

Satan Chats with Jesus

by: Douglas Lockhart

The abduction of Jesus in the wilderness by Satan, the Church's tendency to demonise what it did not understand, and the curious fact that it was the very best of the Christian communities who deserted the ship of faith for the ship of understanding

The supposition behind all exorcisms is that Satan is at large in the world, that he has the power to visit us, and tempt us. In the gospels of Matthew and Luke Jesus is led into the wilderness by the spirit to fast and be tempted by the devil. He holds to his fast for an amazing forty days, and during this period undergoes the hallucinatory experience of being simultaneously in other locations, such as Jerusalem, and on top of a very high mountain from which he can see all the kingdoms of the world. Afterwards, as one would expect, he is very hungry, and we are told that "angels" minister to his needs.

Forty days may be a bit of an exaggeration, but there is no good reason to reject this story out of hand; at least not entirely. Fasting was part of Nazarene-cum-Nazarite practice, and Jesus, like his brother James, was a Nazarene, James being an ultra strict Nazarene with strong Nazarite-Ebionite affiliations. When Jesus is referred to as "of Nazareth", we really ought to read "the Nazarene", for apart from the New Testament there is no actual record of "Nazareth" in Palestine during Jesus' life time, a fact that suggests scribal interference. As with anyone who fasts for a long period, Jesus underwent a change of consciousness, the description given by the Gospel writers accurately reflecting the state of mind Jesus experienced - he was seeing, hearing and experiencing on a different level of reality.

That is important.

Mark's Gospel contains the same temptation story, but his version is thought to have been written ten or twenty years before

that of Matthew's and Luke's, and is considered the source document for this story. So it is interesting to note that Mark ties the whole episode up in two verses; whereas Matthew and Luke expand Mark's cameo statement into 11 and 13 verses respectively. According to Mark, Jesus is driven into the wilderness by the "spirit" and tempted by Satan for 40 days. When his ordeal is over he is ministered to by angels. Matthew and Luke, on the other hand, seem to know what Satan actually said to Jesus, and what Jesus' replies were. So is there another source for this story, or did these writers just elaborate imaginatively on a theme? Or are these extended versions a thinly disguised interaction between Jesus and some unidentified other? It is said to be "Satan", but that may not have been the case. Mark makes no mention of a fast, and that allows us to conjecture that Jesus' state of mind may not have been as later described, the addition of a fast being for no other reason than to support the Satan hypothesis. Described initially as "the tempter", then as "the devil", and only finally as "Satan", this mysterious "other" compromises Jesus dignity by controlling his mind.

In *The Life of Jesus*, Marcello Craveri wonders if this incident may have been the result of delirium due to prolonged fasting, or ecstatic suggestion or hallucination. Then, considering this story as a possible invention of the Evangelists, he adds: "or whether the name of Satan was employed to represent a human agent under orders to corrupt Jesus."¹ I think Craveri is correct in suggesting this; the temptation story could indeed reflect a conversation between Jesus and some human agent, my guess being a commander of the Zealots. Tempter indeed, but only "diabolical" in purpose and cunning as he offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if he will worship him, that is, *follow* him. What this "other" wants is official recognition by the Nazarene Messiah. The promise may have been a little more circumspect, not the *whole* world, just the *known* world. All Jesus had to do was give up his pacifist ways, accept the speaker's authority and join with the militants. *Israel* was the context; the Roman occupation of Palestine what had to be dealt with. The "tempter's" offer is explicit: "All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: *for that is delivered unto me;*

and to whomsoever I will give it."² [emphasis added] This is not Satan or the Devil speaking; it is more likely the devilish intent of an *empowered* Zealot commander, the translated term "Son of God" (*ho hyos Theou*) as used by him a mistranslation of *hyos Theou*, meaning only "protected by God."³

Elaine Pagels notes that Matthew changes Mark's wordless contest with Satan into a dialogue, but posits another source for this incident. Observing that Matthew, writing after the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the whole Jewish infrastructure as a result of sectarian madness, caricatures Satan as a "skilled debater adept in quoting Scripture for diabolical purposes",⁴ she posits the scribes and Pharisees as those being attacked in the guise of Satan. She gives excellent reasons for thinking this, but I find Craveri's speculations more probable. Post the Roman invasion, the Nazarenes and the Christians were singled out for punishment by Jewish orthodoxy, the *birkat-ha-minum* curse ("benediction of heretics") being offered in the synagogues as a prayer for their having aroused Roman wrath. As the Jerusalem Nazarenes and Paul's Christians (Jewish and non-Jewish) are more likely to have been pacifist, this suggests the existence of a militant branch of the Nazarenes not unlike the Zealots, or that the Zealots were in fact a fanatical branch of the Nazarenes whose offer of kingship Jesus rejected.

