed by God, and that one should not therefore flee from it. One might argue that such a hard-line approach actually reflects Tertullian's embrace of Montanism, a radical form of Christianity whose followers claimed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit to prophesy and who urged martyrdom on their followers.[11] However, there is very little explicitly pro-Montanist about this treatise and its most polemical feature is rather its strongly anti-Gnostic line. This is not to say that denying the necessity of

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[8] *Ibid.* 2.2: *Igitur, quod ministerium non est arbitrii, sed servitii - arbitrium enim domini persecutio propter fidei probationem, ministerium autem iniquitas diaboli propter persecutionis instructionem-, ita eam per diabolum si forte, non a diabolo evenire credimus.*

[9] *Ibid.* 2.3: *Nihil satanae in servos dei vivi licebit, nisi permiserit dominus, ut aut ipsum destruat per fidem electorum in temptatione victricem aut homines eius fuisse traducat, qui defecerint ad illum.*

[10] S. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (1987), 83; N. Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (1987), 107-23.

[11] G. Dunn, *Tertullian* (2006), 6-9.

martyrdom, or advocating flight from it, was only a Gnostic position. There was a middle way, necessitated by the reality that many Christians had succumbed to persecution. Origen, who praised and encouraged martyrdom in his *Exhortation to the Martyrs*, defended the fact of Christian flight in his reply to (and attack on) the pagan Celsus:

> And this may serve as an answer to the remark of Celsus: "But they severely punish one who reviles them, so that he must either flee and hide himself, or be taken and perish." If a Christian ever flees away, it is not from fear, but in obedience to the command of his master, that so he may preserve himself, and employ his strength for the benefit of others.[12]

Such a position may partly be explained by Origen's taking a polemical position against a pagan, in defence of his fellow-believers. However, within the church Christian bishops also had to deal with the consequences of re-integrating the lapsed into their congregations. Cycling forward in time, one finds a similar defence of flight from persecution in the early-fourth-century *Canonical Epistle* of Peter of Alexandria, a pastoral text which prescribed penance for different kinds of lapse. This letter explicitly justifies Christians' flight using Jesus' own words: 'But when they persecute you in this city, flee into another.' [Matthew 10:23]. Peter continues:

> For he does not wish us of our own accord to go over to the supporters and accomplices of the Devil, for if we did so we would become the cause of many deaths and would be forcing them to become harsher and to carry out their works of death.[13]

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[12] Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.44: Καὶ ταῦτα δ' εἰς τὸ ἀλλ' οὗτοί γε καὶ σφόδρα ἀμύνονται τὸν βλασφημοῦντα, ἤτοι φεύγοντα διὰ τοῦτο καὶ κρυπτόμενον ἢ ἁλισκόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον. Κἂν φεύγῃ δέ τις Χριστιανός, οὐ διὰ δειλίαν φεύγει, ἀλλὰ τηρῶν ἐντολὴν τοῦ διδασκάλου καὶ ἑαυτὸν φυλάττων καθαρὸν ἑτέρων ὠφεληθησομένων σωτηρίᾳ.

[13] Peter of Alexandria, *Canonical Epistle* 9: οὐ γὰρ θέλει αὐτομολεῖν ἡμᾶς πρὸς τοὺς τοῦ διαβόλου ὑπασπιστὰς καὶ δορυφόρους, ὅπως μὴ καὶ πλειόνων θανάτων αἴτιοι αὐτοῖς γινώμεθα , ὡς ἂν καταναγκάζοντες αὐτοὺς μᾶλλον κατατραχύνεσθαι καὶ τελεσιουργεῖν τὰ θανατηφόρα ἔργα · ἀλλ' ἐκδέχεσθαι καὶ προσέχειν ἑαυτοῖς, γρηγορεῖν τε καὶ προσεύχεσθαι, ἵνα μὴ εἰσέλθωμεν εἰς πειρασμόν.

This suggests that Christians should not seek persecution because by providing the supporters of the Devil (presumably his human persecuting agents) with the task of inventing ever more horrible tortures against the Christians, one would thereby hasten *their* destruction.[14]

In this work Peter of Alexandria provided a host of other necessary explanations for why Christians had succumbed to persecution. The lapsed are frequently said to have been betrayed by their own weaknesses or vices. The fact of lapse is mitigated in some cases by the admission that the lapse was not self-willed. In the first canon Peter stated that those who had suffered torture and lapsed had been 'betrayed by the frailty of the flesh'[15] and again, 'they did not come to this of their own will, but were betrayed by the frailty of the flesh'.[16] This canon then sketches a connection between the fall of Christians and diabolical temptation in its penitential prescription that the lapsed of this category should fast for forty days like Christ in the desert, and then keep vigil meditating on Christ's words: 'Get behind me, Satan; for it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.' [Matthew 4:10] That is, the reminder to Christians that Christ too was tempted by the Devil but rejected him powerfully is implicitly a lesson in model behaviour which they need to absorb in order to reject Satan themselves in the future. In canon two those who succumbed in prison are characterized less forgivingly as 'broken in spirit by poverty of strength and a certain blindness of understanding' who 'without the hardships of struggle became captives [of the Devil]', with no ascription of responsibility to external forces.[17] Similarly, in canon three those who had not suffered are said to have gone over to wickedness 'of their own accord', 'betrayed by fear and cowardice', with no mitigating factors.[18] Finally, in canon fourteen Peter explains that Christians who suffered such violence that they were unable to speak, move, or resist, 'did not assent to their impiety'.[19] It was

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[14] Barnes, *Tertullian*, 171 n.6 suggests that this argument derives from Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 4.76.1 and that it is ultimately Gnostic; see also T. Vivian, *Peter of Alexandria* (1988), 200-2.

[15] Peter of Alexandria, *Canonical Epistle* 1: …προδεδομένοις ὑπὸ τῆς ἀσθενείας τῆς σαρκὸς…

[16] *Ibid*.: …οὐ γαρ κατὰ προαίρεσιν ἐν τούτῳ ἐληλύθασιν, ἀλλὰ καταπροδοθέντες ὑπὸ τῆς ἀσθενείας τῆς σαρκὸς…

[17] *Ibid*. 2: ...γενομένοις αἰχμαλώτοις, κατὰ πολλὴν πτωχείαν δυνάμεως, καὶ κατά τινα τυφλότητα τεθραυσμένοις...

[18] *Ibid*. 3: ...αὐτομολέσασι πρὸς τὴν κακίαν, προδεδομένοις ὑπὸ δειλίας καὶ φόβου...

[19] *Ibid.* 14: ...μηκέτι ἐξισχύσαντες λαλῆσαι ἢ φθέγξασθαι ἢ κινηθῆναι εἰς τὸ αντιστῆναι τοῖς εἰς μάτην βιαζομένοις οὐδὲ γὰρ συγκατέθεντο τῇ βδελυρίᾳ αὐτῶν...

clearly important for Peter to structure his hierarchy of penitential penalties according to the extent to which lapsed Christians could be assigned responsibility for their fall, but the Devil is not as prominent in this pastoral text as in other exhortatory texts.

Although many early Christian texts promoted the pursuit of martyrdom, the sheer concentration of literary effort on the subject suggests that most writers understood the difficulty of doing what they counselled. Many of the reasons which are given for the likely or actual failure of confessing Christians to endure in their faith are, suggestively, not rooted solely in man's weak and vicious nature, but connected to external diabolical temptation. Returning to Tertullian's *Antidote*, we find that even he acknowledged that 'God had foreseen also other weaknesses of the human condition: the stratagems of the enemy, the deceptive appearance of things, the snares of the world…',[20] although his conclusion, that this is why God ordained not just baptism as a strengthener, but also the second baptism of blood which is martyrdom, is typically icy. Still, Tertullian does acknowledge that the Devil's wiles and the deceptive and dangerous nature of the world itself (presumably because of its post-lapsarian state) provide opportunities to sin. Other accounts of Christian failure to endure also vacillate between blaming man's weaknesses and relating these to the influence of the Devil, as in Origen's putative and supposedly exhortatory scenario: 'If during all the time of trial and test we give no place to the Devil in our hearts, who wishes to defile us with evil thoughts of denial, or of doubt or of any plausible argument urging us to conduct hostile to our martyrdom and perfection… then we can say that we have filled up the measure of bearing witness.'[21] Here, evil thoughts of denial and doubt are attributed to the Devil worming his way into our hearts, a scripturally warranted and physically intrusive notion of sin to which we will return (pp. 23-6 below).

