Imagining Demons in Post-Byzantine Jerusalem: John of Damascus and the Consolidation of Classical Christian Demonology

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Marquette University

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IMAGINING DEMONS IN POST-BYZANTINE JERUSALEM:
JOHN OF DAMASCUS AND THE CONSOLIDATION
OF CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN DEMONOLOGY

by

The Rev. Nathaniel Ogden Kidd, B.A., M.Div

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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December, 2018
ABSTRACT

IMAGINING DEMONS IN POST-BYZANTINE JERUSALEM: JOHN OF DAMASCUS AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN DEMONOLOGY

The Rev. Nathaniel Ogden Kidd, B.A., M.Div
Marquette University, 2018

This dissertation traces the consolidation of a classical Christian framework for demonology in the theological corpus of John of Damascus (c. 675 – c. 750), an eighth century Greek theologian writing in Jerusalem. When the Damascene sat down to write, I argue, there was a great variety of demonological options available to him, both in the depth of the Christian tradition, and in the ambient local imagination. John’s genius lies first in what he chose not to include, but second in his ability to synthesize a minimalistic demonology out of a complex body of material and integrate it into a broader theological system. John’s synthesis was so effective, in fact, that it looks reflexively obvious as a statement of Christian demonology in the Scriptural-patristic tradition: it would not necessarily have been so to his contemporaries.

I begin the study with an invitation to enter into an imaginative of reading John through the epithet “destroyer of demons” attached to him in his commemoration, and conclude it with an analysis of John’s understanding of the demonic as a “demon destroying” demonology. Between these terminal points are four chapters: two parsing what John drew from the Christian faith as he knew and had received it, and two considering extrinsic factors shaping John’s thought and imagination, including a discussion of alternate systems of demonology that we can locate in John’s approximate context. The final analysis mirrors my initial discussion of the themes that John inherited, drawing attention to the subtle ways he transformed his theological tradition in laying out a precise paradigm for future theological reflection on the nature of the devil and demons.

John’s demonology – though minimal – is robust, and to read John using his ideas about the devil and demons as a focal point both draws attention to the complexities hidden within demonology as a subject and heightens our appreciation for the extraordinary qualities of the Damascene’s intellect and contribution. In broadest application, finally, recognizing the vast difference between the assumptions, methods, and means underwriting John’s demonology and our own in seeking to understand it prompts reflection on the nature and limits of the historical imagination in theology.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Rev. Nathaniel Ogden Kidd, B.A., M.Div

As an activity in the physical world, reading and writing is a solitary exercise: paradoxically, however, scholarship and research require much society. I would be remiss not to acknowledge and to express my gratitude for some of those persons and institutions who have most directly made this work possible. I will move past that great catalogue of names of men and women both living and dead who have taught and inspired and shaped me with their writings: terse acknowledgements to these decorate my footnotes and form my Bibliography, although I could say much more about each and my indebtedness to it. Within this community of writers, thinkers, and academics, it is right for me to extend an additional thanks to my advisor in the project, Dr. Marcus Plested, as well as those members of my board, Dr. Michel Barnes, Dr. Jeanne-Nicole Saint-Laurent, and Dr. Andrei Orlov. Acknowledgment is due also to my teachers and encouragers along the way – Fr. John Behr, Dr. Garwood Anderson, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Holtzen, the Rev. Dr. Arnold Klukas, and the Rev. Dr. Daniel Westburg (of blessed memory) – without whose direction and encouragement I would never have come to this place.

Marquette University has been a wonderful environment for my development as a scholar, as a priest, and as a human being. I am grateful for the hospitality and generosity of the Campus Ministry Department, which blessed me with a three-year assignment in one of Marquette’s dorms as a Hall Minister. My students in the classroom and in the residence hall helped to anchor me in the human world when I might have cloistered myself in the library and floated off into the realm of ideas. Special thanks is due to the generosity of the Arthur J. Schmitt Foundation, whose leadership-oriented fellowship over the 2017-2018 academic year, in freeing me from teaching responsibilities, made the completion of this dissertation possible. Concurrently, I am grateful to the advisement, counsel, and professional development I have had available to me Graduate School, and Dr. Carrianne Hayslett in particular, whose energy and wisdom regarding teaching, learning, and leadership has been of great benefit to me. I am also grateful to the Marquette Writing Center, where I have in various ways workshopped a significant amount of the following prose.

As an Anglican priest, I have necessarily conducted my scholarship – to a significant extent – in the Church and for the Church. To that end, I am grateful to Archbishop Robert Duncan, who supported and encouraged my studies in its early stages, and my present Bishop, Ken Ross, whose patience has given me the margins I need to complete it. I look forward to bringing fruits of this project into ministry in the Diocese of the Rocky Mountains. I am grateful to Fr. Steve Block, and the men of St. Martin’s, who tolerated this academic in their blessed company, as well as the Rev. Dr. Michael Cover, whose encouragement in prayer through the Marquette Canterbury Fellowship was a welcome balm to my soul. I am grateful also to Bishop Azad Marshall, and the faculty, staff, and students of Lahore College of Theology, which provided me an
opportunity to road-test some of my early methodological experiments with students. Within the community of faith, finally, I am fortunate to have been blessed with many excellent conversation partners who have indirectly helped this project to mature and develop. Their full number cannot be tallied for its magnitude, but among them are Jonathan Sedlak, Hunter Farrow, Anthony Wick, Daniel Adsett, David Burnett, the Rev. Dr. Phil Anderas, the Rev. Jonathan Kanary, and the Rev. Ben Jeffries.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Analecta Bollandiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AV</td>
<td>Ἀνάλεκτα Βλατάδων</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSG</td>
<td>Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca, Brepols, 1977ff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFHB</td>
<td>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, de Gruyter, 1966f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSCO</td>
<td>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Peeters, 1903ff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Byz</td>
<td>Byzantion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMGS</td>
<td>Byzantine and Medieval Greek Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZ</td>
<td>Byzantine Zeitschrift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAG</td>
<td>Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChHist</td>
<td>Church History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOP</td>
<td>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</td>
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Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller. Leipzig.


Greek Orthodox Theological Review


Journal of Early Christian Studies

Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies

Journal of Roman Studies

Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha


Mansi, J. D. Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio. A. Zatti, 1759-98.

Orientalia Christiana Analecta

Orientalia Christiana Periodica

Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity

Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica


Pege Gnoseos [= Dial., Haer., Exp. fid.]

Proche-Orient Chrétien

Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen, Habelt.
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PTS</td>
<td>Patristische Texte und Studien, De Gruyter, 1964f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REB</td>
<td><em>Revue des études byzantines</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSR</td>
<td><em>Recherche de Science Religieuse</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Sources chrétiennes, Paris, 1942f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Schriften JD</em></td>
<td><em>Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLAEI</td>
<td>Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVTQ</td>
<td><em>St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVS Press</td>
<td>St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press: Crestwood, NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StP</td>
<td>Studia Patristica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TU</td>
<td>Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur. Leipzig, 1822f.</td>
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INTRODUCTION

JOHN OF DAMASCUS, DEMONOLOGY, AND SCHOLARSHIP:
IDENTIFYING A SPACE FOR NEW STUDIES

It is not without reason that the demonology of John of Damascus (c. 675 – c. 750) has been so frequently overlooked heretofore. At best, the discussion of demons seems to represent only a minor concern in the larger scope of the Damascene corpus. John dedicates only one of his one hundred chapters on the orthodox faith to the subject, and even that reads almost as a footnote to his longer chapter on angels.¹ John’s angelological synthesis would become an important touchstone in medieval theology, but even that has not received systematic commentary in modern research: it is not surprising, a fortiori, that his shorter parallel treatment of demons would be likewise ignored. The passing references to demons sprinkled throughout John’s writings, moreover, are neither especially detailed, nor especially unique. John articulates an imagination of the demonic that seems familiar to us: we are accordingly prone to assume that it was also familiar to him, and that the points he makes about the devil and demons are little more than thoughtless echoes of a consensus already well established within the framework of orthodox theology by John’s time.

And yet, when speaking of the classic stream of Christian demonology in the medieval Greek tradition, John of Damascus is nearly unavoidable as a landmark.²

¹ Exp. fid. 17 – John’s chapter “On Angels” – runs 86 lines in Kotter’s edition. Ch. 18, “On the Devil and Demons,” is only 37 lines: only a little more than a third of the length.

² C. Mango’s portrait of “The Invisible World of Good and Evil” in Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome (1980), 151-166, along with some parallel studies stand as a notable exception to this: but such exceptions prove the rule. Mango, for instance, specifically avoids the theological framework, reasoning that, “Since the Byzantines were Christians, their conception of this higher world [of angels and demons]
Jaroslav Pelikan, whose brief survey of evil as a *topos* in eastern Christian thought treats demonology chiefly as an articulation over and against dualistic systems, considers John as the first and most important voice in a long line of anti-Manichean polemics.\(^3\)

Similarly, in outlining “The Devil in Byzantium” as a chapter in his four-volume history of the devil, Jeffery Burton Russell describes John at the very center of the tradition: as a Maximian-Dionysian whose development of diabology – again, as rendered principally as an attack on dualism – was “the single most influential” voice in the East, and also seminal in the Western tradition.\(^4\) Richard Greenfield, in his tremendous study of the *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology*, leans especially heavily on John of Damascus for his development of what he calls the “standard orthodox tradition,” quoting him frequently to represent the overwhelming force of Damascene authority among later Orthodox Byzantines.\(^5\) Indeed, even though most of the pieces of John’s demonology had

---

3 “Evil and the God of Love” in *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom* (1970), 216-227, noting particularly how Pelikan follows John’s argument on pp. 220-221 and 222. Pelkian’s placement of John’s anti-Manichean at the earliest point of development in the Greek tradition is somewhat distorting; there is an earlier *Contra Manichaeos* preserved from Titus of Bostra (d. 378), and overlooks the complex history of the appropriation and adaptation of the privative theory of evil among the Fathers. This is partially consequent to the temporal bounds of Pelikan’s study, which begins in the 7th C.

4 *Lucifer* (1984), 37. Russell clearly follows Pelikan (see, for instance, 29 n. 3), but attempts to fill out some of the particular issues within diabology, as well as widening the scope to offer an introduction to Byzantine diabology as a whole.

5 On Greenfield’s method, see p. 4. For his use of the Damascene in expositing the “standard tradition,” see pp. 19, 21, 40, 62-63 and 96; also passim 11, 16, 20, 23-25, 37-39, 47, 48, 54, 56, 58, 64, 70, 72, 74, 100, 108, 128, 136-7, 141; with John’s thought thus underwriting the full scope of demonology, with details elaborated by later authors in ways that build upon John’s basic commitments.
been put into place in previous generations, there is no account prior to his that is so finely and so explicitly balanced within the full scope of philosophy, cosmology, Christian theology, and ascetical anthropology, and one is hard pressed to find a theologically robust demonology after John’s that is not significantly marked by his synthesis.

It is worth wondering, in fact, how effectively we could speak of demonology as a theological domain without the Damascene’s seminal contribution. The Scriptures offer a repertoire of narrative impressions of the demonic, but do not develop a systematic account of the existence and activities of demons, and the residue of early hagiographical and liturgical evidence suggest that the first Christians indwelt that language more through imitation than systemization. Alongside of these, a variety of pagan survivals persisted in the Christian empire, notwithstanding periodic attempts at their eradication; folk beliefs, magical practices, and traditions of other religious systems all provided a vast fodder for demonological speculation, with such trends in popular Christianity often

7 R. MacMullen’s Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries (1997) may be consulted on this point as offering a learned and forceful corrective to the oft-neglected evidence of pagan survivals up to the time of John of Damascus, although it should be read cautiously as being somewhat unbalanced in the opposite direction. A more balanced overview is Jaclyn Maxwell’s chapter, “Paganism and Christianization” in the OHLA (2012), whose attention to the nuances of the debate among scholars reflects the current state of the conversation quite well.
8 Many of these survivals have been lately discovered through the careful study of incantation bowls, amulets, and inscriptions, and together offer a window into a very different world than that suggested by the texts which have been preserved through careful curation by ecclesiastical institutions. See J. Russell, “The Archaeological Context of Magic in the Early Byzantine Period” (1995). Establishing the relationship between these texts and magical artifacts, however, is speculative. As A. Cameron notes, “We shall probably never know whether ordinary people in Byzantine villages really harbored heretical ideas, or how their allegiances affected their lives and their families” (“How to Read a Heresiology” (2005), 194).
We find an early foundation for an orderly contemplation of the “opposing powers” in Origen’s system, and the monastic movement would go on to build many of its elaborate practical demonologies upon it, but the contribution of this theological strategy to clarifying the terms of demonology was mixed, almost as prone to expand the role of the demonic in the Christian imagination as clarify it. There were those theologians who pushed against an excess of demonomachia, certainly – so the Cappadocians and John Chrysostom, the author who wrote under the pseudonym of Dionysius the Areopagite was especially inclined to use his comments on demonology as an opportunity to rearticulate the classical primitive view of evil with force and elegance. We recognize – in retrospect – that these voices constitute a mainstream of the classical Christian tradition: such demonology was probably not, however, the majoritarian view.

9 B. Filotas offers a thorough analysis of these “survivals” from the 5th to 10th C in her Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Cultures in Early Medieval Pastoral Literature, although the geographical scope of her project encompasses only Western Europe, and the situation in the East was more complex and less studied. No work exists systematically treating analogous Eastern sources.

10 De Prin. III.2. See the extended discussion in Ch. 2.


12 Little work has been done on Cappadocian demonology to date. For a helpful discussion, see M. Ludlow, “Demons, Evil, and Liminality in Cappadocian Theology” (2012). Ludlow rightly observes the muted by real role of the demonic in Cappadocian theology, which parallels the tone Damascene’s demonology quite well.

13 Diab. tim.; see also the recent work done by D. Kalleres, City of Demons (2016), 25-114, and S. Miller, No Sympathy for the Devil (2016).

14 DN, 4. Dionysius affirms that even demons are not evil by nature, but rather that demons are driven by an “irrational anger, senseless desire, headlong fantasy” which corrupt the goodness of their being. Thus the demons are the extreme case of Dionysus’s leading point that evil is not being, but a privation of it.
John’s demonology came at a key moment in this process. Without a clear, positive assertion of what the domain of the demonic encompasses, demonology may have remained an ambiguous topic, infinitely diffusive and inherently unresolved. The Damascene supplied the precision necessary to give enduring definition to the subject: by explicitly placing demonology within a larger theological system, John was able to offer a paradigmatic circumscription that set clear boundaries for future systematic speculation on the demonic among other theological subjects in both Greek and Latin theology – and beyond. In other words, in the titular assertion of this project, John of Damascus was in large part responsible for “consolidating” a “classical Christian demonology.”

Demonology has been a hot topic in conversations about religio-cultural matrix of late antiquity and the formation of Christianity in that context. Recent studies, however, tend to drift towards an analysis of the phenomenon of demonic ideation that emphasizes the social and psychological purchase of demonological language, and so discounts the complex synthesis of philosophical and theological traditions that make stories and experiences of the demonic cognizable. In the concern for social margins that attracts the attention of the “cultural turn” in late ancient studies, the demon is interpreted as the

15 P. Brown referred to them as the “stars” of the late ancient world in his bid to “make late antiquity interesting,” his “Rise and Function of the Holy Man” (1971) becoming a seminal essay for the exploration of texts and traditions often overlooked in the older histories.

16 G. Smith explores this limitation of much contemporary analysis in his intriguing essay, “How Thin Is a Demon?” (2008). As Smith observes, ancient description of demonic apparitions often tacitly involve a cosmology and system of physics that defy simplistic reduction to categories of psychological phenomenon and symbolic fantasy. There has been some corrective to overly-psychologized demonology in recent years through an increased attention to the relationship between demons and medical phenomenon – see for instance S. Bhayro and C. Rieder, ed, Demons and Illness from Antiquity to the Early-Modern Period (2017).

17 Helpful in grasping the “cultural turn” and its import is the eponymous collection of essays, The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies ed. By D. Martin and P. Miller (2005).
symbolic quintessence of the marginalized. It is possible, indeed, to read demonology as a form of imagination that justifies a suppression of the Other – whether that Other is identified in the physical body (as the basis for personal asceticism)\(^{18}\) or the body of the pagan, Jew, or heretic (as justification for persecution).\(^{19}\) Scholarly narratives are rarely so reductionistic in their arguments, however, instead implicating demonology in a sophisticated rhetoric of spiritual and ascetical power typical of late antiquity.\(^{20}\) This approach renders demonology a tool of an ideological system enabling and enacting exclusion, suppression, and violence is a present theme, but this presentation is subtle, muted, and nuanced. The more fundamental issue is that demonology so approached is a form of speculation on the ancient world that is sociological at its core. Such a study has the benefit of connecting the concerns of ancient texts with certain contemporary conversations, but it also risks dissolving the unique ideological topography of texts as

\(^{18}\) Some version of this sentiment echoes in many popular assessments of historic Christian asceticism, although responsible scholarship on monasticism the late ancient world – being more sensitive to the nuances – rarely sees it boldly expressed. Many of these opinions, loosely following von Harnack’s metanarrative of Christian history, read into asceticism a Gnosticizing tendency resulting from the abandonment of an integral Hebrew/primitive Christian in favor of a dualistic platonic one. More sophisticated versions of the same prejudice are constructed out of sensitivity to themes in the history of sexuality, following Foucault. Consider – for instance – S. Elm, “Virgins of God: “ The Making of Ascetism in Late Antiquity (1996).

\(^{19}\) See, for instance, J. Goehring. “The Dark Side of Landscape” (2003), who notes that through imaginative devices like demons, “the landscape of the desert myth fashions an artificial unity that it in turn passes off as the actual unity of the ascetic desert” (191). D. Kalleres’s study of the social freight of the anti-demonic rhetoric in the homilies of John Chrysostom and Cyril of Jerusalem, City of Demons (2016).

\(^{20}\) Among the many notable contributors to this trajectory are P. Brown, D. Brakke, and C. Leyser, Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great (2000). Brakke’s culminating project, Demons and the Making of the Monk, is the epitome and pinnacle of these trends, especially as they are applied in the analysis of demonological language and ideas.
expressed in their articulated purposes, and with respect to the philosophical and imaginal contexts that formed them.  

In other instances, the same game is played in reverse: demonologies are interpreted as a symbolic systems with the power to name and subvert the dominant forces of Empire as the “powers and principalities of this dark age” (Eph 6:12). Though embattled by these oppressive foes, the Christian does not lose heart; rather, bearing the hope of the Resurrection, he remembers that his “struggle is not against flesh and blood,” and resists them steadfastly, refusing to answer its violence with his own. Some commentators apply this heuristic only to the earliest Christian literature, implying that – after the conversion of the Emperor – the Church quickly became aligned with the dominant powers, rather than resistant to them. The same type interpretive strategy,

21 A key example of this is D. Frankferter’s provocative book, *Evil Incarnate*, which extends beyond his particular expertise in late ancient Egyptian magical and spiritual trends to the social phenomenon of scares about Satanism into the modern period.


23 I attempt to imitate the piety of the ancients in convention by speaking of a number of theologically-significant entities with initial capitals: ie “the Church” as a unified theological entity; likewise, “the Fathers,” “the Scriptures,” and “the [Ecumenical] Councils.” I maintain the convention for regional, sectarian, and ethnic churches – ie, “the Byzantine Church,” “the Nestorian Church,” “the Greek Church” – as well as particular churches – “the Church of the Holy Sepelchure.” I do not maintain the convention for analytically dissolved entities, ie., “churches” or “patristic tradition.” “Tradition” certainly deserves a similar treatment in many cases by ancient piety, but since it is some traditions and not others that are elevated, and since most uses of the term are analytical, I have chosen to maintain a consistent convention in maintaining the lower case.

24 Such narratives – usually associated with Protestants, and particularly those with Anabaptistic leanings – are well-characterized as suggesting a “Constantian fall” of the Church. J. H. Yoder’s discourse in particular hinges on a blistering critique of Constantinianism as the Church’s collusion with the demonic powers – such a trajectory flows from anabaptistic and pacifistic assumptions, and serves to reinforce them. See ch 8 of *The Politics of Jesus* (1994). Critiques of the dismissal of Constantinianism (for instance, Leithart, *Defending Constantine* (2010)) typically play up the ambivalence of the practical calculus of
nevertheless, can be pressed forwards into the spiritual and ascetical literature of
subsequent centuries, reading renunciation as advocating the rejection of worldliness,
rather than a rejection of the world, and part of a larger project of imagining and
embodying a Kingdom even greater than the Christian Empire.\textsuperscript{25} This comes nearer to the
original spirit of the Fathers, perhaps, who were more concerned about the temptation of
the simplistic dualism of opposing the goodness of a spiritual world to the evil of the
material world than their critics sometimes appreciate.\textsuperscript{26} Nevertheless, a grand historical
narrative of “Christianity as liberating force” – equal and opposite to the grand narrative
of “Christianity as oppressive force” – involves just as many distortions and blindspots as
its counterpart, and can likewise obscure as much as it reveals about the real and complex
content of ancient Christian texts in context.

The idea of demonology-as-resistance in the early Christian literature has a
further life downstream from the scholarship in conversations about practical spirituality,
supporting a groundswell of popular studies that actively leverage a demonological

\textsuperscript{25} This trend is well-represented in some streams of scholarship, for instance, D. Chitty, \textit{The
Desert a City} (1966), or J. Binns \textit{Ascetics and Ambassadors for Christ} (1994). So also the ressourcement of
monastic theology represented by, for instance, G. Peters, \textit{The Story of Monasticism} (2015); explicitly,
Constantinian temptation of the socially acceptable mainline churches. Leithart himself develops this
trajectory in some of his more recent work, for instance, his \textit{Delivered from the Elements of the World}
(2016).

\textsuperscript{26} As we shall discuss (Section 2.2), the Fathers were tremendously concerned with distancing
themselves from the theology and practice of Manicheanism, which tended to identify the material world
with evil.
imagination in contemporary idiom as a religious modality. Authors like Walter Wink and Richard Beck, addressing a thoughtful lay audience, encourage an appreciation of demonology as representing a subaltern social imaginary that can be leveraged to empower the faithful to name and combat the forces of evil invisible yet predominant within the systems and structures that dominate their lives. Other, more committedly literalistic modes often stemming from charismatic circles – represented by figures like Greg Boyd and C. Peter Wagner – emphasize the personal reality of evil spiritual beings, and the need of Christians to campaign actively against them through both personal and social action. These kinds of theoretical paradigms have developed alongside an increasingly elaborate imagination of demons in popular religious fiction:

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27 Wink develops his demonology at length in his powers trilogy – *Naming the Powers* (1984), *Unmasking the Powers* (1986), and *Engaging the Powers* (1992); along with his systematic re-presentation of the whole argument in *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (2010). All of these rest on a Yoderian analysis of the NT powers and aim towards the same kind of anabatpistic ethic of engaged Christian pacifism, as he develops in his *Jesus and Nonviolence* (2003).

28 *Reviving Old Scratch: Demons and the Devil for Doubters and the Disencharnted* (2016). Beck follows much of Wink’s social analysis, but, in leaving more space for understanding the demons as individualized spiritual personalities, he has a better sense for the multivalence of demonological language.

29 Additional individual applications of this way of thinking might be identified, for instance, with respect to human relationships to the natural world (ie, B. Szerszynski, “Techno-demonology: Naming, Understanding and Redeeming the A/Human Agencies with Which We Share Our World,” (2006)), and the constructed relationships between races, classes, groups, etc – a relationship which is often invoked, but has not been systematically articulated to my knowledge.

30 See in particular his *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (1997) and *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theology* (2001); see also his essay in Understanding Spiritual Warfare, “The Ground-Level Deliverance Model.”

31 Wagner developed and mass marketed a paradigm of what he called “strategic-level spiritual warfare” (SLSW) through a number of seminars and publications: first promulgated in his *Spiritual Power and Church Growth* (1986), more recent volumes involve the voices of multiple practitioners, ie, Wagner, ed., *Territorial Spirits: Insights Into Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare & Intercession* (1991). As B. Christerson and R. Flory document in *The Rise of Network Christianity* (2017), these practices have been rapidly spreading and adopted in broad networks faith communities.
from C. S. Lewis\textsuperscript{32} to Frank Peretti,\textsuperscript{33} demonology provides the ground and matrix for imagining the ghostly opponents necessary for the cultivation of a heroic spirituality, and encourages the believer to enter personally into battle with the demons through sometimes elaborate disciplines of “spiritual warfare.”\textsuperscript{34}

For readers accustomed to any of the dominant trajectories of contemporary studies on demons, however, John’s demonology will probably appear rather boring and two-dimensional. John does not seem especially concerned with demonizing his enemies, or in inspiring his co-religionists to stand firm against spiritual forces of evil with evocative theories or elaborate language.\textsuperscript{35} Instead, John wants to offer a coherent and consistent account of the Christian religion that is faithful to what he has received, as he has received it. As such, the Damascene’s treatment of demonology does not stand on its own as a topic with separate development or additional attention: it is subordinate to his comprehensive and integrated account of the Christian faith. It may be, in other words, that the most remarkable thing about John’s demonology is that it is completely

\textsuperscript{32} Lewis’s fiction and non-fiction had a tremendous impact on the formation of a contemporary broad evangelical imagination, and his \textit{Screwtape Letters} (1942) pertains specifically to the imagination of the demonic society and its undetected interaction with human psychology and experience.

\textsuperscript{33} As bestselling works, \textit{This Present Darkness} (1986) and \textit{Piercing the Darkness} (1990) are sometimes credited with undergirding a contemporary Evangelical fiction. On the incorporation of these fictional themes into religious practice, see J. Lewis, “Works of Darkness: Occult Fascination in the Novels of Frank E Peretti” (1996) 339-352.

\textsuperscript{34} In addition to the rapid expansion of popular demonological practices in American charismatic networks, noted above (n 31), these perspectives have attained broad global influence and appropriation. As missiologist P. Hiebert observes, (“Flaw of the Excluded Middle” (1982)). In addition to contextual applications, the strategy has attracted a global network of practitioners through intensive discussion via the Lausanne Movement (see for instance, the discussion piece of A. Moreau, “Gaining Perspective on Territorial Spirits” (2000)).

\textsuperscript{35} Indeed, P. Schadler notices that the demonological dimension of heresy present in earlier heresiographical texts – even the \textit{Panarion} of Epiphanius, on which John’s \textit{Haer} is based – is almost completely absent from John’s understanding of heresy. \textit{John of Damascus and Islam} (2017), 39-42 and 93-96.
unremarkable. John managed to take a vast and sprawling body of speculation about the
demonic, pick out the handful of Scriptural and philosophical ideas that were needed to
make the whole system work, and concisely represent them in his theological articulation,
and that handful of ideas was so well-selected, it has survived the ravages of the centuries
to come to us as an overwhelmingly familiar treatment of demonology.

To think of John as imagining demons, then, has some potential to be infelicitous. Imagination often bears the connotations of arbitrariness, whimsy, unreality: John’s
treatment certainly bore none of these characteristics. In speaking of John’s imagination
for the demonic, I want to eschew any colloquial implication of the fictional and
fantastic, and follow instead on something like Corbin’s “imaginal realm,” wherein the
imagination is conceptualized as an organ of perception offering us access to the
latticework of realities standing between the sensible world and ultimately real.\(^{36}\) The
*imaginal* is thus not in any way opposed to the real, and is indeed a natural and necessary
aspect of it: a helpful point, given the pressure intellectual habits of our age which are
wont to conflate the category of spiritual entities into that of non-existent mythological
entities. Indeed, the demons, for John, exceed even Corbin’s categories of verity. The
Damascene does not grapple for symbols to help him understand the spiritual world,
rather, he understands God to have disclosed the content and contours of that invisible
world in the Scriptures, and the Fathers to have rightly interpreted and transmitted the
content of that revelation.

\(^{36}\) H. Corbin, *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam* (1995). Corbin’s categories have been greatfully
appropriated in a number of esoteric conversations, and have had a substantial role in framing Islamic (and
especially Sufi) presentations of the structure of the spiritual world – including treatments of demonology
(i.e., A. El-Zain, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn* (2009)). His heuristic has not yet been
employed, however, in parsing Byzantine imaginal space.
Potential confusions notwithstanding, speaking John as *imagining* the demonic is important as highlighting his active and creative participation in the process of formulating his dogma. The complexity and creativity involved in his task should not be underestimated. The Damascene’s inheritance came chiefly in the form of ancient texts: the Christian Scriptures, first and foremost, and secondarily, canon of key patristic writings and ideas. John ingested these texts liturgically, dwelling in them both through his participation in the worship of the Church, and his own practices of reading and religious devotion. In giving a concise, comprehensive account of the Christian faith, John sought to move from the *paradosis* or “handing on” of the Scriptural and patristic tradition he had received, to its *ekdosis* – its exposition, or “handing out.” Along the way, he sought to tighten and to clarify the understanding of God, the world, and humanity into which he had been initiated: his philosophical training giving him attention to precision – to exactness, or *akrivia*. This, ultimately, is how John will come to describe his signature accomplishment: he offers us an ἔκδοσις ἀκριβὴς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως – an “Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,” within which the place of the demons in the body of theological science is briefly and elegantly articulated.