In 1959 Kurt Schubert noted that Satan's three temptations were all eschatological in intention; that is, they belonged to the rigorist, isolationist camp of political expectation. In this sense Jesus had not hallucinated a satanic offer of riches due to fasting; he had simply been offered substantial future rewards if he joined the rigorist cause. The request had not come from some supernatural source; it had come from an earthly source demanding that he put his messianic cards on the table.⁵

The Jesus of Thomas' Gospel

Helmut Koester has argued for the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas to be recognised as a source document for the canonical Gospels.

Elaine Pagels agrees and argues that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke resemble this controversial Gospel. Pagel's asks the obvious question: "Why was this Gospel suppressed, along with many others that have remained unknown for nearly two thousand years?"⁶ The answer is that around 370 the Archbishop of Alexandria ordered Christians to destroy all such heretical writings because, like the Gospel of Thomas, they presented a view of Jesus diametrically opposed to that of the canonical gospels. In particular, the Jesus of Thomas's Gospel reflected many of the statements made by the synoptic Jesus, but there were also statements that reversed Jesus' New Testament point of view. This fact, in conjunction with Koester's argument for Thomas's Gospel containing material that *predates* the gospel, allows us to conjecture that the Jesus of the New Testament was edited into his present shape fairly late in the day, and that an earlier language attributable to Jesus has been carefully excised from the Gospels. I suspect the latter; the Gospel texts are possibly older than previously thought.

Paul's theology (when in fact it is his own) presents Jesus as in some sense "divine", but there is just as much evidence in the New Testament pointing in the opposite direction, and that allows us to steady Jesus' image. Paul's Jesus is not divine in the Christian sense; he is a cosmically conscious being whose consciousness Paul offers to his converts as a descriptive *template*. The Gospel Jesus, in contrast, is the ultra-human Jesus struggling to transcend fear and doubt, the Church of Rome's spiritually inflated Jesus this same Jesus explained through a garbled interpretation of Paul's mystic theology. And beneath it all Thomas' psychologically astute Jesus, the bedrock Jesus deemed heretical by Christians then and now. In Pagels' words, this Jesus "urges people to seek direct access to God, unmediated by church or clergy."⁷ This Jesus does not ask his followers for worship; he asks them to dig deep in the way that as he has done - the "Kingdom of God" for this Jesus is not grounded in "belief", but in "knowledge" - a knowledge of psyche's depths. In what Pagels refers to as "sayings as strange and compelling as Zen koans", we hear this Jesus say: "If you bring

forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."

History and Mythology

The Temptation text's political importance has been airbrushed away, Jesus' messianic status sidestepped by later minds to whom Paul's "Christ" has become a species of surname. The story of Jesus is no longer the story of an ordinary man attempting to carry the responsibilities of messiahship; it has been elevated to the level of a supernatural drama. The "extraordinary" has been established as routine, flesh and blood amalgamated with deity, the capacity of individuals to seek God in their own depths transformed into things to be *believed* about Jesus. Extraordinary interpretations of ordinary behaviour have been spliced into the original Jesus story, Jesus' every move, every thought, every statement sound-tracked by a heavenly choir. A myth-making machine is at work. We are in the presence of a meticulously adjusted image whose basis is Jewish sectarianism wrested out of context. Yet not wholly out of context as Paul's mystic "Christ" and Thomas' inscrutable Jesus suggests - Jesus does seem to have deeply affected those around him. The later Roman Church, the new Roman seat of apostolic authority that displaced the original Nazarene "mother" Church's authority is not completely false; it is a genuine offshoot of that church, albeit one that has lost track of its sectarian Jewish roots, attempting to explain why its Jesus should be taken seriously. It is half right and it is half wrong, half honest and half a lie, half convinced and half bemused by its now rapidly fading understanding of what and who Jesus was in himself. It cannot in all honesty be accused of making up an entirely new Jesus story for the sake of it; but it can, as history clearly shows, be accused of progressively manipulating that story down the centuries for the sake of naked power.

