

THE DEVIL

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OF COURSE, SATAN was not always the devil.

In recent decades, the devil has become a staple of popular films and taken over older images in many people's imaginations. When we see a Satan or a Devil movie, we can ask ourselves just what aspect of the devil tradition the film-makers are tapping into. Some will be drawing on the devil as the serpent tempting Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden. Others will be remembering the cosmic battle between the archangel Michael and the Dragon in the books of Daniel and the Apocalypse. Again others will be stimulated by the biblical images of hell (fire and torment and gnawing worms). There are also the many writers and directors who are not so familiar with the texts that they draw on their own memories and imaginings, however accurate or inaccurate they may be.

But, this, in fact, is what has happened in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and in the quite separate Jewish traditions and Christian traditions. The oral folklore, the literature, including the commentaries on the biblical texts and the theological writings, the sculptures and paintings, the transformation by disciples of witchcraft and Satanism, the secular interpretations (both comic and serious) mean that there are quite different pictures of the Devil; that there is a developing iconography throughout the centuries. And, for the last hundred years or more there have been the cinema images, reinforcing old ideas and pictures, playing with the old ideas and producing new images - and some plain old money-making ventures.

So, when we are enjoying a horror movie with a satanic theme, we need to do a bit of homework to appreciate what is going on and what is in the mind of the makers. Are they in

touch with the genuine tradition (for instance, in the movie versions of the Gospels)? Are they mixing bible texts with Renaissance art styles (for instance, *Fantasia* and the Berlioz's *Night on Bald Mountain* and the Gospel story of the last judgment with the apocalyptic monsters)? Are they pursuing an informed and scholarly approach to the devil (for instance, exploring the question of an incarnation of the divine which Christians believe in Jesus as divine and human—is it possible for an incarnation of the devil as in *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Omen* series?) Or is the movie just a play on what the devil might be like (Peter Cook as a satirical Satan in *Bedazzled* or Al Pacino—using the name, John Milton, and evocations of *Paradise Lost*—in *The Devil's Advocate*?)

The Hebrew Scriptures

1. Angels

The best place to start is with angels. We have been so influenced by paintings, classical and popular, that it may take a bit of mental adjustment to realise that, originally, angels were not meant to be considered as what we might call separate individuals. Rather, they were personifications of God, of particular qualities of God. Those familiar with Biblical stories may remember that Gabriel was a personification of God's communication with people; Raphael, God's healing power. But, once personified and, especially, when named, the angels took on a life of their own in people's imaginations. It is important to realise that the angels were, therefore, good.

2. Satan and Job

A question worth asking is: where do we find the first mention of Satan in the Bible? Although the book of Genesis is found at the beginning of the Bible, it is not the earliest

written book. In fact, it was finally edited and written in the 5th century before the Christian era. But Satan appears before this. The place? The book of Job. One of God's personifications, the Tester of human fidelity, the Satan is something like the legal prosecutor, 'adversary' or even, in our later terminology, the 'devil's advocate' (and the Greek is '*diabolos*' meaning 'one who passes to another information against a third party') who roams the earth looking at how faithful people are. His eye is caught by the devout Job and Satan proposes to God that he be allowed to inflict suffering on Job who will then curse God. As we know, it doesn't happen. Despite the loss of his children and all his possessions, despite personal sickness and torment, he remains faithful (Job 1 and 2).

The Satan as an aspect of God appears also in the re-write of the history of the kings in I Chronicles 20 where David's presumption in making a census of the people is attributed to the Satan who is angry with Israel and stirs up David.

So, the first image of the Satan is not that of an evil being but, rather, a being who is a facet of God, a tester of human fidelity. The prophet Jeremiah, a prophet who often laments that he has been born and called to speak on God's behalf, (as in ch.12) is a similar figure of suffering who deals directly with God as does the figure of the faithful servant of God (in the second part of the Book of Isaiah, especially 42,49, 50, 52-3) who suffers for human sin but is finally glorified.

3. Genesis and the Serpent

But, when the Hebrew people were in exile from Judea in Babylon, they discovered for the first time other creation stories, saw temples and statues of deities and were challenged to formulate their own beliefs in oral and literary form. In order to understand human disobedience to God, they wrote the Genesis stories of Adam and Eve. Now the adversary is evil, defying God and wanting the first man and woman to turn against God. The Hebrews borrowed (as they often did) some trappings



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from the stories they heard from the neighbouring cultures and made them their own. They chose the figure of the serpent (which had been a sign of healing during the Exodus, Numbers), 'the most subtle of all the wild beasts that God had made (Genesis 3:1) and it became the true tempter, the evil tempter. The Satan now has an evil dimension. An angel and a symbolic snake are part of the imagining of evil—and the theme of God destroying the devil is also introduced along with the theme of the specially chosen one, son of the special woman (because Eve means 'mother of all the living'), who will crush the devil, crush the tempting Satan:

'Be accursed beyond all cattle, all wild beasts. You shall crawl on your belly and eat dust every day of your life. I will make you enemies of each other: you and the woman, your offspring and her offspring. It will crush your head and you will strike its heel'. (Genesis 3:14-15).