The Damascene’s approach may be difficult for modern readers to appreciate, given its lack of immediacy and practicality. I hope to demonstrate, however, that what John accomplished in his demonology was not only new and interesting in his time, but salient even in our own. The demonological imagination of the sects and people groups surrounding John was elaborate and pluralistic, and it had become especially so as the erstwhile structures of Byzantine Christian society disintegrated, and were replaced by
new Umayyad institutions.\textsuperscript{37} The popular imagination of John’s era was infested with demons. As much as our age prides itself on its enlightened dismissal of all things supernatural, underneath our secular scientistic self-confidence, the imaginal space of modern cultures is not so different.\textsuperscript{38} In the midst of the rapid change and anxiety, pains and uncertainties that characterize our age, an ever more fearsome tribe of imagined demons appear with ever-increasing frequency in our stories and our fantasies, whether they are religious or not.\textsuperscript{39} Our era, perhaps, needs its own John of Damascus: a thinker who can affirm the underlying reality of evil in a way that can give it focus and definition, while at the same time subverting it and subordinating it to a hopeful, life-giving, life-sustaining narrative.

The beauty of John’s demonology, indeed, is that from within a babel of ideas and opinions, he succeeds in receiving and affirming at face value the core of traditional doctrine – the existence of personal, spiritual beings committed to evil – and yet domesticates these beings into a universe that is coherent and subordinate to the designs

\textsuperscript{37} As the ethnographer B. Meyer argues on the basis of examples in modern experience, periods of change and upheaval typically correspond to a rise in reported experiences of witchcraft and demonism as projections and personifications of the psychological/sociological strains of disruptive transition. See her \textit{Translating the Devil} (1999); and the appropriation of her framework in conversations about diabolization in patristic rhetoric in D. Kalleres, \textit{City of Demons} (2017), 4-6. Such a hypothesis may hold true for John’s time: see Chapters 4 and 5 for an analysis of the historical situation and demonological trends within his historical moment.

\textsuperscript{38} Delightfully demonstrating this point in the intellectual history of disenchantment itself is J. Josephson-Storm, \textit{The Myth of Disenchantment} (2017).

\textsuperscript{39} In addition to the sources of religious fiction noted above (n 28, 29, above) numerous examples could be tallied from popular culture and media, from \textit{The Exorcist} and films derived from it; the long-running serial about a demon-hunting family business, \textit{Supernatural}; the popular series of the cheerleader-cum-vampire slayer \textit{Buffy}: examples could be multiplied almost indefinitely – and these only works that contain some meaningful and intentional allusions to language and images about the demonic drawn from the Christian tradition. If the scope is expanded to contain modulations of demonic themes and mirrors of classic demonic entities into science fiction and superhero narratives, the potential domain of the subject becomes overwhelming: effectively coterminous with the sprawling extent of popular media culture.
of providence. Above all, through the fine balance of his theological system, John prevents the devil and the demons from leaving an exaggerated impact on the Christian imagination. The terrors, traumas, and uncertainties that characterize human existence are real, John affirms, but God is ultimately in control. Despite the proliferation of visible and invisible evils, human beings, in Christ and through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, have the power to live lives of holiness and virtue that are pleasing to God. In Christ, God has acted definitively in human history, at once defeating the powers of evil and showing them to be powerless, despite their manifold illusory threats. Despite the ugliness, disease and decay that characterizes so much of our experience as mortal beings, beauty – in the form of the radiance of the divine glory in and through Christ and his saints – actually matters. Beauty, indeed, drives away these forces of evil and chaos: it should be cultivated, therefore, within the Church – notwithstanding the tragic limits of human mortality, and the fact that the world seems to be falling apart.

In this way, a close reading of John’s treatment of the devil and demons serves to challenge and deepen our appreciation of demonology as a subject: it goes beyond that also, however, to transform the way we read John himself. Scholars often portray the Damascene as little more than a mosaicist of other people’s opinions, but as we attend to his treatment of this narrow subject, we witness a peculiar kind of genius at work. Here is a sharp and careful thinker, making very precise adjustments on some very subtle

40 Cataloguing these views, see A. Louth, *St. John Damascene*, vii-viii, and 35-37, with this view persisting to the present in research like J. Demetracopoulos’s “In Search of the Pagan and Christian Sources of John of Damascus’ Theodicy” (2012): notwithstanding a general rising tide of appreciation for the originality of John’s contribution. As Louth rightly notes, the scholarship on John of Damascus has been uneven, on the one hand, being exceptionally well-served with respect to the critical editions of his texts, but undertreated with respect to its overarching structure and themes.
concerns, with an impressive capacity to keep the balance and integrity of the whole Christian system in mind as he does so. As we shall see, several highly technical questions about the spiritual world circulating in the sixth and seventh centuries had significant demonological components:41 John dealt with these questions with exceptional brevity and finesse, crafting judgements on variant traditions that are so fine as to be almost imperceptible. The Damascene argument is so tight that it is hard to imagine his position as anything other than a precise articulation of revealed Christian truth: in fact, this is the genius of his careful selection, arrangement, and presentation of his material.

Admittedly, this project does follow the “cultural turn” in a significant respect by encouraging an imaginative entry into the early Byzantine religious mentality and trying to follow the logic of its concerns and the content of its theological project as unfolding within its particular world. At the same time, however, it also embraces older history of theology models – and the integrity of the received tradition – by appreciating John as a key synthesizer and systematizer of tradition, who for that reason would rightly gain acclaim as a universal Father and Doctor of the Church. My hope is that the strength of the project will be seen in the way that it draws together these divergent methodologies to encourage an imaginative reading of John – and implicitly, of the broader patristic tradition – that is both sympathetic and critical; that looks for deep connections and motivations, but also presumes, in general, that we have more to learn from the ancients than to correct – and not just about their world. To be sure, this is not the only standpoint

41 Chapter 3.
from which John might be viewed: a more consistently critical posture may lead to
different conclusions, whether that critical posture is so by virtue of the theoretical and
methodological framework it selects, or simply by overlooking some of the thematic
questions that this project addresses in order to attend to the underlying philological and
archeological questions with greater vigor and detail. I would contend, nevertheless, that
this project fits given the inherent problems of the Damascene corpus, and current state
scholarship discussing it. We are limited in our studies of John’s life and times by the
paucity of detail, and by the great chronological remove of much of the historical
narratives that do exist from eighth century Jerusalem. Meanwhile, John articulates his
theological system so tightly that it is difficult to find an entry point for commentary.
This project attempts to illuminate both subjects by reading them against one another in a
novel and imaginative way. That there are gaps and limitations to such a method is
inevitable: having dwelt for so long in the associated texts and toiled so long in plotting
this journey through them, this is something I know only too well. I hope, nevertheless, to
offer a picture of these subjects in their complex intersection that is worthy of interest and
attention, even if some of the detail remains to be filled out or corrected.

Outline of the Project

Proposing a new imagination for reading John of Damascus and his demonology
is no small project, and necessarily involves a whole host of subordinate tasks. I do not
have a single methodological paradigm, then, but rather employ (and in some cases,
develop) whatever method or methods seem to make sense in moving the argument
forward. Instead of following an established pattern of argument, I hope that the
composite picture of John and his demonological contribution here developed will serve as an effective baseline for further reflection and research: a model of incorporating a broad pool of data in parsing what may seem to be a relatively minor point within ancient Christian theological systems.

Chapter One serves as something of a liturgical and hagiographical prelude to the study, as I parse the epitaph “destroyer of demons” that has become affixed to the memory of John in his commemoration in the Byzantine Menaion. I invite the reader to suspend concerns for the important historical questions about John’s identity, and instead align him or herself with the way in which the memory of John is preserved and piously performed in the communal life and worship of his spiritual heirs. This approach to John’s biography, on the one hand, sets the tone for the following chapters: the whole project is, in a way, an invitation to imagine our way into a world that is both foreign to us and sparsely detailed in the historical record. At the same time, however, it is also a continuation of the more recent trends in studies of John’s biography, as research has lately suggested that the liturgy composed to John’s honor may be among the earliest memories of the saint.

In Chapter Two, I trace some of the textures that run through late ancient demonology and are accordingly present in the Damascene’s sources. John was well aware of a broad palette of demonological beliefs and traditions: a number of them had become commonplaces within patristic and ecclesiastical texts. John, however, omits many of the details and flattens out divergent perspectives, pursuing with surgical precision his project of locating the demonic in a cosmological and soteriological, rather than a mythological framework. To this end, the Damascene had received a partial grid
through his ecclesiastical and ascetical formation – the way that he received the rich
tradition of Christian faith and thought served as an important prelude to his
interpretation of the demonic. As I explore in Chapter Three, however, this formation
does not account exhaustively for John’s demonology. Instead, I suggest, John moved the
tradition forward through a precise contribution to several contemporary debates on the
nature and structure of the spiritual world, positioning his demonology as the orthodox
middle way between heretical extremes. This heuristic allowed John to retain the
essential depth and complexity of the demonological tradition, but greatly consolidate its
content.

John’s demonology is more than a sum of its source traditions, however: he wrote
at a fascinating and (in retrospect) a pivotal cultural moment, and – although John
himself does not reflect extensively on his context – asking how his demonology played
within it can help develop our sense for John’s goals and intentions. In Chapters Four and
Five, accordingly, I turn to sketch some of the extrinsic factors that were definitive in
John’s particular cultural and historical situation. In Chapter Four, I consider John in his
historical moment: contrasting the relative peace of the early eighth century to the
tumultuous transitions that characterized the seventh. I then situate John among the major
players of his moment, exploring first his relationship to Islam, and then his relationship
to other beliefs and sects described by John as “heresies.” Departing from usual
assumptions, I argue that John did not consider Islam a particularly interesting or
important phenomenon – at least from a theological standpoint. I suggest instead that his
primary concern was for the breakdown of the old Christian order that the new ruling
powers catalyzed. I interpret John’s interest in cataloging heresies as reflecting an anxiety
about contemporary trends within the Christian community, wherein Christians were abandoning the Church in favor of an eclectic mash of spiritualistic beliefs and practices. Unfortunately, however, next to nothing survives of these movements such that we could put their demonologies in conversation with John’s; accordingly, in Chapter Five, I open a speculative window in to the kinds of beliefs and practices regarding the demons such sects may have engaged with by sketching the demonology of three texts whose readership can be traced to John’s approximate context. This vivid taste of the breadth of possibilities available in John’s world drives home just how remarkably unremarkable his professed demonology is. While we can only say with confidence that he read one of the three texts in the chapter, he was at the very least acquainted with the demonological trajectories of each, and he rejected each of them – not by way of lengthy argumentation, but by maintaining a thoughtful center to his argument, and occasionally a well-placed, dismissive argument.

In Chapter Six, finally, I offer a full analysis of John of Damascus’s demonology, building on the rich picture of its background developed in the interior chapters. Indeed, structurally, Chapter Six mirrors Chapter Two, drawing attention to how John reworks his inherited material: the demonological textures that ran through the discussions of John’s sources are – in the context of his system – measured out as dimensions. John gives room for the whole breadth of demonological imagination of classical Christianity: at the same time, his consolidations place demonological speculation within an appropriate domain within the larger project of theology. John’s demonological system, then – remarkably unremarkable as it is – becomes the new governing paradigm for demonology within the theological tradition of classical Christianity. John’s demonology
– forgettable with a single glance and easily written off as conventional with a second – proves on closer inspection to be a compelling synthesis, characterized by deep commitment to the received Scriptural-patristic tradition and rigorous thinking in an age of rapid change: a clarion in an expanding fog of alternative opinions. John’s demonology is not merely conventional, as though John was simply regurgitating what everybody around him already knew and believed about demons. John’s demonology was radically conventional: indeed, it established the conventions.
CHAPTER ONE:

JOHN DAMASCENE, DESTROYER OF DEMONS

Who was John of Damascus? Most students of Church history – students of the development of Christian doctrine, especially – would be able to identify something about him: his dates, his geography, his output and contribution. The basic facts are readily accessible – this eighth century theologian and ecclesiarch lived and wrote under the shadow of an Umayyad Caliphate that had been established for the better part of a generation when he arrived on the scene. John never set foot in any territory under Christian rule, but his theology was nevertheless in sync with the trends of the global Christian community: in addition to writing extensively against the outbreak of iconoclasm, his voluminous systematic, liturgical, and encyclopedic contributions came into wide circulation in subsequent centuries and became – to subsequent generations – a touchstone and foundation of Christian orthodoxy.

But who was John of Damascus? For the magnitude of his impact and theological output, we know next to nothing of his personality and the circumstances of his life. Indeed, so thin are the details that the historical figure is almost in danger of dissolving entirely: if we acknowledge – as it seems we must – that John of Damascus operated within an extensive circle or with the support of a broader school,¹ it is not impossible that John in fact was this circle; that “John of Damascus” is little more a name attached

(for one reason or another) to the output of a theological industry centered in Jerusalem in the first half of the eighth century. This suggestion is somewhat farfetched: we lose more than we gain if we question the historical John out of existence altogether.

Entertaining such a possibility, however, serves to highlight the agnosticism towards which modern critical scholarship on the Damascene is pushed if it insists on accepting only that data about his life and person which is most rigorously verifiable.

It is impossible, in the end, to peel back the curtain of the centuries and find the historical figure behind the memory of the sainted theologian. The pious embellishments in our sources are too thick and overwhelm any purely historical portrait: if we succeed in removing them, we may find that nothing remains. Rather, since we are already indebted to pious sources to remember the Damascene for us and alert us to his importance in the life of the Church, it is appropriate to begin by entering sympathetically into that reverent imagination – at least for a time, and to a certain extent – to meet John within the timeless liturgical framework that celebrates him. Such a journey does not require suspending our intentions of critical inquiry – we need not confuse sympathy with credulity – but it invites us to engage with biographical details and epithets differently, and ask questions about the meaning of what the Church remembers, rather than obsessing about the extent to which various details correspond to historical truth.

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2 This already the established for two of the primary outputs attached to John: his liturgical poetry and the Hiera. In both cases, the attribution is generally accepted as in some sense meaningful, but what it means is less clear: probably not that John personally completed the whole project. Certainly, it is easier to imagine such texts as the product of a monastic scriptorium, rather than an individual. But could not the same be said for several of the pieces in John’s corpus? What if “John” were more of an editor and project manager, than a thinker and writer in his own right? Or what if the name “John” were affixed pseudonymously in deference to the humility of a team of monastic authors? Notably, even centuries later, works were being persuasively attributed to John of Damascus to borrow something of his theological ethos and reputation – most notably, the Vita Barlaam et Joasaph, which was believed to be authentic Damascenea until R. Volk completed work on the critical edition in 2009.
1.1 John and his Anti-Demonic Exploits as Liturgically Rendered

Let us begin, then, by imagining the situation and circumstance in which John’s most direct spiritual descendants have for centuries come to celebrate his memory. It is the eve of 4th December in the chapel of a monastery with its roots in the tradition of Greek Orthodoxy, and by the prescriptions of Byzantine liturgical calendar, it is the beginning of the “Commemoration of the Holy Great-Martyr Barbara and our Righteous Father John of Damascus.” The service of Vespers is nearing its end: outside, the shadows have deepened into darkness; within, however, lights dance throughout the nave and the sanctuary, illuminating the bright images of saints that adorn the walls. The perfume of incense still hovers heavily in the air: although the visible clouds of smoke have now dispersed, the prayers they represent and with which they mingle continue to ascend.

As the service nears its end, suddenly – although subtly, within the mesmerizing flow of liturgical chant – the choir intones the doxastikon:

3 John’s commemoration on Dec 4 can be dated to at least the 10th C, at which point he appears on a calendar of Palestinian origin preserved in Georgian. See G. Garritte, Le Calendrier Palestino-Géorgien du Sinaïticus 34 (Xe Siecle), (1958), p. 109 and 402-403. Some synaxaria (ie. the 10th C Synaxarion of Basil II) place John on 29th November (see the excerpt in PG 94, 501D) although the 4th December date has become typical in churches of the Byzantine tradition. The early Roman martyrology remembers John on 6th May – see “Vita St. Johannis Damasceni” in Acta Sanctorum: Maii II (1866), 108-118. Leo XII elevated John to the dignity of Doctor of the Church in 1890, establishing the Roman commemoration of 27th March. See Acta Sanctae Sedis 23 (1890), 255-6. The March 27th date persisted in the Roman Church until the commemoration was brought in line with the eastern practice at Vatican II.

4 Menaion for 4th December: Μηναία τοῦ ὑπὸ ἔναρτος, (1892), II.360ff. A bibliography of modern liturgical commemorations of John in Greek can be found in H. Follieri, Initia Hymnorum Ecclesiae Graecae (V.2, 1966), 170. Of special interest (though not indexed by Follieri) is the full service in honor of the Damascene prepared by the Ecclesiastical Music College of the Patriarch of Athens, Ἀκολούθια τοῦ ἐν ἄγιοις πατρός ἡμῶν Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ (1888), which sets the principle hymns to elaborate chant in Byzantine notation.
Ὅσιε πάτερ, εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐξῆλθεν ὁ φθόγγος τῶν κατορθισμάτων σου, δι' ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς εὑρέθης μεθὸν τῶν καμάτων σου. Τῶν δαμαμόνων ὡλέσας τὰς φάλαγγας, τὸν ἀγγέλουν ἑρθασας τὰ τάγματα, ὁν τὸν βίον ἀμέμπτως ἐξῆλθος. Παραρισείαν ἔχον πρὸς Χριστὸν τὸν Θεὸν, εἰρήνην αἴτησαι ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἡμῶν.

Righteous Father [John], into all the earth the sound of your achievements has gone forth: through which in the heavens you have found a reward for your labors. You destroyed the ranks of the demons, you attained to the order of the angels, whose life you blamelessly emulated. Having boldness with Christ God, pray there be peace upon our souls. 

Placed prominently after the final stichera verses for the day of the week, between the opening line of the ancient doxological prayer “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and the Holy Spirit” and its conclusion, “Now and ever and unto the ages of ages,” this hymn ranks only behind the troparion in establishing the theme of the commemoration. Moreover, highlighting the importance of this particular hymn in the liturgical memory of the Damascene, the expanded service cycle repeats these verses at the Matins service before the canon of orthos, thus prescribing that the pious hymn John’s anti-demonic exploits both evening and morning in the course of his commemoration.

The kind of demonological adventures alluded to in this verse, however, would probably strike most of John’s readers and admirers as somewhat out of place. John is not

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5 Menaion II.362; Ἀκολουθία, 39-41. All translations from the Menaion, as well as other Greek texts, are also my own unless otherwise noted.

6 The ranking of hymns can be inferred from the Typika, of which there exists several traditions, the most widely available of which is the edition of George Violakis, Τυπικόν κατά την τάξιν τῆς του Χριστοῦ Μεγάλης Εκκλησίας (1888) – the Typikon according to the order of the Great Church of Constantinople – although it is not without its problems, see K. Ware, Festal Menaion (1984), 543. In which, see, for the rubrics of the Vesperal liturgies of the Menaion, pp. 2-16, with pp. 110-111 pertaining specifically to the Dec 4 service. For a general discussion of the structure of the Menaion services and the logic of their ranking and themes in English, see Job Getcha, The Typikon Decoded (2012), 99-116.

7 See Ἀκολουθία, 39-41. Several additional services, with the superscription, “Ποιήμα τοῦ Μάρκου τοῦ Ἐυγενικοῦ” circulate informally and independently of the Menaion, containing all that is published in the official service books, but also expanding on it. Mark of Ephesus wrote some additional original hymnody in honor of the Damascene, which – interestingly – is more subdued in its demonological contents: focusing, instead, on the play of John’s relationship with the Biblical Johns, and his relationship to Paul as one who traveled “from Damascus to Sion.” See E. Mineba, Το υμνογραφικό έργο του Μάρκου Ευγενικοῦ (2004), 363-390, 679-680. We will leave off a detailed consideration of Mark’s liturgical poems, however, as being both late and containing little of interest for our purposes.
remembered, for the most part, as a great warrior against the demons. The apolytikion, following soon after the doxastikon, offers a somewhat more standard catalogue of his accolades:

Øρθοδοξίας ὁ δῆγε,  
εὐσεβείας διόδασκαλε καὶ σεμνότητος,  
τῆς οἰκουμένης ὁ φωσήρ,  
tὸν μοναξόνθων θεόπνευστον ἐγκαλλώπισμα,  
Ἰωάννη σοφὲ,  
tαῖς διδαχαῖς σου πάντας ἐφώτισας,  
λῦρα τοῦ Πνεύματος.

Leader of Orthodoxy,  
teacher of godliness and seriousness,  
illuminator of the world,9  
an adornment of monastics, inspired by God,  
O wise John –  
your teachings have illuminated all,  
O harp of the Spirit.9

Scholars often complain about the historical problems in the tradition of John’s Vita,10 but because the particular details it preserves problematic, not because it is full of colorful battles with demons like the Life of Antony,11 or fantastic exorcistic miracles like the Life of Theodore of Sykeon.12 Indeed, like the apolytikion, the Lives of John allude

8 There is a pun here in the Greek that is difficult to capture in translation: the referenced “οὐκουμένη” might be taken to refer to either the inhabited world, or the economy of salvation. John thus illuminates the world by elucidating the doctrines of the divine dispensation – a theme that occurs at several points in his commemoration, here condensed into double entendre.

9 Menaion II.362; Ἀκολουθία, 27. This hymn also appears in the abbreviated Horologion service for John, see Ὄρολόγιον τὸ μέγα (1851), 215. Note, however, the hymn is typologically applied, and so also used (with suitable modification) for other hymnographers and theologians as well, such as Andrew of Crete (4 July), Methodius of Constantinople (14 June), and Pope Leo (18 Feb). The hymn seems, moreover, to be a popular candidate for reproduction in the Horologion, appearing there nine times. See H. Follieri, Initia Hymnorum, III.150.


11 BHG 140. Vie d’Antonie, ed. G. Bartelink, SC 400 (1994), with D. Brakke’s studies on the Vita and its monastic context bringing the demonological dimension into focus and conversation. See his Demons and the Making of the Monk (2006). Notably, earlier generations of scholarship questioned Athanasius’ authorship of the Life of Antony because they found the highly demonological content to be out of sync with the rigorous thinking of much of his other work.

12 BHG 1511Z. The Life of Theodore of Sykeon is remarkable as being especially ripe with demonological content, from Theodore’s childhood exorcisms (18) to demons who know him by the unusual epithet σιδηροφάγε – “iron-eater” (35, 43, 46, 84, 86, 108) – with respect to his peculiar strength against the demonic horde.
chiefly to his theological labors and his hymnographic accomplishments. The climactic miracle associated with the *Life of John* does not involve a scuffle with the devil, but rather a plot of the iconoclastic Byzantine Emperor to silence John’s eloquent defense of the veneration of images and the miraculous restoration of his severed hand by the ministrations of the Virgin Mary – very much a suitable wonder for a saint whose primary legacy lies in the theological precision of his written output.13

Why, then, should John’s commemoration lay an additional stress on his destruction of the demonic ranks? The acclamations could, perhaps, be written off as conventional tropes of liturgical hyperbole, applied to John typically rather than thoughtfully. Indeed, the *menaion* applies this anti-demonic *doxasticon* to several other saints who are all held together by the common epithet of Ὅσιος – “venerable” or “righteous,” the leading term of the hymn. The Greek *menaion* applies these verses as the *doxastikon* for no less than thirteen “righteous Fathers.”14 The Slavic tradition, meanwhile, expands the collection of heroes of the faith it applies these verses to by reciting them in a less definitive way, at *orthos* following Psalm 50.15 The total number of saints lauded with these words, accordingly, tops out at over thirty.

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13 *Vita* 17, PG 94, 457C. This particular legendary account seems to elide Maximus’s signature tribulation into John’s Mariological piety. Maximus, famously, was made a confessor for standing up against the imperially mandated policy of Monothelitism. The author of the *Vita* apparently constructs this episode considering Maximus a type of the suffering John endured by virtue of being outside of the imperially promulgated theology; probably also recognizing that Maximus is an important theological hero for John. See also n. 43 below. The Marian dimension, meanwhile, corresponds to John of Damascus’s evident piety to the Virgin, represented by the three poignant sermons in honor of her dormition (Kotter, *Schriften JD* V:471-555) and one on her nativity (Kotter, *Schriften JD* V:169-182) which survived in popular transmission.


15 See the English *Meniaon* following in large part the Slavic tradition, tr. Lambertsen (1996).
Indeed, the collection of saints liturgically heralded as “destroyers of demons” is expansive, and with the length of the list comes a good deal of chronological and characterological diversity. Members of the ranks include Desert Fathers like Onuphrius (12 June)\textsuperscript{16} and Abba Poemen (27 August),\textsuperscript{17} to theologians like Maximus the Confessor (21 January, 12 August)\textsuperscript{18} and liturgists like Theodore the Studite (11 November),\textsuperscript{19} to missionary saints even of the modern period, like Herman of Alaska (12 December).\textsuperscript{20} In each case, the title Ὅσιος highlights the monastic endeavors of the respective holy men: their successful project of living the “angelic life,” and their accordant victories in destroying the influence of the demonic over them and around them. The epithet Ὅσιος and the associated doxastikon become inseparable: to be “righteous” is to “destroy the ranks of the demons,” and vice versa. If this is the case, it is not something distinctive about John that earns him these accolades, but something non-distinctive: it is not his personal accomplishments in theology or hymnody that have earned him for him the congratulations of a “destroyer of demons,” but his ascetical struggle his attainment of an

\textsuperscript{16} For his Vita tradition, see BHG 1378 and following. On the liturgical services applied to Onuphrius, see L. Petit, Bibliographie des Acolouthies Grecques, 222 and Initia hymnorum, V.2, 262.

\textsuperscript{17} BHG 1554; Petit, 237.7; Initia hymnorum, V.2, 285.

\textsuperscript{18} Petit, 188; Initia hymnorum, V.2, 216-217. Notably, sections of the liturgical service also appear with Maximus’s work in Combeif’s edition (1675), which is reproduced in Migne (PG 90, 205-222)

\textsuperscript{19} BHG 1754; Petit, 192.5; Initia hymnorum, V.2, 126.

\textsuperscript{20} Thus commemorated in the English (tr. Lambertsen) Menaion, IV.121. The application of these verses to Herman – who died in 1836 and was canonized in 1960 – is the latest saint to whom this troparia applies, and testifies to the enduring resonance of the tradition in liturgical-hagiographical memory. The process of Herman’s canonization and appropriation of typed liturgical hymnody to his memory provides a helpful narrative against which to imagine parallel processes in John’s reception. See Canonization of Saint Herman of Alaska: Kodiak, Alaska, 9 August, 1970 A.D. (Bishop Innocent Diocesan Press, 1970), and Sergei Korsun Herman, a Wilderness Saint: From Sarov, Russia to Kodiak, Alaska (Holy Trinity Publications, 2012).
anonymizing conformity to the traditions of monastic exercise, stretching back through the ages of the Church.

We should not be quick to dismiss even a conventional application of this trope as thoughtless and unrevealing, however. The crucial lines of the doxastikon were not the only verses that the liturgists might have applied to John as a “righteous Father:” Follieri’s index records no less than eighty possibilities, and most of them do not go in a demonological direction. More still, the unique material in John’s liturgy resonates with the “destroyer of demons,” epithet, identifying John as a victorious combatant over all kinds of spiritual opponents. One possibility is that John’s reputation for destroying demonic forces represents his writings against heretics. The hymnlist notes throughout his verses in honor of “the Righteous John” that the forceful denouncement of heretical ideas constitutes a major theme in the Damascene’s thought. An index of John’s work easily collaborates this claim: in addition to compiling and/or expanding an anakephalaiosis of Epiphanius’s Panarion – the famous “medicine chest” against “all heresies” – John wrote a good eight or nine specific treatises against the theological position of various heretical movements. Indeed, the leading term of the doxastikon fits well with this

\[\text{\textit{Initia Hymnorum}, III.161-165.}\]

\[\text{CPG 3745; edition K. Holl. John’s relationship to the Panarion is complex. O. Knorr argues – against Kotter’s assessment that John was working only from one or more earlier anakephalaiosis, and with no complete copy of the text – that John expanded an existing anakephalaiosis, or produced his own. “Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte des ‘Liber de Haeresibus’ des Johannes von Damaskus (um 650-vor 754): Anmerkungen zur Edition B. Kotters,” BZ, 91 (1998), 59-69. On the basis of John’s duplication of the Cathars at Haer. 95 (which Epiphanius includes in a digression under the Cathars in Panarion 59), Louth notes in passing that John either did not know the full text of the Panarion, or did not know it very well (St. John Damascene, 60).}\]

\[\text{Kotter presents editions of John’s anti-heretical work in volumes III and IV of Schriften JD, with the former containing John’s three orations Contra imaginum calumniatores, and the latter paring his Liber de haeresibus with the eight minor polemical treatises attributed to him.}\]

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interpretation: καθοριζμάτω, might just as well be referring to John’s “corrections” of heretics as to his “accomplishments.” Several of the *troparia* to the Damascene in the odes of the *orthos* service identify John’s heretical opponents, which are at one point described as “tares” sown by the “enemy,” in allusion to Matthew 13:25. Perhaps most dramatically, the *kontakion* to John after the third ode of *orthos* depicts John as a spiritual warrior wielding the Cross as a weapon almost as a kind of apotropaic device against the “enemies of the Church,” which are then principally identified as “the deception of heresies:”

The hymnographer and holy man John, instructor and illuminator of the Church and opponent of her enemies:

Let us hymn him, O faithful!