[20] Tertullian, *Antidote* 6: *Prospexerat et alias deus inbecillitates condicionis humanae, aduersarii insidias, rerum fallacias, saeculi retia…*

[21] Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 11: Εἰ παρ'ὅλον τὸν τῆς ἐξετάσεως καὶ τοῦ πειρασμοῦ χρόνον, μὴ διδῶμεν τόπον τῷ διαβόλῳ ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν, μολύνειν ἡμᾶς διαλογισμοῖς πονηροῖς θέλοντι ἀρνήσεως, ἢ διψυχίας ἤ τινος πιθανότητος προσκαλουμένης ἐπὶ τὰ ἐχθρὰ τῷ μαρτυρίῳ καῖ τῇ τελειότητι ... τότ' ἂν εἴποιμεν, ὅτι ἐπληρώσαμεν τὸ μέτρον τῆς ὁμολογίας

3. Providential persecution in martyr narratives

The idea of providentially ordained persecution was not only expounded in exhortatory sermons and letters like those of Tertullian and Origen discussed above; it also saturates the earliest anonymous narratives of the trials and martyrdoms of Christians (martyr *acta* and *passiones*). Some of these have undergone re-writings and revisions and none of them are the identifiable product of a single, known author, but there is nonetheless an identifiable corpus of texts which can be dated between the late second and early fourth centuries, many of them apparently composed close to the date of the events they relate.[22] These stories were translated into various languages over time, and widely diffused; the delicate process of editing and dating multiple recensions of these stories in one language, as well as ordering and relating their tellings in multiple languages, has stoked a scholarly industry with a distinguished past and a likely long future.[23] In terms of influence, martyr stories were incorporated wholesale into the works of later writers, and came to shape the texture and dynamic of a wide range of later Christian writing, from poetry to sermons. Indeed, it has been convincingly argued that the post-Constantinian church derived an enduring sense of its identity from these martyr narratives, and that the emerging Christian ascetic discourse of the third and fourth centuries was modelled on the vigorous figurative language of combat found in these texts.[24] In this, the main body of this paper, I will examine how persecutors were presented as imitating or executing diabolical actions through the close reading of a range of post-apostolic martyr acts.

The earliest surviving martyr story is that of Polycarp, martyred in the middle decades of the second century, probably in 157.[25] It takes the form of a letter from the church at Smyrna to the Christian community of Philomelum and is believed to preserve relatively intact a narrative written not long after Polycarp's death.[26] It is also an archetypal text because so many subsequent narratives of martyrdom borrowed from and built on its structure, language, and rhetorical ploys; indeed, Eusebius

[22] W. H. C. Frend, *Martydom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford 1965); G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (1995), 23-40; L. Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (2004), 23-5; T. D. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History* (2010), appendices 2-3.

[23] Barnes, *Hagiography and History*, 285-97.

[24] E. A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (2004)

[25] Barnes, *Hagiography and History*, 45 and 368-73.

[26] H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (1972), xiii-xiv; P. Hartog, *Polycarp and the New Testament* (2002), 18-31; B. Dehandschutter, *Polycarpiana* (2007).

reproduces a large portion of it almost *verbatim* in his *Ecclesiastical History*.[27] Near the beginning of this letter the purpose of martyrdom is asserted in the following terms: 'Blessed indeed and noble are all the martyrdoms that took place in accordance with God's will. For it becomes us who profess greater piety than others, to ascribe authority over all things to God.'[28] The ascription of martyrdoms to God's will in the first sentence of this passage might seem unequivocal, but the second sentence hints at dissension from this view by nameless others whose piety is (albeit modestly) impugned. This declaration of the workings of providence is made in the author's introduction and frames the narrative of events, but in other martyr stories it is audible within the narrative itself as voiced by the protagonists; in the Greek recension of the *Martyrdom of Carpus, Papylus, and Agathonice*, Carpus defiantly declares to the proconsul interrogating him: '"For by God's decree he [the Devil] possesses a knowledge of wickedness and God permits him to tempt man and try to move him away from piety."'[29]However, it is my contention that such notions of providence at work – imbuing the actions of persecutors and the sufferings of martyrs with providential purpose - are actually constituted persistently but subtly in the very linguistic warp and weft of martyr acts.

a) Fulfilling divine intentions

Martyr acts commonly undermine any notion that persecutors are in control of events, and suggest that their actions are better understood as unwittingly fulfilling divine intentions. Let us begin by analysing the account of Polycarp's betrayal and condemnation:

> …and the eirenarch, who had been allotted [*keklērōmenos*] the same name as Herod, as he was called, hurried to bring [Polycarp] into the stadium, in order that [*hina*] he might fulfil his

[27] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.15.1-45.

[28] *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 2: Μακάρια μὲν οὖν καὶ γενναῖα τὰ μαρτύρια πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ γεγονότα. δεῖ γὰρ εὐλαβεστέρους ἡμᾶς ὑπάρχοντας τῷ θεῷ τὴν κατὰ πάντων ἐξουσίαν ἀνατιθέναι.

[29] *Martyrdom of Carpus, Papylus, and Agathonice* 19: ἔχει γὰρ ἐκ τῆς ἀποσάφεως τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ἀδικίαν τὸ εἰδέναι, καὶ κατὰ συγχώρησιν θεοῦ πειράζει τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ζητῶν πλανῆσαι τῆς εὐσεβείας.

> appointed lot [*klēron*] of being a sharer in Christ, and [in order that] those who betrayed him might receive the punishment of Judas.[30]

The language of *klēros* (lot), which in the Septuagint has a strong figurative sense of destiny, inheritance, and lot, and is rooted in the sense of God's overruling of history, conveys the sense that the actors in this story are fulfilling lots apportioned to them by God:[31] the eirenarch Herod is *allotted* his name and Polycarp has a *lot* or destiny to share in Christ. There is a strong typological dynamic to this passage; Polycarp's suffering at the hands of a new Herod marks him out as an imitator, or sharer, of Christ, and the fact that he was betrayed by members of his own household (servants who were tortured, we learn) mirrors Jesus' betrayal by his disciple Judas. That is, this martyrdom is being constructed on the lines of, or even as a re-enactment of, the gospel stories. Furthermore, the purposive dynamic of this passage implies something rather striking about the persecutor's actual, as opposed to apparent, control of events: on the one hand (*men*) Herod leads Polycarp into the stadium *hina* (in order that) the Christian might fulfil his lot to die like and for Christ, and on the other hand (*de*) (and here one must supply a second *hina* which is implied by the optative mood of the verb) *in order that* his betrayers might receive Judas' punishment. The very structure of this sentence thus suggests that Herod unwittingly and inadvertently fulfilled a divine purpose in hurrying to bring Polycarp to his death in the stadium.

These kind of constructions, which imply that Christians' deaths fulfilled God-given lots and typological destinies, and that pagans unwittingly implemented divine plans, are a common feature of the narratives of martyr acts. The *Martyrdom of Agape, Irene, and Chione* declares:

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[30] *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 6: καὶ ὁ εἰρήναρχος, ὁ κεκληρωμένος τὸ αὐτὸ ὄνομα Ἡρώδης ἐπιλεγόμενος, ἔσπευδεν εἰς τὸ στάδιον αὐτὸν εἰσαγαγεῖν, ἵνα ἐκεῖνος μὲν τὸν ἴδιον κλῆρον ἀπαρτίσῃ Χριστοῦ κοινωνὸς γενόμενος, οἱ δὲ προδόντες αὐτὸν τὴν αὐτοῦ τοῦ Ἰούδα ὑπόσχοιεν τιμωρίαν.