The Old Testament Context

According to Jewish tradition Satan was God's silent partner in moral affairs (witness the temptation of Job), God having allowed Satan to tempt and harass the inhabitants of the earth for moral purposes. As noted elsewhere, however, this Old Testament understanding of Satan was later replaced with Satan in a quite different role, that of God's moral adversary, and it is this Satan that appears in both Matthew's and Luke's Temptation story. The earlier Satan is however still in operation as the "tempter" offering "worldly power" in return for Jesus' support, the two Satans having been collapsed into one another by Christian over-writers to shield us from Jesus' messianic connections. By the end of the wilderness temptation passages, what was in all likelihood a Zealot commander trying to persuade Jesus to function as warrior Messiah has been turned into a proof of his divine status. Jesus is no longer a pacifist Messiah; he is divinity housed in flesh abjuring direct Satanic attack, a view of Satan that will become the Church's principle means of crowd control. By the end of the New Testament story no one will be safe from this perception of reality, the supposed betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot used to highlight Satanic possession with the words: "Then entered Satan into Judas".⁸ Using this as a convenient shorthand, Christianity will demonise Jews, pagans and "heretics", all such being classified as dupes of the Evil One and dealt with accordingly.

The Satanic Indictment

In *The Origin of Satan*, Elaine Pagels traces the evolution of Satan as an idea from its earliest origins to its later Christian interpretation. At first merely obstructive, Satan changes into the "Prince of Darkness", the four Gospels condemning as "creatures of Satan" *anyone* who disagrees with the view of Jesus presented - even Christians with a tangentially different view of Jesus are described as *satanic*. Thus was born Christian certainty, its indefatigable belief that what it decided to be "truth" must necessarily be the truth beyond all debate or criticism. It was God's will that the New Testament was the way it was, and no amount of

scholarship or study or honest probing would ever undermine the Good News it contained.

In the depths of their own minds the educated, thinking clergy voice serious doubts about Jesus' divinity and much else, but in the public eye they mostly deny that any real problem to exist. As anyone with a modicum of commonsense knows, however, the Jesus story as conveyed in the New Testament is full of problems, western society in conjunction with Christianity still uncertain as to where the line should be drawn in relation to Satan's existence, his nonexistence, and what the nonexistence of Satan would mean for Christianity in general. Christian fundamentalism, whatever is hue, is at the centre of this affair, its spectre of an all-powerful diabolical counterpart to God alive and kicking

According to David Sperling of Hebrew Union College, Elaine Pagels' book on Satan "helps us to understand the power of irrational forces that still need to be confronted in contemporary society." Christianity's demonising of her enemies - Jews, pagans and heretics - has shaped the Church's growth and allowed her to survive against all odds, but at what price? For as the historians Malachi Martin and Peter de Rosa show in their separate historical accounts of Christianity, the Church's early successes, in conjunction with the favoured status conferred on it by the 4th century Roman emperor Constantine has produced, and continues to produce, a lethal cocktail of power and authority disguised as love and tolerance. Moves are being made to rectify this situation, but outside of academia the hierarchies of both the Catholic Church and the Anglican communion are, on the whole, hedging their bets, their evangelical-fundamentalist wings continuing to offer, unblushingly, a God, a Jesus and a diabolical being all but equal in power to God himself.

Pagans came to hate Christians; they perceived them to be "atheists", another strange twist in an already twisted tale. Christianity's success in converting Gentiles to the idea of their being only one god would, it was thought, bring down the wrath of the "gods" and threaten social cohesion. To believe such a thing was an insult to the gods that would cause a breakdown in

spiritual values. From being a persecuted Rome-based minority religion between 70 and 100, Christianity, with the help of Constantine, steadily lost sight of its sectarian Jewish origins and turned into a hybrid faith that God (a new conception of the Jewish God) had brought into existence for their spiritual convenience. As the Jewish God was now defined in Christian terms, and the Jews had rejected Jesus' claim to be the "Son of God", or "Messiah", the whole Jewish nation was perceived to be under the baleful influence of Satan. Classifying the pagan gods as demons mistakenly worshipped as gods, Jews and pagans were relegated to the spiritual rubbish heap and persecuted just as Christians had themselves been persecuted by their now Roman benefactors. The boot was on the other foot, and it was a jackboot.