For taking as a weapon the cross of the Lord, he has repelled all the deception of heresies and as a fervent intercessor before God, he grants to all forgiveness for faults.

Exaggerating the Damascene’s reputation for spiritual warfare might also be a poetic homage to his hymnographic activity. The commemoration frequently likens John to David with his ten-stringed lyre: memorably, in the Biblical account, David used that

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24 In particular, Manes in a *troparion* at Ode VII; Nestorius, Severus, monotheletes and monenergists in the first *troparia* at Ode VIII, and iconoclasm in the second. *Menaion* II.368. All of these verses are unique to John’s commemoration (*Initia Hymnorum* II.135, II.33, and I.537, respectively.)


26 This *kontakion* does not typically appear in the Greek *Menaia*, although it does appear in the *Great Horologion* (p. 215). Notably, the hymn is applied only to John: see *Initia Hymnorum*, IV.243. It also appears in the English Menaion tr. by Isaac Lambertsen, IV.28, which is based principally on the Slavic sources. In any case, this liturgical trope echoes John’s on the Cross in *Exp. fid.* 88.40-44: “By it [the Cross] we faithful are set apart from the infidels and recognized: it is a shield and armor and trophy against the devil; a seal that the destroyer may not strike us.”
lyre to soothe the evil spirit afflicting King Saul.27 This connection might be ignored as circumstantial except for the evocative language the liturgist uses to connect John and David: John is said to have “struck [his] harp and emulated the musical modes of David...enchant[ing] (κατέθελξας) all with divine melodies,”28 thus he “bewitches and beautifies (κατακηλοῦσάν τε καὶ ἀγλαίζοσαν) the Church of Christ.”29 The hymnist even cries aloud to John, exclaiming “infused (ἄναδέδεξα) by the breath of the Comforter...you enchant (θέλγεις) our thoughts.”30 Borrowings from a sophisticated lexicon of ritual language, these phrases seem to suggest that John’s theological hymnody weave a kind of evangelical magic working in contradistinction to the deceptive spells of the demons, the pleasures of the world, the enticements of heresy.

It is also possible that the liturgist means to commemorate John’s theological accomplishments as a victory over the demons. The evangelist with whom John shares a name – the Apostle John, often called “John the Theologian” in the eastern tradition – is distinctive among the evangelists in his demonology for reinterpreting Jesus’s exorcistic ministry as a cosmic conflict between Jesus and the Devil; in so doing, he effectively eliminates demons from his theological account. Might the Damascene have

27 Cf. 1 Sam. 16:23, although David’s exorcistic exploits are typically overlooked in the tradition in interest of those of Solomon, in large part because of the messianic typology of Solomon as the “son of David.” Exorcistic musicianship, however, remains the preserve of the harp of David.

28 *Stichera* at the *aposticha*, *Menaion* II.361. Interestingly, the term καταθέλγω appears once in John’s corpus, in an extract from the History of Theodoret, referring to the effect of a shrewd question on a well-meaning but deceived Messalian monk (*Haer.* 80.136).

29 *Apolytikion* of John of Damascus. This verse has been historically omitted in favor of Barbara’s, and does not appear in the *Menaion* service in this edition, however, it is also predictably included in the independent expanded services as the hymn, Τὴν καλλικέλαδον καὶ λιγυραῖς. See *Initia Hymnorum*, IV.74.

30 *Kathisma* of John after the second selection of psalms at *Orthos*, *Menaion* II.363. This hymn is also applied – although with much less notoriety – to another hymnographer of the name John, the Athonite hymnographer John Koukouzelis (d. 1360). See Sophronios Eustratiades, “Ιωάννης ο Κουκουζέλης, ο μαίστωρ, και ο χρόνος της ακμής αυτού,” (1938), 75.
accomplished something similar in constructing his theological system? Such we might hear echoed in the contemplation of the first vesperal verse in honor of John: “With what name shall I acclaim you, oh holy [John]? Shall I liken you to John the Theologian, or David the Melodist? Are you a harp of the Spirit, or a pipe to the Shepherd? For you sweeten both the ears and the mind, you gladden the assemblies of the Church, and by your honey-flowing words, you adorn the uttermost [parts of the earth] (καταγλαίζεις τὰ πέρατα).”

Good theology may have an apotropaic or even exorcistic quality in being such, and John – like his namesake – is a good theologian.

We should not ignore, finally, the resonances that open up when we the commemoration of the Damascene in the larger context of the celebration of the communion of saints. The liturgical services of 4th December interweave John’s commemoration with that of the Great-Martyr St. Barbara: a liturgical diptych that causes some of John’s characteristics illuminate Barbara, while some of Barbara’s illuminate John. Barbara’s agony, like that of most martyrs, is depicted as an especially intense struggle with the spiritual forces of evil: thus, Barbara “broke the snares of the

31 Stichera at the aposticha, Menaion II.360. The same verses are reproduced as a testimony to John and his work in Migne’s collection (PG 94, 508D-510B), and are, naturally, unique to his commemoration (Initia Hymnorum, IV.152).

32 On the liturgical commemoration of Barbara in the Greek tradition, see Petit, 20-22; on her Passio tradition, BHG 213-216. John himself evidently boasted a piety to the martyr, as his encomium to her memory attests. Barbara’s cult is of oriental, and quite possibly Syrian provenance, the earliest evidence to her being a Syriac palimpsest at St Catherine’s Mount Sinai – see A. Smith, Select Narratives of Holy Women, ix-x (1900). It is not impossible that John’s devotion to her could have played a critical role in consolidating her cult in Jerusalem, or in the Grecophone world more broadly, whence she became a widely-regarded saint of the middle ages – see H. Williams, “Old French Lives of Saint Barbara,” (1975), 156-58. The elision of their commemorations may reflect a memory of this, or perhaps simply the fact that John’s homily on the martyr was most poignant one to survive in Greek. It is certainly the oldest surviving Greek encomium to the martyr (BHG 217).
enemy” – being delivered, like John, “by the weapon of the Cross.”33 “The tyrant who
rages in vain to destroy and annihilate both earth and sea lies at the feet of the girl
Barbara,” the liturgist announces, “for Christ has trampled him down and bound him like
an unclean bird.”34 Thus too in the same liturgical moment we find John fighting
alongside her, “striking down all false knowledge of the God-opposing heresies” with his
“splendid writings.”35 In the background, all the while, are echoes of the three youths in
the fiery furnace in Babylon, praising God from the midst of the flames without being
burned.36

Amplifying this effect, John and Barbara stand on the calendar immediately
before the “venerable and God-bearing Sabas the Sanctified,” lauded Father of
Hieropolite monasticism, and namesake of the great monastery of Mar Sabas that stood at
the heart of the monastic movement within the Jerusalem Patriarchate.37 Incidentally, the

33 Apolotykion of the Great Martyr. While suppressed in the Menaion service, it appears as the
general troparion in the Horologion: for instance, Ὠρολόγιον τὸ μέγα (1851), 215. See Initia Hymnorum,
I.220.
34 Troparion of the Martyr at Ode VII, Menaion II.367.
35 Troparion of the Righteous at Ode VII, Menaion II.368.
36 The canon of orthos consists of an elaborate series of verses linked through allusion to the nine
Biblical odes, much like antiphons in the western tradition – although the recitation of the texts of the
Biblical odes has given way to the liturgical poetry and all but disappeared in most canons. Nevertheless,
the Biblical odes remain an important background, lending a certain palate of vocabulary and imaginative
setting to each of its associated compositions, and remaining a part of the performative memory through
linking verses which draw the material forward through explicit allusion. Odes VII and VIII are queued to
the Song of the Three Youths (Dan. 3:23-91 in translations following the Septuagint) the ode being divided
at v. 56.
37 This juxtaposition is already in use by the 10th C, according to the Palestinian calendar
preserved in Georgian (Calendrier Palestinio-Géorgien, 108). That the liturgical commemoration of saints
has a logic based on the sequence of their celebration is evident from other juxtapositions on the calendar,
for instance, of Dionysius (Oct 3) and Hierotheus (Oct 4). And, as in the case of John Damascene and
Sabas, part of the way this logic is communicated is through shared hymnographic material (in this case,
the troparion Χρηστότητα ἐκδιδαχθείς, which – although very specific to these two figures – changes only
the name of the commemorated saint in the hymn. Initia Hymnorum V.1, 101; Horologion, 204.) This
being the case, John Damascene’s juxtaposition to Sabas on the calendar needs to be evaluated as a
anti-demonic *troparion* in question appears at two points in the commemoration of St. Sabas, whose establishment of a city of monks in the Judean desert follows much more closely upon the lines of the paradigm for monastic spiritual warfare laid down by the *Life of Antony*. Anti-demonic venerability of the type ascribed to John is thus a trope with deep roots in the Jerusalemite tradition: these feasts together preserve and represent that tradition in an anticipation of the Feast of the Nativity, a subtle homage to the life of the Church in the city where the ministry of the incarnate Word had its center, and first manifest through his ministry the divine triumph over the demonic powers of evil.

Indeed, some traditions of John’s commemoration extend and amplify the themes of the vesperal *doxasticon* by borrowing for him a hymn that was probably originally written for St. Sabas, incorporating it at the conclusion of *orthos*:

| Τὸν Μοναστῶν τὰ πλήθη, τὸν καθηγητὴν σὲ τιμῶμεν Ἰωάννη Πατήρ ἡμῶν· διὰ σοῦ γὰρ τὴν τρίβον, τὴν ὄντως εὐθείαν, πορεύεσθαι ἐγκνωμέν. Μακάρως εἰ, τῷ Χριστῷ δουλεύσας, καὶ ἑρθοῦ θρημβιζόσας τὴν δύναμιν. Αγγέλους συνομίλε, δύκαιον ὁμόσκοπνε καὶ ὁσίων. μεθ’ ὧν πρέσβευε τῷ Κυρίῳ, ἐλεηθήναι τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν. | Instructor of the multitude of monks, we honor you, O John our Father; for by your footsteps we have truly learned to walk the straight path. Blessed are you: you served Christ and denounced the power of the enemy. O converser with angels, companion of venerable and righteous, with these elders in the Lord, |

potential early witness to his residency at the monastery, and may challenge some of the critical scholarship that has questioned the association based on its seemingly late appearance in the tradition.

38 *Menaion* II.372, 378. For further bibliography on the services commemorating St. Sabas, see Petit, 231; *Initia hymnorum*, V.2, 296.


40 Further evidence of this is that certain early calendars also included a synaxis celebration of the twelve minor prophets on this day, the logic of which being the anticipation of the feast of the Nativity. See *Calendrier Palestinio-Géorgien*, 402-403. The celebration of the Prophets Nahum (1 Dec), Habakkuk (2 Dec) and Zephaniah (3 Dec) which persist into the *menaia* of the modern period continue to preserve this calendrical-liturgical logic.
have mercy on our souls.  

Individual pieces of the liturgical memory that make John into a “destroyer of demons” can be explained away, but the number and variety of anti-demonic allusions that populate the service keeps this aspect of his accomplishments firmly in view. John’s reputation as a combatant against demonic forces is neither incidental nor hyperbolic, but deep, deliberate, and consistent throughout his commemoration, offering rich clues about his character, memory, and legacy, and his place in the ecclesiastical tradition.

The most intriguing possibility, no doubt, is that John composed some of these anti-demonic verses himself. He would not, of course, have applied them to his own honor: he would instead have been honoring some other “righteous Father” with a view to developing this saintly type within the liturgical cycle. John’s seminal contribution to the formalization of Byzantine liturgy is well-attested, and several compositions specifically attributed to him adorn the cycle of churches in the Byzantine usage.  

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41 The Greek tradition puts less stress on this hymn, as is evident by the fact that the hymn is alluded to only by its incipit at Menaion II.371 – although it is fully applied to St. Sabas on Dec 5 (Ibid, 376). See Initia Hymnorum IV.350. The hymn is given greater weight in the Slavic tradition, whence it appears in the service according to Menaion, IV.32 tr. Lambertsen. See also Ακολουθία, 16-19.

42 The most convenient list can be found in J. Nasrallah, Saint Jean de Damas: son époque, sa vie, son œuvre (1950), 150-157. See also Initia Hymnorum, V.1, 273f, noting that some of the hymnography probably attributable to John is preserved under other names (John the Hagiopolite, John the Monk, John the Arklas, or just John), and “to distinguish between Johannes Damascenus, Johannes monachus, and ‘Johannes’ is at present hardly possible” (J. Svöverffy, A Guide to Byzantine Hymnography: A Classified Bibliography of Texts and Studies, vol. II (1979), 12). John is also remembered as the original compiler of the Octoechos, which would to accord with his systematic and liturgical interests, but in fact probably reflects that he brought the tradition with him from Syria and adapted it for the Jerusalemite monastic context. See E. Wellesz, A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography (1961), 140. In general, however, unwinding the different voices within compiled liturgical texts is no small matter. Little has been done with respect to a thoroughgoing critical evaluation of the tradition with a view to separating out authentic Damascana from spurious and relating his liturgical contribution to his theological, although S. Eustratiades offers a promising start in his lengthy serial essay, “ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης Δαμασκηνός καὶ τὰ ποιητικὰ ἄρτοι ἐγγεγράμματα,” Nea Sion, 26 (1931) 385-401, 497-512, 530-538, 610-617, 666-681, 721-736; 27(1932) 28-44, 111-123, 165-177, 216-224, 329-353, 415-422, 514-534, 570-585, 644-664, 698-719, 28(1933) 11-25.
had a significant hand in the services of several of the saints who are described as “destroyers of the demonic rank,” particularly the canon in honor of Maximus the Confessor, who was among John’s principle theological heroes. Maximus’s canon in fact shares several hymns and hymnic tropes with John’s commemoration, even beyond the anti-demonic doxastikon. The menaion also applies the thematic troparion Ὄρθοδοξίας ὀδηγέ – translated above – to Maximus (21 January), and pairs him with an early martyr (Neophytus), much as it pairs John with Barbara. We should not forget, moreover, that within the hagiographical tradition, both saints are purported to have lost their right hands over their uncompromising theological positions – although ultimately, a miraculous intervention by the Theotokos restores John’s hand to him. At the least, these parallel memorials establish Maximus and John on a diptych; perhaps it is also an echo of a deeper connection.

The text of John’s commemoration names the Sabaite hymnographer Stephen as the liturgist who compiled the service. Given that he died no later than 807, Stephen would have written less than fifty years after John’s death, and was likely therefore to have had immediate or near-immediate experience of the Damascene. The hagiographical tradition strengthens this connection even further by remembering Stephen as a nephew

43 In the Life of Maximus, (BHG 1233m-1235), see PG 90, 108. For John, see Vita 17, PG 94, 457C. See also n. 13, above. A separate commemoration for the icon of the Mother of God “of three hands” on 28th June is also linked to this legend. Further weaving these themes together, the name of the monk who transported the miraculous icon to Mt. Athos is “Sabas.” See BHG 885m. See the comprehensive study of the tradition, I. Rochow, Die Legende von der abgehauenen Hand des Johannes Damaskenos: Ursprung-Varianten-Verbreitung (2007). Roschow affirms the amputation of Maximus’s hand as an important historical precedent for the legend, but does not explore the possibility of whether the Maximus’s suffering as a literary or characterological type superimposed into John’s Vita tradition.

44 Menaion II.363. As V. Kontouma notes, this attribution is unquestioned (“John of Damascus,” 7).
of John.\textsuperscript{45} It is certainly possible that when Stephen sat down to honor his spiritual and biological uncle that he would have sought to model his commemoration on a commemoration that John himself had written.

1.2 \textit{Demons in the Life of John and the Curation of his Memory}

It is difficult to speak with confidence about the historical content of John’s liturgical commemoration. The particular logic of these verses has been lost beneath the encrustations of Byzantine embellishment. This must be taken at face value, however: the aim of the generations of monastic liturgists who gave these verses their final form was more to honor the memory of their heroes by weaving it into the communion of saints, rather than to preserve its historical details. What is certain, in any case, is that the liturgy has a purpose for calling John a “destroyer of the ranks of demons,” and communicates a deep logic consonant with the themes of his faith and life. The question that faces us, then, is this: if we put this epithet at the forefront of our heuristic apparatus – as seems justified by the emphasis it receives in liturgically commemorating him – how does it change the way that we read and interpret the life and contribution of John of Damascus? How does it affect our reading of his theological corpus, and the relationship of his theology to the culture in which he lived, prayed, and wrote? To what extent, finally, does reading John in this way invite a more general rereading and reinterpretation of ancient and medieval theology along these demonological lines?

\textsuperscript{45} So the \textit{Life of the Melodists} (BHG 394), see \textit{Analecta} IV.299, which also calls him a “product of John’s erudition.” See also H. Delehaye, \textit{Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae (Novembris)} (1902), col 170, 1.20-23.
The “Commemoration of the Holy Great-Martyr Barbara and our Righteous Father John of Damascus” probably represents the oldest extant tradition about the life and character of the Damascene. Embedded in the verses of the service are most of the points of John’s biography that scholars today consider fixed beyond reasonable doubt, all which are taken up by the Byzantine hagiographers of subsequent generations. John was of prestigious and wealthy stock\(^{46}\) and well-educated – a philosophical sage\(^{47}\) who abandoned his riches and honors\(^{48}\) to distribute his goods among the poor\(^{49}\) and take up a life of poverty and asceticism.\(^{50}\) He was a distinguished expert in Christology and Trinitarian theology, which he taught through his writings,\(^{51}\) establishing “orthodox dogma”\(^{52}\) and consolidating the hymnographic tradition of the Church,\(^{53}\) in fact contributing many of his own hymns to it.\(^{54}\) Last, he was a man of action: a disputant

\(^{46}\) Trobarion at Ode IV, Menaion II.365, specifically, reared with access to the “splendor, wealth, and beauty of the world,” which he subsequently forsook.

\(^{47}\) Trobarion at Ode I, Ibid., 362: he was “wise, keen of wit and judgement…looking into the nature [of things].”

\(^{48}\) Trobarion at Ode IV, Ibid., 365.

\(^{49}\) “Distributing [his] wealth” (Trobarion at Ode III) and “impoverishing” himself (Trobarion at Ode IV).

\(^{50}\) Kontakion, Ibid., 364: earning the rewards of labor ἵδρωσι τῆς ἁσκήσεως – “by the sweat of ascesis.”

\(^{51}\) Trobarion at Ode IX, Ibid., 369: he “taught all the sons of the Church to hymn the Unity in Trinity reverently in an orthodox fashion,” and “to theologize the Incarnation of the divine word,” aspects “of the Scriptures” which many find “difficult to understand.”

\(^{52}\) Exapostilarion, Ibid., 370.

\(^{53}\) Trobarion at Ode VI, Ibid., 365: enriching the Church with orthodox praises likened to those of the “heavenly choirs.”

\(^{54}\) He personally “hymned the ranks of saints,” (Trobarion at Ode IX, Ibid., 370) and illuminated the Church with the “splendor of [his] hymns and light of [his] character.” (Doxastikon at the Exapostilarion).
with heretics who combatted the pernicious doctrines of the Manichaeans, Nestorians, and Jacobites as well as the iconoclasts.\textsuperscript{55}

Modern biographers of John, however, have generally underestimated the historical value of this commemoration. Instead, the favored source is the tenth or eleventh century \textit{Vita}, the Βίος τοῦ ὁσίου πατρός ἰμὸν Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκήνου, or Life of our Holy Father John of Damascus (BHG 884), bound together with John’s work as a preface to his opera in Migne’s \textit{Patrologia Graeca}.\textsuperscript{56} Written by a certain learned patriarch John,\textsuperscript{57} the \textit{Life} is coherent and well-written, intentional about maintaining careful ties with the Syro-palestinian traditions it purports to represent: indeed, it explicitly claims to draw on preceding Arabic traditions of John’s life.\textsuperscript{58} Despite its late date, then, the \textit{Life} has enjoyed something of an authoritative status for subsequent

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Troparia} at Ode VII and VIII, Ibid., 369.

\textsuperscript{56} PG 94, 429-490.

\textsuperscript{57} The majority consensus within the manuscript tradition – as well as modern scholars such as Hoeck and others considering the edition represented in the \textit{PG} edition – is that this was John VI or John VIII of Jerusalem (r. 964-966 and 1098-1106 respectively). Earlier manuscripts, however, identify John of Antioch as the author, which could refer to John III (r. 996-1021) or John IV (r. 1051-1062). V. Kontouma recently offered a persuasive argument for the authorship of John III of Antioch, and anticipates that this case will be settled definitively by further philological and palaeographic study. See “John III of Antioch (996-1021) and the Life of John of Damascus (BHG 884)” (2015).

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Vita} 3 (PG 94, 431). The edition of the Arabic life is Georg Graf, “Das Arabische Original Der Vita Des Hl. Johannes von Damascus,” (1913). Unfortunately, however, recent studies life reveal that the surviving Arabic life seems to derive from the same prototype as the Greek \textit{Vita}, and so offer little by way of further historical detail or even corroboration of the information we find there. See also R. Portillo, “The Arabic Life of St. John of Damascus” (1996), 157-170.
hagiography\textsuperscript{59} as well as modern biographies of the saint.\textsuperscript{60} Nevertheless, there are numerous problems with the text: among other things, it represents from a decidedly Constantinopolitan point of view, giving only the most superficial references to the internal dynamics of the Christian community under the Umayyads. Its characterizations of the “Saracens” are shallow and stilted; it is vague about the details of John’s life, and it presents a problematic chronology – solving, for instance, the problem of John’s ambiguous relationship with Cosmas by simply positing that he knew several people named Cosmas at different points in his life. Alongside the text’s late date, these kinds of issues have led modern readers to the general assessment that, for all its polished presentation, the \textit{Life of John} is an unreliable source of historical information.\textsuperscript{61} Under repeated rounds of critical inquiry, moreover, many of even the more plausible-sounding assertions of the \textit{Life} have begun to erode back into the mists of uncertainty. As Andrew Louth summarizes, “If the ripples of [John’s] influence reach out throughout a millennium or more of Christian history, at the center from which these ripples emanate there is found a mysterious figure. In fact, we know far more about the times of St. John

\textsuperscript{59} Ie, BHG 395: the “Life and Customs of our Righteous and God-bearing Fathers: the brothers and coworkers in the Church of God, John of Damascus and Cosmas,” written by John Merkouropoulos, patriarch of Jerusalem (fl. 1156). Written in exile in Constantinople – Jerusalem was at that point occupied by the Crusaders – John takes the \textit{Life of John} as authoritative and uses it as a standard to correct the account of the earlier \textit{Life of the Melodists} (BHG 394). \textit{Analecta}, IV.303-350. The panegyric of the Damascene offered by Constantine Akropolites (\textit{Sermo in S. Joannem Damascenum}, BHG 885, \textit{PG} 140.812-884) written in the late 13\textsuperscript{th}/early 14\textsuperscript{th} C likewise also treats the \textit{Vita} authoritatively, as do the \textit{synaxaria}.

\textsuperscript{60} Ranging from the pious rendering like that of C. Cavarnos’s \textit{Saint John Damascene} (2010), to a more critical take such as A. Louth, \textit{St. John Damascene} (2002).

\textsuperscript{61} Most forcefully, Kontouma, “John of Damascus,” 23; but see also the sources listed above, n. 10.
Damascene than about the events of his own life, and closer scrutiny of the sources in recent scholarship has only eroded the few fixed points that were thought to exist.”  

Although in many ways it has raised more questions than it has offered answers, Vassa Kontouma’s recent research has done much to illuminate the broader historical situation in which the commemorative traditions about John took shape, and his work first circulated. According to Kontouma’s account, the *Life* appeared at least a century after the anonymous *Life of the Melodists Comas and John Damascene*, which she understands to be composed by iconodules in Constantinople to rehabilitate the memory of the Damascene in the wake of the “restoration of Orthodoxy” in the period between 845 and 976. The *Life of John* itself, meanwhile, she identifies as an Antiochian text composed in the style of the high medieval Constantinopolitan hagiography of Symeon Metaphrastes, probably by someone who had spent some time working with Symeon in his massive project of compiling and editing hagiographies for his foundational menologion. The *Life of John* draws together material from the *Life of the Melodists*

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62 Louth, St. John Damascene, 3.

63 The critical study of John's biography, she notes, can result in a certain “loss of one's bearings.” “John of Damascus,” 28.

64 In her *John of Damascus: New Studies on his Life and Works*, see her articles, “John of Damascus” and “John III of Antioch (996-1021) and the *Life of John of Damascus* (BHG 884),” both of which are quoted above.

65 BHG 394. See *Analecta*, IV.271-302. As Kontouma notes, this *Vita* is even more problematic than the standard *Life of John* in its anachronisms and general disorder – so much that it was explicitly corrected by the later *Vita* of John Merkouropoulos (BHG 395) and banned from being read in church. Kontouma, “John of Damascus,” 11.

66 Kontouma, “John of Damascus,” 11-16. This contradicts the usual opinion, which places the *Life of the Melodists* in the late 10th / early 11th C. D. Sahas, for instance, while noting some of the problematic characteristics of the text, nevertheless extracts from it some useful details. *John of Damascus on Islam*, 37-38.

67 Kontouma, “John of Damascus,” 18-20. Her argument on this point has not yet been thoroughly digested by the scholarship, most of which follows the ascription in the PG which identifies “John” the
with other hagiographic traditions no longer extant with the ultimate purpose – by Kontouma’s assessment – of promoting the cultus of John Damascene in Antioch during the period when the Byzantines had regained control of the city (969-1078). Presenting John – the Hagiopolite hero of the Melkite tradition – in the garb of Constantinopolitan hagiography obscured his historical personality, but it had an important social function in helping to solidify fraternal relationships between the Greek garrison and the indigenous Christian community by promoting common reverence to a common spiritual father. Such overtures were important at that time: under some three centuries of Arab rule, the local Christians had become principally Arabophone, and adapted to the relative autonomy they had in their ecclesiastical life under the Caliphate. The Damascene’s Vita may or may not have been successful in building these bridges, but the systematic representation of John’s legacy in Greek would contribute to his ultimate recognition as a universal Father of the Church and a pillar of orthodoxy.

This reconstruction of the historical situation of the origin of John’s Vita tradition can also shed some light on how the demonological dimension prevalent in the early memory of John would end up so muted in his biography. The primary audience for the Life was not the community who knew John and witnessed his labors for the Christian community, nor was it the tradition stemming John’s labors organically:68 instead, the

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68 Interestingly, the major divergence between the surviving Arabic Life and its Greek counterpart (which otherwise follows the Greek quite closely) is its imagined circumstance of origin. The author of the Arabic Life – a monk by the name of Michael – reports composing the Life of John on the occasion of a miraculous deliverance on 4 December, 1084 following fervent petitions to John and Barbara. Discovering, then, that no adequate life of John existed, the monk Michael set about the task. See R. Portillo, “Arabic Life,” 171-173.
Life represents the reappropriation of John’s memory by Christians whose historical perspective had been shaped by subsequent events centered in the court at Constantinople, determined in large part by the ongoing controversy over icons. Where John had devoted the better part of his time and attention to reinforcing the wall between orthodox Christianity and its heretical or non-Christian “other,” the chief interest of the Life was building bridges between Christian communities that had drifted apart. There was little reason, accordingly, to emphasize John’s wrestling with demons, whether in his own life, or encounter with outsiders.

John’s hagiographer indulges in one prominent instance of demonization of specifically surrounding the traumas of the iconoclastic controversy, but this passing reference serves as the exception that proves the rule. Indeed, the move is so appropriate as to be expected: by the time the Life was written, iconoclasm had been vanquished, but had left indelible mark on Byzantine faith and imagination. In the Life of John, accordingly, Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (r. 717-741) – the first emperor to instigate policies of iconoclasm – is awarded the infamy of serving as the chief villain of the text, and John’s major antagonist. This is historically implausible: John was too far from the Emperor’s influence to fall under the sphere of his coercion. The hagiographer, indeed, must invent an elaborate intrigue in order to justify placing his hero in immediate antipathy to the Emperor. Nevertheless, cleverly playing on words to heighten the

69 This is also a historical reordering over and against the Life of the Melodists – which identifies Constantine Copronymus (r. 741-775) as John’s chief iconoclastic opponent, and thus locating John’s anti-iconoclastic activity later in life. In this case, it seems that the Life of the Melodists may represent the better chronology, given that iconoclasm receives relatively little attention in John’s corpus outside of his treatises on images, and that Constantine is the emperor who took specific action against John that is documented in other extant historical sources (Rochow, Die Legende, 79-80).
tension, the *Life of John* elides the identity of the Emperor Leo (Λέων) with the “ravening and roaring lion (ὡς λέων),” the famous Biblical epithet for the devil from 1 Peter 5:8: the bestial predator who “prowls around seeking whom he may devour.” 