[31] G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (1985), 442ff.

> For instead of those visible enemies, we have now begun to vanquish invisible enemies, and the invisible substance [*hupostaseis*] of the demons has been handed over to the flames by [*hupo*] pure and holy women who are full of the holy Spirit.[32]

This acknowledges the invisibility of demons while also affirming that they have their own *hupostaseis* (substances). The idea that demons were hidden and invisible but nonetheless had subtle aery bodies that moved through and filled space both underpins early Christian thinking about demonic activity and possession, and explains why they might be thought to be destroyed by fire.[33] In this passage demons are said to be delivered to the fire *hupo* (by) the female martyrs Agape, Irene, and Chione, and this preposition indicates real agency on their part even if the overall construction is couched in the distancing passive – another typical element of such constructions in martyr acts. The image of the women conquering demons precedes (and therefore shapes the reader or listener's interpretation of) the subsequent description of their receiving capital sentences:

> When these three women were brought before the magistrate and refused to sacrifice, he sentenced them to the fire, in order that thus by a short time in the fire they might overcome those that are devoted to fire, that is, the Devil and all his heavenly host of demons...[34]

The magistrate sentenced the women to death by burning *hina* (in order that) they might thus overcome those who are devoted to the fire, glossed as the Devil and his army of demons (presumably because of their love of fiery pagan sacrifice).[35] A pagan magistrate would clearly not have been deliberately enabling the women to conquer the Devil by allowing themselves to be burnt, so this

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[32] *Martyrdom of Agape, Irene, Chione* 1: ἀντὶ γὰρ τῶν πολεμίων τῶν ὁρατῶν, ἀόρατοι ἐχθροὶ νικῶνται, ἀφανεῖς δαιμόνων ὑποστάσεις πυρὶ παραδίδονται ὑπὸ γυναικῶν καθαρῶν καὶ σεμνῶν, πνεῦματος ἁγίου πληρουμένων.

[33] G. Smith, 'How thin is a demon?', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16.4 (2008), 479-512.

[34] *Martyrdom of Agape, Irene, Chione* 2: ταύτας τὰς τρεῖς προσαχθείσας αὐτῷ ὁ ἄρχων καὶ μὴ θελούσας θύειν πυρὶ κατέκρινεν, ἵνα διὰ πυρὸς προσκαίρου τοὺς αὐτῷ πειθομένους νικήσασαι διάβολον καὶ πᾶσαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ὑπ' οὐρανῶν δαιμόνων στρατιάν...

[35] Smith, 'How thin is a demon?'; see, for example, Origen, *Exhortation* 45 on demons nourished by exhalations - burnt sacrifices, blood, and incense.

purpose-clause must be taken to indicate a providential provision; the judge's actions effected a happy triumph over the Devil, *without his even realising it*, much as Herod's haste to execute Polycarp's death sentence unwittingly allowed Polycarp to fulfill his destiny and his betrayers to receive apt punishment.

b) Pain and punishment

The account of Agape, Irene, and Chione being burnt to death plays on the reflexive relationship between the manner of their deaths and the resulting fate of their spiritual enemies: short-term pain for martyrs, in fire or on the rack, versus long-term, indeed eternal pain for the demons in hellfire. This idea of reversal, that the suffering of martyrdom in fact inflicted suffering on the demons, was central to early Christian theological justifications of martyrdom and a powerful argument in the repertoire of exhortation. Thus Origen encourages would-be martyrs that 'the evil spirits will be made to suffer by us rather than achieve anything with us.'[36] In attacking the pagan Celsus, he develops this theme at greater length:

> But when the souls of those who die for the Christian faith depart from the body with great glory, they destroy the power of the demons, and frustrate their designs against men… … And as the demons perceive that those who meet death victoriously for the sake of religion destroy their authority, while those who give way under their sufferings, and deny the faith, come under their power, I imagine that at times they feel a deep interest in Christians when on their trial, and keenly strive to gain them over to their side, feeling as they do that their confession is torture to them, and their denial is a relief and encouragement to them.[37]

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[36] Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 48: …πάθωσι μᾶλλον τὸ ὑφ' ἡμῶν ἐνεργοῦν, ἅπερ δράσωσι…

[37] Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.44: Ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ αἱ ψυχαὶ τῶν διὰ χριστιανισμὸν ἀποθνῃσκόντων δι' εὐσέβεταν μετ' εὐκλείας ἀπαλλαττόμεναι τοῦ σώματος καθήρουν τὴν δύναμιν τῶν δαιμόνων καὶ ἀτονωτέραν αὐτῶν ἐποίουν τὴν κατὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιβουλήν… … Ἐγὼ δ' οἶμαι ὅτι αἰσθόμενοι οἱ δαίμονες ὅτι οἱ μὲν νικῶντες καὶ δι' εὐσέβειαν ἀποθνήσκοντες καθαιροῦσιν αὐτῶν τὴν δυναστείαν οἱ δὲ διὰ τοὺς πόνους ἡττώμενοι καὶ τὴν θεοσέβειαν ἀρνούμενοι ὑποχείριοι ἐκείνοις γίνονται, ἔσθ' ὅτε προσφιλονεικοῦσι τοῖς παραδιδομένοις Χριστιανοῖς, ὡς κολαζόμενοι μὲν ὑπὸ τῆς ὁμολογίας αὐτῶν ἀναπαυόμενοι δὲ ἐπὶ τῇ ἀρνήσει αὐτῶν.

Not only demons, but also earthly persecutors were said to be tortured and destroyed by feats of Christian endurance. Returning to the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, we find that his own defiant words to the governor provide a template for this equation: '"The fire you threaten me with burns merely for a time and is soon extinguished. It is clear you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment and of the judgment that is to come, which awaits the impious."'[38] A third-century pseudo-Cyprianic sermon in praise of martyrdom expresses the same sentiment in pithy terms: 'Martyrs rejoice in heaven; the fire will consume those who are enemies of the truth. The paradise of God blooms for the witnesses; Gehenna will enfold the deniers, and eternal fire will burn them up.'[39] The idea that what the Christian suffers for a short time is what persecutors will suffer for eternity powerfully suggests that forgiveness is not available for human persecutors and the fire – hellfire parallelism is frequently exploited in Christian texts promoting martyrdom.

As we will see (pp. 16-19 below), the ambiguity of some accounts in assigning responsibility for persecution to humans or the Devil allows for the stereoscopic possibility that Christian martyrdom involved both physical endurance of human opponents but also spiritual combat against demons. Exhortatory texts contemporary with persecution tend, understandably, to be very free in consigning both the spiritual and the human enemies of Christ to eternal punishment, and limited in their concession of the possibility of forgiveness for either. The occasions when vicious divine vengeance on persecutors is predicted far outweigh those when the forgiveness of persecutors by God is imagined or requested. Indeed, the flip-side to a providential view of history was the necessity of demonstrating that the wicked will be punished, and in some extreme versions of this, Christians tried to argue that such punishment was not even reserved for the hereafter, but would be spectacularly and messily enacted on earth. Such is the tenor of Lactantius' grisly and self-explanatory *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*. Beyond the fate of human persecutors, the question of the Devil's ultimate fate had

[38] *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 11: Πῦρ ἀπειλεῖς τὸ πρὸς ὥραν καιόμενον καὶ μετ' ὀλίγον σβεννύμενον· ἀγνοεῖς γὰρ τὸ τῆς μελλούσης κρίσεως καὶ αἰωνίου κολάσεως τοῖς ἀσεβέσι τηρούμενον πῦρ.