The Demonic Cloud

We no longer hear the word "demon" as Christians once did; it has lost its connection with "demons" and requires an excursion into the mind-set of 3rd century Christians wielding Roman power. No, that's not quite right; what we have to do is enter the Christian *imagination*, for it is there in the dim, preternatural light of a mental cosmology given over to Satan and his angels that we stumble into the terror - the terror of living on a planet in the throws of a cosmic war. The whole climate of Christian opinion was locked into a vision where God and Satan battled it out for supremacy allied to a still developing theology around Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. With this mental climate as background daily events took on unusual significance, unexplained perturbation in life being sensed as a psychic threat. Everything said, thought or done was subject to such suspicion; Satan and his minions were constantly at hand to lead the unwitting astray.

There is a point in time where all of this falls into a clear and terrifyingly real perspective: the Roman arena. It is there in the blooded sand that we see this belief system at work. Arrested for not sacrificing to the Emperor, many Christians managed to sustain a quiet fortitude in the face of unbelievable barbarity. So much so that Justin, a student of philosophy in Rome around 140, was startled to witness Christians being torn apart by wild animals with

the kind of equanimity generally associated with philosophers. And these unfortunates were not educated Christians, they were illiterate trades people. Inexplicably, these simple men and women had "tapped into a great, unknown source of power" according to Elaine Pagels, their confidence being grounded in the certainty that their deaths would advance God's victory over the forces of evil, forces believed to have inhabited the minds and hearts of the magistrates who condemned them. It is all but impossible for us to fully appreciate what having such a belief system felt like, but knowing something of what lay behind such acts of courage will perhaps partially penetrate the mystery.

What we are left with is a vision that intuits unseen energies forcing human beings to do their enigmatic will; a view endorsed by the pagan world itself. According to Pagel's, Justin "realises with a shock that Socrates himself had said the same thing the Christians are saying - that all the gods Homer praises are actually evil energies that corrupt people."⁹ But it was not seen in quite this way by the pagan world; their gods were not evil, just capricious. Justin could however see through this subterfuge, for was not Socrates himself charged with atheism, just like the Christians? In Justin's mind this was a form of proof for the Christian point of view: the irrational hatred exhibited against the Christians was a symptom of the very thing the Christians were describing - demons were in control of the pagan mind.

For Christians, this view also applied to the Jewish mind, orthodox Jews being perceived as under the thrall of Satan for what they had done to Jesus. Blanketing all in sundry with satanic intentions, Christians saw themselves as besieged by evil, the great cosmic conflict between God and Satan being visibly obvious in the Roman courts. Scratching a living, Rome's Christians kept a low profile and lived out their message as best they could. If educated, they ran the constant risk of discovery, but could claim a quick death; if uneducated, there was less chance of discovery, but every chance of a brutal death prefaced by torture.

These Roman Christians were utterly sincere in their faith; in fact the word "sincerity" is insufficient to describe the kind of faith they possessed. Their patience, good works and perseverance in

the face of what must often have appeared to be insurmountable odds is staggering. One is reminded of Tielhard de Chardin's comment that he himself did not measure up, in moral terms, to someone of simple faith. But not all of them managed to hold their simple faith in place. Some collapsed mentally under Roman brutality and named their associates, betrayed their brothers in Christ and died in stark terror of what the afterlife would bring. Some sacrificed to the gods and the emperor and lived to tell the tale; particularly Christian of "Gnostic" persuasion. Tongue in cheek they happily sacrificed to the Roman god's and got off without as much as a curt word, their behaviour causing consternation among regular Christians. Regular and irregular Christians existed side by side, and the irregular ones constituted another category of demonised individual.