Interestingly, this association falls rather short of John’s expressed demonology: the Damascene deliberately stopped short of making this point in his polemics. John understood the iconoclastic movement to be the product of demonic instigation, to be sure, but he refused to anathematize an Emperor who still had time to repent.

If John had been writing his own biography, the demonic apparitions he might have identified would probably have been more immediate. John’s migration from Damascus to Jerusalem, first, probably did not take place under happy circumstances: increasing hostility to Christians in the Umayyad capital may in fact have forced John to leave. The caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685-705) passed away in 705: John’s family had enjoyed al-Malik’s close confidence, and worked in his service as high-ranking public officials for several generations. Al-Malik’s son and successor, al-Walid (r. 705-715), seems to have been less accommodating to his Christian subjects, accelerating the Arabicization of the apparatus of state, and confiscating the major Chalcedonian facility in Damascus – the Basilica of St. John the Baptist – to construct the city’s Great Mosque, the *Gami’ Bani Umayya al-Kabir.* As a diplomatic concession, al-Walid would
ultimately offer to compensate the Christians by returning some previously-seized ecclesiastical properties, but the move was a considerable blow to the Christians living in Damascus nonetheless, and John’s Chalcedonian community especially.

Of course, John may have preferred to read these unfavorable circumstances in the Umayyad Damascus as the workings of divine providence rather than demonic obstruction; indeed, within his theological system, John would ultimately describe all demonic activity as subject to larger providential purposes.74 In that same year, 705, a new opportunity emerged for Christians in Jerusalem: the Patriarchal throne, which had been effectively vacant for nearly seventy years following the repose of Sophronius, was at last re-established. The subsequent thirty years of John V’s leadership were a major season of rebuilding for the Patriarchate, and a wealthy, high-cultured, seasoned intellectual like John Damascene would have been a tremendous asset for such a project. It is not known when or how they met, but the two Johns ultimately became close allies, if not personal friends.75

One way or another, John found himself recruited to the service of the Jerusalem Patriarchate with the purpose of consolidating the patristic witness of the Maximian or monastic name, in part, as an homage to that great Christian monument from which he and his co-religionists had been forcibly displaced. See also A. Shboul, “Change and Continuity in Early Islamic Damascus” (1994).

74 Exp. fid. 43, which concern and emphasis is certainly resonant with the contemporary debate in Islamic thought contemporary to John on the question of predestination and the limits of human freedom, although the precise connection and direction of influence is unclear. S. Griffith, “John of Damascus and the Church of Syria,” 228-230. See also the fuller discussion in Section 5.3.

75 The Patriarch given affectionate direct address in John’s epistle on the Trisagion Hymn HTris. 26.10-15: “Who knows better than I the thought of his Beatitude, the Patriarch John? No one. For in truth, he never breathed a word of dogma that he did not entrust to me as to his disciple.”
Melkite\textsuperscript{76} position in the face of increasing competition from other Christian doctrines and sects – to say nothing of other religious groups. John seems to have been unusually forthright in drawing attention to his theological acumen;\textsuperscript{77} as such, he may have even petitioned for the task. The overall shape of John’s output – including, as it does, introductory treatises on philosophical vocabulary in Neochalcedonian appropriation, liturgical compositions and a consolidated liturgical system, a compendium of heresies and anti-heresiological manuals, Scriptural and patristic florilegia, and his famous Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith – fits very well into the curriculum of “rebuilding” that would have been so important in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem at the dawn of the eighth century.\textsuperscript{78}

It was probably the Patriarchate of John V (705-735), then, that afforded the Damascene the intellectual and spiritual peace necessary to lay the foundations for his grand theological undertaking. We have little sense for the specific state of things when

\textsuperscript{76} So S. Griffith, “John of Damascus and the Church of Syria.” Griffith is particularly systematic in identifying the construction of Christian identities under Islam. The term “Melkite” is somewhat anachronistic, applying to the Arabic “six council” and “Maximian” Christians of later centuries, but label applies reasonably well, since John’s theology was central and foundational to the “Melkite” sectarian identity. See his “The Church of Jerusalem and the ‘Melkites’: the Making of an ‘Arab Orthodox’ Christian Identity in the World of Islam (750-1050 CE)” (2006), and “‘Melkites,’ ‘Jacobites’ and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/ninth century Syria,” (2001).

\textsuperscript{77} A. Alexakis observes that John’s appropriation of the Byzantine “modesty topos” indicates a writer tremendously confident in his own ability (“The modesty topos and John of Damascus as a not-so-modest author.” (2005)).

\textsuperscript{78} Most comprehensively, S. Griffith, “John of Damascus and the Church of Syria” (2008), yet D. Sahas also identifies “an ideological and reform-minded Christian movement” – which he describes as a “circle” – “putting into action its education and creed under the challenge of Islam and in response, perhaps, to the progressive Arabization and Islamization of the Syro-Palestinian region,” with a more ambitious imagination as to the sociology of this “circle” and its relationship to John (“Cultural Interaction,” (1994), 39). I am also indebted to S. Ables, who made this argument in an unpublished paper “Are the Polemical Interlocutors of John of Damascus Real or Rhetorical?” delivered a meeting of the North American Patristics Society in 2012.
John began his project: what kinds of existing institutions and traditions John would have had access to, and what he would have had to build or rebuild from scratch. The hagiographic accounts – which focus on John’s patrimony in Damascus, rather than in Jerusalem – suggest a Christian community holding doggedly to its heritage traditions, yet at the same time needing to be enriched by learned captives from the west brought to the region as part of the booty from Arab naval raids. At the same time, the sheer number of seventh and eighth century Hagiopolite theologians and churchmen with strong ties to Damascus – which, besides John, includes Sophronius, Cosmas of Maiuma, Stephen the Sabaite, and Andrew of Crete – seems to indicate a vibrant tradition coming from that city, and perhaps even traces the Syro-palestinian axis along which Melkite theology and practice would coalesce. In any case, however, John was able to leverage the resources he needed for his projects, whether by relying on the ecclesiastical resources of the Patriarch and monastic networks, or investing what remained of his substantial family fortune into it. Leo’s iconoclastic program began to disrupt imperial religious life beginning in 726, but these policies did not necessarily overthrow John’s access to scholarly leisure. Although local varieties of iconoclasm may have sprung up in

79 John’s teacher, Cosmas (not to be confused with his contemporary, Cosmas of Maiuma, although the two are conflated in some hagiographical accounts) is remembered as a Sicilian with fine philosophical training. Vita 8 (PG 94, 410D-412B); “Life and Customs,” Analecta IV.305. Also mentioned in a Life of Cosmas the Melodist – see T. Detorakis, Κοσμᾶς ο Μελωδός Βίος και έργα, (1979).

80 Sahas, “Cultural interaction,” 39 – with this “spiritual axis” becoming a “circle” of theologian scholars with John at the center. Griffith, whose claims are more restrained, nevertheless identifies a similar Damascus-Jerusalem connection in “John of Damascus and the Church in Syria,” 215ff.

81 The Damascene’s Vita makes a point of noting that his family had significant property holdings in Judea and Palestine (PG 94, 437D). While he is noted both by his liturgical commemoration and Nicaea II as leaving this great wealth in service of the Church, this does not preclude investing said wealth in the Church.
Palestine paralleling the imperial policy, there was neither mechanism nor provision to enforce the destruction of icons beyond the Byzantine state: indeed, John had the full support of the Patriarch in writing in defense of images, and may have even been writing as his official spokesman on the matter.82

This does not mean, of course, that John’s life was free of major opposition (demonic or otherwise): his position probably become especially vulnerable in 735 at the repose of his friend and patron John V. There were, in any case, no shortage of shadows pressing in on the beleaguered Christian community living in the Holy Land in the early part of the eighth century. Passing details in certain of John's minor works suggest “a climate of instability and infighting among the Chalcedonians of Palestine,”83 with John being held in suspicion for refusing to follow what was the popular trend of his context of addressing the Trisagion hymn to the Son alone,84 and for advocating the extension of the Lenten fast to a full eight weeks.85 And, although we find no specific references to local iconoclastic practices in John’s corpus, it seems reasonable to assume that at least a

82 Kontouma develops this theme in her critical work on John’s biography. See “John of Damascus,” 29. Similarly, D. Olewinski likewise identifies the autonomy of the Church viz-a-viz the Empire among John’s “Theologische Grundmotive.” See Um die Ehre des Bildes (2004), 402-404.


84 Epistola de Hymno Trisagio (Kotter, Schriften JD, IV: 304-332). This had been a running argument between Chalcedonians and miaphysite sects since Peter the Fuller (d. 488) proposed adding a line to the hymn, making a Christological reference unambiguous. It seems, in general, that the Syriac and other Oriental traditions preferred a Christological interpretation of the hymn, which may have been more ancient; whereas the Greek tradition came to understand the hymn as addressed to the Trinity. On the hymn and the emergence of the conflict, see S. Brock, “The Thrice-Holy Hymn in the Liturgy,” (1985). Given that it occurs separately from his apologetics against miaphysites, John’s position – which is emphatically repeated at Exp. fid. 54 – likely represents a loyalty to the occidental tradition over and against the native sympathies of local Semitic-language speaking Chalcedonians.

85 De sacris jejunii, PG 95, 63-73. See Kontouma’s analysis of the debate and its history in her article, “La Quarantine hiérosolymitaine dans le De sacris ieiuniis de Jean Damascène” (2005).
portion of the Christians of Jerusalem embraced the imperial policy, or had arrived at it independently in adapting themselves to the aggressive aniconism popular among Arab monotheists. It was to these sorts of things that John was undoubtedly alluding when he noted that “the enemy of the Church still stirs up trouble…by means of those living in piety,” by which John indicates that leadership of the parties opposing him was probably predominantly monastic. Indeed, at one point in his life, at least, John finds himself so beleaguered by critics that he describes himself as having been “amputated in speech.” One cannot but wonder if he had these kinds of tumults in mind when he affixed a cryptic personal supplication offered at the end of his encomium on Barbara: “Heal the wounds of my soul and my body, and protect me from every punishment due to events!”

There is not enough evidence here to paint a complete picture, but the few indications we have seem to point away from the what is suggested by the standard Life of John, viz., that at the end of his life, the Damascene enjoyed a peaceful retirement which afforded him plenty of leisure to revise his corpus. The end of his life, in fact, may have been the most uncertain and contentious, and – absent patriarchal sponsorship –

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86 HTris. 1.16-18.
87 De jej. PG 95, 65B
89 Vita 38, PG 94, 487. Intriguingly, John Merkouropoulos’s Life suggests that John retired into hymnody after completing his systematic project: noting the intellectual slackness of many Christians, John translated the “preciseness of his dogma (τὴν τῶν δογμάτων ἀκρίβειαν)” into song, “in order that what [the simple] could not attain by pains, they might attain by melody, such that the faith not be damaged” (Analecta, IV.348). It is possible, however, that rather than expressing a claim of chronological priority, this account is emphasizing the exceptional doctrinal quality of the hymnography associated with John’s name.
he may not have had access to the resources needed to continue his theological work.

Nevertheless, John’s works were collected, collated, and revised towards the end of his life and immediately thereafter, whether or not John himself was personally involved in the process.\(^9\) John may never himself have been an inmate of the monastery of Mar Sabas – that claim, although strong in the later traditions, can no longer be taken for granted\(^1\) – but that said monastery was chiefly responsible for curating both the Damascene’s corpus and his memory is not disputed. John became so thoroughly appropriated and naturalized to Mar Sabas in the centuries between his death in the mid-eighteenth century and his rediscovery as a theologian of depth and Father of the Church in the Greek- and Latin-speaking communions in the twelfth and thirteenth, in fact, that it is probably better to read the earliest witnesses of John’s life and writings against a broad

\(^{9}\) Here I am expanding the theory advanced by A. Louth (St. John Damascene. 31-35, and “The ‘Pegae Gnostos’ of St John Damascene: its date and development” (2003), 335-340) as nuanced by Kontouma, “The Fount of Knowledge between Conservation and Creation” (2015). Since, as Kontouma notes, the editorial hand comes down early and heavily on John’s corpus, and there is no reason to assume that John needed to have personally produced the polished edition of the \textit{PG\textsc{a}} that most lately entered into circulation. With both of these, I take a strong stand against H. Thümmler, “Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der sogenannten \textit{Pegae Gnostos} des Ioannes von Damaskos,” (1981), who argues that (1) the prefatory letter, originally affixed to the \textit{Dialectica fusior}, refers to a planned work that was effectively abandoned, (2) the 150 Chapters consisting of the \textit{Dialectica brevior} and the \textit{Exp. fid}, and the \textit{Haer.} were pursued as independent projects, (3) both were effectively completed before the outbreak of iconoclasm in 726, and (4) were gently revised at the end of his career to include iconoclasm as a concern.

\(^{1}\) Although this claim is strongly attested in the tradition and accepted to this day in some modern scholarship, there are excellent reasons to doubt it. The 10\(^{th}\)/11\(^{th}\) C \textit{Vita} is the first place where John is explicitly described as a Sabaite (PG 94, 461B), and the early 9\(^{th}\) C \textit{Menologion} of Methodius of Constantinople instead contraindicates that he was “a monk and priest of the Holy Anastasis,” ie, that his primary ecclesiastical office was as a priest at the patriarchal church in Jerusalem. Auzépy concurs, noting that John’s close relationship with the Patriarch makes it likely that he would have remained in the heart of the city, as a monk attached to the Church of the Resurrection (“Les Sabaite et l’iconoclasme,” (2000), 305 n. 4). Yet see my comments above at n. 37: John’s liturgical juxtaposition with Sabas may be an early witness to his residence at the monastery, and needs to be systematically evaluated as such. John was an ascetic, certainly, as his liturgical commemoration already indicates, but, as Kontouma aptly observes, even if he was involved at St. Sabas, it would seem that he “did not withdraw from the world as a simple monk, but occupied a position of the highest importance in the patriarchate of Jerusalem, in contact with laity, pilgrims, and even high-ranking ecclesiastics” (Kontouma, “John of Damascus,” 26).
early medieval Sabaite context (700-1000) rather than getting lost in a search for the historical John.

In that local and immediate context, the Damascene’s theological corpus was – above all – tremendously useful. From an early point, his name was more associated with his industry than with his personality – perhaps even during his own lifetime\textsuperscript{92} – a feature that could account for many of the problems of his surviving corpus.\textsuperscript{93} At Mar Sabas – where the Greek language tradition persisted with special tenacity, even as the need for the production of ecclesiastical literature in Arabic became more and more urgent – John’s output served as the theological gold-standard for the project of producing literature to bolster the Church in the Arabophone orthodox community that would come to be described as Melkite.\textsuperscript{94} This is perhaps most dramatically demonstrated in major luminary of the following generation, Theodore abu Qurrah (d. 823), some of whose anti-Islamic work is said to have proceeded “ἀπὸ φωνῆς Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμακηνοῦ,”\textsuperscript{95} with

\textsuperscript{92} Sahas, “Cultural Interaction,” 40. Sahas not only imagines John of Damascus as at the center of a “circle” of monastic intellectuals rather than as a distinctive personality, he asserts, “One may want to view John of Damascus’ major systematic work, Fount of Knowledge, not necessarily as a work of his own hand, but as the product of a team of researchers, compilers, organizers, copyists and editors under the Damascene’s personal guidance.”

\textsuperscript{93} The editorial and transmission problem of the P\textit{Gn}, for instance, noted above (n. 90): and would also apply to the \textit{Hierea}, which is even more problematic. It also fits with the mode of compilation of his liturgical outputs, which involved a combination of compilation and original composition.

\textsuperscript{94} S. Griffith has been approaching this thesis more and more directly through his work over the past few decades. See his “‘Melkites,’ ‘Jacobites’ and the Christological controversies” (2001), “The Church of Jerusalem and the ‘Melkites,’” (2006), 191-197 and finally his mature treatment, “John of Damascus and the Church of Syria,” (2011), 236-237.

\textsuperscript{95} Noting the connections between abu Qurrah’s anti-Islamic works and that the Damascene, Sahas and Janosik take this to mean that abu Qurrah’s treatise represents a tradition of discursive argument with its roots in John’s teaching that has changed relatively little. Although John’s connection to these texts is disputed (on the \textit{Disp.}, see Hoeck, 23-24, on \textit{Haer.} 100, see A. Abel, “Le chapitre CI du \textit{Livre des Hérésies} de Jean Damascène: son inauthenticité,” (1963)), their authenticity has usually been assumed in histories of Christian-Islamic relations, and has subsequently gained considerable acceptance, thanks to Kotter’s work determining the antiquity of \textit{On Heresies} 100 over and against Abel’s arguments (Kotter, \textit{Überlieferung.}
several of his other works bearing definite hallmarks of having been shaped by the Damascene’s theological system.  

Westward in Constantinople, meanwhile, the powerful forces of the iconoclastic controversy were at work, fixing the contours along which John and his memory would be received in the Greek imagination. As the controversy came into full force, John became a contested figure: an important authority on the side of the icon-venerators in their brutal back-and-forth with their iconoclastic opponents. To the Council of Hieria, for instance – the Council which in 754 managed to temporarily affirm iconoclasm as ecclesiastical, and not merely imperial policy – John’s trenchant defense of icons was an offense of the first degree, and earned him the highest rebuke of that assembly. Calling him by his “ignominious” (κακωνύμω) oriental family name of “Mansur,” the Council denounced him as “Saracen-minded,” maligning the Damascene as a traitor to the Empire and enemy of the orthodox faith. “Mansur” was affixed with a triple anathema to be

211ff; with a summary in Schriften JD IV, 4). Janosik (First Apologist, 93-97, 116-134) offers the most recent assessment in favor of the authenticity of the text traditions, considering these pages so important that he comes to describe John as the “first apologist to the Muslims.” See my extended discussion on the question of John’s engagement with Islam and its relationship to these polemical works attributed to him in Chapter 4. On the ἀπὸ φονῆς formula, see M. Richard, “Ἀπὸ φονῆς,” Byzantion 20 (1950), 191-222.


97 The extent of John’s readership within the empire is difficult to determine. Certainly, in his defense of images, he spoke as a Byzantine to Byzantines, explicitly seeking to address the trend within the larger Greek-speaking church, and Hieria certainly identifies him as their most notable adversary. For this reason, some middle ground between the presentation favored by Griffith and Sahas of a John absorbed in a local context and that of Meyendorff, Louth, and others of a Byzantine who simply happened to live beyond the bounds of the empire needs to be discovered. Regardless, the scant references to John’s treatises in the Greek pro-icon polemics of the subsequent centuries raise some questions about how well-disseminated his works were in this period among Christians living in Asia Minor and elsewhere in Byzantine territory. See also n. 113 below.

98 Mansi, XIII 356.D; Hieria Horos, 68-69. The insulting quality of this epithet is highlighted in passing by Stephen the Monk in his Vita of Stephen the Sabaite, as noted in the testimonium to John
recited annually, along with the other leading partisans of icon veneration, Patriarch Germanos and George of Cyprus, as “three whom the Trinity has destroyed” – a line taken to refer, both to the Council’s condemnation of their doctrines, and the recent decease of their persons.99

Indeed, both the iconoclastic Council of Hiereia and its responders at the pro-icon Second Council of Nicaea (787) proved themselves eager to cast the controversy in terms of an epic narrative of spiritual warfare.100 Hiereia led the charge, evidently,101 its epitome specifically implicating “Lucifer” within its first few lines102 – not only as the

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99 Mansi, XIII 356.D; Hieria Horos, 69. Indeed, this line is often taken as a key touchstone for determining the date of John’s death (S. Vailhé, “Date de la mort de Jean Damasèn,” (1906)).

100 Especially evident in the Sixth Session of the Second Council of Nicaea (Mansi XVIII:205A-380A), which took up the refutation of the definition (ὁρὸς) of Hiereia and offered its own. Diabolology served as a primary hermeneutic for Hiereia’s interpretation of the emergence and persistence of iconolatry, and the Second Council of Nicaea responded in kind, declaring the Hiereian synod to be a “mob assembly of the accusers of Christians (අχλαγωγηθείσης τῶν χριστιανοκατηγορῶν)” (205A) – echoing the “accuser” of Revelation 12:10 – motivated by the “misanthrope demon” (205B). At one heated moment, indeed, the refutation takes on an especially frustrated tone with these spiritual deceits: “No Christian man living under the sky has ever worshipped an icon,” it asserts: “this is a myth of the pagans, an invention of demons, and its undertaking an act of Satan” (232D).

101 The original council documents of Hiereia have not been preserved: only its epitome survives in the Acta of Second Nicaea, and that interspersed with refutation. An edition of its surviving material, along with German translation and an analysis of the reliability of the text, can be found in Kranich et al., Die ikonoklastische Synode von Hiereia 754: Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar ihres Horos (2002). The priority and prominence given in the extant epitome to the demonological reading of history indicates that is likely authentic to the mood and rhetoric of the Council.

102 The selection of “Lucifer” (Ἑωσφόρος) as the leading demonic personality is consistent through the Hiereian horos and not incidental. The “light-bearer” of Isaiah 14:12 and Job 41:10 (LXX) resonates with the deceptive “angel of light” of 2 Cor 11:14, thus drawing attention to the subtlety and complexity of the demonic deceit – and is also likely intended as an undercutting allusion to the splendid aesthetic appeal of the iconographic tradition. This, then, would be an exception from the general tendency observed by J. Russell, that notwithstanding a few exceptions, by the medieval period, “the [diabolical] tradition as a whole affirms the unity [of the persons of Satan and Lucifer] and uses the terms indiscriminately as the name of a single personage.” Lucifer (1984), 11. Significantly, the Second Council
origin and prince of evil, but as the instigator of the trend towards icons in the Christian tradition. Icons, according to Hiereia, are a demonic subterfuge to undermine the God-pleasing comeliness (ἐυπρέπειαν) of the worship of the Church: within the broad iconoclast narrative of history, then, John – for his articulate alignment with the iconodules – is more than a foreigner and a traitor: he is an anti-apostle, in league with the demons as propagating the arch-deceit of idolatry. “Let every mouth that speaks [such] iniquities and blasphemies…be silent,” Hiereia decrees: iconography is a “pagan art” (Ἑλληνος τέχνη): an “invention of demon-minded men” rooted in “the customs of demon-worshipping nations,” and “Mansur,” accordingly, is anathematized as “icon-worshipper and falsity-writer…[an] insulter of Christ…teacher of impiety, and misinterpreter of the Holy Scriptures.”

The claim was so strong that it had to be addressed when the Second Council of Nicaea sought to undo theology and practice imposed by Hiereia. Convoked by the

of Nicaea does not mince words like its predecessor council in bluntly attributing the rise of iconoclasm to the “misanthropic demon” (μισανθρώπω δαίμονα) (Mansi, XIII.205B).

The primordial fall of Lucifer is narrated in the horos at Mansi, XIII.212E-213A; Hieria Horos, 31, especially connecting the devil’s fall to subsequent overarching desire to deprive man of the glory that is his due by seducing him into worshipping the creature rather than the creator (cf. Rom 1:15). He is then again invoked as “the aforementioned demiurge of evil” (ὁ προλεχθεὶς τῆς πονηρᾶς δημιουργώς) at 221C; Hieria Horos, 32 to characterize the emergence of the veneration of icons as a fall of the Church patterned off the primordial fall of man.

True worship, as Hiereia is wont to point out, with allusion to John 4:24, is “in spirit and truth.” See 216C and 280E. Especially interesting is the assertion of 216C; Hieria Horos, 32: the salvation of Christians is nothing less than that God “removed us from the corrupting teaching of demons – namely, the error [of idolatry] and worship of idols, and handed us over (παραδέδωκεν) into worship in spirit and truth.”

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Mansi, XIII.276D; Hieria Horos, 48.

Mansi, XIII.273D; Hieria Horos, 48.

Mansi, XIII.356D; Hieria Horos, 68.
Empress Irene (r. 780-802), the Second Council of Nicaea – received in the later memory of the Greek and Latin traditions\(^\text{109}\) as the Seventh Ecumenical Council – intentionally turned to identifying the Damascene as “John” rather than “Mansur.”\(^\text{110}\) Indeed, specifically repudiating the anathemas of Hiereia, the Council heralded him as a spiritual hero to be likened to the evangelist Matthew, a man who had abandoned the “riches of Arabia” to follow Christ in the same way that Matthew had abandoned his comfortable tax-booth.\(^\text{111}\) The Council sought thus to anchor John’s memory in the unimpeachable archetypes of Christian imagination: no longer was he to be taken as a treacherous court official of an oriental power, but a pious Christian and ally of the imperial faithful, friendly to the orthodox faith to such an extent that when the “madness” of iconoclasm broke out, he preached “from the east” in favor of the ancient practices of the Church and her peace.\(^\text{112}\) Still, the absence of specific echoes of John’s arguments in the records of the Council suggests that there may have been some lingering questions about his

\(^{109}\) The reception process of the Nicaea 787 among Arabic-speaking Melkite Christians is less clear and it should not be taken for granted that it followed western reception in perfect parallel. S. Griffith observes that the practice of affirming “six councils” persisted till modern times, and that among the canon collections of the 13\(^{th}\) to 17\(^{th}\) centuries, only seven of the twenty-one extant manuscripts mention the seventh council. See his “From Aramaic to Arabic” (1997), 24 n. 80. This is not to say that the Melkites repudiated the Seventh Council and its teaching, so much as it testifies to the probable insularity of the tradition. Arabic-speaking Christians in Palestine were more concerned with preserving and passing along the tradition as they had received it than they were necessarily concerned with staying in line with Greek and Latin renderings of the faith. This posture is especially understandable, given that the Melkite heroes like John of Damascus had successfully repudiated iconoclasm without recourse to conciliar authority. The reception of the Seventh Council among medieval Arab Christians, however, would be an interesting topic for further study.

\(^{110}\) Mansi XIII, 357B; 400C.

\(^{111}\) Mansi, XIII, 357B, in an artful allusion that elides the calling of the apostle in Matt. 9:9-13 with the example of Abraham as it is remembered in Heb. 11:25-26.

\(^{112}\) Mansi, XIII, 357C.
reputation – or perhaps that his corpus had been effectively suppressed and not thoroughly digested by iconophiles in consequence.\footnote{Theodore the Studite (d. 826) and Nicephorus of Constantinople (d. 828) both allude to John’s corpus, but only briefly, and Photius (d. 891) makes no mention of it. See Andrew Louth, “St Denys the Areopagite and the iconoclast Controversy” (1997), 334. See also M, Auzépy, “Les Sabaïte et l’iconoclasme” (2000).}

John’s memory would face another major setback in the Byzantine territory within a generation, when the imperial court again took up the case against religious images. A second period of iconoclasm broke out in 814, and persisted until the final restoration of icons – the “triumph of Orthodoxy” – under Theodora in 843. During this period, the decrees of Hierieia came back into force, along with the anathemas against “Mansur.” John had thus become a symbolic token in this tug of war, and would need rebranding before he could be received as anything other than a mere partisan of the longstanding and painful controversy. Hence, as Kontouma notes, within the Byzantine territories, “before the end of the 10th century, when an ‘official biography’ of the saint saw the light of day…John of Damascus was not really venerated nor often cited, even in iconophile circles.”\footnote{Kontouma, “At the Origins of Byzantine Systematic Dogmatics” (2015), 3-4.}

John would ultimately receive this rehabilitation – but not, it seems, because of a recognition of the quality of the contents of his larger theological project. Instead, much of the interest in John in the period directly after iconoclasm seems to have been driven by a curious text, the \textit{Homily on those who have reposed in the faith} (CPG 8112), which became spuriously attributed to him in the ninth century.\footnote{Oratio de his qui in fide dormierunt, PG 95,248-77. On the authenticity of the text, see Hoeck, “Stand und Aufgaben,” 39-40.} The \textit{Homily} is one of the few
Byzantine texts to entertain the possibility of a remission of sins after death, a doctrine after the style of Gregory’s *Dialogues*, which came into Greek around the year 800. Nevertheless, the text became tremendously popular, even coming into liturgical use as a commemoration of the dead in many circles for many centuries: indeed, the surviving manuscripts of the *Homily* rival in number those of the popular romance of *Barlaam and Jehoshaphat*, also spuriously attributed to John. Associating this text with the Damascene seems to have served the dual purpose of offering a posthumous path of forgiveness to the defeated iconoclasts – an important undertaking in a culture wearied by and still tense over the recent conflict – and reasserting the value of John’s memory as a Byzantine hero, rather than a controversial oriental traitor. The presence of the same doctrine in the *Life of the Melodists* seems to indicate that it may have emerged from the same circles with the same intent; possibly even from the same pen.

It is not until we come to the literature of the twelfth century—more than three centuries after John’s death— that we find evidence that the Damascene has gained notoriety in Byzantine theology as a dogmaticist. Euthymios Zigabenos quotes him forcefully in his Πανοπλία Δογματική, putting him on the same level as such august

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116 So argues Kontouma, “John of Damascus,” 9-10, who follows the scholarly consensus in attributing the homily to Michael Synkellos, and then makes the intriguing step of linking the *Life of the Melodists* to him as well, by virtue of the resonance of their themes.