In view of this text, it seems strange that there are not more movies showing this confrontation between the woman and the devil. There are many heroes who destroy the devil—and, a new theme that is introduced, the offspring of the devil who will ultimately be crushed but who will be dangerous and venomous to the 'sons (and daughters) of God' who will confront the devil in later generations.

In the much later Book of Wisdom (not a canonical book in Hebrew and Protestant Scriptures but accepted in the Catholic canon), we read 'it was the devil's envy that brought death into the world' (Wisdom 2:24, written

in the first century BCE).

In the centuries after the fifty years' experience of exile in Babylon (587-537 BCE), the remnant Jewish people, centred on their capital, Jerusalem, did not get involved in foreign politics as they had done before but, rather, focused on the writing and the translating of their sacred books into Greek, the *Septuagint*, and developing synagogue prayer and worship. They developed their literature of prayer and of wisdom (see Psalm 109 which is a variation on Job but without the Satan, and Psalm 91 where angels care for the tormented person, a psalm that Jesus and the Satan/Devil will argue about in the temptations in the desert).

In the prophet Zechariah (about 500 BCE) we find that the writers are beginning to see Satan as malevolent, not just a tester of the human race, but an enemy—and an enemy of God. Satan is standing at the right hand of the High Priest who is standing before the 'angel of Yahweh' (God himself) and the 'angel of Yahweh' changes tone towards Satan now, 'May Yahweh rebuke you, Satan, may Yahweh rebuke you' (Zech. 3:1-2).

4. Asmodeus.

There is also a Hebrew mythology in stories and writings outside the recognised Scriptures (for instance, stories of Lilith, wife of Adam). Some of these stories have been drawn on by the writers of the Satan movies. An interesting example is found in the book of Tobit (again, not recognised as canonical by Jews or Protestants but accepted by Catholics). One of the major archangels, Raphael, the voyager and healer (introduced in 3:16), is a principal character in this book. But there is also reference to diabolical 'possession': Sarah, the virtuous woman, has seven of her husbands killed by Asmodeus before the marriages could be consummated. It is considered that she is in the grip of Asmodeus, 'that worst of demons' and needs to be rid of him. Tobias, the dutiful son of the worthy Tobit, is able to rid her of her demons and marries her.

The origins of the figure of Asmodeus are

similar to those of Satan. He is probably the 'destroyer' (as in 2 Samuel 24:16 and Wisdom 18:25). It is suggested that the Asmodeus figure is related to a Parsee demon, Aesma, another example of the Hebrew people appropriating ideas and images from neighbouring cultures. Asmodeus is found in the traditions of Judaism after the biblical era - and in The Testament of Solomon is an enemy of the marriage act.

5. Manes and the principles of Good and Evil

Around the time of the Jewish exile in Babylon, there were spiritual movements in Persia, in Babylon. It was the period of the rise of Zoroastrianism and the time of Manes and the growing way of thinking about Good and Evil. Rather than holding a belief in a source of Good (which could be called God) and evil as subordinate to the Good, a physical and moral absence of Good, the Persians thought of two equal principles or sources of Good and Evil. With the interest in astrology and its accompanying symbols from the observation of the stars, a mentality developed that tended to go beyond the earth, used colours and numbers, often in a hyperbolic and poetic style, to interpret the universe. The name given to this movement was 'Apocalyptic' and, over the centuries, it infiltrated the Jewish imagination.

In the 7th century BCE, the prophet Ezekiel was already using this kind of imagery, the most famous of which was the apocalyptic battle with Gog, of Magog, whose cavalry was at Megiddo and where, on the plain of Megiddo, Gog, symbol of evil, would be defeated. (It is from Megiddo that we derive the word and meaning of Armageddon.)

It is not a difficult step to introduce this apocalyptic imagination to the themes of Satan and the devil.

6. The Book of Daniel

The name of the angel who confronts Satan in Zechariah 3:1-2 has the symbolic name, Michael, literally 'who is like God'. This Michael is a great angel, later the principal

archangel. He is re-introduced in the Book of Daniel which dates from the second century BCE (10:20-11:1). It is often a morale-boosting book for the Jews who were experiencing fierce military assault and religious persecution from the Syrian king, Antiochus. In chapter 7, there is an image of beasts (representing the kings hostile to the Jews) but the saviour figure of the Jewish Scriptures, the Son of Man, comes in majestic triumph on the clouds of heaven and vanquishes all the beasts.