[39] Pseudo-Cyprian, *In Praise of Martyrdom* 11: *caelo martyres gaudent, veritatis inimicos ignis adsumet. Paradisum Dei testibus floret, negatores gehenna conplexa aeternus ignis inardescit.*

arguably greater theological ramifications, as demonstrated by the heated debate over Origen's reported views on *apocatastasis* (universal salvation), themselves frustratingly difficult to reconstruct.[40]

The suffering of a martyr was, then, held to have some kind of reverse effect on the persecutor, and the *manner* of a martyr's torture and death was particularly significant. On some occasions the kind of suffering described prophetically anticipates and prefigures the manner of the adversary's punishment (as the fire burning the martyr predicted hellfires, pp. 13-15 above); on others it appears to fulfill a type or complete a pattern identified in scripture. Returning to the passage of Tertullian's *Antidote* cited on p. 4, we remember that God is ascribed with wanting man to become a vengeful *inculcator* (literally 'trampler') of the Devil in return for being crushed by him. Now, Latin verbs of trampling and treading (*calco* and the associated *inculco* and *concalco*, all deriving from *calx*, heel), when applied to man's action on Satan, recall the Old Latin Bible account of the fall and God's curse of the serpent: 'he [man] will tread on your head and you will strike his heel'.[41] The language of trampling is found in the opening of Tertullian's address to confessors in prison, *To the Martyrs*, where he suggests that although they are accompanied in prison by the Holy Spirit, the prison is the Devil's house too: 'But you have come to the prison for the very purpose of trampling [*conculcetis*] upon him right in his own house. For you have engaged him in battle already outside the prison and trampled [*conculcaveratis*] him underfoot.'[42] In Perpetua's famous dream of her martyrdom, the scriptural allusion is made not just in the language of trampling but in the visionary appearance of her opponent in the very form of a serpent, coiled around the foot of a ladder ascending to heaven. She recounts: 'using it as my first step, I trod on its head [*calcavi illi caput*] and went up.'[43]

c) Tyrants and adversaries

As we have seen, the very endurance of martyrs was shown to effect the downfall of their human and demonic enemies, and these human and demonic enemies were closely, sometimes inextricably

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[40] M. Ludlow, 'Universalism in the history of Christianity', in R.A. Perry and C.H. Partridge, *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate* (2004), 191-218.

[41] Genesis 3.15 in the Vetus Latina (Hetzenauer, 1906): … *ipsa conteret caput tuum, et tu insidiaberis calcaneo eius.*

[42] Tertullian, *Ad Martyras* 1: *Sed vos ideo in carcerem pervenistis, ut illum etiam in domo sua conculcetis. Iam enim foris congressi conculcaveratis*.

[43] *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, 4: *et quasi primum gradum calcarem, calcavi illi caput et ascendi*.

associated. The nature of the relationship between human persecutors and the archetypal adversary, the Devil, warrants further investigation. I have already outlined the debate over the extent to which the Devil had a free hand in pursuing Christians, and we have seen that for opponents of the Gnostics it was very important that his activity should be seen as divinely controlled and circumscribed. We have also seen that martyr acts tend to suggest that human persecutors, like the Devil, may inadvertently be doing God's will even if they do not intend it. What, then, of the ways in which martyr acts configure the precise relationship between persecutors and the Devil? Who, ultimately, is responsible for this activity on earth?

A passage in the martyrdom of Polycarp on the use of torture against Christians suggests that hostility to them is simultaneously human and diabolical:

> Similarly did those who were condemned to the beasts endure terrifying torments, being laid out upon trumpet shells, and bruised by other kinds of torture, so that, if possible, the tyrant [*ho turannos*] might turn them to a denial [of Christ/their faith] by constant torment. For many were the things that the Devil [*ho diabolos*] contrived against them, but thanks be to God, he did not prevail over all of them.[44]

Ho turannos (the tyrant), subject of the first sentence, was commonly employed in secular political rhetoric, in panegyric, historiography, and epigraphy, as a way of avoiding directly naming a defeated and disgraced aspirant to political power. Such evasive terminology might appear to erase the condemned man's memory but in fact it paradoxically served to draw attention to the un-nameable *turannos*. It is also likely that unmentionables in 'secular' texts would in fact have been perfectly identifiable to contemporaries by context and associations.[45] However, although the deployment of

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[44] *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 2-3: ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ οἱ εἰς τὰ θηρία κατακριθέντες ὑπέμειναν δεινὰς κολάσεις, κήρυκας μὲν ὑποστρωννύμενοι καὶ ἄλλαις ποικίκων βασάνων ἰδέαις κολαζόμενοι ἵνα, εἰ δυνηθείη ὁ τύραννος, διὰ τῆς ἐπιμόνου κολάσεως εἰς ἄρνησιν αὐτοὺς τρέψῃ. Πολλὰ γὰρ ἐμηχανᾶτο κατ' αὐτῶν ὁ διάβολος, ἀλλὰ χάρις τῷ θεῷ, κατὰ πάντων γὰρ οὐκ ἴσχυσεν.

[45] C. Hedrick, *History and Silence: Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity* (2000), ch. 4; J. Elsner, "Iconoclasm and the preservation of memory," in R. Nelson, M. Olin, eds., *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade* (Chicago, 2003), 209-32.

circumlocutions like *turannos* to avoid directly naming the agent of persecution is also a common, even defining feature of martyr accounts, it is often more difficult to identify to whom this refers (whether Devil, emperor, proconsul, or torturer) than it is in equivalent secular 'pagan' invective. In the passage preceding that cited above, there is no singular subject to which *turannos* might be connected, only plural 'savage executioners'. One might supply the reigning emperor, or see *turannos* as anticipating other villains of the piece such as the eirenarch Herod who appears later on to condemn Polycarp to death. But in the text itself as it was read or heard, the next immediate singular agent of persecution is in fact *ho diabolos* (the Devil). Rather than trying to identify 'who' is meant by tyrant here, we should perhaps read the ambiguity and potential for slippage between these meanings as deliberate and provocative: it is both the Devil *and* human persecutor(s), or the former operating through the latter.

Such slippage can be seen in the use of another archetypal term for enemy which derives ultimately from scripture. After the betrayal, condemnation, and execution of Polycarp, the narrative of his martyrdom circles around the fate of his body, and there follows a chain of consequences:

> The jealous, envious, evil one, the adversary [*antikeimenos*] of the race of the just, realizing the greatness of [Polycarp's] testimony, his unblemished career from the beginning, and seeing him now crowned with the garland of immortality and the winner of an incontestable prize, took care [*epetēdeusen*] that no-one took up the poor body though so many were eager to do so and to have a share in his holy flesh. He suggested [*hupebalen*] that Niketes, Herod's father and Alke's brother, petition the governor not to give up his body: 'Otherwise', he said, 'they may abandon the Crucified and begin to worship this man.' And all of this was at the suggestion [*hupoballontōn*] and insistence of the Jewish people, who even kept watch as we were on the point of removing his body from the fire.[46]

[46] *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17: ὁ δὲ ἀντίζηλος καὶ βάσκανος καὶ πονηρός, ὁ ἀντικείμενος τῷ γένει τῶν δικαίων, ἰδὼν τό τε μέγεθος αὐτοῦ τῆς μαρτυρίας καὶ τὴν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἀνεπίληπτον πολιτείαν , ἐστεφανωμένον τε τόν τῆς ἀφθαρσίας στέφανον καὶ βραβεῖον ἀναντίρρητον ἀπενγνεγμένον, ἐπετήδευσεν ὡς μηδὲ τὸ σωμάτιον αὐτοῦ ὑφ' ἡμῶν ληφθῆναι, καίπερ πολλῶν ἐπιθυμούντων τοῦτο ποιῆσαι καὶ κοινωνῆσαι τῷ ἁγιῳ σαρκίῳ. ὑπέβαλεν γοῦν Νικήτην τὸν τοῦ Ἡρώδου πατέρα, ἀδελφὸν δὲ Ἄλκης, ἐντυχεῖν τῷ ἄρχοντι ὥστε μὴ δοῦναι αὐτοῦ τὸ σῶμα · μή, φησίν, ἀφέντες τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον τοῦτον ἄρξωνται σέβεσθαι. Καὶ ταῦτα