117 CPG 8120. While *Barlaam* was considered genuine by Hoeck (“Stand und Aufgaben,” 32-33) and Kotter (who intended to include it in his series of editions of John’s works), Kotter’s successor in editing the Damascene corpus, R. Volk, definitively put the question of authorship to rest, arguing the point in a lengthy critical essay published as independent volume in the series (Schriften JD VI/1, PTS 61, 2009). As Volk demonstrates, the legend as we now have it in Greek is a reworking of the Georgian version of the legend by the Athonite monk Euthymius (d. 1028).


figures as the Cappadocian Fathers and Dionysius the Areopagite. If Euthymios’s account can be trusted, it seems to have been the imperial imprimatur of Alexios Komnenos (r. 1081-1118) that enabled the retrieval of the Damascene, yet even in this connection, John was treated as a source of patristic theology tailored to the circumstances of the immediate needs of denouncing heretics, and less as a theologian in his own right. Still, the groundwork was in place at this point for the widespread appreciation of John’s corpus in later Byzantine theology, a full assessment of which has not yet been undertaken.

The long pattern of conflict over John’s memory emphasizes those themes most salient to John’s early heirs and defenders. In particular, the kinds of texts which were attributed to John posthumously trace the evolution of his reputation as a “destroyer of demons.” A text like the *Homily on those who have reposed in the faith* invokes John as a voice of authoritative insight about the nature and structure of the spiritual world, whose theological insights reshape the spiritual landscape, creating a mechanism for the redemption of the previously demonized iconoclasts. The fragment *De octo spiritibus nequitiae*, meanwhile – little studied, but regarded as spurious – attempts to pass off an

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Euthymius’s interest in the Damascene was his own struggle against hard dualist heresies – in his case, the Bogomils – for which John’s anti-Manichean chapters were an evident inspiration. See Hamilton and Hamilton, *Christian Dualist Heresies* (1998), 180-207.


122 So assesses A. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (650-860)* (Athens, 1999), 77. Matters have improved somewhat thanks to Kontouma’s research, especially insofar as she has been able to recapture a sense of John’s distinctive theological contribution as something more than a compiler. Still, while giving several examples of the appropriation of the Damascene between the 9th and 14th C, she notes that “much research remains to be done” – both beyond that period, and within it. “At the Origins,” 15.
outline of the Evagrian system of eight demonic thoughts as Damascene wisdom for much the same reason. The most famous Damascene pseudepigrapha, finally, the Romance of Barlaam and Jehoshaphat, imagines John as the Christian reinterpreter of oriental myth, assigning him, implicitly, a role that is above reproach, and capable of discharging this spiritually delicate task in a reliable manner, impervious to the kinds of demonic overtones such dalliance could possess. John is in this sense too, then, a “destroyer of demons” – one whose memory was considered equal to the task of preserving and perfecting difficult doctrines about the spiritual world. And since we see John’s memory and biography so consistently interacting with this theme, it seems appropriate to ask whether there is something in John’s theological synthesis itself that is anti-demonic in content or effect.

1.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought – above all – to invite us to conceptualize John of Damascus and his legacy in a way that departs from the standard scholarly treatments in order to align more closely with the piety of his historical readership. Along with the faithful who have hymned this “righteous Father” for more than a millennium, I have suggested that we imagine the Damascene as a “destroyer of demons;” as a figure whose life and work makes an extraordinary contribution to the great, unseen battle for the coherence and integrity of the “faith once delivered to the saints.”

123 CPG 8110; PG 95, 80-84. While Hoeck accepts the authenticity of the work without comment (“Stand und Aufgaben,” 28), the text is fundamentally identical to another with older witnesses, preserved among the corpus of works attributed to Ephrem the Syrian in Greek translation (CPG 3975). See D. Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, DSp, IV.809. It is possible, however, that the fragment ended up among John’s work because John himself had an interest in its content.
This is, of course, a liturgical and hagiographical accolade: determining what this moniker tells us about the life, accomplishments, and personality of the historical John requires no small degree of interpretation, if, indeed, we can extract any meaningful historical data from it at all. To honor the ecclesiastical memory and imagination that has so lauded this Father, however, I have placed this unusual epithet at the center of this project, developing it as a lens through which we will read John’s whole career and contribution. What does it mean to assume that the Damascene’s theological output somehow achieves or is involved in the “destruction of demons?” How do we read John’s life, his context, and his theology differently if we read it, not just as an encyclopedia of patristic beliefs, but as a proclamation of Christian truth against the deceptive incursions and corruptions of demonic agencies?

In the end, this is certainly not the only reading of John: it certainly has its limitations and needs to stand alongside and in conversation with other methodologies. I will contend, however, that this is an eminently helpful approach: a reading that opens new questions and avenues of insight for understanding John and his project. Considering how John’s theology might serve to “destroy demons” necessarily focuses our attention on neglected concerns and elements of his system and destabilizes our assumptions about John’s relationship to the faith he inherited, and to the world in which he articulated this faith.

As we shall see as we move forward, the options available to John in formulating a demonology were legion. The precision and focus of John’s system, however, minimized and streamlined the demonic and its role, ignoring any number of popular theories and compressing the vast mainstream tradition of interpretations, anecdotes,
speculations into a single, simple diabolical theme in an overwhelmingly positive theological vision. As John moved from *paradosis* to *ekdosis* – from what he understood from the tradition of the faith, to what he articulated as a teacher of the faith – the infernal was taken up into the supernal, and the demons, though affirmed as cosmic and existential reality, were utterly subordinated to the designs of providence, and drowned in the suffusion of heavenly light. John was thus, in this sense, really and truly a “destroyer of demons.”
CHAPTER TWO

TEXTURES: ANCIENT INHERITANCES WOVEN INTO JOHN’S DEMONOLOGY

The demonological imaginary that John of Damascus inherited from the ancient Church was complex, sophisticated, mature – and in many respects opaque to us. The homogenized demonology that comes down to the modern faithful in basic catechesis not only overlooks the diversity of early Christian voices on the subject, it also ignores the process by which the paradigm became homogenized in the first place. We assume that the Damascene’s demonology was familiar to him because it looks familiar to us, but this need not be the case. The major themes of classical Christian demonology had appeared by John’s time, but this does not mean they were predominant: indeed, John was the first to integrate demonology into a comprehensive system of Christian thought both explicitly and successfully.\(^1\) Doing so required him to weave together several disparate strands, developing a whole out of a picture which to that point had only ever been \textit{ad hoc} and partial.

Within John’s weave, we will trace out three key textures: three ancient concerns that propagate into the Damascene’s demonology, albeit in a flattened form. \textit{Scriptural textures} are of primary interest and importance to John: considering the Bible the central locus of revelation of divine truth, he was concerned above all that his understanding of

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\(^1\) Of course, the systems of Origen and Evagrius possessed an explicit demonological dimension – to say nothing of heretics further afield, like the Manicheans – but these views were never fully successful, and ultimately condemned. Conversely, the Desert Fathers, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Ps-Dionysius, Maximus and others seemed to have operated out of a satisfying demonological paradigm, but never came to the point of explicating it systematically and comprehensively. John is the first, to my knowledge, to successfully join the two impulses together.
the devil and demons would be an accurate exposition of Biblical demonology. That said, John’s use of the Biblical material reflects a long tradition of the reading and interpretation of the Scriptures in the Church that had already done much to harmonize the variety of opinions about demons preserved within the Scriptures, such that the Scriptural, for John, cannot be separated from the tradition of patristic interpretation. The philosophical textures John’s demonology, meanwhile, address questions about demons in cosmological rather than mythological space, and serve to connect the Christian understanding of created spirits and their society to the speculations of generations of non-Christian philosophers. Finally, the ascetical textures running through John’s work reflect a longstanding anti-demonic interest in monastic spiritually concerned with practically engaging with demons in a personal manifestation of a largely (but not exclusively) psychological form. Working together, these three overlapping textures confirm the thoroughly Hellenistic and thoroughly Christian-monastic character of John’s demonological system, but they also begin to distinguish John’s unique, synthetic contribution within the broad contours of his thought.

2.1 Scriptural Textures

For John of Damascus, the central truths about demons are those revealed in the Scriptures as taught by the Church: he considers the Judeo-Christian Scriptures and their tradition of interpretation to delineate a bounded imaginal world whose contents demand constant contemplation and careful explanation. In elaborating on the nature of the devil and the demons, John seeks – as much as possible – to work within that world, rather than press its boundaries. The nature of demonology as a subject, nevertheless, requires
that certain blanks be filled in: the Scriptures do not offer a perfectly consistent chain of proof-texts on the nature of demons, so much as a treasury of narrative allusions that offer an incomplete glimpse into an unseen world full of creatures that are “difficult to define.” Methodologically, then, John does not develop his demonology by offering a detailed exegesis of each relevant text: instead, he operates out of an assumed composite view derived from these Scriptures, and seeks to trace out the whole topography of orthodox demonological doctrine.

Nowhere is the Scriptural background of the Damascene’s demonological framework more apparent than in the voluminous *florilegia* known as the *Hiera* (or, the *Sacred Parallels*) that has come down to us in John’s name – notwithstanding that little progress has been made in addressing the numerous problems attending to its reading and interpretation, and even its authorship. Karl Höll convincingly challenged the universally-received Damascene ascription in the early twentieth century, but subsequent scholars have cautiously retained the epitaph “Damascenian *florilegia*” – an implicit nod

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2 δυσόριστος – see 6.2 at n 169. Note that this is also true of Qur’anic demonology, which we shall explore in Section 5.3.

3 The *Hiera* (Greek – Τὰ ἱερά: “the Sacred Things”) accumulated this title in its Latin reception as *Sacra Parallela*, so-called because the final book juxtaposed each virtue with its opposite vice in parallel columns. No surviving copy of the *Hiera* preserves this form: this structural feature is known only because of its preservation in the prologue to the text, which lays out the plan of the work (PG 95, 1041). The Latin title became standard in western convention; I use the two interchangeably.

4 Hoeck noted the immensity of the problem in the 1950s (“Stand und Aufgaben,” 29, n.6), and work has continued on the tradition of the Byzantine florilegia, with a particular breakthrough being offered by M. Richard, “Florileges Spirituels Grecs,” in *DSp* 5 (1962). For a more recent assessment, see A. Alexakis, “Byzantine Florilegia” (2015). While several studies have improved our understanding of individual manuscripts and text traditions, these advances in understanding very particular texts do not always apply to the *Hiera*, nor do they necessarily translate quickly or easily into an appreciation of the broader phenomenon of the Damascene florilegia.

to the traditional ascription to John⁶ – to describe the *Hiera* and its family of derivative texts. Höll helped to frame the study, then, but he proved unsuccessful in setting its terms of discussion, and for several reasons. John may not have been the author of the *Hiera*, but eighth century Syro-Palestine is short on other personas with whom we might associate it;⁷ moreover, the discrepancies of source material and style between the *Hiera* and other portions of the Damascene corpus – frequently adduced as evidence against John’s authorship – may simply reflect differences in the genre and aims of the text, with the *Hiera* representing a moral-ascetical collection, differing substantially from the dogmatic and liturgical texts that comprise the greater and more prominent part of the Damascene’s *oeuvre*.⁸ Nor should it be forgotten that the *Sacred Parallels* proved to be highly useful in subsequent centuries, and so later generations of monastics would revise and remix it substantially as a result.⁹ The work is thus lost to us in its original form, which (assuming it was indeed a work of the Damascene) may have been more identifiably of John’s tradition.

The *Hiera* is, in any case, the kind of project that John and his circle would have been likely to work on. If the evidence is not sufficient to endorse the inscription that

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⁶ I have found only Tomás Fernández to distance himself from this implication “The Florilegium Coislinianum and Byzantine Encyclopaedism,” (2009), n. 26; and he goes on to note how frequently use of the designation is associated ambivalence towards authorship with a vague positive regard for its association with the Damascene.

⁷ The recent work of Thom and Declerck (see n 11 below) asserts that the author of the *florilegia* is another monastic John living in Jerusalem, otherwise unknown to us, later falsely conflated with John of Damascus.


names John as the primary originator of the *florilegia* without qualification, neither is it strong enough to dissociate the text from the Damascene entirely. With Marcel Richard, it seems good to affirm the “parrainage indéniable de Jean Damascène” of the text, \(^{10}\) notwithstanding the challenges that have been made, and recognizing that the work that remains to be done will result in a clearer sense of the text and its relationship to the Damascene. \(^{11}\) It is sufficient for our purposes, in any case, to note the universal agreement that the *Sacra Parallela* emanates from John’s approximate context, and we should thus expect its demonological content to be reasonably reflective of the beliefs about demons current among eighth century, Greek speaking, Syro-Palestinian Christians of the mainstream orthodox party following the ecumenical councils. Our object is not a strict analysis of the *Hierarchia* as representative of the Damascene’s demonology so much as an approximation of the Scriptural textures undergirding what he develops elsewhere, and the text is sufficiently connected to John to be useful to that end.

There is only one chapter in the *Hierarchia* specifically dedicated to the question of demonology: an entry under Δ entitled Περὶ διαβόλου, ἦτοι Σατανᾶ καὶ δαμόνων – “Against the devil, which is to say, Satan and the Demons,” \(^{12}\) yet this single chapter

\(^{10}\) “Florileges Spirituels Grecs,” col. 477. Andrew Louth makes a similar assessment, deeming it probable that the text had some meaningful origin in John, but then not treating it in any great detail (*St. John Damascene*, 25).

\(^{11}\) Some of this work has been recently completed: with certain measure of authority, T. Thom and J. Declerck, extending Kotter’s project of critical editions of the Damasciana by offering the editions of the *Hierarchia*, have ruled the florilegia spurious. Unfortunately, I did not have time to study their argument closely – the editions are being published even as I revise this chapter. While this vote against a Damascene origin of the text should increase our skepticism towards his authorship, it does not substantially invalidate argument here, which rests on an optimistic ambivalence.

\(^{12}\) PG 95,1405. Note that the titular conflation of “Satan and the demons” together into “diabolology” and the treatment of the topic in a single chapter represents a significant deflation of
offers a broader array of Scriptural citations than we see in the development of
demonology anywhere else in John’s corpus. The compiler here selects a total of twelve
Scriptural passages, eight from the Old Testament, and four from the New. Two verses
from the historical books ground the demonic in the full breadth of the experience and
history of the people of God: 1Sam 16:23, which refers to the “evil spirit” which came
upon Saul and was calmed by David,13 and 1Chr 21:1, which identifies “Satan” as an
agent working against the good and prosperity of the Israel by inciting David to disobey
God and perform a census of the people.14 Two passages from the end of the Book of
Job, in turn, paint vivid a picture of the fearsomeness of the Christian’s spiritual enemies:
first, Job 40:16-17 describes “the power” of the devil as “in the navel of his belly,” with
“his tail like a cypress,” and his nerves as “wrapped together,” highlighting the particular
demonology as an essential theological locus, and is already consistent with the broader contours of John’s
demonological method, as we will see in Chapter 4.

13 “It came to pass when the evil spirit was upon Saul, David took the harp and played with his
hand: and Saul was refreshed, and the evil spirit departed from him,” being numbered in the Septuagint as I
Kingdoms 16:23. The quotations here and following, although they do not differ substantially from the
LXX, are translated directly from the SP as found in PG 95, 1405f. Deviations from the LXX are noted in
italics. This verse is frequently cited among the Fathers as proof of the apotropaic power of psalmody, with
Eusebius, Origen, John Chrysostom, and Basil all using the verse several times in their commentaries on
the Psalms. This may be the part of sense of the verse here, however, given the aims of the Hiera as a
moral/ascetic text, probably more following Maximus the Confessor (QDub 3), who interprets the episode
to indicate that, “Everyone who like the blessed David shepherds … via the reasoning part of the soul, and
is victorious over the lion of anger and the lust of the she-bear: [like David], this person will delight the
hearer and put to sleep the passions of wickedness in him by means of the word of teaching and a certain
lofty contemplation” (cf also QDub 109). However, Origen (De Prin. 3.2.1) uses the verse more
expansively as part of a catalogue of proof texts on the nature of “opposing powers.”

14 “The devil stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.” The LXX here renders
the Hebrew שָׂטָָ֖ן as διάβολος. Incidentally, this verse is itself a reworking of 2Sam 24:1, which attributes
David’s actions to the anger of the Lord “burning” against Israel. The interplay of these texts is not noted
by the Hiera: however, Maximus the Confessor treats the discrepancy in QDub 161 in a way that
fundamentally anticipates John of Damascus’s approach to demonology: viz., the demons operate under the
scope of providence according to God’s permission, rather than according to his pleasure. See Section 6.1.
ferocity of his ghostly strength. Following this, a reworking of eight verses of Job 41 highlights the mysterious yet fearsome qualities of the beast:

His soul is a live coal, and his heart has been hardened as iron. Who can open the face of his garment, who can enter the folds of his breastplate? Who will open the doors of his mouth upon his face? There is terror all around his teeth; his innards are as brazen plates. Out of his mouth proceed burning lamps, heaps of fire are strewn about. Out of his nostrils proceeds the smoke of a furnace burning with a fire of coals. His soul is a burning coal, and flame proceeds from his mouth.

15 The Hiera’s rendering gently consolidates the passage and specifies its application to Satan, rendering it, “The power of Satan is in the navel of his belly. He sets up his tail like a cypress; and his nerves are wrapped together like a rope.” Again given the moral/ascetical context, parallels are probably intended with Vit. Ant. 5, which metaphorically applies this verse to the ὁμφαλὸν γαστρός of the would-be ascetic, indicating that the devil attacks through appetites for food and sex. Maximus takes the same interpretation of the verse in QDUB 1.67 in explicating the symbolism of the monastic belt; also John Cassian, Conf. 5.4.

16 According to the LXX numbering, the text is drawn from vv. 13a, 16, 5-6a, 11-13, 14b, and 22. There are some underlying textual questions about the numbering and order of these verses, however: for instance, the same text in the number of the NRSV corresponds to vv. 21a, 24, 14-15a, 19-21, 22b and 30. On the complex textual issues of the LXX Job, see H. Orlinsky, “Studies in the Septuagint of the Book of Job.” Nevertheless, the reason that the text is given in reworked form as a cento, rather than as a specific, exact quotation from any extant version of the Scriptures, is unclear: however, the somewhat loose adaptation of vocabulary and reduplication of v 13a (LXX) seems to point to some kind of oral rationale, akin to the way in which the text is interpolated in VA 5 and 24. As a cento on Job 41, this passage has no extant parallel in other works. We might impute a rationale by noting that although the LXX rendering of the Hebrew already involves a certain amount of interpretive consolidation of its angelological and demonological content, monastic readers of Job likely found this treatment unsatisfying, and – given that the textual issues had been widely known since Origen – they felt especially free to be flexible with the text. As J Gammie argues, while LXX Job does move toward a more dualistic system of demons, “its demonology is exceedingly bland and undeveloped” compared to much of its contemporary literature (“The angelology and demonology in the Septuagint of the Book of Job,” (1985) 12-19).

17 Coal and fire imagery appear in Antony’s descriptions of the Devil in VA 24. Origen alludes to the Job passage at De Prin. III.2.1 (although he does not quote it; or original quotations have been paraphrased) saying, “Through his answers to Job, the Lord has imparted much information regarding the power of the dragon which opposes.” Assimilation of the dragon to the Leviathan (at Job 41:1 [40:25 LXX] – Heb יְהֹוֵי becomes Greek δράκων) to Satan is complete by Revelation 12:9, and seems to be the template through which this imagery is assimilated into diabolology.

18 The LXX and every other extant witness (specifically, the fragments of Origen’s commentary, that of Olympiodorus, and Gregory’s Moralia, as well as the passing citation in Andrew of Caesarea’s CommRev 34); all read “hardened as a stone (ὁσιοι ὠθοῖς).” The substitution aims, perhaps, to condense some of the imagery of the chapter, and perhaps queues to a particular pattern of oral interpretation of Job 41.

19 Notwithstanding some potentially evocative language and imagery (i.e., ἀποκαλύπτει πρόσωπαν ἐνδόν ἐντὸς ὃταῦτα, which might be taken as a plea for a revelation of the demonic nature), this trope seems little appropriated or commented on, notwithstanding the fragments of Origen’s homilies, and Olympiodoros’s comments.
Destruction runs before him. His bedding is sharp obelisks, and all the gold of the sea under him is as an ineffable clay.\(^{20}\)

Citations from the prophetic books then serve to extend these themes. We find a quotation of Zech 3:1-2, which serves, like 1Chr 21:1, to emphasize Satan as adversary of the people of God.\(^{21}\) Isaiah 14 – that perennial proof-text invoked to support a primordial demonic fall – is quoted at great length: verses 12-20 are reproduced in full, thus capturing both the devil’s destruction through the audacious, self-exulting pride of saying he will make himself like God, and his ultimate fate, when he will be destroyed in the depths of the earth.\(^{22}\) Daniel 8:25 then serves to amplify this theme, as the prophet

\(^{20}\) Again, this rich and puzzling language has been little exploited or appropriated in the extant tradition. The LXX here expands on the Hebrew, trying to communicate potential puns in the language by retaining both senses (ie., חָום could denote either “gold” or be an expression of the quality/quantity of the clay – the LXX translates it both ways). The translator’s effect intensifies the Leviathan’s caricature as a chaos beast – see N. Girardot, “Chaos.” ER 3, (2005), 1537-1541.

\(^{21}\) “The Lord showed me Jesus [ie., the high priest Joshua] standing before the face of the angel of the Lord, and the devil stood on his right hand. And the angel said to the devil, ‘The Lord rebuke you, devil, the one who has chosen Jerusalem.’” Also as in 1Chr, the LXX renders the Hebrew שָׂטָן as διάβολος. This verse has a rich extant patristic reception, with the Fathers delighting in giving it Christological interpretation (ie., Eusebius, Prep. ev. 4.17). It is likewise quoted among Origen’s demonological texts in De Prin. III.2.1, and the verse also became a contested verse in anti-Jewish polemics to prove demons to be rebellious angels, beginning with Justin Martyr, Trypho, 73.

\(^{22}\) “How has he fallen from heaven, the morning star, that rose in the morning? How has he crashed into the earth, he that exercised power over all the nations? You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven! I will set my throne above the stars of heaven! I will sit upon a high mountain, upon the high mountains toward the north! I will ascend above the clouds! I will be like the Most High!’ But now you will descend into hell, even to the foundations of the earth. Those who see you will wonder at you, and say, ‘This is the man that troubled the earth, that made kings to shake, that made the whole world desolate, and destroyed its cities, who did not release the captives.’ ‘All the kings of the earth lie in honor, every man in his house, but you shall be cast forth on the mountains as a detested corpse, with many dead who have been pierced with swords, descending into hell. In the same way that a garment defiled with blood shall never be cleansed, so neither shalt you be cleansed; because you have destroyed my land, and have slain my people,’ says the Lord.” As with the passage of Job, this is an exceedingly long quotation; in this case probably intended to open up the commonplace of Satanic fall and appellation “morning star” (ἑωσφόρος). Use of Isa 14 imagery to support retrojection of demonic fall into primordial history is at least as old as Rev. (ie., 9:1, 12:9), but being specifically developed by Origen (not in the catalogue of demonological verses at De Prin. III.2.1, interestingly, but at I.5.5) quoting the passage at slightly greater length (extending through v. 22), and juxtaposing it with Ezekiel 28 and Luke 10:18. On the reception history of this passage, see the discussion in K. Bordjadze, Darkness Visible (2017), 130-152.
testifies that “there is guile in his [the devil’s] hand and in his heart he shall magnify himself, and by his craft he shall destroy many, and he shall cause many to stand upon destruction.”23 And, lastly, the oft-cited verse from the Wisdom of Solomon – Wis 2:24a – serves, albeit somewhat obliquely, to connect the fall of the devil and the fall of man to the root of human suffering: “Through the envy of the devil, death entered the world.”24

Interestingly, the compiler uses a much smaller proportion of the available evidence from the New Testament:25 although references the devil and demons are far more numerous and clear in the Christian Scriptures and more important as a theme, only four passages are selected from these texts to focus the interpretation of the assembled Old Testament material. No more than two Gospel episodes appear: the Matthaen account of the Temptation of Jesus – Mat. 4:1-10, told with some minor, abbreviations, insignificant for the interpretation of the story – and Luke’s report in Luk 10:18-19 that

23 This verse is an odd inclusion for its relative obscurity, although Origen appropriates it to the Antichrist (CC 6.46); elements of the description are applied to the apocalyptic Ishmaelite invasions in the ApocMeth (11.13).

24 Thanks in large part to the appropriation of the Apostle Paul – who replaces substitutes “sin” for “the envy of the devil” in a similarly structured thought at Rom. 5:12, the reception of this proverb is quite broad. As a few notable instances, see Gregory Thaumaturges, Hom. annut. 2 (PG 10, 1164A) which elides Rom and Wis; Eusebius, Prep. ev. 12.13.38, which suggests the thoroughgoing goodness of God in the Hebrew Scriptures fulfills the stipulations of Plato for good theology as laid out in Resp. II; Athanasius De inc. 5.1, where it stands at the beginning of the demonic deceits against man which blind him to the knowledge of God and efface the divine image in him; and most lately, Anastasius of Sinai, Hodegos 4, which suggests that he devil was envious because, as the commander of the bodiless hosts, he expected to rule the material realm as well, but found this dignity bestowed on Adam instead. The verse is also alluded to at Exp. fid. 44.69, where the devil is described as an “envious and hateful demons” who “unable to suffer our attainment of the higher things” sought to “raise [Adam] to the heights of his conceit,” so that he might “drag him down to the same abyss of ruin.”

25 The seven verses cited from the Hebrew Scriptures represent most of the explicit references to “the devil and demons” in the OT, with the addition of only a handful of texts being possible – Gen 2-3 and Job 1-2 being the most obvious omissions. By contrast, wide swaths of demonological material in the NT is completely omitted from the discussion, as shall be discussed below.
Jesus “saw Satan fall like lightening” with his accordant empowerment of the Seventy.26 Together, these passages serve an important function in epitomizing the animosity between Jesus and Satan, and establishing the authority Christ gives to his followers over demons. More importantly, however, the juxtaposition suggests the triumph of Christ over the devil as the source of spiritual power that the Christian can employ to best the devil.27 Nevertheless, this meager selection glosses over a huge amount of interesting and important demonological material. The exorcistic ministry of Jesus28 – and its subsequent extension through the ministry of the apostles29 – does not feature at all; neither does the Johannine reworking of the theme as Jesus’s cosmic exorcism.30 Could it be that the compiler of wants to deemphasize the role of exorcistic practices? Or is it adequately

26 “The Lord said to the Seventy, ‘I saw Satan like lightening fall from heaven. Behold, I give to you the authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and upon every power of the enemy.’” Witnessed in VA 41 and Andrew of Caesarea’s CommRev. 34 is a tradition of a “second fall” of Satan – a fall into ineffectuality – to which this citation may also allude. That Satan “fell like lightening” was generally taken as a Gospel endorsement of both the “fall of Satan” narrative, and an image of Christ’s defeat of Satan. See for instance, Athanasius De Inc. 25, VA 40; Cyril of Jerusalem cat. 2, Basil, Deus non auctor Mal., PG 31, 353, Anastasius of Sinai Hex. 7b.4. The image does not appear in John’s unquestioned corpus, however.

27 This is an essential feature of the story for John, cf. Exp. fid. 64.17-18: “the Evil One did not attack [Christ] through the thoughts, just as he did not attack Adam through thoughts, for Adam he assailed through the serpent.” The repulsion of the re-externalized attack of the devil on Christ is the basis for Christian capacity to resist demonic suggestion. See Section 6.3 at n 188.

28 Exorcism forms a major aspect of Jesus’s ministry according to the synoptic gospels – see for instance the summary of Jesus’s activities in Mat 4:23 – with seven major incidents detailed (A36, A38, A91, A97, A137, A151, A163) and others alluded to in passing (ie. Mark 16:9, Luke 13:31-32), as such, they are essential aspects of how the evangelists understand Jesus’s identity and mission, and are interwoven with major themes such as the secret of Jesus’s identity and his power and legitimacy the religious leadership.

29 Jesus specifically commissions his followers with this authority in Mark 6:7, Mat 10:1, Luk 9:1. conflict over exorcistic prowess between Christian and Jewish community is noted in Acts 19:13-16.

30 The synoptic trope of exorcistic miracles is completely omitted in John, but reconfigured as the activity of Satan/the devil is identified as at work in Jesus’s betrayers (John 6:64-71, 8:44, 13:2, 13:27), but unable to find anything in him (John 14:30), and cast down/cast out in judgement through the Crucifixion (John 12:31, 16:7-11) The Damascene’s approach to demonology might in fact be rendered “Johannine” in this sense, as abstracting from a multiplicity of demonological “facts” to a broader cosmological and psychological framework.
comprehended as a subtheme through the 1Sam instance of the evil spirit afflicting Saul, and the authority over the demons granted to the apostles?