This theme of the struggle against the beasts, especially under the image of the dragon, is linked with Daniel, chapter 12, where Michael the good angel protects the people in a time of great tribulation. (Daniel 12 is a great source of imagery for Satan movies, especially as it is taken up in the book of the Apocalypse.)

7. Life after death

The last theme from the Hebrew Scriptures for background to the Satan movies is the introduction of the theme of life after death. It comes as a surprise to many to discover that until about two hundred years before the coming of Jesus, there was only the vaguest of notions about a true life after death—and this from a people who had spent centuries in Egypt even building pyramids, the extraordinary monuments to a belief in life after death. The Hebrew notion was that of ‘Sheol’, where people lingered like ‘shades’ in a gulf or a pit. The person was not annihilated in death but the aftermath of life was almost life-less.

With the reflections in the psalms, in the book of Job and other wisdom literature, there emerged, along with some influence of Greek thinking about the immortality of the soul and some eastern thinking about the new life of the body, the ‘resurrection of the body’, a fuller understanding of what came to be called heaven and hell. One can find an early trace of it in that same chapter of Daniel, chapter 12, with a reference to a Book where the names of the virtuous are written. But Daniel is still advised to keep this book a secret.

This gives these initial explorations of the

theme of life and death a mysterious quality, Michael defending the virtuous but the wicked ‘wandering this way and that’ and wickedness increasing (v 4).

The apocalyptic influence tended to reinforce the conflict of two sources, one of good and the other of evil. There were to be terrible times of woe, described with apocalyptic dramatic hyperbole. A fuller life after death could be anticipated. This imaginative look at the end of days gave a new context for the activity of the Satan of the Devil.

The Christian Scriptures

It is commonly agreed that most of the Christian scriptures were written between 40 and 100 of the Christian era. Paul was a pharisee and knew his scriptures well and so his letters, the earliest of the writings, reflect the developments of thinking from the Judaic tradition. The other letters of the New Testament also draw on these traditions. The Gospels, which were decades in the making, going through an oral phase until the apostles grew old or were executed, were then written down by particular communities with their own interests in the life and death of Jesus. Matthew’s Gospel is considered to be a Gospel for Jewish Christians. The New Testament ends with the apocalyptic Book of Revelation which was heavily influenced by Jewish apocalyptic imagination. The movie-makers have drawn on the Christian developments of the Satan themes, especially in the Jesus movies.

1. Paul

Paul does not use a great deal of Satan and devil language. He tends to talk more about sin and death rather than personifying it in diabolical symbols (Romans 7:13). Explicit references to Satan are to his role as enemy of the human race and as the punisher: the man guilty of incest in 1 Corinthians 5:5 is to be handed over to Satan for punishment; Satan as the ‘god of this world’ who blinds unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4), who is also referred to as ‘the ruler who governs the air, the spirit

who is at work in the rebellious' Ephesians. 2:2). In one of his earliest letters, when Paul believed that the second coming of Christ was imminent—as the years passed, he realised that this 'Parousia', this special Second Coming, was not going to happen in the immediate future—he spoke of The Rebel, The Enemy, a symbolic person who would act destructively on Satan's part (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12). The moviemakers have dramatised this emissary of Satan who, though not Satan, nevertheless embodies the Satanic and diabolical in this world. But it is Jesus who 'by his death could take away the power of the devil' (Hebrews 2:14).

Which means that Paul is not a strong source for movie-makers. He certainly writes about angels—a now seemingly quaint reference to women covering their heads at worship 'out of respect for angels' (considered as guardians of public order and worship). He also draws on the hierarchy of angels described in Hebrew literature, 'choirs of angels' with names such as Sovereignities and Powers which Paul refers to. He also refers to the power of God in reference to coming in glory with the angels.

2. The Gospels

The tempter

Satan makes an immediate appearance in the Gospels, in the first chapter of Mark, considered the earliest of the Gospels. He is the Satan who tests Jesus in the desert, just as the Satan tested Job. Satan is not presented as the evil one in this Gospel. Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to be tested for forty days and forty nights (succeeding in confronting the Satan and remaining faithful to God whereas the chosen people of the Exodus, wandering the desert for forty years did not). The Gospel says that he was cared for by angels (Mark 1:12-13).

Matthew and Luke also put the temptations in the desert into a positive context, that of Jesus being led by the Holy Spirit. For Luke the tempter is simply the devil. Luke's devil has some dominion over the whole world and

offers Jesus his power and glory if Jesus will worship him. This is a powerful development of the theme where the devil now has cosmic power and wants to be worshipped. At the end of the temptation scene in Luke, the devil leaves to return 'at the appointed time', the time of Jesus' passion and death.

Matthew has a more detailed development. The Satan is first simply referred to as 'the tempter'. After the first test about turning stones into bread, he is called 'the devil'. It is the same after the other two tests. But Jesus' final words are, 'Be off, Satan!' The Gospel with more explicit reference to Judaism has all three.