At the beginning of this passage, the singular subject of the sentence is defined by his vicious qualities (jealousy, envy, evil). This is the *antikeimenos* ('adversary'). *Antikeimenos* was used in the Septuagint to translate Hebrew *satan* and in two Pauline letters (not in fact by Paul) to refer variously to Satan (I Timothy 5:14-15) and to 'the man of lawlessness' (II Thessalonians 2:3-4), a human opponent associated with the Devil who appears to resemble the apocalyptic vision of the Antichrist in the Johannine letters.[47] In this passage, the *antikeimenos* is the subject of two verbs: *epetēdeusen* ('taking care' that Polycarp's body not be taken), and *hupebalen* ('suggesting' that Niketes petition the governor not to give up Polycarp's body). The portion of direct speech that follows appears to be the Devil's rationalization of why keeping Polycarp's body was important, but it is grammatically unclear exactly whose words they are: the Devil's words to Niketes, Niketes' words to the governor, or the Devil's words as repeated by Niketes? The lack of clarity about who is speaking here exploits the very ambiguity of *antikeimenos*, a word which stood in scripture for both a cosmic spiritual adversary and a human doing such an adversary's dirty work. In the final sentence of this passage the focus of blame shifts abruptly again to another party: the Jews. Here, because 'the Jews' govern the same verb of suggestion (*hupoballontōn*) that was just used of the Devil (*hupebalen*), the diabolical association is forged. This is not the first, or the worst, imputation of diabolical malevolence to the Jews by early Christians.[48] It does, however, further confuse the question of who, in this story, is responsible for what.

Ambiguous references to tyrants and adversaries, which could be construed as referring to earthly enemies, spiritual enemies, or both, abound in the literature of the persecuted church. The figure of the persecuting tyrant was prominent in classical political invective and philosophy, but he was likely mediated to the earliest Christian writers of Greek martyrdoms through two specific Jewish works, 2 and 4 Maccabees. These Greek texts, dating respectively from the mid second century BC and the late 1st century BC – 1st century AD contained stories of the persecution of Jews by the Seleucid monarch Antiochus IV in the mid-second century BC, including an attempt to force the scribe Eleazar

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ὑποβαλλόντων καὶ ἐνισχυόντων τῶν Ἰουδαίων, οἳ καὶ ἐτήρησαν μελλόντων ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς αὐτὸν λαμβάνειν...

[47] H. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (2006), 30, 115-16, 119; Russell, *Satan*, 34 and n. 6; Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 279-80.

[48] E. Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (1995).

to eat sacrificial pork, and the account of the murder, one by one, of seven brothers in front of their mother. These characters were adopted by Christians as proto-martyrs, and these texts demonstrably influenced the shape and dynamic of (especially Greek) Christian martyr acts.[49] However, although Antiochus is cast as a stereotypical savage and bestial tyrant, and his fiery punishment in the world beyond is predicted by those whom he tortures, both familiar from Christian texts, the Devil is notably absent from 2 and 4 Maccabees, pointing up the significance and novelty of his appearance in Christian martyr acts. A more obvious way in which these Jewish martyrdoms shaped Christian martyr narratives was in the insistent characterization of the persecutor as seized or possessed by mad rage, and acting like a savage beast.[50] This can be seen in the speech(showing characteristically reckless *parrhēsia*, free speech) of the youngest seventh son, on the cusp of being killed in front of his mother, to his persecutor:

> 'You profane tyrant, most impious of all the wicked, since you have received good things and also your kingdom from God, were you not ashamed to murder his servants and torture on the wheel those who practice religion? Because of this, justice has laid up for you intense and eternal fire and tortures, and these throughout all time will never let you go. As a man, were you not ashamed, you most savage beast, to cut out the tongues of men who have feelings like yours and are made of the same elements as you, and to maltreat and torture them in this way?'[51]

d) Mad rage

One of the defining features of the classical tyrant, the rhetorical and philosophical opposite to the good king, was his cruelty and violence, themselves connected to the idea that allowing oneself to be ruled by the passions was a sign of vicious weakness. When tyrannical cruelty expressed itself

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[49] D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martydom and the making of Christianity and Judaism* (1999), ch. 4; S. Shepkaru, *Jewish Martyrs in the Pagan and Christian Worlds* (2006); D. DeSilva, 'An example of how to die nobly for religion: the influence of 4 Maccabees on Origen's *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17.3 (2009), 337-55 ; D. Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, *Christian Memories of the Maccabean Martyrs* (2009).

[50] T. Rajak, 'The angry tyrant', in T. Rajak, ed., *Jewish Perspectives on Hellenistic Rulers* (2007), 110-127.

[51] 4 Maccabees 12.11-13.

through rage and madness, these frequently appear to be uncontrollable external forces, often figured in bestial or daimonic language.[52] Thus when the Jewish boy appeals to Antiochus' humanity in 4 Maccabees (above), we know he is doomed precisely because he addresses the monarch as 'most savage beast', and such a creature will not listen to human reason. As in 2 and 4 Maccabees, the suggestion that humans might commit or facilitate bestial violence underlies many passages in Christian martyr acts, blurring the normal boundaries between man and beast, civilized and wild. Of course, such polarities are hardly a Christian invention, but are integral to Greek literature from Homer onwards.[53]

Furthermore, in both Greek and Latin the languages of rage and insanity are intimately connected, with the result that those who are raging frequently seem out of control, and possibly implicitly not entirely responsible for their actions. For example, Hercules was punitively maddened by the goddess Juno and *furens*, raging, killed his wife and children. It is only on coming to from his frenzy that he sees and understands what it is that he has done.[54] In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the crowd of pagans and Jews in the amphitheatre respond to the announcement that Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian by shouting 'with uncontrollable *thumos* (rage)'[55] and demand that Philip the Asiarch loose a lion on Polycarp, which he notably refuses to do; their savagery and desire for condemnation *ad bestias* is thus surprisingly checked. The Greek recension of the *Martyrdom of saints Carpus, Papylus, and Agathonice* also evokes *thumos*: '[Papylus] too was hung up and scraped [with claws] and endured three pairs [of torturers], but did not utter a sound; like a noble athlete he received the rage [*thumos*] of the adversary.'[56] Papylus endures three pairs of torturers, but the singular rage of a single enemy; as observed above, such shifts of subject between plural humans and singular Devil, effected without remark, yoke the two together intimately.

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[52] R. Padel, *Whom Gods Destroy : Elements of Greek and Tragic Madness* (1995); *Eadem, In and out of the Mind : Greek Images of the Tragic Self* (1992) ; W. Harris, *Restraining Rage : The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (2001).

[53] C. Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles* (1999), ch. 2.

[54] Seneca, *Hercules Furens*; in Euripides' *Herakles*, Herakles is maddened by the goddesses Iris and Lyssa.

[55] *Martyrdom of Pol*ycarp 12: ...τὸ πλῆθος ἐθνῶν τε καὶ Ἰουδαίων τῶν τὴν Σμύρναν κατοικούντων ἀκατασχέτῳ θυμῷ…

[56] *Martyrdom of Carpus, Papylus, and Agathonice* 35: ἀνακρεμασθεὶς δὲ καὶ οὗτος καὶ ξεόμενος ζυγὰς τρεῖς ἤλλαζεν καὶ φωνὴν οὐκ ἔδωκεν, ἀλλ' ὡς γενναῖος ἀθλητὴς ἀπεδέχετο τὸν θυμὸν τοῦ ἀντικειμένου.