Moving beyond the Gospels, we find other major demonological themes that receive no mention in the *Hiera*. Despite Paul’s rich language of “principalities and powers” and the several meaty allusions he makes to Satan and the devil, the Apostle is not excerpted at all. Nor is the vivid imagery of John’s Apocalypse represented – although Greek Christianity’s relative ambivalence about the book through most of the patristic period provides a reasonably straightforward rationale for this omission.\(^{31}\)

Allusion to the colorful and mysterious Enoch traditions that still echo in the canonical Scriptures in verses such as Jude 6 or 2Pe 2:4 are also absent from this tabulation of the *Hiera*,\(^ {32}\) as they are generally absent from the demonology of John’s broader theological system.

Two notable verses from the catholic epistles, however, are included in the demonological entry of the *Sacred Parallels*: Jas 4:7 and 1Pe 5:8. Significantly, both orient the reader to the urgency of their spiritual struggle, with James instructing, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you,” and Peter enjoining, “Be sober, be vigilant, for your

\(^{31}\) On the reception history of Revelation in the eastern churches, see E. Constantinou, *Guiding to a Blessed End* (2013), 1-46. John of Damascus does not share these hesitations: he openly receives the Revelation of John as canonical (*Exp. fid.* 90.76) and repeats Epiphanius’s denunciation of the “Alogians” who reject it (*Her.* 51). The controversy may have yielded some reticence to draw proofs from it, nevertheless, and certainly diminished the number of themes that were taken into the tradition between the 5th and 8th C.

\(^{32}\) They are quoted, however, as the main Scriptural evidence in a short separate chapter, which lays out “that the sinful angels are being punished” (PG 95:1095-1097). There they appear beneath Job 26:13b, which proclaims “[God] slew the apostate dragon with a command.” These Scriptures are then further elaborated by a fragment of Philo on Genesis, and three quotations from the Origenists (!) Didymus, Nils, and Evagrius that do not seem to be attested elsewhere. We shall comment on this Origenist strand below, but it is sufficient for the present time to note their existence and indicate that they are of such a different character from John’s concerns or the concerns of this chapter of the *Hirea* to deserve separate treatment.
adversary the devil walks around roaring, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm
in your faith.” Positioned at the end of the list of proof-texts, these verses serve to orient
the interpretation of all the preceding verses: the demonic powers introduced and
described by the Old Testament passages and shown to be subordinate to Jesus in the
Gospel selections are ultimately understood as invasive, oppositional forces to be resisted
through vigilance and sobriety. The compiler of this chapter evidently seems to
understand the ascetical practices associated with resisting the influence of the demons to
be the culmination and completion of the Christian demonological schema, with the bulk
of the Christian’s anti-demonic activity expressed through these practices.

Perhaps the trajectory of these juxtapositions is inconsequential: after all, the
ordering of these passages is fixed by the broader structural program of the *Hiera*, which
– here as elsewhere – simply presents its Biblical data in canonical order. To this point, it
is worth noting that the selections themselves have been made carefully with a view to
their overall impact as a single demonological narrative. Without altering this organizing
principle, a different selection strategy could be applied to the demonological texts of
Scripture to emphasize something else, such as the role of charismatic authority in
beating back the forces of evil,33 the importance of political action against the demonic
dimensions of the principalities and powers,34 or expanding the lexicon for demonology

33 For instance, by offering a collection of which the centerpiece was the exorcistic miracles of
Jesus and the Apostles, and carrying this through hagiographical narratives within the later literature over
theological treatments.

34 By emphasizing the demonological conversations between Jesus and his opponents (ie., “He
casts out demons by the prince of demons,” Mat 12:24) and the associated texts of Paul, following, for
instance, John Cassian, *Conf.* 8, or in modern appropriation, the work of G. Caird, *Principalities and
Powers* (1956).
within the religious imagination. Moreover, the seven patristic quotations that follow the Scriptural material – taken from three works of Basil and one of Gregory Nazianzus – reinforce the themes of the Biblical selections, emphasizing the devil’s fallenness and his subsequent war against human beings exercised through the subtle machinations of their psychology.

The concerns of the demonological chapter in the Hiera thus resonate well with what we will observe as John’s principle interests in demonology. John affirms the reality of demons, and especially acknowledges their influence on the plane of ascetical struggle. At the same, however, he diminishes the active role of the demonic in driving that struggle. Nevertheless, the key prooftexts to which John will appeal in developing his formal demonology in Exp. fid. 18 do not overlap with the citations in the demonology of the Hiera. These texts are Gen 1:21 – which John quotes to assert the goodness of all created natures; the temptation of Job (cf. Job 1-2) and the Gergesene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20, Matthew 8:28-34, and Luke 8:26-39) to which he alludes as proof of the ultimate subjugation of the demons to the permission of divine providence, and Matthew 25:41 – on which he asserts the ultimate demonic punishment and its eternity. As we shall explore in greater detail in Chapter Six, this network of texts has a significantly different interest, emphasizing cosmological concerns over ascetical. Nevertheless, there are no

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35 This kind of selection criteria would have maximized the imaginative language of the prophetic oracles of Job, and would probably have involved the inclusion of other chapters with an explicit demonological focus. Within the confines of this chapter, however, greater emphasis would be placed upon the apocalyptic material of Daniel and Revelation.


37 or. 6 [De pace] (PG 35, 737-44)
contradictions in reading John’s demonology as articulated in other works against the
Hiera: indeed, the Hiera helpfully compiles the Scriptural material in such a way as to
illuminate the underlying imaginal ground of John’s demonology as a product of the
Scriptures read in the tradition of the Church.

2.2 Philosophical Textures

Notwithstanding its substantial ground in the imaginal world of the Scriptures, the
Greek Christian demonological tradition of which John is an exponent and representative
can be read as modified continuation of the ancient philosophical tradition of concern for
the ways in which daimons mediated the divine within the pre-Christian systems of
Hellenistic religion and philosophy.\(^\text{38}\) Despite the fact that the great classical philosophers
– Plato and Aristotle, particularly – desired to exceed the limitations of the old
polytheistic worldview of the ancient Hellenistic religions and identify an ultimate,
unified presence or force behind the phenomenon of existence associated with the
divine,\(^\text{39}\) the daimonic haunted their systems and those of their philosophical descendants

\(^{38}\) I am distinguishing here and throughout between the pagan/philosophical daimon as a neutral
spiritual mediator, and the Christian “demon” as an evil spirit – although there is a substantial metaphysical
overlap between the two, as we shall explore below. As a convention, I am using a more direct
transliteration of the Greek term when the more positive connotations of philosophical tradition are a
possibility, but reverting to “demon” when the Christian thought world is clearly presupposed

\(^{39}\) Despite Plato’s tendency to look for divinity “beyond” the ambiguities and inconsistencies of
phenomenological experience (ie in the Timaeus), and Aristotle’s to look “within” said reality (the
transcendent frame being reduced to the effective passivity of an “unmoved mover;” Metaphysics XII (esp.
7 and 9) both systems inclined towards recognizing a fundamental unity to reality to be equated with
divinity in a way that undermined the pagan cultic conception both implicitly and explicitly: and indeed,
both were sharply critical of the pagan cultic system as a result – in Plato, see esp. Euthyphro, Resp. II.10.
X ; in Aristotle, his disparaging attitudes toward Hesiod and the Orphic poets (e.g., Metaphysics III.4.1000a9,
XII.6.1071b27) This de-polytheizing philosophical trend was taken to be profoundly compatible with
Christian monotheism – with apologists capitalizing on this convergence quite readily.
as an ambiguous, intermediary category between the created and uncreated, temporal and eternal.  

Concern for the daimonological mediation of this divine presence and power became tremendously important to the eclectic philosophical systems retrospectively described as Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, which developed at least in parallel to and probably in dialogue with the earliest Christian demonologies and their Jewish antecedents.

John, for his part, understood the coming of Christ to be the turning point in history for the demons: prior to the advent of Jesus Christ, the Greeks were hopelessly...

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40 This is more true of Plato than of Aristotle, as Plato not only speculated about the existence and qualities of such intermediary beings (i.e., Symp. 202e), but ascribed to Socrates a daimonic familiar with whom the philosopher had regular intercourse (the most notable example being Apology 31c-d, 40a; but involving a more extensive development within Plato’s thought, tying together three key loci: Timaeus 90 A–C, which describes the soul as a daimon given to us by God; Phaedo 107D 6–9, where the daimon of each man leads him to the place of judgement after death and Resp. X.617E, where Plato says we all choose our daimon), and was became a point of fascination for later Platonists (for instance, Plutarch, De Genio Soc., Apuleius, De Deo Soc.). Aristotle’s system, for emphasizing the immanence of the forms and consequently reducing transcendent space, leaves less room for daimons, and if he had any particularly interesting opinions on the matter, they are not preserved. Nevertheless, he is remembered by several Fathers as upholding the tradition that every person has a daimonic companion (i.e., Clement, Strom. 6.6; also attested in some Aristotelian fragments – Frag. var., 5:30.193).

41 For an overview of Middle Platonist demonology, see J. Dillon, The Middle Platonists (1977) 24–33 (on Xenocrates); 168–73 (on Philo); 214–23 (on Plutarch); and 315–25 (on Apuleius). Plutarch’s De Def. Or. offers the richest inventory of Hellenistic opinions (esp. 10–15: Moralia 415A–418D), as well as his De Isis and Osiris, which implies a relationship between Hellenistic demonology and oriental cult. Assessing Plutarch’s contribution, and its synthesis of Greco-Roman demonology, see G. Soury, La démonologie de Plutarque: Essai sur les idées religieuses et les mythes d’un Platonicien éclectique (1942) and F. Brenk, In Mist Apparelled: Religious Themes in Plutarch’s Moralia and Lives (1977). Brenk more expansively works backwards from Plutarch to the broader question of Hellenistic demonology in his lengthy entry, “In the Light of the Moon: Demonology in the Early Imperial Period,” (1986). As G. W. Bowerstock notes, “It is very important to remember here that Christianity had a powerful influence on the paganism that prospered in the late antique world, to a degree … no less important than the influence – much more frequently remarked – of paganism on Christianity.” Hellenism in Late Antiquity, 27. In recent scholarship, see H. Marx-Wolf, “A Strange Consensus: Daemonological Discourse in Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus,” (2010), 219–40. Marx-Wolf applies to the question of demonology the same kind of method that in recent scholarship has unearthed deep commonalities in late ancient theology between pagan and Christian authors, represented, for instance, in P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede, Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity (1999). See also Rangar Cline, Ancient Angels, 1-18.

42 As most late ancient Christians writing in Greek, John uses the term Ἐλλην – Hellene – to denote what we would typically describe as pagan (i.e., Exp. fid. 7.28 speaks of the “polytheistic error of the Greeks;” likewise Exp. fid. 89.16-24 and Images I.24 / II.17) I am following John’s terminology here
deceived, unable to wrestle themselves out from under the spell of the demonic powers.

With Christ and afterwards, however, the saints appear on the stage of history, driving the demons away and establishing among all true faith and virtuous living in the name of Christ and in the power of his Spirit.\textsuperscript{43} It is something of an irony, then, that when John lays out the metaphysical framework by which he understands the basic properties of these demons, he demonstrates himself profoundly indebted to the tradition of the very non-Christian Greeks he may very well have reckoned as possessed by them.\textsuperscript{44} Christian revelation – and more especially, the edifice of Christian doctrine built slowly but steadily upon it – had stimulated a fundamental and probably irrevocable change in the caricature of the demon as a spiritual power. That change, nevertheless, depended upon a

\textsuperscript{43} Cf. Exp. fid. 45.33-45, 77.29ff, Images II.10/III.9, inter alia. See 6.1.2, esp. near n 76.

\textsuperscript{44} John acknowledges a debt to the Greeks, and openly seeks to “set forth the best contributions of the Greek philosophers,” since anything good is of God, yet “anything contrary to the truth is a ‘dark invention’ of the deceit of Satan and a ‘fabrication (ἀνάπλασμα) of the tortured (κακοδαίμονος) mind,’” (\textit{Dial} proem. 43-48; intensifying the demonology of what Gregory of Nazianzus said of pagan religious ritual at \textit{or.} 39.3, PG 36, 336C). Several Jewish and Christian apologists will take this a step further to claim that the Greek philosophers were in fact plagiarizing from Moses, such that even the truth they hit on was not theirs: a typical example would be Eusebius, \textit{Prep. ev.} 13.6, who implies both Socrates as demon-possessed, and suggests Moses as the true source of his wisdom. John does not do this, however, and seems to acknowledge that – demonic deception notwithstanding – the Greeks have managed to come upon true and valuable insights through the process of natural reason.

The trope of demonic inspiration of Hellenistic culture is a common one in anti-pagan polemic / apologetic literature. Origen attributes non-Christian wisdom to the “opposing powers,” but not with a view to harm so much as a view to imparting what they believe to be true (\textit{De Prin.} III.3.3). The \textit{Clementine Homilies} assert the whole of Hellenic παιδεία as “the terrible fabrication of an evil demon” (4.12); yet this after implicitly affirming the aims of philosophy, but critiquing philosophers as generally failing to live up to them (4.9). Notwithstanding the eventual extinction of the ancient cults, these arguments continue to resonate in Greek theology, appearing, for instance, on both sides of the Hesychastic controversy. See, for instance, Gregory Palamas’s use of the trope at \textit{Triads} I.1.15.19.
deeper continuity with philosophical discourse as underlying the broader spectrum of religious thought in the Hellenistic world.

In John’s *Dialectica* – a manual of philosophical terminology as it had been appropriated by the Chalcedonian tradition – the Damascene identifies demonology as a branch of theology which, as its particular science, contemplates the demons as bodiless (*ἀσώματον*), intelligent, volitional beings, alongside their analogous counterparts of angels and souls. This definition would have been recognizable to the pagan philosophers of late antiquity as mirroring their concerns and some of their language: the second century philosopher Apuleius, for instance, defined a *daimon* as “animal in genus, passive in soul, rational in mind, ethereal in body, eternal in duration,” while in the fourth century, Calcidius – speaking as a philosopher, although he was possibly a

45 In her essay, “Remarques sur la situation de la philosophie byzantine du council de Chalcédoine à Jean Damascène” (2015), V. Kontouma establishes a particularly “neochalcedonian” philosophical tradition moving through John of Caesarea, Anastasius of Antioch, Theodore of Raithou, Maximus the Confessor, and Anastasius of Sinai. This can be cross referenced with Kotter’s work identifying the background sources of the *Dialectica* in the philosophical manuals based on Porphyry’s *Isagoge* from Greek-speaking Syro-Palestine.

46 And theology, in turn, as a branch of theoretical (rather than practical) philosophy, alongside physiology (as the study of natures of things with a material manifestation) and mathematics (as the study of those things which stand between the material and the immaterial). *Dial.* 3.29-39; also *Dial.* 67.16-30.

47 The character of demonic bodilessness, however, is a matter of some ambiguity: “While they are called immaterial (*ἀκολα*) in comparison with the body, in comparison with the properly immaterial – namely, the divine – they are material.” *Dial.*, 67.22-23. Interestingly, John’s argument there resembles that of Origen, *De Prin.* 1.6 “to exist without material substance and apart from any association with a bodily element is proper to God alone.” We shall return to this question in Chapter 6.

48 *Dial.*, 67.21-22, which matches with the distinction of “bodiless, rational, and immortal” subsistent forms in *Inst. el.*, 6.20. Demonology is conflated into angelology, however, in *Dial.* 3.34, but remains present implicitly as a subset of it. As an interesting aside, L. Wickham suggests that John Philoponus may have criticized Gregory of Nyssa’s *De Anima Res* the resurrection on the basis that he did not sufficiently differentiate between demons and the souls of the departed: see “John Philoponus and Gregory of Nyssa’s Teaching on Resurrection” (1989), 208-209. Relevant to our study is that John’s taxonomy certainly avoids any similar critique.

49 *De Deo Soc.* 13.
Christian also – similarly defined a *daimon* as “a rational animal, immortal, passible in soul, ethereal in body” with a particular charge to “care for human beings.”

Building on a divergent Judeo-Christian trajectory, however, John’s definition pushes the themes of the discipline in a somewhat different direction from its pagan counterparts.

For latter Platonists like Iamblichus and Proclus, *daimons* had come to be recognized as a natural declension of the divine energies, differing from the gods mostly as a matter of degree, and not a matter of kind. Proclus indeed generalizes them as “secondary [divine] natures” through which the benefices of the divinities are communicated to every generated nature.

Iamblichus maintains a more traditional fourfold cosmology of the spiritual world with gods as immutable, immortal, perfect minds inhabiting the celestial sphere, the *daimons* as their representatives in the sublunary atmosphere, heroes (or demigods) as ascended souls or divine persona in a more localized psychic expression, and souls as last of all, as agents governing particular bodies.

Iamblichus fills out this schema along the lines of (potentially Gnostic)

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50 *Com in Tim*, 135. Calcidius makes specific reference to Hebrew (ie Biblical) angelological traditions in 132. See the helpful discussion of J. Den Boeft, *Calcidius on Demons* (1977), 29-31. As Den Boeft notes, the Christian tradition was more interest in the angelic office than the angelic nature.

51 *Inst. Theo.*, prop. 145. Proclus’s *Elements of Theology*, it should be noted, represents an especially mature expression of Hellenistic theology, which deliberately eschews any attempt to name the intermediate spirits that may exist between gods and souls. Proclus is not hesitant to offer explicit exploration of the specific natures of angels and demons in other works, however, such as his *Platonic Theology*, in which he preserves the language to be faithful to the textual categories and designations he has received.

52 See for instance, *De Myst.* II.1. According to Plutarch, this cosmological schema was first explicated by Hesiod: although Homer speaks of gods and demons, he seems to use the terms interchangeably. *De Def. Or.* at *Moralia* 415A. Plutarch preserves a number of other ancient opinions about the race of *daimons*, some of which are quite provocative in view of the seeming universal consistency of later opinion. (For instance, Plutarch preserves a testament to a belief that the *daimons* are mortal – albeit long-lived by human standards).

53 Presumably characteristic of these Gnostic systems was the proliferation of speculative genealogies of divine beings (cf. 1Tim 1:4). See also Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, Epiphanius, *Panarion*, and our
Christian speculation by adding angels and archangels as divine attendants within the empyrean sphere, distinguishing between types of *daimons*, and introducing archons and princes as the governors of the material world.\(^{54}\)

The late ancient philosophers in this way continued to regard the *daimons* as an integral (if ambiguous) piece of the metaphysical economy: noetic beings responsible – in one way or another – for underwriting the harmony and intelligibility of the cosmos. There are substantial differences between the philosophical tradition of *daimons* and Judeo-Christian Scriptural witness on the subject: for instance, *daimons* never played this neutral mediating role in the imagination of the Biblical tradition: spiritual creatures were described as either angelic figures subordinate to the God of Israel or rebellious ones fated to be conquered by him,\(^{55}\) but the cosmology is sufficiently parallel that Jewish

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\(^{54}\) *De Myst.* II.7, among others. The addition of “angels” to the taxonomy of the unseen world hardly began with Iamblichus, however; the earliest traditions of Greek angelology were independent of Judeo-Christian Scriptures. Nevertheless, later Platonists were certainly aware of Judeo-Christian forms of angelic speculation, and this awareness was necessarily tacitly accounted for in their spiritual hierarchies as Christianity grew in prominence.

\(^{55}\) The spiritual worldview of Biblical imaginary is of course its own subject – and a diverse and vastly complex one at that – but for a general introduction, see M. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*. D. Martin helpfully observes that the LXX was involved in the construction of this speciation by conflating a variety of negative spirits found in the Hebrew as “demons,” while never applying this term to translate גֶּשֶׁם (angel), which was consistently translated as ἄγγελος. See his “When did Angels become Demons?” (2008), 470-512.
Platonist Philo of Alexandria could remark, “Those beings whom the other philosophers call *daimons*, Moses calls angels, and they are souls hovering in the air.” ⁵⁶

What emerged in early Christian discourse was a distinctive version of the late ancient philosophical interest in consolidating a theory of the unseen world and critique the pagan cult. The continuity itself should not be surprising: like Philo, many early Christian thinkers openly understood and presented themselves to be part of the philosophical conversation. ⁵⁷ It does, however, imply that the Christian demonological apologetic was not so much an external assault on the classical religious imaginary, so much as a way of reinventing that religious imagination from within in response to an intellectual and spiritual space that had transformed by the various socio-political and cultural forces brought about by the rise and preeminence of Christianity. Parallel developments within pagan thought serve to strengthen this hypothesis. In the third century, for instance, Porphyry – as Plotinus before him and Proclus after him – performed the same kind of reimagination by conceptualizing the development of the human soul as an ascent of return to unity with the (divine) One chiefly through

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⁵⁶ *De gig.* 6. Philo’s equation here notably overlooks the LXX tendency to collapse evil spirits into the category *daimon*, as A. Wright observes (“Some Observations of Philo’s *De Gigantibus* and Evil Spirits in Second Temple Judaism,” 476). This tension with the LXX may reflect Philo’s preference for the Greek tradition (viz, that he is deliberately importing favorable connotations to the term *daimon* over and against the LXX), or that Philo is aware of the underlying ambiguities of the Hebrew which the LXX tries to conflate.

⁵⁷ Notably, in the ²nd and ³rd centuries, many Christian leaders signaled their moral and philosophical authority by dressing in the philosopher’s mantle. Justin Martyr, who came into the Christian faith through his philosophical quest for truth, continued to wear the philosopher’s mantle after his conversion (*Trypho* 1.2 (PG 6, 473)); Tertullian achieved the same effect in the opposite manner: announcing himself to have become a philosopher of Christianity, he donned the philosopher’s *pallium* in place of the Roman toga typically worn in ²nd C Carthage (*De Pallium*). Eusebius likewise remembers Origen and his circle to have dressed as philosophers (*Hist. eccl.* VI.19).
philosophical exercises, rather than ancient rituals. While these systems borrowed language and imagery from the old Hellenistic religions, their ultimate focus was on the cultivation of mind, not on the maintenance of cult: Porphyry, in fact, specifically sought to undermine the apparatus of religious ritual by casting doubt on the coherence of the assumptions on which it was built, and came close to openly ridiculing it. Indeed, Iamblichus is the exception that proves the rule in seeking to reintegrate framework of philosophical ascent back into the practices of pagan cult, rearticulating the philosophical foundations of theurgy in the persona of an Egyptian priest over and against his teacher.

Christian philosophical demonologies like that of John of Damascus and his precedents had come to stake a particular ground within this sequence of late ancient philosophical debates. Much of outline of the Christian position had been laid out by

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58 Typical of Porphyry’s method in this respect is his De Philosphia ex Oraculis. The text survives only in the quotations preserved in Eusebius, Augustine, and John Philoponos, but the remaining fragments confirm Porphyry’s intent to sublimate divinatory themes to the practice of contemplation (see J. O’Mera, “Porphyry’s Philosophy from Oracles in Eusebius’s Praeparatio Evangelica and Augustine’s Dialogues of Cassiciacum,” 109). He also set about to blaze a new path divergent from the old pagan cult by offering the great philosophers as exemplars his hagiographical Lives of Plotinus and Pythagoras.

59 Most direct is his De Absententia – especially Book II.36f, which counsels abstention from meat, and avoiding sacrifice to demons entirely (II.42). His fragmentary Letter to Anebo also communicates this inclination, and for this reason is cited with approbation by Eusebius (Prep. ev. 5 and 14) and Augustine (Civ. Dei 10.11) as converging with their complaints about the pagan cultic and mythical system. Of this letter, Iamblichus complains that certain questions raised are “foreign to the subject,” or are “improprieties,” disputations that “exhibit a contentious disposition of mind,” although he proceeds to patiently and systematically disentangle Porphyry’s critiques (De Myst. I.1-2).

60 Iamblichus’s De Myst., which, prefaced by the outline of Porphyry’s Letter to Anebo, is framed as a systematic response to it. Indeed, G. Shaw argues that Iamblichus’s emphasis on theurgy was an attempt to revive the “old ways” of the Hellenistic religio-philosophical system, over and against the “new ways” that had shifted the emphasis to theo-logical approaches to the divine (Theurgy and the Soul (1995), 3-4).

61 Although refusing to engage with the position, Iamblichus implicitly acknowledges Christian demonology as having a coherence under the view that “all divination is accomplished by evil daimons.” In the tradition of late ancient anti-Christian polemic, Iamblichus regards this view as “atheistic” (De Myst. III.31).
Origen, a contemporary of Plotinus, and possibly even of his personal acquaintance, given the formative studies undertaken by both thinkers in the city of Alexandria. Some of Origen’s more experimental positions would be rejected and even condemned by later generations of Christians, but his fundamental contribution to Christianity demonology was never fully displaced. Accordingly, when many of Origen’s cosmological assumptions were condemned in the sixth century, it would leave a number of loose in demonology that would need tied up by new projects of systematic reflection, like the Damascene’s *Exact Exposition*.

The clearest philosophical textures within the Damascene’s demonological system, then, are those strands of the common Christian framework of philosophical demonology that we can trace through from Origen and find persisting into John. We can briefly enumerate these in about five points. First, Christian demonologies generally divested the celestial bodies of the divine qualities that had been assigned to them by the Greeks. This is not to say that the stars were completely demythologized to the point of

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62 The most radical exponent of this view is H. A. Kelly, who suggests that Origen had invented a “new biography” of Satan, which – as a (Hegelian!) synthesis of the Scriptural view with oriental dualism – he was able to retrofit to the Scriptures and then ultimately displace the “old biography” of primitive Judeo-Christianity completely. Kelly considers this development an unmitigated disaster: the sublimation of Christianity into a dualistic Zoroastrian mentality. “The main difference between Iranian Dualism and the New Christian Dualism [after Origen] is that in the former the Principle of Evil always existed as such, whereas in post-Origen Christianity the Principle of Good created the Principle of Evil!” (*Satan, A Biography*, 198). This narrative is a vast oversimplification in need of significant correction: however, it scarcely overstates the influence of Origen on Christian diabology.

63 As John of Damascus summarizes, “the Greeks say that all our affairs are governed by the rising, setting, and conjunction of these stars and of the sun and moon…we say that, while they do give indications of rain and drought, cold and heat, wetness and dryness, winds and the like, they give no indication whatsoever of our actions, for we have been made free by the Creator and we control our own actions… [Accordingly,] we say that the stars do not cause anything to happen, whether it be the production of things that are made, or events, or the destruction of things that are destroyed. Rather, they are signs” (*Exp. fid. 20*). Here particularly following Basil, *Hex. 5* (PG 29, 128-129) and Nemesius, *De nat. hom. 35* (PG 40, 741), see also Aristotle’s refutation that all things happen by necessity in *Metaph. vi*. It should be noted, nevertheless, that this is not universally the case among Christians or even Christian texts.
being dead matter, as is the case with modern astronomy: with the Fathers, John acknowledges that “the spiritual powers – that is, the angels – as well as all spiritual things are enclosed and contained” within the “shell” of the heavens, and leaves a degree of mystery regarding the courses of the stars, and how their motions may be intertwined with human affairs. But Christians like John were more zealous even than Proclus to empty the heavens of a multiplicity of divine personalities. One God “created the heavens and the earth” in all their grandeur, and all things “visible and invisible” within them. Empathically, there is one Divinity who is “uncircumscribed and filling, containing, and surrounding all things because he transcends all things and it is he who

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TSol, for instance – which we shall explore in greater detail in Chapter 4 – explicates astronomical correspondences with associated with many of the demonic beings it introduces, with TSol 18 in fact alluding to a full blown astrological tradition. See Klutz, Rewriting the Testament of Solomon, 38-43. TSol can hardly be regarded as normative Christian demonology, however; Greenfield assigns astronomical demonologies a place among the “Alternative Traditions” within Byzantine demonology, see Traditions of Belief, 220-225, and also the tables of demonological-astrological associations on pp. 336-339.

64 Exp. fid. 20.1. Nevertheless, following Basil (Hex. I.9-11) he affirms that the heavens themselves are corruptible (although held together and sustained by divine grace) (Exp. fid. 20.75-76) and that the stars are “inanimate and without feeling” (20.84).

65 For this reason, astrological training remained a standard dimension of higher education well into the Middle Ages, and was considered directly relevant to mundane concerns such as medicine. While Christian philosophy tended to diminish the role of the stars in the government of providence, it did not eliminate it altogether. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, actively affirmed the influence of celestial bodies on earthly ones – or rather, he affirmed the governance of God on lower bodies through the higher – although he denied that the celestial motions have any direct bearing upon our intellect or volition (SCG III.82-87; ST I.115.1-6). Notably, Aquinas appeals to the authority of the Damascene on this point (ie., ST I.115.4 sed contra).

66 On Proclus’s tendency within his fundamental theology to dissolve all intermediary spirits into a single category between the divine and the psychic, see note 51 above.