Jesus uses this language of Satan himself. For instance, when Peter wants to protect Jesus from suffering, Jesus puts his refusal very strongly, 'Get behind me, Satan. You are an obstacle in my path because the way you think is not God's way but man's' (16:23). Peter is like the tempter. With Judas, however, he is referred to as a devil by Jesus after the miracle of the loaves (John 6:70-71: he is seen to be the tool of the devil, 'They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot to betray him' (John 13:2). The Satan is the dark devil who has succeeded in his tempting of Judas: 'Satan entered him... he went out. Night had fallen (John 13:27-30).

This theme continues in The Acts of the Apostles where Ananias and Sapphira keep back money they have promised to give to the early community. Peter asks Ananias how 'Satan can have so possessed you that you should lie to the Holy Spirit?' (5:3).

Possessed by devils

Diabolical possession movies have been popular since *The Exorcist*. The Gospel foundation for this is in the several miracle stories where Jesus 'casts out devils' and 'unclean spirits' from afflicted people. Who or what these devils were has been long discussed. At some time, they are symbolic of harmful illness, as with the boy described by his father as a lunatic whereas he sounds like an epileptic; but 'when Jesus rebuked it, the devil came out of the boy'

Matthew 17:14-18. A much more detailed version of the fits and of the behaviour of the disciples and Jesus is given in Mark 9:14-29. Luke's version is shorter but also graphic in its description of convulsions and the boy foaming at the mouth—'the devil threw him to the ground in convulsions'. The spirit is 'an unclean spirit' (Luke 9:37-43).

Often the devils speak out against Jesus, or argue that they do not want to come out of the person they inhabit and possess. Early in Jesus' ministry, in Mark 1: 21-28, the crowds watch and listen as an 'unclean spirit' and Jesus argue (also in Luke 4:31-37). In Matthew (8:32-34), there is a dumb demoniac who speaks when the devil is cast out.

Mark has quite a long narrative about a possessed man on the far side of the Sea of Galilee who lived in a cave, so fierce that he had to be chained, who howled and gashed himself with stones. The evil spirits possessing him are challenged by Jesus and their reply as to their name is the famous quotation, 'My name is legion, for there are many of us'. This is the story where the outcast devils go into the herd of pigs and rush headlong over the cliff into the sea (Mark 5:1-20). Matthew has a shorter version with a few different details about the man and his behaviour (8:28-34), Luke a longer one (8:26-39) where the spirits plead not to be sent back to their home, 'the Abyss', the depths of the earth.

There are several women friends of Jesus called Mary and their stories in the Christian storytelling and art tradition get entangled with one another. This is especially true of Mary of Magdala. The main reference to her is with several women who were 'cured of evil spirits and ailments', 'from whom seven demons had gone out'. This has led people making her the actually anonymous prostitute of Luke 7:36-50 as well as attributing to her (because of the anointing with oil) stories of Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 12: 1-11). This gives some kind of 'official' basis for the linking of possession and sexuality.

A key Gospel text on possession is Luke

11:14-22, also Matthew 22-28. Jesus is in debate with his critics, the religious leaders, who accuse him of casting out devils in the name of 'Beelzebul, the prince of devils' (sometimes referred to as Beelzebub). Jesus says that Satan cannot be divided against himself and that it is by the power of God that Jesus casts out devils—and that this is a sign that God's kingdom is amongst us. However, he adds that the devils prowl—'when an unclean spirit goes out of a man, it wanders through waterless country, looking for a place to rest, and not finding one, it says, 'I will go back to the home I came from'. But, on arrival, finding it swept and tidied, it then goes off and brings in seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and set up house there so that the man ends up by being worse than he was before' (vv 24-26).

In the Gospels it is not so much Satan himself who possesses people but rather his associate devils who act for him and in his name. *The devil and hell*

Hell and the devil have also been popular movie themes. The Gospels offer some imaginative basis. Jesus threatens the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida in Galilee with wanting to be exalted on high but with being thrust down to hell (Lk. 10:13-15). Jesus alludes to a prophecy from Isaiah (14:13-15) where a proud king, referred to as the Daystar, son of Dawn:

'How did you come to fall from the heavens...
How did you come to be thrown to the ground,
you who enslaved the nations?
You who used to think to yourself,
'I will climb up to the heavens;
and higher than the stars of God
I will set my throne.
I will sit on the Mount of Assembly
in the recesses of the north.
I will climb to the top of the thunderclouds,
I will rival the Most High.'
What! Now you have fallen to Sheol,
to the very bottom of the abyss!

Jesus goes on to refer to this passage when he talks about the 'fall' of Satan. I watched Satan fall like lightning from heaven' (v.18).

Daystar can be the name of the ‘Light-bearer’, Lucifer. It was not difficult for later generations of Christians to link the Lucifer and his pride and vaunting against God with the story of the fall of the Daystar and make the link that the Gospels make to Lucifer being Satan, thrust down to hell.