In a passage of the Latin *Martyrdom of saints Marian and James* we find the shift in subjectivity between persecuting prefect and Devil which is so typical of these texts, and the two are further collocated by the language of rage and madness:

> For the rage of a blind and bloodthirsty prefect was hunting out all of God's beloved by means of bands of soldiers with vicious and savage spirits. Indeed, his insanity was exercised not only against those who were living freely for God and had remained undisturbed by the earlier persecutions; but the Devil stretched forth his insatiate hand as well against those who, though earlier driven out into exile, had become martyrs in spirit though not yet in blood. These the wild madness of the prefect had crowned.[57]

Here, the main subject of the first sentence is the prefect's *furor* (rage, fury), that of the second sentence is his *insania* (insanity), and that of the third sentence is his *ferox amentia* (wild madness) endowing these qualities with a striking sense of separate aliveness. The second sentence of this passage also effects a neat shift in perspective; the persecuting agent is initially the prefect's mad rage, and then the Devil himself. The adjectives applied to the prefect are *caecatus* (technically one who has been blinded, rather than just *caecus*, one who is blind) and *cruentus* (bloody, with a transferred sense of bloodthirsty). The fact that humans were blinded by, enraged, or maddened by some implied exterior force beyond their control creates some ambiguity about the extent to which the prefect was responsible for his own actions. Turning the tables, persecutors sometimes accused their victims of madness, as in the *Acts of Marcellus*:

[57] *Martyrdom of Marian and James* 2: *namque omnes dilectos Dei cruenti et caecati praesidis furor per militares manus infensis et infestantibus animis requirebat. Nec in hos solos crudelitatis exercebatur insania qui superioribus persecutionibus inconcussi libere deo viverent sed in illos quoque manum diabolus insatiabilem porrigebat quos iamdudum in exilia submotos, etsi nondum sanguine, mente iam martyras, ferox praesidis amentia coronarat.*

> 'With what madness are you inflamed [*quo furore accensus es*],' asked Agricolanus, 'to throw down the symbols of your military oath and to say the things you did?' Marcellus replied: 'There is no madness in those who fear the Lord.'[58]

Furor here is conceived of by Agricolanus as something which has inflamed or kindled Marcellus, and Marcellus' reply suggests that it is a quality which inheres in people; again, as forces that take hold of one. This passage also illustrates the comically different valuation by pagans and Christians of their behaviour and a typically Pauline inversion of pagan values; what is madness to the prefect is not counted as madness by Marcellus.

e) Divine and diabolical indwelling

The idea of fury or madness as a force driving humans to act in certain ways is accompanied in many of our martyr acts by a strong sense of auxiliary or internal divine or diabolical presence. The narrative of Polycarp's death is infused by the sense that he is strengthened by external forces:

> As he said these and many other words he was filled with a joyous courage; his countenance was filled with grace, and not only did he not collapse in terror at what was said to him, but rather it was the governor that was amazed…[59]

He is eager to meet death and requests not to be nailed to the stake on which he is to be burnt, reasoning:

> "Leave me thus. For he who has given me the strength to endure the flames will grant me to remain without flinching in the fire even without the firmness you will give me by using nails."[60]

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[58] *Acts of Marcellus,* recension M, 4: *Agricolanus dixit: quo furore accensus es, ut proiceres sacramenta et talia loquereris? Marcellus respondit: furor nullus in eis est qui Deum timent.*

[59] *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12: Ταῦτα δὲ καὶ ἕτερα πλείονα λέγων θάρσους καὶ χαρᾶς ἐνεπίμπλατο, καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ χάριτος ἐπληροῦντο, ὥστε οὐ μόνον μὴ συμπεσεῖν ταραχθέντα ὑπὸ τῶν λεγομένων πρὸς αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ τοὐναντίον τὸν ἀνθύπατον ἐκστῆναι…

In the first of these passages we find that Polycarp's capacity to endure extreme suffering is ascribed to his being filled with courage and grace, the verb in question being *plēroō*, to fill, which has a primary sense of physically filling a container, be it with food, breath, or liquid, and a figurative sense of filling with emotion, knowledge or, as in the New Testament, with wisdom, grace, and comfort.[61] In the second passage, Polycarp himself claims to be strengthened by God for endurance. Returning to the passage of the *Martyrdom of Agape, Irene, and Chione* discussed above (p. 13), we remember that the suffering women were said to be full of (*plēroumenōn*) the Holy Spirit, the verb in question again being *plēroō*.[62]

The idioms of fullness and in-dwelling were used frequently to explain how martyrs were either strengthened by divine power within them (be it the Holy Spirit, Christ, or God's grace), or even had God suffer within them. Thus the account of the martyrdom of Sanctus in the *Martyrs of Lyons* mentions in passing that '... Christ suffering in him achieved great glory, overwhelming the adversary [*antikeimenon*]...'[63] In the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, Felicitas, giving birth prematurely in captivity, is challenged by her captors to meditate on the horrible torments that await her. Her reply couples the idea of God suffering in and for her with her suffering with him: 'What I am suffering now, I suffer by myself. But then another will be inside me who will suffer for me, just as I shall be suffering for him.'[64] In the *Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius* the Christians' suffering was cast in more scriptural terms, aligned with that of the youths in the fiery furnace in Daniel 3: 'it was not difficult for those of faith to believe that modern marvels could equal those of old, in view of the Lord's promise through the spirit, for he who caused that deed of glory in favour of the three youths

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[60] *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 13: Ἄρετέ με οὕτως· ὁ γὰρ δοὺς ὑπομεῖναι τὸ πῦρ δώσει χωρὶς τῆς ὑμετέρας ἐκ τῶν ἥλων ἀσφαλείας ἄσκυλτον ἐπιμεῖναι τῇ πυρᾷ.

[61] Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, 868ff.

[62] *Martyrdom of Agape, Irene, Chione* 1: ἀντὶ γὰρ τῶν πολεμίων τῶν ὁρατῶν, ἀόρατοι ἐχθροὶ νικῶνται, ἀφανεῖς δαιμόνων ὑποστάσεις πυρὶ παραδίδονται ὑπὸ γυναικῶν καθαρῶν καὶ σεμνῶν, πνεῦματος ἁγίου πληρουμένων.

[63] *Martyrs of Lyons* 23**:** ἐν ᾧ πάσχων Χριστὸς μεγάλας ἐπετέλει δόξας, καταργῶν τὸν ἀντικείμενον...

[64] *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 15: *et illa respondit: modo ego patior quod patior; illic autem alius erit in me qui patietur pro me, quia et ego pro illo passura sum.*

[Daniel 3] was also victorious in us.'[65] In some cases, such as the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, it has been suggested that the emphasis on martyrs being filled with the Holy Spirit demonstrates that the text has a polemical Montanist angle, since one of the defining features of Montanism was the belief that the Holy Spirit directly inspired or filled chosen human vessels with striking prophetic results.

The acknowledgment of divine support, even indwelling, raises the question of how far martyrs are responsible for their own bravery and suffering, a theme introduced above (pp. 4-5) with reference to the space which Tertullian accorded to human virtue. Circling back to the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* again, we find a telling correction in an account of the endurance of a preliminary set of martyrs which illustrates an essential tension between these ideas. The martyrs were said not to have let a sigh or a groan escape them, 'showing to all of us that in the hour of their torment these noblest of Christ's witnesses were not present in the flesh, or rather that the Lord was there present holding conversation with them.'[66] The corrective *mallon de* (or rather) in this sentence suggests an attempt to override (but not, after all, to erase) the idea that the martyrs' endurance could be explained by their absenting themselves from the flesh, with the idea that they were in fact strengthened by Christ.