The Heretics

Everything hinged on whether you followed the party line or not; veer from the accepted interpretation of gospel events and you were out in the cold. Jesus may have said: "seek and ye will find, knock and it will be opened unto you", (Matt. 7:7) but such an argument did not wash with the leaders of the Christian community at the end of the 1st century. Elaine Pagels details this attitude in her book on Satan's origins, and what she reveals is that dissident thinkers did not have a chance of being heard. It is at this point that we stumble upon the transition point between a church governed by Apostles, and a church governed by deacons, priests and bishops. Authority arrangements had changed; the days of the visiting Apostle were over: the communities were now on their own and subject to the pressures of the pagan world on all sides. Like all rapidly growing communities, the Christian community was subject to growing internal pressures. Pagel's cites a letter written to Christians in the Greek city of Corinth by Clement around 90 that reveals much of what was going on during this period. Sections of the Church were in uproar over heavy-handed behaviour from leaders such as Clement who had decided, in their wisdom, that what they nominated as "truth" was beyond

questioning. To cement their authority in place, such leaders resorted to writing their own Scriptures; that is, they created letters (Epistle) supposedly written by some of the Apostles. In such letters they contrived to show that certain individuals - themselves - had received the necessary apostolic blessing to make them heirs of these Apostles.

Of such a nature was Peter's first Epistle, and Paul's Letters to Timothy. Ordained an "overseer" or "bishop" by Paul, Timothy is made Paul's legitimate successor and allowed to wield Paul's portion of apostolic authority. It is in these Letters, for instance, that Paul makes child bearing the chief task of women, so barring them from occupying positions of power in the Church. Uta Ranke-Heinemann remarks: "Women in particular are given all sorts of pious directives in both the presumably false and the certainly false letters of Paul. And down through history the Church has toiled tirelessly to get women to take such exhortations to heart."¹⁰ Women should obey their husbands, learn in silence and submissiveness, and keep silent when men are around. Child bearing is their lot. In her witty and provocative book *Putting Away Childish Things*, Ranke-Heinemann sums up this situation and suggests that some kind of warning against forgeries ought to be printed on the New Testament. It should perhaps "cut down on the use of the expression 'Word of God', not just for false Letters but also for the genuine ones. For all their genuineness, not one of them has ever been anything more than the word of man."¹¹

Referring to Christians who did not agree with him as self-willed people who had initiated a "horrible and unholy rebellion", Clement rails against their rejection of the clergy, and in the process lets slip that the dissidents considered such appointments an innovation. Clement's reaction to this charge is to quote Paul's forged Letter to Timothy in the hope that this convenient piece of propaganda will cancel dissident objection: is it not because of such apostolic successions that the church's truth-claims must be accepted? The irony of the situation is that Matthew and Luke, virtual contemporaries of Clement's, had revealed in their gospel

reconstructions that the Jewish priesthood had been Jesus' principle enemy - the house of selected cards was shaking.

By the second century the dispute over clergy had hotted up and infected church's everywhere, the growing authority of the clergy having alarmed many Christians. Those of Clement's persuasion used Clement's tactics and enforced adherence to pre-set moral codes and an interpretation of earlier writings rendered historically "safe". And sometimes for very good reasons; there were Christians who had evolved not only a hatred of the clergy, but also some who evolved fantastically illiterate theories around the Church's basic doctrines. Conscious of scriptural manipulation in high places, these Christians had tried to separate the true from the false and ended up creating an even greater doctrinal mess.

By 180 radical-minded Christians had so successfully spawned diverging offshoots of standard belief that Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, wrote a five-volume refutation of such deviance, such writers being called "heretics" (*hairesis*: "choice"), and linked to Satan. Those guilty of *choosing* between one interpretation of the gospel story and another were categorised as having become self-willed, their safety even among fellow Christians being removed at the stroke of a pen. Tertullian would later bring this situation to a state of dictatorial perfection by announcing that the clergy must not allow their congregations to ask questions - it was the asking of questions that made heretics.¹²

I think it is beyond dispute that Tertullian perfected the sinister state of mind that eventually invaded Christian thinking, for he goes on to make some hair-raising statements about the nature of truth, and in justifying those statements reveals a mind closed off to all commonsense. Writing that believers must desist from any discussion of Scripture, that all deviation in opinion comes from the devil, and that Satan has master-minded "false exegesis", he observes that "Heretics ought not to be allowed to challenge an appeal to the Scriptures, since we ... prove that they have nothing to do with the Scriptures. For since they are heretics, they cannot be Christians."¹³ Such reasoning, circular and profoundly silly as it is, became the tenor of so-called inspired Christian reasoning,

future Fathers of the Church building intricate travesties of logic on this unassailable foundation. The Christian psyche was now in the hands of the clergy, their interpretive stranglehold on people's lives beyond sensible discussion or debate.