Matthew and Mark have several allusions to this hell making it a place of horror, of darkness, worms, torment. It is eternal fire in 18:5-10 in the passage where those who give scandal to children are damned and where anyone who sins with a limb should cut it off or pluck out an offending eye. It is, in Mark 9:48, a place ‘where their worm does not die nor their fire go out’. This is a direct quotation about punishment from Sirach 7:17—‘Be very humble since the punishment of the godless is fire and worms’—and from Isaiah 66:24—‘...the corpses of men who have rebelled against me. Their worm will not die nor their fire go out; they will be loathsome to all mankind’.

It is worth noting that the specific reference is not so much to hell as to Gehenna, to the valley of Jerusalem, Gehinnom, where infant sacrifice once took place and which became a rubbish tip.

Jesus does not refer to hell in the Sermon on the Mount (5-7), but, as the Gospel goes on there are more references to hell: ‘The disciple is not superior to his master... if they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, what will they not say of his household?’ (10:25); ‘fear him... who can destroy both body and soul in hell’ (10:28). Allusions to aspects of hell occur in Jesus’ parables, like that of the Rich Man and Lazarus where the Rich Man who feasted lavishly and never gave anything to the poor man at his gate goes into hell. And Lazarus who is in heaven (referred to as the ‘Bosom of Abraham’ Luke 16: 19-31) cannot move from heaven. The Rich Man wants Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue, ‘for I am in agony in these flames’. At the end of the parable where the guests refuse to come to the wedding feast, the man without the wedding garment is to be

bound hand and foot and thrown out into the dark where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth (Matthew 22:13-14 and also Matthew 8:12). It is the same with the man who buried his talent instead of trading with it (Matthew 25:30).

At the end of Jesus’ last discourse in Matthew, the parable of the Last Judgment (25:31-46) and the separation of the faithful sheep from the faithless goats, those who have cared for the sick, prisoners and those who have neglected them, Jesus is again explicit about the devil and hell, ‘Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels...and they will go away to eternal punishment’.

Satan and the Prince of this world.

There are not so many references to Satan in John’s Gospel. There are those for Judas. In an angry confrontation with his critics who claim to be true children of Abraham, Jesus says that:

The devil is your father,
and you prefer to do what your father wants.
He was a murderer from the start;
he was never grounded in the truth;
there is no truth in him at all:
when he lies
he is drawing on his own store,
because he is a liar and the father of lies (8:44)

With this background, Jesus in his last discourse, refers to Satan as the adversary, the tempter and ‘the prince of this world being already condemned’ (16:11). John’s Gospel was the last to be written and it reflects the themes of the other Gospels but is not as expansive in dealing with Satan. Satan appears more strongly in the other Johannine writings, the letters and the Book of Revelation.

The antichrist

The first letter of John opens with a declaration of faith in the incarnation of Jesus, that he was truly, fully human when he walked the earth. One of the images for Jesus and, especially for God, is light. Darkness is the realm of untruth, of lies. Being born into this light and living in it means that Jesus’ disciples have

overcome the darkness. By the second chapter John is referring to this as a victory over the Evil One. This is the beginning of John's developing theme of Jesus and Christians overcoming the Tempter - crushing the head of the ancient tempter, the serpent in the garden of Eden (2:14).

Then comes the first mention of an Antichrist (to be considered as the same as the Rebel, the Enemy of Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:4). The antichrist is not Satan at this stage. In fact there have been several antichrists, 'rivals of Christ' who were part of the community but left, John saying that this proved they never really belonged. In fact, the conclusion is then drawn that anyone 'who denies that Jesus is the Christ—he is the liar, the Antichrist, and he is denying the Father as well as the Son' (2:22). These liars can also be false prophets who have a spirit of falsehood in them (4:1-6). The same theme finally appears in the summary of the letter: the protection of God against the Evil One in whose power the whole world lies' (5:18-19). John associates the false prophets, the antichrists with the Evil One, so it is not difficult to see how Christians started to identify the Antichrist with the Devil.

This is reinforced in the second letter of John where the word used this time is The Deceiver: 'There are many deceivers about in the world, refusing to admit that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. They are The Deceiver; they are the Antichrist' (v.7). Just as Paul says all disciples make up the body of Christ, so all deceivers/antichrists make up the body of The Deceiver/The Antichrist.

Apocalypse

Revelation is the major apocalyptic work of the Christian scriptures (there were contemporary non-biblical apocalyptic writings by both Christians and Jews at this period, later first century and early second century of the Christian era). The direct influences are the book of Daniel, especially chapters 7 and 12, with the imagery of the kings and emperors as beasts, the coming of the Saviour into the court of God with the 144,000 worshippers and the

battle between Michael and the Dragon, as well as the book of Ezekiel, especially chapters 39 and 40, reference to eschatological battles. The book has images of church communities, of liturgy: candles, lampstands, incense, images of Jesus as the Lamb, of the Church as the New Jerusalem as well as the dramatic four horsemen of the apocalypse and the seals, especially the seventh, to be broken. The symbols of the apocalypse have extended beyond Satan movies.