The conviction that God fights alongside, for, and even *in* the martyr, was often paralleled by the conception that the enemies of the Christians are variously filled with, armed, and goaded by the Devil. In his treatise *Against Celsus*, Origen declares: 'for it is true that the souls of those who condemn Christians, and betray them, and rejoice in persecuting them, are filled [*plēroumenas*] with wicked demons.'[67] The effect of describing humans as being full of the Devil is often to blur the boundaries of responsibility between humans and Satan. In the *Martyrs of Lyons*, persecutors are explicitly described as being filled with or stirred up by the Devil. One passage about torture, which also illustrates some of the subjects discussed above (such as the shift in subject from tyrant - who is here a torturer - to Devil and the victory of Christ over the torturer *through* his saints) runs thus:

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[65] *Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius* 3: *nec difficile credentibus fuit nova posse ad vetera exempla pertingere, domino per spiritum pollicente, quia qui gloriam istam operatus est in tribus pueris, vincebat et in nobis*. See ibid. 4.

[66] *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 2: … ἐπιδεικνυμένους ἅπασιν ἡμῖν, ὅτι ἐκείνη τῇ ὥρᾳ βασανιζόμενοι τῆς σαρκὸς ἀπεδήμουν οἱ γενναιότατοι μάρτυρες τοῦ Χριστοῦ, μᾶλλον δέ, ὅτι παρεστὼς ὁ κύριος ὡμίλει αὐτοῖς.

[67] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.43: ἀληθὲς γὰρ τὸ φαύλων δαιμόνων πληρουμένας τὰς τῶν καταδικαζόντων Χριστιανοὺς ψυχὰς καὶ τῶν προδιδόντων καὶ τῶν εὐδοκούντων Χριστιανοῖς προσπολεμεῖν.

> The tyrant's instruments of torture had been utterly overcome by Christ through the perseverance of the saints; and so the Devil turned his mind to other devices, confinement in the darkness of a prison, or in the most difficult places, the stretching of limbs in the stocks to the fifth notch, and all sorts of other indignities, which assistants when provoked to anger [*orgizdomenoi*] and filled with the Devil [*diabolou plēreis*] are accustomed to inflict upon their prisoners.'[68]

Here we find the verb of filling applied to diabolical influence, itself scripturally warranted in Acts 5.3 where Peter says: "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart (*eplērōsen tēn kardian*)…?"[69] Origen mingles another set of scriptural images of the Devil getting inside us:

> If during all the time of trial and test we give no place to the Devil in our hearts when he would defile us with evil thoughts of denial, as indecision or some inducement draws us away from martyrdom and perfection… then we can say that we have filled up the measure of bearing witness.[70]

The allusions here are to the gospel account of Satan's instigating Judas to betray Jesus: 'And during the supper, *when the Devil had already put it into the heart* [*beblēkotos eis tēn kardian*] of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son to betray him…'[71] *Beblēkotos* comes from *ballō*, a verb with a primary physical sense of

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[68] *Martyrs of Lyons* 27**:** καταργηθέντων δὲ τῶν τυραννικῶν κολαστηρίων ὑπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ διὰ τῆς τῶν μακαρίων ὑπομονῆς, ἑτέρας μηχανὰς διάβολος ἐπενόει, τὰς κατὰ τὴν εἱρκτὴν ἐν τῷ σκότει καὶ τῷ χαλεπωτάτῳ χωρίῳ συγκλείσεις καὶ τὰς ἐν τῷ ξύλῳ διατάσεις τῶν ποδῶν ἐπὶ πέμπτον διατεινομένων τρύπημα καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς αἰκίας ὅσας εἰώθασιν ὀργιζόμενοι ὑπουργοὶ καὶ ταῦτα διαβόλου πλήρεις διατιθέναι τοὺς ἐγκλεομένους.

[69] Acts 5:3: 'Ανανία, διὰ τί ἐπλήρωσεν ὁ σατανᾶς τὴν καρδίαν σου...'

[70] Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 11: Εἰ παρ'ὅλον τὸν τῆς ἐξετάσεως καὶ τοῦ πειρασμοῦ χρόνον, μὴ διδῶμεν τόπον τῷ διαβόλῳ ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν, μολύνειν ἡμᾶς διαλογισμοῖς πονηροῖς θέλοντι ἀρνήσεως, ἢ διψυχίας ἤ τινος πιθανότητος προκαλουμένης ἐπὶ τὰ ἐχθρὰ τῷ μαρτυρίῳ καῖ τῇ τελειότητι ... τότ' ἂν εἴποιμεν, ὅτι ἐπληρώσαμεν τὸ μέτρον τῆς ὁμολογίας.

[71] John 13:2.

casting or throwing, and a looser secondary sense of placing or putting; in either case, the Devil's entry has a physical quality to it. Paul offers a similarly locative idea of the Devil in his command: 'give no place [*topon*] to the Devil'.[72] Origen combines these two phrases to suggest that Christians might be able to resist giving a place to the Devil in our hearts, suggesting that vulnerability to external forces is to some extent under our control.[73]

4. Persecution after persecution

Many of the prominent themes of the literature of the era of persecution are adapted in Christian sermons and poems on martyrs pronounced in the fourth and fifth centuries, long after the reality and memory of persecution had passed. This was not, of course, an era of security. Although the persecuting Roman official was no longer the most prominent agent of diabolical activity on earth, Christians perceived themselves to be beset by other threatening forces, especially by heretics and 'barbarians'. Some embattled Christian sects such as the Donatists continued to think of themselves as suffering diabolically tinged persecution and to cast their forced deaths as martyrdoms, only the agents of that persecution were now Roman Christian officials.[74] Furthermore, with the rise of asceticism the language of combat and torture once used to describe what martyrs had suffered was redeployed to characterize saintly demon-fighting.[75] As martyrs came to figure prominently in the liturgy of the church year and in sacred topography, their memories came to be celebrated in increasingly fanciful hagiographies, sermons and poems. Indeed, poetic and homiletic accounts of martyrs in this period draw on the anonymous martyr stories I have discussed above. It is thus hardly surprising that they develop familiar themes - of diabolical savagery and madness in persecutors and divine fullness and indwelling in martyrs - or that they continue to create thrilling slippages between demonic and human agency.

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[72] Ephesians 4:27.

[73] R. Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (2002), 66-7; 195-6, shows how Origen combined the same texts in his *Commentary on Ephesians* and *De Principiis*.

[74] M. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*: *The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa* (1996).

[75] D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (2006); Grig, *Making Martyrs*.

Nonetheless, the changing contexts and audiences for Christian writers, as well as increasing pressures on them to assert their spiritual and intellectual authority through their writings, stretch and transform these themes in intriguing ways. I select here three examples to illustrate this point.

John Chrysostom, in a homily on the martyr Julian, compares Julian's execution (tied up in a sack of snakes and hurled into the sea) with the Old Testament archetype of Daniel in the lion's den. This is a tricky exercise because Daniel was famously left untouched by the lions, whereas Julian died in his sack, although he was then miraculously assumed into heaven. Chrysostom inverts the polarities of man and beast along familiar lines by suggesting that 'in each case the wild beasts respected the bodies of the holy men, to the shame and condemnation of those [i.e. persecutors] who are honoured with reason and held worthy of being human, but reveal their savagery in the excess of their own particular bestiality…'[76] He then engages in a familiar kind of scriptural parallelism, comparing the martyr with Daniel, and celebrating the martyr's bravery in facing the *thumos* (rage) of bestial enemies:

> Daniel fought and beat two lions, but they were sensible ones [*aisthētous*]. Julian fought and beat a single lion, but it was a conceptual one [*noēton*]. For 'our enemy, the devil', it says, 'circles like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour'. [I Peter 5:8] But he was defeated by the martyr's courage. My point is that Julian shed sin's poison. For that reason it didn't swallow him up. That's why he was afraid of neither a lion nor the wild beasts' rage.[77]

Daniel fought lions which were *aisthētous*, that is, that could be sensed; Julian fought one which was *noēton*, conceptual, or mental, that is, the Devil, as suggested by the simile in I Peter which compares

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[76] John Chrysostom, *Homily on the Martyr Julian*: Ἀλλὰ πανταχοῦ αἰδοῦνται τὰ σώματα τῶν ἁγίων οἱ θῆρες, εἰς αἰσχῦνην καὶ κατηγορίαν τῶν λόγῳ τετιμημένων, καὶ ἀνθρώπων μὲν εἶναι καταξιωθέντων, τήν δὲ ἐκείνων ἀγριότητα τῇ τῆς οἰκείας ὑπερβολῇ θηριωδίας ἀποκρυπτόντων.