Radical and Ultra-radical Christians

There were however Christians who rejected this approach without becoming ultra-radical in either their ideas or their behaviour. One such Christian, Valentinus, broke with the majority and formed an underground group which, although still a professing part of the standard Church, considered itself more mature by way of spiritual experience and discernment. Accepting that faith, hope and love were the true foundation of the Christian life, he added "understanding" (*gnosis*) to the mix, and developed a doctrine that invited Christians of standard practice to experience their deeper spiritual selves. Covert meetings were held, and we learn from Elaine Pagels that Valentinus had been taught secret teachings attributed to Paul by a teacher called Theudas, teachings that caused him to steer a middle course between extreme radicalism and the standard confession. The result was an interpretation of Scripture carrying meanings believed to be part of the very early Christian communities - meanings that went "beyond the literal interpretation of the Scriptures to question the gospel's deeper meaning."¹⁴ Educated Christians responded to this kind of thinking, Tertullian complaining that it was often the very best of his membership who deserted the ship of faith for the ship of understanding. And so the Church began to subdivide, Christian communities to fragment. Enter Marcus, a doctrinal innovator castigated for his alleged seduction of women *because* he offered them participation in celebrating the Eucharist.

Valentinus sometimes used the image of divine "Father" and divine "Mother" to describe what he believed to be the indescribable source of things seen and unseen. Marcus, working from this enlarged vision of God, is recorded in Irenaeus' writings as having allowed women to officiate at church services, and of encouraged them, like Paul, to speak in prophesy. He is even

accused of calling down the holy spirit on their behalf, and of "touching them" (blessing them) with his hands. Pagels makes the point that when Irenaeus speaks of Marcus and his followers as "adulterers", he is in fact using the biblical image of *illicit religious practices*; he is not accusing them of actual adultery.

The most revealing idea that Valentinus inspired is found in the *Gospel of Philip*, a gospel that offers an alternative explanation to good and evil as cosmic opposites. Laying this approach aside, Philip's gospel argues that opposites such as "good" and "evil" are actually *interdependent* pairs. Moral law as handed out by the authoritarian Church is the equivalent of eating from the tree of knowledge that delivered not knowledge, but a slow death and estrangement from paradise.¹⁵ Such a view flew in the face of how Gnostic teaching was being interpreted by Irenaeus and Tertullian; they translated *gnosis* as "hard knowledge" and made Gnosticism's spiritual insight into cerebral creations. The facts were otherwise. Gnosticism proper was not about intellectual knowledge, or about imagination run riot; it was about understanding in terms of *insight*. Insight arose from the depths of the human heart and signalled, not an intellectual or theological "interpretation" of God, but an experience of God allied to the discovery that the human self constituted a barrier to spiritual comprehension. What we had to do was examine this self's opinion of itself and note that its claim on everything as its own was misplaced. The idea of the mind being "my" mind, of the heart being "my" heart, and of God being "my" God, was an illusion. So also with the gospels. Just as there was a deeper way in which to approach the self, there was also a deeper way in which to approach what the gospels said about the self in relation to God.

Moral law strictly adhered to was the outcome of minds struggling to get back to God by a self-conscious route. Jesus had rejected this self-conscious route and deeply angered and infuriated the upholders of Jewish religious orthodoxy. Like Jesus, the Gnostics believed that each person carried a different set of needs, different levels of comprehension, and different qualities of maturity. To feed everyone on the same strict moral diet was to ignore true need and further distort an already distorted self in

need of help. Forcing everything into opposition and demanding *this* choice over *that* choice undermined our ability to act with freedom and love - particularly when we set up one of those choices as unquestionable truth. To be told, as Adam had been told, that he could eat from *this* tree, but not from *that* tree, clearly suggested a lack of freedom on Adam's part; the freedom that truth and real knowledge were supposed to impart. This in turn suggested a form of cosmic enslavement that enforced moral law perfectly mirrored, and in this sense the Genesis story could be reversed: God was the Evil One because he denied Adam and Eve comprehension of evil. Jealous of the fact that these beings had achieved "knowledge of good and evil", God threw the pair out of the garden and barred their return. Previously ignorant of the existence of evil, Adam and Eve now recognised that they had been denied this knowledge because it revealed too much about the creator who had imbued them with his own unpredictable nature.