The first half of the book is full of light, the symbol of the presence of God, and angels appear more numerous than any other biblical book, all servants of God, all facets of God.

It is in chapter 12 that the darkness appears. First it is a red dragon who attacks the pregnant woman who symbolises the Church. Its tail sweeps the stars from the sky and it stalks the woman finally confronting her to devour her child—images of powers of evil confronting the Church and disciples. Christian interpretation soon saw the pregnant woman as Mary and Mary as a sign of the Church. It is an easy step from this to seeing the dragon as the devil confronting Jesus, but that is not the original meaning.

Next, Michael reappears and we have an apocalyptic version of the fall of the Daystar of the prophet Isaiah, the fall of Lucifer who is now Satan and is the primeval serpent. The dragon does now become the devil and both he and Michael have armies of angels doing battle. 'The dragon fought back with his angels, but they were defeated and driven out of heaven. The great dragon, the primeval serpent, known as the devil or Satan, who had deceived all the world, was hurled down to the earth and his angels were hurled down with him' (12:7-9). So, with the apocalypse, the themes all come together in this vision of a cosmic battle of good and evil.

But the dragon still pursues the mother and the rest of her children, 'that is, all who obey God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus' (12:17).

Through chapter 13, beasts like those from

the book of Daniel appear, representing the contemporary earthly powers, especially that of the emperor of Rome who is branded with the symbolic number 666 (though there is a textual variant of 616). Hebrew and Greek numbers were also letters and the totals of the letters of a name became a symbolic identification. (The author might now be regretting that he wrote the verse about 666: 'There is need for shrewdness here; if anyone is clever enough he may interpret the number of the beast: it is the number of a man, the number 666' (13:18). Many a writer has considered himself shrewd enough!

In chapter 15, there is the image of plagues and of a glass lake suffused with fire, and standing by the lake those who had fought against the beast and won' (v.2). The next chapters focus on the destruction of Babylon—which stands for Rome. One of the symbols is the 'famous prostitute', Rome and its idolatry. But there is also an appearance of a beast, one of the emperors, who is described in a recurring phrase as, 'who once was not and now is not'. But this beast is to rise from the Abyss, a kind of second coming, and then go to his destruction (17:8-18).

Before the book ends with the coming of the new Jerusalem and the prayer for the coming of Jesus, 'Maranatha', there is an apocalyptic battle and Babylon is destroyed. It is also the end of the devil. Those who refuse the beast's brand-mark come to life again and reign for a thousand years with Christ.

While the first letter of Peter warns that Christians 'be calm and vigilant, because your enemy, the devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for something to eat. Stand up to him, strong in faith, and in the knowledge that your brothers all over the world are suffering the same thing' (1 Peter 5:8-9), Revelation tells us about the end of the devil's days: 'Then I saw an angel come down from Heaven with the key of the Abyss in his hand and an enormous chain. He overpowered the dragon, that primeval serpent which is the devil and Satan, and chained him up for a thousand

years. He threw him into the Abyss, and shut the entrance and sealed it over him to make sure he would not deceive the nations again until the thousand years had passed. At the end of that time he must be released, but only for a short time...

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive all the nations in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, and mobilise them for war. His armies will be as many as the sands of the sea; they will come swarming over the entire country and besiege the camp of the saints, which is the city that God loves. But fire will come down on them from heaven and consume them. Then the devil, who misled them, will be thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet are, and their torture will not stop, day or night, for ever and ever (20:1-3; 7-10).

Here the New Testament ends.

But speculations about the devil, Satan, antichrist did not end. Interpretations have continued throughout the Christian era, in theology, in spirituality, in fringe movements and cults, in art and literature, in drama, in prayer and in later, more rationalist centuries, in interest in the occult and, in more recent decades when it was asked, 'Is God dead?', in fiction and movies where Christians and non-Christians alike have been fascinated by this heritage and with a mixture of insights, deep and shallow, authentic and fanciful, have made their Satan movies.

The Christian Era

Not all the Christian writing of the first century was considered 'canonical', that is, to be regarded as a sacred text of the scriptures. There was quite a lot of writing, some of it letters to emerging churches, some of it meditative, some of it apocalyptic. It was also the period of the Jewish writings and the beginnings of commentary on the biblical texts. Which meant, then, that it was a period of interpretation, with some highly imaginative

elaborations of old stories and invented stories of biblical figures who might have been mentioned only in passing. As the early Christian centuries went on, there was also a passion for knowing more about Jesus' life—developed in what came to be called 'apocryphal gospels'—and a passion for giving names to characters who were originally anonymous. Everyone knows, for instance, that Salome asked for the head of John the Baptist on a dish but, if you ask which Gospel Salome appears in, the answer is none. In Mark's Gospel, the only Gospel which recounts the incident, she is merely called the daughter of Herodias.