[77] John Chrysostom, *Homily on the Martyr Julian*: ὁ Δανιὴλ κατηγωνίσατο καὶ ἐνίκησε δύο λέοντας, ἀλλ' αἰσθητοῦς · οὗτος κατηγωνίσατο καὶ ἐνίκησεν ἕνα λέοντα, ἀλλὰ νοητόν. Ὁ γὰρ ἐχθρὸς, φησὶν, ἡμῶν διάβολος περιέρχεται ὡς λέων ὠρυόμενος, ζητῶν τίνα καταπίῃ · 'αλλ' ἡττήθη τῇ ἀνδρείᾳ τοῦ μάρτυρος · ἀπέθετο γὰρ τὸν ἰὸν τῆς ἁμαρτίας · διόπερ οὐ κατέπιε τοῦτον · διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἔδεισεν οὔτε λέοντα, οὔτε τὸν θυμὸν τῶν θηρίων.

the Devil to a lion. The historical snakes in Julian's sack have been conveniently relegated to the background and the noetic lion takes centre-stage.

Such playful typological exploitation of the parallel rhythms of martyr texts and scripture is openly acknowledged by other Greek homilists to be stretching the limits of the genre. Thus Gregory of Nyssa, in a homily on the forty martyrs of Sebaste, elaborates on how the martyrs' confession of Christ was 'a blow to their opponents, this was a spear-point aimed at the Enemy, with this word the Adversary was wounded in the middle of his heart, this was the stone, slung by David's hand [I Samuel 17.49:51] that hit the helmet of the Adversary.' He then admits that his sermon has broken loose from its reins, been carried away and transgressed its boundaries, and that 'It boldly broaches what cannot be caught in words and, continuing to speak about these things, it describes – as if it was a spectator of things invisible…'[78] The pointed reference to the difficulty of the ekphrastic exercise is of course a self-deprecating piece of self-promotion, but it is also tantamount to an admission that the biblicizing physical language of combat used to characterize the martyrs' confession is a way of describing a combat which was in fact invisible. This is some departure from the aesthetic of martyr acts, which rarely acknowledge the figurative conceits of their scriptural typologies and allusions.

The late fourth and early fifth centuries also saw the poetic elaboration of martyrdoms in terms which are partly scriptural, but which also borrow from the realms and techniques of secular epic. Prudentius describes Agnes' martyrdom thus:

> All this Agnes tramples on and treads under foot as she stands and with her heel bears down on the head of the fierce serpent which bespatters all earthly things in the world with his venom and plunges them in hell: but now that he is subdued by a virgin's foot he lowers the crests on his fiery head and in defeat dares not to lift it up.[79]

The Devil figured as serpent is an ancient Christian interpretation of the narrative of the Fall in Genesis, and we have already encountered the image of martyrs trampling on the Devil in fulfilment

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[78] Gregory of Nyssa, *First Homily on the Forty Martyrs at Sebaste*, 149/22.

[79] Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 14.312-18: *Haec calcat Agnes ac pede proterit / stans et draconis calce premens caput, / terrena mundi qui ferus omnia / spargit uenenis mergit et inferis, / nunc uirginali perdomitus solo / cristas cerebri deprimit ignei / nec uictus audet tollere uerticem.*

of God's curse in Genesis (pp. 4 and 16 above). Prudentius' Agnes also appears to draw on Perpetua's dream vision of treading down the head of a serpent under her foot (p. 16 above).[80] However, this provides only a very basic structure for an elaborate image which, in its vivid bestial detail (a venom-spattering, crested, fiery head) and characterization of conquered coyness, perhaps recalls Seneca's account of the mighty but definitively vanquished snake-headed Cerberus whimpering at Hercules' heel; Prudentius certainly knew his Seneca.[81] In Prudentius such details are strictly extraneous to the historical or theological demands of the narrative, but they are absolutely essential to poetic pleasure.

5. Conclusions

Early Christians saw their acts in 'eschatological, not political terms' and viewed the Devil as their primary opponent in persecution.[82] Of course, the belief that invisible spiritual powers, be they gods or *daimones*, influenced, intervened in, or even drove human affairs is extremely ancient and widespread. It can (and has been) identified in near eastern myth and in the earliest surviving Greek literary texts.[83] It suffuses ancient tragic drama. It is also a major part of the inheritance of Jewish apocalyptic.[84] This phenomenon has been studied with close philological and philosophical attention in Greek tragic and medical literature to rich and productive effect by Ruth Padel and Bernard Williams.[85] It has been examined in the Gospel narratives and the church of the first two hundred years in luminous detail by Elaine Pagels, and books about beliefs in and concepts of the Devil in late

[80] *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, 4.

[81] G. Sixt, 'Des Prudentius' Abhängigkeit von Seneca und Lucan', *Philologus* 51 (1892), 501-6. See Seneca, *Hercules Furens* ll. 783-827.

[82] W. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (1965), 15-16; Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (1981), 37, 41, 71-2; E. Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (1995), ch. 5.

[83] N. Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (1987)

[84] C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (1982), and J. B. Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (1977), ch. 5.

[85] B. Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (1993), ch. 6; R. Padel, *In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self* (1992), ch. 6.

antiquity continue to appear.[86] But these works have all tended to focus on the treatises of Christian intellectuals at the expense of the range of martyr stories in circulation which reflected and shaped ideas about the Devil at work in the world. Early Christian theologizing about the role of the Devil and demons in persecution was not done in a vacuum. In this paper I hope to have demonstrated a fruitful way of establishing a broader and highly influential context for such thought by examining the implications of the presentation of diabolical, divine, and human action in martyr stories.

The title of this paper deliberately alludes to Stuart Clark's excellent book, but it would be misleading to suggest that the Devil and demons were *just* 'good to think with' in late antiquity, if by 'good to think with' we mean that they were tackled *only* as a way of exploring anthropological and soteriological issues. This over-privileges our embarrassment at the apparent importance of diabolical beliefs to the early church and diminishes the significance of the cosmic and apocalyptic dimension of accounts of persecution. It would be dangerous to assume that diabolical forces were only 'good to think with' for early Christians in the same classificatory or relational way in which Lévi-Strauss deemed that animals were totems 'good to think with' for 'primitive man'.[87] Although hierarchies of demons associated with different vices and sins eventually emerge in, for example, Christian ascetic demonology,[88] the diabolical tends not to be so colourfully variegated or systematized in these early narratives of persecution, but is instead portrayed as single-mindedly concentrated on unsettling Christians from their stubborn adherence to faith. And although martyr acts make allusive, typological, and figurative connections between the works of the Devil and the works of man, this does not mean such connections were not thought to be very real. Although the 'noetic lion' which John Chrysostom envisages for the martyr Julian was a metaphor for the Devil, it was implicitly just as significant an enemy as the sensible lions were to Daniel; indeed, if one follows the hierarchical dynamic of typology, Julian's martyrdom represents the fuller, more complete antitype to Daniel's type. Investigating the ways in which Christians thought about and used typology and metaphor, both hermeneutically in their interpretation of scripture and other canonical texts, and creatively in their coinage and deployment of figurative language, is therefore the next step in this project on the diabolical imagination.

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[86] Russell, *The Devil*; Russell, *Satan*; H. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (2006).

[87] C. Levi-Strauss, tr. R. Needham, *Totemism* (1969).

[88] Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*.