67 cf. Exp. fid. 19.1-3, 20.2f. This language, of course, echoes the ancient creeds; tradition of Genesis 1, which according to some readings is littered with the corpses of Ancient Near Eastern deities who have not only been defeated, but altogether de-divinized. See J. Levenson, Creation and the Persistence of Evil (1994). Presuming this reading is correct, part of the tradition of pulling the ontological rug out from under the divine beings of other religious traditions; and undoubtedly part of the reason that the early Christians were accused of being atheists (ie, Justin, Apology, 5-6).
has created all\textsuperscript{68} – notwithstanding the profundity of the character of that Divinity, both as he can be contemplated philosophically through natural reason, and according to his self-revelation in Scripture as Trinity.\textsuperscript{69} Because the Divine is One, and human beings created in the image of that Divine have been invested with a meaningfully free will, the chorus of celestial beings is excluded as exerting a causal impact on human affairs – although an attendant circumstantial impact may remain.\textsuperscript{70}

Second, the \textit{daimons} are actually “demons” – that is, fallen angels.\textsuperscript{71} spiritual beings whose will is permanently fixed towards evil and the destruction of God’s good creation – especially human beings.\textsuperscript{72} Indeed, even the old gods – to whatever extent they can be said to exist as real and distinct spiritual powers and personalities, rather than

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{68} Exp. fid. 20.4-6.
  \item \textsuperscript{69} In the \textit{Exp. fid}, philosophical contemplation of the attributes of God predominantly occupies ch. 3-14, with some Trinitarian considerations dispersed throughout (esp. ch 8). The bulk of John’s theological analysis actually pertains to the Christological dimensions through the divine economy of the Word explored in \textit{Exp. fid}. 46-81.
  \item \textsuperscript{70} Exp. fid. 21.117f
  \item \textsuperscript{71} There is some debate as to when, exactly, this equation became fixed in the Christian imagination. Angels and demons have, at some points, been regarded as separate species, as D. Martin nicely summarizes in his article “When did Angels become Demons?” The major alternative theory is Enochic framework that the demons are the spirits of the offspring of disobedient angels, which interpretation – given that it appears in Lactantius (\textit{Inst.} 2.14) and is polemicized against in the Syriac \textit{Cave of Treasures} persists as a widely-held opinion until the 4\textsuperscript{th} C at least. Moreover, explicit “fallen angels” language is conspicuously absent from some ascetical literature, even as late as John Climicas; we cannot rule out the possibility in some of these texts that demons are simply assumed to be an altogether different genre of being (see below, n. 107). Origen, however, is a major proponent of the angelic fall – his cosmology in fact necessitates it (\textit{De Prin.} I.8.1) – and the interpretation likely became normative through his influence. John of Damascus explicitly holds this theory and entertains no alternative in \textit{Exp. fid}. 18.
  \item \textsuperscript{72} John clearly posits the immutability of demonic evil at \textit{Exp. fid}. 18.35-38 and implicitly 17.20-24, also 44.52-56, \textit{CM}. 75; see also the discussion in ch 3, 4, 6. There is some discrepancy here in the tradition: Origen would share commitment to the categorical hostility of demonic forces, but not necessarily to the permanence of their malice and ultimate damnation, which would be resolved in the \textit{apokatastasis} of universal restoration (ie, \textit{De Prin.} I.6.3). The proposition that the arbitrary demonic election of evil is immutable after the primordial choice for the same reason that repentance is impossible after death was first proposed by Nemesius of Emesa, \textit{De Nat. Hom.} PG 40, 521C-524A: and this is the principal form of anti-Origenist ideation John appropriates into his demonology.
\end{itemize}
mere human fantasies – are demons as well: malevolent spirits that have kept the nations in bondage and deceived them into offering sacrifice and the worship due in truth only to the Most High God. Nevertheless, despite this radical redefinition, a good deal of linguistic and imaginal common ground persists between the philosophical daimons and the Christian demons. Daimonic manifestations in Iamblichus, for instance, are described as turbulent and fiery; their motion is unsteady and they are prone to drag souls downward into the material sphere, rather pull them upward, as the angels do.

Calcidius, likewise, posits that daimons of the lowest strata are prone to corruption due to their association with the mutability of the material world. Such commonalities may be mediated by the popular imagination, which was more dualistic in its spirituality than the philosophical literati, and more receptive of the “demons as fallen angels as evil spirits” equation made by preachers of Christianity as a result. Moreover, the suggestion that demons dwell in sublunary and aerial habitations persists strongly in Christian...

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73 This idea has its roots in the LXX generalization of foreign spiritual powers as daimons: ie, Ps. 95:5, oi θεοὶ τῶν ἑθνῶν δαιμόνια; Deut 32:17, 1En 6-9. This idea was developed by the early apologists – see for instance, Justin I Ap. 5, 12, 25-27, 62. The iconoclastic Council of Hierea makes the same argument regarding the shape of history, although depicting the iconophiles as idolaters reintroducing the pagan worship of demons. See Section 6.2.3.

74 De Myst. II.3-9 treats the manifestation of each class of spiritual beings in its appearance and effects, including the daimons. Iamblichus of course also makes a firm distinction between good daimons and evil daimons, with the ministrations of the former being constructive and beneficial, while the ministrations of the latter are destructive and harmful (cf. ie. De Myst. IV.7). At the level of manifestation, however, Iamblichus does not distinguish between the two.

75 Com in Tim 133.

76 As Porphyry notes, “The popular opinion [about the daimons] is that, if they are neglected and deprived of the cultic reverence that is their due, they are noxious to those who neglect them, and that – if they are appeased by prayers, supplications, sacrifices, and other similar rites – they become beneficent again” (De Abst. II.37). He goes on to nuance this opinion by carefully distinguishing between good and evil daimons. Contrarily, a Christian philosopher would exploit the same popular belief by proclaiming the demons to be exclusively evil spirits from whom human beings can be liberated by participation in the Christian rituals.
imagination, indeed bolstered by Scriptural allusions to Satan as “the prince of this world,” (John 12:31, 16:11) “the god of this age” (2Cor 4:4) and “the prince and power of the air” (Eph 2:2).77

Third, Christian philosophical demonology shares with its pagan counterpart: a commitment to assigning an ultimately privative character to evil. Both non-Christian78 and Christian79 philosophers emphatically denied evil its own substance or eternal existence, even as certain strands of popular piety in both Christianity and paganism continued to indulge in dualistic speculations and tendencies.80 Christian philosophers diverged from the Hellenistic tradition, however, in understanding demonic beings uniformly hostile.81 They rejected the attempt by pagan philosophers to distinguish the

77 In the Christian imagination, the aerial quality of the demonic bodies became a matter of practical interest in ascetical engagement with them. See Section 2.3, below.

78 Plotinus, *Enneads* esp. I.8, “On the Nature and Source of Evils,” but see also II.4-5, II.9, III.9; Proclus, *De mal. sub*.

79 Athanasius, *CG* 6-7, Basil, *Hex*. II.4-5 and *Deus non auctor mal*. (PG 31, 329-353), Gregory of Nyssa, *Hom. in Eccl.* 7 (GNO IV.406,7-407.15) and *Virg* (GNO VIII.1, 299,12–14). Origen also specifically denies evil a substantial existence, although he is less adamant about it, typically describing evil as an “accidental” quality, rather than privative one (ie., *De Prin.* I.5.5) – likely because he had not encountered the especially radical dualism of Mani. Most systematic and influential in the Greek tradition (and in medieval appropriation in the Latin Church as well) is ps-Dionysius the Areopagite (*DN* IV.18, 716A ff) – although Dionysius famously adapts Proclus’s treatment of evil quite closely. The most famous early Christian exponent of the privative view of evil is, of course, St. Augustine, although we will omit from consideration since his impact in the Greek tradition was minimal within the first millennium of Christianity, even though it was definitive in Latin tradition.

80 The prevalence of popular tendencies towards dualism can be recognized in the urgency of responses offered to them. In Hellenistic circles, for instance, Plotinus writes “Against the Gnostics” (*Ennead* II.9); Christian apologists battled the persistent specter of Manicheanism, which – although effectively exterminated in Byzantium by the 6th C – continued to be detected in every dualistic sect – and was sometimes even lobbed at theological opponents indiscriminately (Lieu, *Manichaeism*, 207-218; Hamilton and Hamilton, *Christian Dualist Heresies*, 1-5).

81 Another important divergence was that, while the neoplatonic accounts tended to emphasize the ontological and cosmological dimensions problem of evil as constituting limits of being, Christians tended to focus on the volitional dimensions of the question. As, for instance, Justin Martyr argues, “If humanity does not have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice (προαιρέσει ἐλευθέρα), they are by no means responsible for their actions, whatever kind they may be” (*I Apology*, 43). This, however, impinges upon questions of demonology via asceticism, as we shall discuss below. Notably, Origen’s
*daimons* into a variety of roles, some of which might be good with respect to the overall economy of creation, but subjectively bad for us as individual beings.\(^{82}\) Christians considered the operation of demons to be ultimately subordinate to divine providence, of course, but according to their system, every demon was a rebellious spirit and God’s will in the world was effected over and against its ministrations, rather than through them.\(^{83}\)

This leads to a fourth concern: Christian demonology radically rejected the tendency of pagan philosophers to assign particular personalities to the *daimons*. In rendering the demonic as uniformly evil, a product of a corruption angelic nature through willful disobedience, Christians divested any independent essence or quality from the category, including personality. This has two consequences in Christian treatments of the unseen world: first, demons can be basically omitted from a rendering of the noetic hierarchies, effectively relegated to footnote as being an aberration from true angelic treatment of the “opposing powers” in *De Prin*. III.2 follows on a detailed excursus on the freedom of the will in III.1.

\(^{82}\) In *De Myst.* II.7, Iamblicus enumerates “punitive” and “wicked” demons as among the forms of divinities manifested during divinatory and theurgic rites. Elsewhere, however, he argues that evil *daimons* are not accorded a role in the administration of the cosmos, and that they should never be set on an even footing with the good (*De Myst.* IX.7). Moreover, their connection to the God is impure and wavering, disturbing true divine connection (*De Myst.* III.13); and vicious persons perform their “theurgy” to commune with the evil demons, which increase their dissolution and chaos.

\(^{83}\) Origen, *De Prin.* III.1.13; “Although a man may appear to be afflicted with evils of a serious kind, suffering convulsions in all his limbs, he may nevertheless, at some future time, obtain relief and a cessation from his trouble; and, after enduring his affictions to satiety, may, after many sufferings, be restored again to his (proper) condition. For God deals with souls not merely with a view to the short space of our present life, included within sixty years or more, but with reference to a perpetual and never-ending period, exercising His providential care over souls that are immortal, even as He Himself is eternal and immortal. For He made the rational nature, which He formed in His own image and likeness, incorruptible; and therefore the soul, which is immortal, is not excluded by the shortness of the present life from the divine remedies and cures.” This will constitute one of John’s core arguments about the demons at *Exp. fid.* 18.
being which (in the view of eternity) will eventually be corrected.\textsuperscript{84} Second, qualities distinctive of individual demons are usually omitted from formal Christian demonology.\textsuperscript{85} While the angelic powers and the saints are frequently accounted in elaborate hierarchies and located within taxonomies of peculiar personal qualities and powers,\textsuperscript{86} the demons are reduced to the anonymity of a chaotic-chthonic mob of shadowy figures: the demonic becomes a two-dimensional foil in the drama of the life of virtue or the life of a saint.

Indeed, the theurgic imagination stands almost completely opposite its Christian counterpart on this score. When Iamblichus talks about angels, for instance, he harkens primarily to their quality as messengers, diminishing their individual character by subordinating them directly to the gods.\textsuperscript{87} Daimons, on the other hand, are more

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\textsuperscript{84} Thus, while they bear mention in the ps-Dionysian corpus, they not rendered as a part of his elaborate account of the heavenly hierarchy in the CH, but they are considered separately within the question of the problem of evil, as a sub-question within the divine appellation of “Goodness” (\textit{DN} III).

\textsuperscript{85} Once again, importantly, this is a general tendency, and holds principally for demonology of a more “formal” character. \textit{TSol} would be an exception to this, as would the \textit{De op. daem.} attributed to Michael Psellos, and Psellos’s demonology generally. These exceptions stand out as unique within the body of formal Christian demonologies preserved in Greek, although they may reflect certain traditions within popular piety (Greenfield, \textit{Traditions of Belief}, 202-214, 219-248), that certainly found periodic expression in informal demonological beliefs and practices among Christians (ie., Palladius, \textit{LH} 17.12). The most interesting exception to this rule is the demonology of Evagrius, which offers a demonological taxonomy rooted in the experience of tempting thoughts -- as we shall discuss below. Evagrius also suggests that, because demons are cut off from divine illumination, they have no knowledge of language, but what they are able to learn from human beings -- thus demons are divided into tribes much like humans are (IV.35). However, Evagrius’s demonology serves as the exception which proves the rule in assimilating the distinction between demons to distinction between psychological motions, thus rendering them more functionally than ontologically distinct. John Cassian also elaborates on these kinds of distinction at considerable length (Conf. 8). By contrast, Antony (via Athanasius) identifies it as a possible and profitable line of inquiry, but not of first order importance (VA 21).

\textsuperscript{86} Most notably, ps-Dionysius, \textit{CH}, appropriated by John in \textit{Exp. fid.} 17.

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{De Myst.} II.3. The angels are “tranquil” in their appearance by their assimilation to the higher, rather than the lower principles, but this also renders them effectively invariable in their appearance -- and rather boring, consequently.
thoroughly differentiated on the basis of their attention to and involvement with the diversified forms of generate nature.\textsuperscript{88} The \textit{daimon} in fact becomes the principle mediatory category between humanity and divinity for the pagan philosophers, with heroes often being subsumed into the \textit{daimonic} as sublunary mediators participating in the governance of souls.\textsuperscript{89} Even the gods themselves are sometimes indistinguishable from \textit{daimons} – not because the two are equivalent, but because the divine manifestation is \textit{daimonically} mediated.\textsuperscript{90} Rather than being excluded from the divine hierarchies and “demonized” for its relationship to the lower natures, the \textit{daimon} is needed within the pagan system for precisely that attribute in order to localize and particularize the universal divinity.

Fifth and finally, then, the Christian system proscribes every kind of \textit{daimonic} divinization and theurgical practice in the strongest terms as being fundamentally idolatrous and harmful.\textsuperscript{91} The \textit{daimons} are very real agencies within the Christian imaginary, but they are neither divine nor benign: they are deceptive, unclean, and

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{De Myst.} II.1-2.

\textsuperscript{89} This refers to the role of heroes in the metaphysical imaginary of theurgy and the mediatory structures between divinity and humanity, again see \textit{De Myst.} II.2. In mythology, the assimilation could also happen in the other direction, writing the heroes into the human sphere and human experience as persons with divine blessing bestowed by their birth or achievement which sets them apart from the rest of humanity – to use the modern category, “superhero” narratives.

\textsuperscript{90} Christian apologists were of course quite eager to appropriate this confusion to their own ends and note that pagans, when at their most honest and most thoughtful, acknowledged that their gods were actually demons. See for instance, Eusebius \textit{Prep. ev.} 5. Iamblichus – in typical fashion, attempting to rehabilitate the old cultic conceptions – tries to solve this problem by offering a taxonomy of apparitions whereby the operative superior race might be known through the qualities of the manifestation (\textit{De Myst.} II.3-9).

\textsuperscript{91} Interestingly, this is a point of convergence with Porphyry, although Porphyry also offered perhaps of the most formidable philosophical critiques of Christianity in the ancient world. His fifteen-volume \textit{Against the Christians} provoked wide response from the Fathers, but unfortunately has not survived antiquity.
polluting spirits. Consequently, the proper Christian engagement with them becomes a matter of exercising various sorts of “warfare” in the name of and in the power of Christ: especially within the exercise of personal spiritual discipline and asceticism – as we shall see below – but also sociologically, against heresies from within and non-Christian practices and sects from without. Even philosophy itself becomes suspect for some Christians, being considered too tainted by the old pagan traditions (and, usually implicitly, the demons that inspired them) to be useful.

Like many Fathers, however, John takes a firm stand against the radical view that would condemn philosophy over its non-Christian works, upholding the usefulness of philosophical reasoning both implicitly and explicitly. In addition to his measured comments in defense of the propriety of studying non-Christian literature, John includes in the early chapters of the *Dialectica* a defense the philosophical task itself. “Some have set about to destroy philosophy,” John notes,

by asserting that it does not exist; that there are no [problems of] knowledge or apprehension. To them we ask, “How can you say there is neither philosophy, nor knowledge nor apprehension? Do you know and perceive this, or is it something you do not know or have not apprehended? If you have apprehended it – look! there is knowledge and apprehension. If by not knowing, no one will believe you, because what you are talking about is something you neither know nor understand.”

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92 On the leveraging of demons sociologically within the late ancient city, see D. Kalleres, *City of Demons* (2015), esp. 1-50.

93 Tertullian’s famous line, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” is oft quoted in this connection, although the relationship is clearly complex, since Tertullian obviously makes good use of his philosophical training in the course of his argument. Clement apologizes for his philosophical framework by claiming that evil angels had stolen divine truths and taught them to the philosophers, such that the “barbarian” philosophers had possessed genuine wisdom, although it had been distorted by their demonic religion (*Strom. 1:16-17, 5.1 passim, 6.8, 6.17-18*); Justin Martyr making a similar argument (*II Apology*). Although significantly downplaying the involvement of demons, Basil likewise stands in this tradition in his magisterial advice to youth on reading pagan Greek literature in his *De leg*.

94 *Exp. fid.* 90.40-45. See n. 7-8 in Chapter 6, below.

95 *Dial.* 3.50-57.
On the whole, in fact, the *Dialectica* represents a long tradition of Christian appropriation of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, a neoplatonic teaching introduction to the *Categories* of Aristotle.\(^{96}\) Neither Porphyry nor Aristotle give any place to *daimons* in their renderings of the categories of thought, however – indeed, neither souls nor spirits of any kind are mentioned.\(^{97}\) Instead, these prototype texts – especially dense manuals of philosophical terminology – proceed with no fanfare and minimal introduction to parsing the distinction of logical categories. They presume, accordingly, a high degree of philosophical preparation on the part of the reader: he or she must already understand and appreciate the value of such divisions, and their utility within the apparatus of human thought. Porphyry, indeed, begins by gesturing to the specialized problematic of appreciating the “doctrine of Aristotle,” saying outright that his whole project is oriented towards giving a concise and logical summary of “how the ancients, and especially the Peripatetics, discussed these subjects” of the division of logical categories.\(^{98}\) By contrast John – or perhaps more rather the tradition of Christian philosophical manuals he is following – broadens the scope of the discussion to include an exposition of the broader purposes of philosophy, even to the point of alluding, however briefly, to the place of the contemplation of demons within the domain of philosophical task.

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\(^{96}\) Louth, *St John Damascene*, 40-44.

\(^{97}\) The nearest the *Isagoge* comes to engaging with the spiritual or psychical is in defining the human being (through a roundabout discussion) as “a rational, mortal, animal” in ch. III. This invites some discussion of *immortal* rational beings, which Porphyry renders as θεοί, and mentions in passing some four times in the text for the purpose of categorical differentiation. Pious Christian copyists, incidentally, would often substitute the term ἀγγέλοι.

\(^{98}\) *Isagoge*, 1.3, 15.
The discussion of daimons had expanded in both its scope and its variety in late antique philosophy, but by John’s time, the Christian conception of the “demon” had effectively won out. The process had been so thorough that John needs nothing by way of prelude, introduction, or apology to laying out this understanding: indeed, he can assert it as part of his foundational metaphysic. The standardization of the term in John’s orthodox imagination was so complete that he could simply ignore any dissenting voices, relegating them to the shadowy catalogue of heresies rather than engaging with them as potential loci of hidden insights, or constructive conversation partners in an increasingly plural religious environment. Even when these heresies represented the voices of living traditions and communities, the focus of orthodox engagement with them – at least so far as the extant textual residue is indicates – was in refutation and counterdistinction, not a project of critical consideration and dialogue.

2.3  Ascetical Textures

In general, the ascetical textures in John’s demonology reflect questions in the broader philosophy of asceticism: while they are latent in much of the preceding Christian ascetical literature and practice, they are not always discussed in a direct or systematic fashion. For Evagrius of Pontus, for instance, demons chiefly inhabited the realm of the πρακτικῆ: they were for the most part encountered as the force of resistance

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99 The situation is evidently not far removed from Greenfield’s analysis of standard demonology late Byzantine theology: “That [demons] were evil is a fact so obvious and fundamental that the whole Christian concept of [their] existence that it hardly needs stating” (Traditions of Belief, 22).

100 Such is the perlocutionary force of John’s extensive work on heresies (Kotter IV); see the discussion below in Section 4.3, and our imagination of a dialogical connection between John’s demonology other traditions in Ch 5.
in the development of virtue. The demons attack the monk by seeking to activate the passions by deception, by fearsome display, and – most subtly – by tormenting the monks with “[invasive] thoughts” (λογισμοί). Indeed, in some of Evagrius’s ascetical writings, the demon becomes almost interchangeable with the thoughts it introduces, and several of Evagrius’s ascetical treatises are devoted in their entirety to suggesting strategies for evading the influence of these demonic thoughts. Adaptations of this kind of literature made for tremendously popular monastic reading: apothegms of the Desert Fathers, Isaac the Syrian, Hesychius, Diadochos of Photike, John Climacus, Barsanuphius and John, each feature these thought-demons and strategies for evading their destructive influence. Indeed, the exceptions prove the rule: for instance, for someone like Dorotheos of Gaza, for whom the devil appears more frequently a literary character than a psychological instigator, the same structure of psychological categories maintained. The mechanisms of intrusive thought, sinful habits, and healing through

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101 As distinguished from the neutral mental motions of the *noemata*. Notably, the demons attack people in the world by means of things; monks they attack through the λογισμοί because they are withdrawn from things (*Prak*. 43). Elsewhere, Evagrius will speak of “δαιμονιώδες λογισμοί” (ie., *PLog* 2) For Antony, evil thoughts are the first line of demonic attack (*VA* 23), although perhaps this is because Antony is presupposing a monastic audience – Abba Poemen suggests that only those who under spiritual obediences are attacked by the demons (*ApPat*, Poemen, 67).

102 Ie., *Prak*. 6-14: after laying out the eight principle λογισμοί, Evagrius goes on to use the terms interchangeably as the prelude to the activation of sinful passions. In *KGn* IV.37, demons and thoughts are identified as having bodies of air.

103 In addition to the eponymous *Peri Logismon, Praktikos, Eight Spirits, Antirhetikos*, as well as many of the *Chapters on Prayer*. While there is some precedent to a demon-passion association text in Gnostic texts like the *Secret Book according to John* or the *Book of Zoroaster*, it does not seem that Evagrius was familiar with these sources, and seems to have been an independent and creative thinker in any case. See *Traité pratique ou Le Moine* SC 171:68-84; see also Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 57-58.

104 Dorotheos illustrates the central point of nearly every chapter of his *Didascalia* with demon-ridden stories of the Desert Fathers, yet he avoids direct appropriation of the mechanism of demonic thoughts, notwithstanding a general appreciation of it as a part of the adversarial action of the Devil against
repentance and renunciation persist: the only thing that has been removed was an explicit reference to the demons as active agents of intimate suggestion.

John of Damascus follows the minority trend in his ascetical psychology: he scarcely mentions demons when he parses the operations of the soul. Likewise, John does not develop the involvement of the demons in the instigation of the invasive thoughts, although he does not rule it out, either. John’s psychology, in fact, suggests the existence of such a mechanism, even if it is much reduced in its scope over and against the elaborate Evagrian hierarchy. John further offers no strategic advice on the practices that avert demonic influence – although he does places a high value on the exercise of clear and systematic thought as a key dimension of the orthodox faith, which would (presumably) stand over and against the deceptive partial truths pedaled by demons. The closest John comes to the genre of ascetical demonology is offering a detailed and systematic treatment of the freedom of the will, the problem of habit, the relationship between demons and providence – all crucial questions for the architechtontic imaginary of ascetical life, and all with scattered precedent in Christian philosophical and ascetic texts, but before John never developed as consistently and as systematically as he proposes in relative isolation from their ascetical appropriation.
The monastic πρᾶκτικὴ of wrestling with the demons in other texts was not without concern for these underlying questions. Even a marginally astute ascetic theorist would have been aware of these questions and would have had to stake some sort of ground on them, even if that ground remains undisclosed. As the case in point, Evagrius’s vision of the ascetical life, beyond merely warring against the passions, also necessarily involves θεώρια φυσική, a contemplation of essences, among which the demons are numbered. The speculative dimension of Evagrius’s demonology, however, would eventually become a point of contention. Following (and possibly intensifying) Origen’s myth of the primordial unity of all intellectual substance, Evagrius posited the ultimate repentance and redemption of the demonic powers, possibly even within the experience of the individual monastic, as the eschatological framework was themes in a way that is abstracted from ascetical concerns altogether and stands more within the tradition of philosophical discourse. Interestingly, John’s overarching demonology bears several similarities to that articulated by John Cassian in conferences with Serenus (Conf. 7-8), although without the discursive form, the omission of ascetical advisement, and minimization of details. The systems are certainly related, but a direct dependence would be difficult to demonstrate (see n 162).

Demons implicitly included in the progression of contemplation, see KGn V.52: “A pure mind has need of the logoi of bodies, a purer one the logoi of incorporeals, and a one purer still the Blessed Trinity.” For Evagrius, demons are contemplated separately, especially as a part of the πρᾶκτικῆ as observation of their devices (Prak. 50), and within theoria as appreciation of the ultimate absence of opposition within the Divine (KGn I.1ff). Notwithstanding Evagrius’s cosmological/eschatological monism, unlike other authors (including John of Damascus), Evagrius never identifies “angels, demons, and souls” as sharing common genre – quite to the contrary, when he does juxtapose them, he substantially differentiates them (KGn I.68; see n 138 below), and suggests that the moral habit of the soul over the long-term in fact affects its substance (KGn II.79).

The extent to which Evagrius is responsible for what will later be described as Origenism is not entirely clear from what survives of the Evagrian corpus, and has been a matter of some debate among scholars. Guillaumont suggests that Evagrius is highly responsible for these developments (Kephalia, 156f): Casiday, however, suggests that the more problematic Evagriana was the work of later copyists who were adapting Evagrius to their more radically Origenist views (Reconstructing the Theology of Evagrius (2015), 70-71). This debate need not detain us. What is most important for our purposes is to observe the trend of intensification of Origenistic themes and the reaction to it within the ascetical tradition as distant aspect of the background of John’s work on the subject.
psychologized.\textsuperscript{109} After Evagrius’s condemnation at Second Constantinople (553), the
Evagrian corpus fell into disrepute among Greek-speaking Christians – especially his
theoretical works.\textsuperscript{110}

Later generations of ascetics were understandably reticent to embrace the
excesses of Evagrian cosmological and eschatological speculation, preferring to stay
more closely cropped to the practical questions, to follow the language of Scripture
whenever possible, and to stick close to the imaginary of demonic presence that had
become canonical through the \textit{Sayings} of the Fathers and stories of their lives.\textsuperscript{111} Still,
some sort of working theory of the demonic was necessary to organize, interpret, and
deploy the Biblical and patristic witness concerning the demons in an intelligible fashion
– even if that framework was mostly or entirely tacit. Indeed, the condemnations against
Origenism and its speculative interest in a coherent world of spirits may have had
unintended consequences for ascetical demonology precisely for this reason. One of the
major aims of Origenistic-Evagrain cosmology, after all, had been to resolve the apparent
dualism of the contest between God and the “opposing powers” evident in the Scriptures
and ascetical experience into the ultimate unity of God. Forcefully and explicitly
excluding this view from the bounds of Christian orthodoxy eliminated a theretofore

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{109} Evagrius is ambiguous as to when and how the change in human nature occurs with respect to
achievement in virtue or confirmation in sin (\textit{KGn} III.48, 50; also V.11): human souls are children who will
one day reach the adulthood of the just or impious (\textit{KGn} IV.15). In any case, however, this theme becomes
clearer when radicalized by later Origenists, such as Stephen bar Sudaili. See Section 5.2.

\textsuperscript{110} Much of Evagrius’s speculative work (ie.,\textit{KGn}) was not preserved in Greek; his practical
treatises were often preserved under other names (most frequently, Nilus the Ascetic, to whom Evagrius’s
\textit{On Prayer} is attributed in the \textit{Philokalia}).

\textsuperscript{111} Guillaumont accordingly identifies the demonology of Athanasius and Evagrius as defining the
classic desert demonology in the Greek tradition, and Cassian as a contributor of similar magnitude in the
Latin tradition, with later traditions only clarifying or elaborating on these sources (“Démon,” 210).
\end{footnotesize}
leading interpretive strategy for softening the dualistic cast of monastic spirituality. The suppression of this voice within the ascetical tradition may well have corresponded to a rising dualistic character within the structures of practical monastic theology, and, over the long term, contributed to the proliferation and success of Christian sects with a stronger dualistic emphasis. Sophronius’s articulation of the scope of the Christian faith in his *Synodalical Letter*, for instance, gives extensive attention to denouncing Origenism as a part of articulating the orthodox doctrine of creation, but completely ignores Manicheanism or any of its assorted dualistic tendencies – except in passing for their docetistic Christology.¹¹² John of Damascus, writing a century later, offers considerable attention to debunking Manichean ideas and dualistic tendencies, but offers only the slightest engagement with Origenistic ideas.¹¹³

John’s philosophy of asceticism made an important contribution in offering a clear, systematic framework for demonology that was neither Origenistic nor dualistic, as we shall see; nevertheless, there were factors already latent within the structures of ascetic demonology itself that had prevented the grossest dualistic tendencies from becoming dominant within the mainstream of the Christian monastic movement. First, Christian monasticism stood in continuity with other traditions of wisdom and practice which put the anti-demonic warfare model of spirituality in a broader context and thus worked against its elevation as the exclusive focus of the ascetical life. It is important to remember just how thoroughly the *daimons* were integrated into the broader

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¹¹² *Synodical Letter* 2.4. Condemning Gnosticism and Manicheanism, 2.3.1.