In Gnostic thinking there is a reconciliation of God and Satan, heaven and hell and light and darkness. Satan turns out to be not so much a ravenous being intent on the moral destruction of the human race (a conception of Satan developed at the time of Jesus by the wilderness sectarians, particularly the Essenes), but rather a creative principle, an energy of obstruction and opposition not separate from God, but an integral expression of God's character. *And* ours. As the early history of Satan reveals, cosmic opposites were unthinkable to the early monotheists of Israel. Valentinian thinking reflects this stance in that God and Satan constitute one force, one truth, one experience that we break apart due to the development of the conscious self. There is no Satan in the *Gospel of Philip* - God controls everything, even the lower cosmic forces.

The existence of such forces, creative and destructive, are recognised by the Gnostics to exist, but are thought to inhabit our natures in the form of archetypes or psychologically anthropomorphised psychic entities. Such entities are projections of the human mind; they are only "actual" to the extent that they represent energies of consciousness beyond that of the personal. The "little devil" and "little angel" sitting metaphorically on our

shoulders are not wholly the result of enculturation or social conditioning, they are allied to processes of consciousness at *depth* that can quite explicitly express alternatives to what we think and do. Introduce a distorted, fear-ridden religious formula into this mix, and almost anything is possible.

Elaine Pagels is at pains to point out that ethical questions are just as real and as just as important to these Gnostic Christians as they were to their consensus brothers and sisters. The difference was that they had realised how fear disables one's ability to make helpful ethical choices. Connecting this to a rejection of cosmic opposites, Philip's injunction is to not "fear the flesh, nor love it. If you fear it, it will gain mastery over you; if you love it, it will devour and paralyse you."¹⁶ Our dilemma is how to mentally balance ourselves between our fears and our loves, our revulsions and our desires, our projections and what actually exists. To live with the constant restrictions of fear is to be mastered by life; to live without any kind of restriction is to be overcome by one's appetites. The secret is to avoid extremes; it is extremes of belief and behaviour and theory that bedevil us. Push the moral question too far and we end up killing people for their own good; refuse to properly recognise the moral question and we end up doing exactly the same thing.

The Satan Jesus talked to in the wilderness was *not* the Satan of Job's inner torment, and neither was he the Satan of later Christian pathology. He was, I think, a human being demonised by the overwriters of the Gospels for the purpose of deflection. There had been a secret meeting in the desert between this prominent Nazarene and a sectarian leader, and this fact, although mitigated by Jesus' refusal to recognise this leader's authority, nevertheless informed the reader that Jesus the Nazarene had been known to, and had had complicated dealings with, a militant branch of the desert sectaries. As shown by Elaine Pagels, the surviving Jewish community had viewed the Nazarenes as heretics and just as responsible as the Zealots for the Roman invasion of Palestine. *Their* Jesus had been much more complicated than the Gospels later made him out to be, much more complicated than the early Church Fathers could comfortably admit, and much, much more

complicated than the adjusted and additionised New Testament suggested.

References and Notes:

- 1 Craveri, Marcello, *The Life of Jesus* (1970), p. 85.
- 2 Luke 4: 6.
- 3 Craveri, Marcello, *The Life of Jesus* (1970), p. 83.
- 4 Pagels, Elaine, *The Origin of Satan* (1995), p. 81.
- 5 Schubert, Kurt, *The Dead Sea Community* (1959), p. 132.
- 6 Pagels, Elaine, *The Origins of Satan* (1995), p. 69.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 8 Luke 22: 3
- 9 Pagels, Elaine, *The Origin of Satan* (1995), p. 124.
- 10 Ranke-Heinemann, Uta, *Putting Away Childish Things* (1994), p. 227.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Pagels, Elaine, *The Origin of Satan* (1995), p. 164.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 165.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 171.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 172.