So, writings and later Christian art offered all kinds of information—but it was interpretation of the biblical texts. And this material influenced later interpreters so that movie makers may be tapping into authentic material or merely tapping into some local, colourful fantasy.

There is a case in point already in one of the last books of the New Testament, the letter of Jude. In a criticism of false teachers, the writer says they are abusing the angels and goes on to remark that 'Not even the archangel Michael, when he was engaged in argument with the devil about the corpse of Moses, dared to denounce him in the language of abuse; all he said was, 'The Lord correct you' (v.9)... Commentators note that this material in Jude contains references to two Jewish writings: 'Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs' and 'Assumption of Moses'.

It might be useful to outline some of the steps in the development of thought about and images of Satan down the Christian centuries:

- One of the most dramatic representations of the devil in the early centuries is in the moral struggles of the so-called 'Desert Fathers'. Following the example of such saints as Paul, the first hermit' and, especially, Anthony of Egypt, many Christians fled the pagan world and lived an anchorite's life in the desert. By the fourth century, a number of the men banded together and monasteries were

established. However, there are vivid stories recounted of the temptations of the hermits (and the theme of sexual temptation is strong in this regard), of literal struggles with the devil and devils who often appeared in voluptuous female form. This is certainly a theme that has continued through the ages.

- At the same time, theologians began reflecting on and writing about Christian doctrine and more formal theological expressions of sin, temptation, the devil and hell were formulated. There was speculation about the nature of hell, its 'material' of punishment (fire) and whether it was eternal. Theologian Origen speculated that at the Last Judgment, all sinners would have paid their price of their sins and all would rise to heaven. This was also the period of trying to understand the human condition and human sinfulness and the formulation of a doctrine of 'Original Sin' which reinforces the Genesis stories of Adam and Eve and the devil as the serpent.

- Influences of Greek philosophy and the traditions of Persian thought were strong on many of the theologians and preachers. The Gnostics spoke of everything flowing, emanating from God—and often suggested that Jesus was not truly human but a divine being in a human shell. Neo-Platonists took up Plato's ideas that anything on earth was merely a shadow of the true reality that existed in an ideal world. All kinds of connections could be made between these heterodox ideas and the biblical notions.

The greatest of the theologians of the first millennium, St Augustine, illustrates this. In his early years, before his conversion, he lived a worldly and intellectual life, had a mistress and a son and was strongly influenced by Manichean thought, that there were equal principles of evil and good. His writings, using imagery of light and darkness, is eloquent on sin and evil. He has also been considered strongly misogynist with the link, like that of the desert fathers, between woman and temptation and sin.

- During the so-called Dark Ages (from

the 6th century to the 10th century), there was an extraordinary interaction between the ‘barbarians’ and Christianity, especially with the preaching of the missionaries. But it also meant that ‘pagans’ influenced religious practices and beliefs just as the Roman traditions were incorporated and ‘baptised’ by the church. Celtic spirituality encountered Christianity as did the Nordic myths of Germany and Scandinavia. However, the times were so difficult, even for survival, that it was only when peace prevailed that beliefs and doctrines were more clearly formulated.

- Historians refer to the Middle Ages as comprising three periods, Early, High and Late. The Early Middle Ages date from about 1000 to 1200 CE, a period where Europe was to emerge from the barbarian invasions and their aftermath to a time of peace and economic and cultural growth. Theologians were taking up where the predecessors of several centuries before had finished and began to research the scriptures and the earlier writers to catalogue sayings on various church doctrines.

But with the end of the first millennium, fringe and unorthodox groups abounded, many with apocalyptic messages and bizarre interpretations of the battle between good and evil and the role of the devil and the last times for earth. Aspects of this kind of millenarianism can be seen in *The Name of the Rose*, set in a remote Italian monastery in 1327 but still with members of these sects being hounded by authorities who later became the Inquisition. In the film, there is also a treatment of the theme of witchcraft which became more prevalent and public during these centuries (as later in such stories as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*). The presence of Satan/The Devil is stronger because of the links with these groups and with witchcraft—as evidenced in the biblical stories in the stained glass windows in the Gothic cathedral statuary and, especially, with the gargoyles.

- The High Middle Ages, especially the 13th century, saw the golden age of theology with scholars like Thomas Aquinas. It was also

the century of Giotto and the flowering of fresco paintings where biblical stories caught the imaginations of the artists. As the Middle Ages moved into the Renaissance, motifs which included the devil, especially images of The Last Judgment and Hell, were prevalent, culminating in Michelangelo’s Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel.

- The Late Middle Ages saw a decline in medieval culture and religion. The Black Death and its devastation had dire consequences for church order which led to the need for change and, ultimately, to the 16th century Reformation. Sect writings were still prevalent though suppressed, and followers charged with heresy. However, the dilution of religious authority and the rise of nationalism led to the Renaissance and its art. The focus was on human beauty rather than diabolical evil.

- However glorious the vision of 1500 with the opening up of new worlds in the Americas and the changing understanding of the universe, the 16th century saw the greatest upheaval in the Church’s history and the division of Christendom into churches which, instead of fostering dialogue, urged polemic which led to persecution and religious wars. Once again, fringe sects arose and witchcraft thrived (remembering *Macbeth*, and that James I of England showed great interest in the subject). In religious art, especially in the Catholic tradition, the Baroque, larger than life statues and the light and dark of the paintings, were the last images of the classical symbols of the scriptures. The Protestant tradition moved away from images, were even iconoclastic as was Oliver Cromwell, but the 16th century ended with new outbreaks of possession amongst non-conformist Puritan groups like those in Salem, dramatised in *The Crucible*.

- But, with the coming of the Age of Reason, the 18th century, there was a move, in European and European-influenced culture, away from religion and piety. Science and philosophy had displaced faith and the century culminated in the French Revolution and, perhaps, the American revolution. The 18th is not a century

for developments in reflection on Satan.

- From the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, there was a shift in religious thinking. While the Industrial Revolution gave birth to a creed of Progress, the romantic and revolutionary reaction to reason had its consequences for religion. A new piety emerged, more popular and sentimental. The battle between good and evil was dramatised in Catholic prayers, especially in prayers after 1917 for the conversion of Russia, in a struggle between Archangel Michael and the devil, ‘...thrust Satan down to Hell’. Statues of warrior Michael abounded (for instance, Jacob Epstein’s sculpture at Coventry Cathedral).

It was also an era of visions. The 1917 apparitions of Mary to the Portuguese children at Fatima emphasised a spirituality of Hell. In some areas of Catholic piety this has continued to the present with children in Medjugorje in the Balkans claiming apparitions of Mary and the need for repentance and the threat of Hell as well as the current popularity of the devotion to the Divine Mercy to us human sinners promoted by the Polish nun, St Faustina (canonised, 2000). With the experience of the Russian revolution into the Stalinist era, with the world wars and consequent regional wars, the imagery of ‘demonising’ the enemy has given new currency to the language of Satan and the Devil.

However, along with the renewed piety, there was in many countries, especially the UK, a new interest in the occult, in seances and the other world.

- The move to foreign missionary work on the part of most Christian churches (especially during the 19th century) has meant that the churches have ‘seen the devil’ metaphorically in pagan customs and rituals. In some areas (as in the doomsday cults in Africa today), possession by ‘the devil’ has become more prevalent. Also the need for rituals of exorcisms (the case on which *The Exorcist* is based occurred in Georgetown, Washington DC, in 1949).

However, the cultural transitions of the 60s, especially concerning religion, theology and

spirituality, have had enormous influence, especially on best-sellers, movies and television. Bishop John Robinson published a book in Britain in 1963 asking questions about the relevance of so much God discourse, *Honest to God*. Soon after, especially in the United States, Paul Tillich and other theologians echoed this questioning of traditional religious concepts and language and coined the phrase, ‘God is dead’. *Time Magazine* had a black cover for its April 1966 story, ‘Is God Dead?’ (This is the issue read by Mia Farrow in the doctor’s waiting room in *Rosemary’s Baby* - Polanski deliberately introducing this into his pioneering movie on Satan and Satanists.)

Is it true that when God is dead, people want alternatives? The general answer seems to be in the popularity of so many movements which come under the general heading ‘New Age’ and which have proliferated since the 60s. However, there was a renewed interest in Satan. God might be dead, but Satan was not. Ira Levin’s novel, *Rosemary’s Baby*, was popular in the mid-60s. It had a Catholic context, the visit of Paul VI to the United Nations in New York in late 1965. Roman Polanski’s 1968 film was the first of the new phase of Satan movies, reinforced by *The Exorcist* five years later and then in 1976, *The Omen*. The millennium brought a number of Satan films, especially *End of Days* and *Dogma*. But, given millennial anticipations, it is surprising there were not more.

Conclusion

This survey of the Biblical data and changing church interpretations for 2000 years indicates that the Satan movies sometimes drew on the leads from the Jewish scriptures or the New Testament. But, often, they draw from eclectic sources of literature or the visual arts—of the film-writer’s imagination. The resulting films have moved away from ‘pure’ biblical reference and offer syncretistic tales and interpretations. But, they still draw indirect inspiration from a Judaeo-Christian tradition of three thousand years.