¹¹³ Lieu, *Manicheanism*, 175; Louth, *St John Damascene*, 70. See also Section 3.2.
metaphysical context of asceticism for both pagans and Christians. As Peter Brown notes, in the late ancient world, asceticism was “a discipline most usually initiated in response to a divine calling and brought to perfection by divine aid.”

The philosophers considered this divine assistance to be rendered by a good daimon; Christians maintained the same effective cosmological structure, modifying it only superficially by transferring this function to angels and saints. Averil Cameron, meanwhile, suggests that ascetic discourse required a “developed demonology against which to define itself” in order to provide a context within which the ascetic could interpret the resistance he experienced to his purposes, define his practices, and assert his victories. Philosopher-ascetics entered into this speculation reluctantly, positing the existence of specifically evil daimons more concerned about attending to the asymmetry of their own souls than their divine responsibility to their human supplicants. The clarity and homogeneity of the Christian demons provided an obvious advantage in this respect, and perhaps accounts for its greater success within the popular imagination. In neither system, however, are these mediating spirits ultimately the point: the daimons assist and/or obfuscate, but their


115 See, for instance, Porphyry, De abst. II.38: the good daimons “arrange every benefit upon those subjects they rule,” which involves not only inanimate and irrational natures, but human souls as well – “They are our leaders in techniques of music and teaching, medicine and gymnastic, and of every similar field.” More, “Plato [in Symposium, 202E] calls them ‘transporters’…who announce the things of man to the gods, and the will of the gods to mankind, who carry our prayers to the gods as judges, and unfold the exhortations and admonitions of the gods through oracles.” Plotinus speaks somewhat more obliquely of an “immediate (ἐνταῦθα)” or “presiding (ἡγούμενον)” daimon coordinating between the human soul and its nobler aims (Ennead III.4.3).

116 On this development, see, E. Muehlberger, Angels in Late Ancient Christianity (2013), particularly pp. 91-114.


118 For instance, Porphyry, De Abst. II.39,
involvement is ultimately subordinate to a vision for the cultivation of virtue and the possibility of contemplative union with the Divine principle. Accordingly, within the Christian ascetical framework, the demons are never rendered exclusively responsible for human evil. They can make “assaults” on or “suggestions” to the ascetic but the heroism of monastic resistance to these incursions underscores that the human will is capable, with divine assistance, of fending off their attacks.

The complexity of Christian ascetical demonology, moreover, was not entirely dependent on its philosophical precedents: it developed its own thickness through use in the tradition of monastic literature. The superficially dualistic imagery of warfare against the demons in fact conceals an intricate network of sayings and symbols encoding the wisdom derived from the experience of Christian ascetics. With a few key assumptions about the demonic established from Scriptural and philosophical reflection, ascetical practitioners were able to deploy the language and imagery of demons within and between their communities in a variety of genres, and to a variety of ends. The demon became, in effect, a stock character within the transmission of the wisdom of the Christian spiritual athletes of late antiquity – but primarily in the sense of being two-dimensional or invariable, a puzzling presence meant to upset certainties and provoke

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119 The Life of Antony, for instance – which in addition to having one of the most varied description of demonic apparitions, was also one of the most widely read ascetical texts -- describe them as appearing after the likeness of “beasts and creeping things…lions, bears, leopards, bulls, serpents, asps, scorpions, and wolves” (9); often “bold and shameless” in their approach, they take the appearance of “women, wild beasts, creeping things, gigantic bodies, and troops of soldiers;” (23) attempt to mislead by deceptive prophecy, and appear in the form of the great beast of Job 41 (24, and see n 17 above); other times, without appearing, they make the sound of music or of a voice, or repeat the Scriptures, or take on the guise of monks (25) or angels (35). See also D. Brakke’s assessment of a variety of demonic apparitions in Demons and the Making of the Monk (2009), 157-239.
further reflection. Thus Athanasius imagines Antony to summarize the extensive teaching on the devil and the demons he offered over the course of his life by saying, “You know the treachery of the demons, how fierce they are, but how little power they have.” Fierce and treacherous, but powerless: this is the profile of the monks’ demonic adversary.

Perhaps nothing underscores the paradoxical and ambiguous character of the demons better than the fact that, while the monk is summoned to war against the them and carefully equipped with the spiritual weapons he will need for this battle, he is at the same time cautioned that the surest route to his defeat and demise is trusting in his own ability. In this contest of mortal peril, the ascetic is told to train himself and strengthen himself, but at the same time, he is warned that this training will never win the battle: the demons – as crafty, subtle, and immortal spirits – have an irreducible and insuperable advantage over him. As the desert ascetic Amma Theodora teaches,

Neither asceticism nor vigils nor any kind of labor can save besides genuine humility. For there was a certain anchorite who drove out demons and examined them, saying, “By what means are you expelled? Is it by fasting?” And they said, “We neither eat nor drink.” “By vigils, then?” And they replied, “We do not sleep.” “By withdrawal from society?” “We ourselves dwell in the desert.” So finally he asked: “By what means do you come out?” And the demons said, “Nothing but humility conquers us.” So know that humility is the conqueror of demons.

120 See for instance, J. Pageau, “Understanding the Dog-Headed Icon of St. Christopher” (2013). Demonological apothegms of this sort resemble, not only the daimons of Hellenistic religious mythos, but the yetzer hara of Rabbinic tradition as well. See I. Rosen-Zvi, Demonic Desires (2011). With this in mind, highly demonological works – such as ascetical and hagiographical literature – deserve fresh attention with this operative assumption, not considering the demonic trope boringly repetitive and out-of-sync with modern mentalities, but with appreciation for the particular kind of imagination being leveraged. D. Brakke’s treatment in the second half of Demons and the Making of the Monk begins this work, although more is needed; particularly with sympathetic appreciation for the broader theological aims of demonology in its wide reception as part of the Christian imaginary.

121 VA 22-43.

122 VA 91.

123 ApPat Theodora, 6 (PG 65, 204).
Humility is the key weapon of a warfare that is ultimately, on the whole, defensive: the mature and effective monk, as we know him through his reflection on his teaching and practice of asceticism, never goes on the offensive, seeking to attack the demons to root out and destroy the forces of evil\textsuperscript{124} – as much as his hagiography will eventually make claims to the contrary.\textsuperscript{125} Instead, the demons are consistently stirred up by envy to oppose any serious human intention to do good, lest by so doing we achieve some spiritual benefit, and make our ascent to that high place from which he was cast down.\textsuperscript{126} For this reason, humility is developed by John Climacus as among the highest of active virtues,\textsuperscript{127} and Dorotheos of Gaza offers humility as the substantial ground of the

\textsuperscript{124} The paradigmatic Scriptural text behind this is the panoply of Eph 6:10-17, which – importantly – identifies only one offensive weapon in the Christian armory, and grounds its ultimate imperative in “stand,” not “fight.” On the appropriation of this passage among early Christian authors, see J. Strawbridge, see her chapter “Spiritual armour…to wage a spiritual war” in The Pauline Effect (2015), 57-96.

\textsuperscript{125} Hagiographical texts, modeled on Jesus’s dramatic authority against the evil spirits demonstrated in the Gospels, typically lionized the ascetical struggle against the demons and pagan infrastructure, as did the paradigmatic Life of Antony, which expanding outward on the horizontal plane of the victory of Christ over the devil and his demons. The archeological record is often at odds with the historical and hagiographical accounts, however, which tend to remember the campaigns against pagan worship as much more violent and heroic then they evidently were (ie, R. Wiśniewski, “Pagan Temples, Christians, and Demons in the Late Antique East and West” (2015)). Doubtless there is a connection here: at times, the ascetics were said to have cleansed the desert regions from the demons even apart from embellished historical and hagiographical narratives (ie., ApPat John the Eunach, 5 (PG 65, 233)); nevertheless, the teaching of Abba Nesteros recorded by John Cassian is typical: casting the faults from oneself is greater than casting demons from others (Conf. 15.8).

\textsuperscript{126} Ie., Did. II, 27; see also, the teaching of Abba Poemen, who notes that the demons do not oppose those who do their own will, only those who strive towards obedience (ApPat Poemen, 67 (PG 65, 337)). Abba Agathon describes prayer as the hardest labor – a warfare until our last breath – because the demons want to prevent this, knowing the power of prayer to unite the soul to God (ApPat Agathon, 9 (PG 65, 112)).

\textsuperscript{127} Humility is Step 25 on Climicas’s Scala Paradisi, appearing between simplicity and discernment. Couilleau describes this trio as constituting the higher virtues of the active life, and preparing the way for union with God, the shape of which is described in Steps 27-30 (DSp 8, 1972, col. 373). Likewise also, humility undoes the most subtle of vices of that plague the monastic: vainglory and pride (treated in Steps 23-24). A demon that has been “roped by the noose of obedience and thrashed with the whip of humility” confesses, “There is only one thing in which we have no power to meddle...if you keep up a sincere condemnation of yourself before the Lord you can count us as weak as a cobweb. For I, Pride,
ascetical life, a way of escape from every demonic trap. Indeed, with this in mind, one might even wonder the epithet of “humble monk” affixed to many of John’s works may have been a similar formulaic anti-demonical laudation as found within the liturgical services in his honor.

The paradoxical and aphoristic quality of demonological language is further thickened by theological considerations: the larger scope of Christian theology must always be maintained in the background. In contemplating the demonic nature itself, for instance, the ascetic had to grapple with the reality that even in the midst of their rebellion and evil, the demons are subject to the broad framework of providence, and are thus in some respect its agents. This kind of thinking often emerged in the form of reflection on the endurance of Job – and in particular, the fact that Satan required the divine permission before he could tempt the righteous man. Moreover, if emphasis on the wiles of the demons can highlight the urgency and reality of the ascetical task, exaggerating their power might minimize the reality and efficacy of the historically achieved victory of Christ. A balance must be struck: Christ defeated the demons, and is the source and substance of every ascetical victory over them; nevertheless, Christ is also the trail-blazer who he summons monks to follow in his path of ultimate, self-

mount up on the saddle of Vainglory, but holy humility and self-accusation laugh at both horse and rider” (Scal. par. 23.37).

128 Did. II, 29. Likewise the experience of Abba Macarius, who was invulnerable to a demon’s attempt to cut him with a knife because of his great humility (ApPat Macarius, 35 (PG 65, 278)). See also John Cassian, Conf. 12.8-18.

129 John of Damascus is especially keen on this point, as we shall see in Section 6.3.

130 Ie., Vit. Ant. 29; John Cassian, Conf. 6.19, 12.14

131 Ie., Vit. Ant. 28.
sacrificing virtue. This is a significant part of why the *Life of Antony* becomes such an important monastic text: the practical is fused with the biographical, and the monastic biography cued to the life of Christ. Within that paradigm, the monastic life is not simply an exercise in religious and ascetical extremes, but a way of being bounded by a narrative and a community dispersed over time and space which gave the Christian monastic experience a coherent shape distinct and separate from the ascetical programs of other sects.

While these dynamics played out internally as monastics wrestled with the themes of Scriptures and tradition, Christian teachers also had to do the work of distinguishing the genuine orthodox ascetical scheme from dualistic asceticism of other sects. This “dualism” was characteristic first within some Gnostic groups, and generally associated with the mindset of the Persian tradition, where dualism took on its most extreme and explicit form through the teachings and religion of Mani. Meanwhile, in

132 Cf. Athanasius, *De Inc.* 25. This dynamic is beautifully expressed in an apothegm of Abba Elias, who had taken up residence in an abandoned temple following and imitating Jesus’s defeat of the demons, but also found himself unequal to the task without Christ’s intervention (ApPat Elias, 7 (PG 65, 1840)).

133 As denoting simply two contrasting or conflicting principles, “dualistic” is, of course, an extraordinarily broad category; for a general overview see the helpful discussion of “Dualism” by U. Bianchi and Y. Stoyanov in *ER*.4:2504-17. In this context, “dualistic asceticism” refers to those groups that specifically and explicitly identified an eternal, evil principle responsible for or operative in the material world, over and against an absolutely pure divine spirit with which the ascetic could personally and/or eschatologically attain union with.

134 Characteristic of Gnostic systems was the proliferation of spiritual beings between the ultimate divinity and the material creation, the lowest of which (most closely related to sense experience), are taken to be “evil,” giving the systems their frequently dualistic cast. Although it is a distorting generalization to lump such systems together with Manicheanism as though they are “dualist” in the same way or to the same extent, such a characterization seems to have been common in the ancient world. Porphyry, for instance, titled Plotinus’s anti-dualistic tract “Against the Gnostics” (*Enneads* II.9).

Syria, Messalians (and potentially other derivative groups) practiced a certain form of Christian ascetical dualism, which emphasized the power and the persistence of the “indwelling demon,” imagined in grossly corporeal form. The Damascene was by no means the first, accordingly, to try to situate Christian demonology precisely vis-à-vis dualistic sects, but his systematic and epitomizing approach accounted for a wider variety of possible alternatives, providing an elegant, integrated statement of the philosophical mechanisms undergirding the demonological dimensions of monastic practice within the orthodox Christian tradition.

Another aspect of the inherited ascetical conversation about demons that held special interest for John is the question of the nature of demonic bodies. Modern readers are typically deaf to the immediacy of this problem for the ancient imagination: for us, posing questions about the finer points of demonic embodiment may seems like little more than a variation on the question of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Yet to the ascetic’s imagination, demons are very real: they exist as part of a natural, rather than supernatural order, and although they are (in most circumstances) invisible, they are neither reducible to symbolic or metaphorical entities of merely sociological or psychological import. The nature of demonic bodies, accordingly, was a vital orienting concern with a direct implication for the ways in which the demon might be known and

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136 So preserves John of Damascus from Theodoret, EH 4.10 in Haer. 80. See Section 3.2.

137 G. Smith, “How Thin is a Demon?” (2008), 482. Greenfield asserts that, “in general,” the problems of demonic composition were “not really considered or discussed in the standard orthodox tradition” outside of the idea of the “subtle body” (Traditions of Belief, 200). It is true that demonic physics was much less detailed and specific than it might have been, however, this assertion overlooks the fact that these “bodies” were still bodies, and were discussed with subtle variations that give important clues to the broader discourse. For our purposes, moreover – as Smith notes – emphasizing the “bodily” character of the demons serves to emphasize that we are not talking about “mere” symbols or psychological manifestations.
encountered, and how the demon and their assaults would necessarily have to be described. Nevertheless, these questions were usually not approached directly, rather, they were pondered in and through their associated practical questions, such as modality of demonic attack, the extent of demonic prognostication, and the shape of demonic apparitions.

The reigning assumption in late antiquity was that demons existed in a quasi-material state, thought usually to be composed of air or aether or fire. Indeed, so normative was this assumption that the spiritual bodies which such beings are sometimes invested should not be taken as synonymous with immaterial bodies: this would be a paradox anyway, since bodies are defined by some sort of distension in space. Instead, describing a demon as spiritual denotes a certain quality or kind of material existence; that these bodies are composed of pneumatic material, rather than having the thickness of an earthly or fleshly composition. Evagrius, for instance, suggests that

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138 Joining psychological and physical imagery, Evagrius suggests that the basic constitution of angels, demons and souls is equivalent, but that in angels, nous and fire predominate; in human beings epithumia and earth, and among the demons, thumos and air (K Gn I.68). He also suggests that demonic bodies are very cold (K Gn VI.26). See Smith, “How thin is a demon?”

139 “Spiritual body” (σῶμα πνευματικόν) is primarily a phrase that Paul employs to speak of the resurrected body, as opposed to the “natural body” (σῶμα ψυχικόν), but it is at times explicitly appropriated to the bodies of demons, for instance (and significantly) by John’s near contemporary, the Monophysite philosopher John Philoponus (Comm. De Anima proem; CAG 15:20.12). On Paul’s usage in its original context, there is an enormous literature.

140 See for instance, Aristotle Physics IV.2; although within modern discourse, more pronounced by Descartes’s fundamental distinction between the res cogitantes and the res extensa. Neoplatonist commentators on Aristotle had retained significant philosophical space for non-corporeal materiality in regarding unformed prime matter as incorporeal: this, however, was rejected by John Philoponus, who suggested prime matter be regarded as possessing three-dimensional extension. See F. De Hass, John Philoponus’ New Definition of Prime Matter (1997).

141 Tatian offers perhaps the most striking example in contrasting the “material pneuma” with the “divine pneuma” which does not pervade matter, but gives it shape (Or. grec 4.2). For many ancient philosophers, this spirit-material was further related to the question of daimonic diet and habitat, which would feeding off the fumes of the sacrifices in order to gain the heaviness needed to sink into lower
The bodies of demons have color and form, but they escape our senses because their composition is not the composition of bodies that our senses apprehend. For when they wish to appear as persons, they transform themselves into the complete likeness of our body, while not showing us their bodies.\textsuperscript{142}

This mode of existence gives demons several advantages over humans: it means, for instance, that they are invisible in their default state for the subtle quality of their material composition\textsuperscript{143} and yet are also capable of manifesting themselves in a variety of visible forms by condensing into a more solid state.\textsuperscript{144} Their ethereal form endows them with great agility, which allows them to move at incredible speeds and spy out things that are about to happen and relay them to human beings as deceptive oracles.\textsuperscript{145} Others propose that they are able to ascend to the upper reaches of our atmosphere steal secrets atmosphere and manifest themselves to human beings: for instance, Origen \textit{Ex. martyr}. 45 and Porphyry, \textit{De abst.} II.5, 42.

\textsuperscript{142} KGn I.22, see also \textit{Ep.} 56.4. In \textit{KGn} V.18, Evagrius suggests that this demonic appearance is an imitation, while the angels actually know how to transform bodily natures.

\textsuperscript{143} With their aerial bodies, the demons and the devil “are able to enter in through shut doors, and haunt the air” (Athanasius, \textit{VA}, 28). They hover about in the air, (ie., Athanasius, \textit{De Inc.} 25; Moses, \textit{ApPat}. 1) where they seek to impede the ascent of souls in their posthumous (and possibly mystical) ascent (\textit{VA}, 60, 65). Providence has mercifully hidden them from our view, according to Cassian’s report of Abba Serenus, since if we saw their crowd in the air about us, we would either despair for fear, or submit to their example and grow worse and worse (\textit{Conf.} 8.12). The “subtlety” of spiritual natures creates interesting paradoxes in their depiction, as G. Peers fascinatingly discusses in his \textit{Subtle Bodies} (2001).

\textsuperscript{144} Isaac the Syrian identifies this as the grossest form of three modes of the manifestation of spiritual beings – manifestation according to “density of substance” (\textit{AH}, 28). In Isaac’s demons are also able to manifest according to a “subtlety of substance” as well – which would seem to be a \textit{pneumatic} interaction with the sensory organs. They are not, however, capable of imitating the essential angelic light of true \textit{theoria}, which is completely immaterial (see also \textit{AH}, 22).

The substance of demonic bodies was not exclusively advantageous: Athanasius repeatedly emphasizes in the \textit{Life of Antony} that, while they could take on extraordinarily frightening appearances, in fact, they were powerless except as they were given divine permission (Antony experiences it at \textit{VA} 9, and teaches it at \textit{VA} 28-30). Abba Pambo laughed at the powerless of the demons as they tried to play a joke on him with some feathers, but it took several demons to move them (\textit{ApPat Pambo}, 13 (PG 65, 372)).

\textsuperscript{145} Athanasius, \textit{VA} 31; Isaac the Syrian \textit{AH} 28; John Climicas, \textit{Scal. par.} 3; John of Damascus, \textit{Exp. fid.} 18. Accounting for demonic prophecies was a major problem in late ancient literature, and not just for Christians (compare \textit{De Myst.} III).
from the heavens. More still, their freedom from a weighty flesh endowed them with extraordinary intellectual attention and acuity, accurately reading the slightest motions of human passion from external indicators, to tailor their temptations to the weaknesses of their targets. Some even believed the demons to be so refined as to be able to penetrate into the darkest corners of the human heart, and observe man’s most secret thoughts.

Whatever the constitution of demonic bodies, however, demonic apparitions were not necessarily assumed to be material. Many texts imply that the demons could appear in phantasmal manifestation – that is, not impressing upon the sight by taking a visible form with their aerial bodies, but by activating the senses from within by means of the phantasms which mediate between sense perception and cognition. This apparitional mechanism could have a greater or lesser degree of physicality to it depending on the underlying assumptions being made about material physics and physiology: this

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146 In particular, this belief persists into the Qur’an – see Section 5.3. Clement of Alexandria articulates a similar view, though not on the ability of demons to ascend so much as on the ability of angels to fall – viz., some angel knew the truth but did not abide in it, and then communicated these truths to man (Strom. 1.16). In this case, the tradition is clearly related to the Enochic tradition of the forbidden wisdom taught by the fallen angels.

147 Evagrius, Prak. 44.

148 Within the mainstream tradition, this idea is usually proposed in order to be denied. Evagrius specifically repudiates this point: the demons do not know our hearts (PLog. 37) and need to observe external indicators in order to discern our internal state (Prak. 47). This is because for Evagrius, the nous is completely without form or matter, and thus imperceptible even to the demons in their subtlety (KGn I.46). John Cassian transmits the same teaching (Conf 7.9f). The tradition seems to have enjoyed more traction in the Syriac tradition, however. Although ps-Macarius does not answer the questions of whether the demons know our hearts, he articulates a physics that would support the position, by noting that just as God and the devil are in the air without God being substantially polluted by the presence of the devil, so too the demons coinhabit the soul with divine grace, and being thus present within us, is an ongoing source of evil thoughts (Hom. 16.79f). John Cassian refutes this proposition point by point in Conf. 7.12. Others, such as Diadochos of Photiki, would admit this state prior to baptism, but posit that baptism has displaced the devil from the depths of the heart and filled it with grace, such that the devil can only attack from without (Disc. 76-77).

149 On this physiological mechanism, see Nemesius, de. Nat. hom., 6.
phenomenon could be conceptualized as a projection of demonic energy onto the *nous*, or the effect of a subtle spiritual body interpenetrating the mind and interacting with the particular *pneuma* involved in sensation. In either case, the ancients would have emphatically denied that the person reporting such an experience was imagining things: such manifestations were real experiential data that deserved an accounting. More still, some sects proposed that a level of spiritual acquisition or form of ascetical exercise could equip the ascetic with a reliable capacity to see the demons, even in their natural, subtle form.

In other instances, however, the effects of demonic activity was not observed by either the senses or the phantasy: it was instead retrospectively discerned through an imaginal or discursive process. This was a routine and well-articulated process on the small scale in the form of reflection on experience and observation of the motion of

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150 For instance, Evagrius suggests that demons can produce a false vision of God by touching a particular part of the brain and manipulating the light surrounding the *nous* (*Prayer*, 73-74).

151 This is the sense in which Antony advises cultivating a sensitivity to the difference between natural bodily motions, those brought about by dietary habits, and those instigated by the demons (*ApPat Anthony*, 22 (PG 65, 84)). An additional form of discernment is needed to distinguish between spiritual perceptions instigated by angels and those brought about by the demons, which in most cases would use the same perceptual mechanisms, although according to some theories, the angels had additional modes of manifestations as interacting directly with the *nous* as instantiations of the divine energies. So Isaac the Syrian, *AH* 22, 28 (see n 144 above).

152 Within the schema of those strands of Platonism which take the realm of the ideas is the truly real and the phenomenal world to be imperfect material representation of it, suggesting the demon to be a purely intellectual creature beheld through phantasmal *pneuma* might be objectionable to the Christian, not because it makes the demons less than real, but because it makes them too real.

153 For instance, Evagrius – consistent with his demonic physics – suggests that demons are accompanied by a strong stench (*Prak*, 39); however, he also posits that the ability to perceive this odor (rather than merely being affected by it) is a gift of the Spirit (*KGn* V.78). For ps-Macarius, neither the dark world of the Satan and his demons, nor the luminous world of God and his angels can touched or seen by the eye of the flesh, but to the spiritual person (*πνευματικοὶ*), they are revealed to the eye of the heart (*Hom.* 14.43-51). Especially helpful on the role of discerning demons as a dimension of spiritual direction is I. Hausherr, *Direction spirituelle en Orient autrefois* (1955).
thoughts – indeed, the better part of the work of a spiritual director was to perform this kind of reflective discernment and accompany others in it. It also occurred more broadly, however, through the interpretation and representation of public memory, in the recollection of the lives of the saints or historical events. It is difficult to say how prevalent this kind of interpretation was in every day conversation, or how self-conscious Christians were about it: rarely if ever is this process of inventing demonological narratives to embellish a history or hagiography explicated within the ancient literature. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assert that these symbolic modes of discernment were related and mutually reinforcing, as monastics actively discerned the presence and influence of demons both historical and psychological phenomenon. Through this reflective process, demonological tropes were modulated and condensed into a tradition of symbolic language, which had its own structure and logic to coordinate between the existential and historical encounter with evil through the presence of the demon.

For this reason, at their most profound, the physical bodies of the demons were in fact ambiguous and paradoxical – much as above we noted their literary bodies to be. The fantastic and aggressive demonic apparitions sometimes recounted in the Scriptures, the histories, and the sayings of the Fathers did not conform to the usual assumptions about the demonic bodies, or with the everyday experience of the demons, even for monks who obsessed over them. Many of such reports, accordingly, were fundamentally enigmatic –

\[154\] Thus the voluminous teaching on spiritual direction among the Church Fathers; as pertaining specifically to the discernment of spirits, see for instance, VA 22-43, noting esp. his introduction to the demonological teaching: “It is pressing and necessary for us to know the wiles of the demons against us” (21). See ApPat Elias, 4 (PG 65, 1840). The same teaching is prioritized by John Cassian, Conf. 2.1. See also the fine study I. Hausherr, Direction spirituelle en Orient autrefois (1955).
and meant to be. Evagrius, for instance, spoke of demons attacking the ascetic with severe blows, appearing suddenly out of the air and attacking like wild beasts, and damaging whole body. According to his account, one monk saw the devil “transform himself into a lion … and fix his claws into [his] thighs on both sides;” another experienced a demon “wrap himself around him in the form of a snake and chew his flesh,” as he prayed, “spitting [the monk’s masticated flesh] into his face.” Another monk, living alone in the desert, was beset upon by demons who crumpled him up and “played ball with him for two weeks, tossing him in the air and catching him.” The physicality of such episodes is so emphatic that it cannot be ignored – and this from the monk who asserts that demonic bodies have no perceptible color or form, and for whom the term “demon” is elsewhere interchangeable with the term “thoughts.” A description of demonic appearances of this kind imaginatively joins physical form and encounter to the storied demonic body in such a way as to weave and reinforce the vast and vibrant symbolic narrative of monastic encounter with the forces of evil, in which God’s saints struggle to tend the oil of their lamps that their lights in this dark world be not extinguished until the bridegroom returns. Amma Syncletica’s ascetical teaching binds these dimensions together profoundly and powerfully:

We must arm ourselves in every way against the demons: they attack us from outside, and they also stir us up from within. The soul is like a ship when great waves break over it, and at the same time it sinks because the hold is too full. We are just like that: we lose as much by the exterior

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155 Prayer, 91, 95.
156 Prayer, 106
157 Prayer, 107
158 Prayer, 111
faults we commit as by the thoughts inside us. So we must watch for the attacks of men that come from outside us, and also repel the interior onslaughts of our thoughts.\textsuperscript{160}

Modern commentators have been prone to balk at the demonomania of late ancient storytelling, but the deeper reason of abounding demon stories in the old hagiographies is that every such narrative serves at once to confirm the mythos of ascetical experience, and particularize the trials and temptations to the individual saint. The ambiguity of the demonic presence allows the demon to be an effective foil for the saint, who in defeating the demon, shows himself or herself to be worthy of the sanctity that he or she has been afforded.\textsuperscript{161} The demon is tailored to his saint, not because of the unique properties of the individual demons, but because of the unique character of the individual saints, with the demons – in a wonderful irony – being conscripted against their will into decorating the godliness of their sanctified human opponents.

Within the ascetical imagination, then, we might say that demonology had been systematized non-systematically, through the aggregation of sayings and stories, through image and liturgy. If Origen had been a major inspiration, his explicit influence had dissipated significantly by John’s time; Evagrius as well, although his contribution continued to echo through his more directive practical advice.\textsuperscript{162} In their place had

\textsuperscript{160} Vit Sync. 45.

\textsuperscript{161} This analysis stands in apparent contradiction to P. Brown’s assessment that demons are the “stars of the religious drama of late antiquity,” (\textit{The World of Late Antiquity} (1984), 54) but these perspectives can in fact be reconciled. In proper perspective, the demon is a mirror of the saintly or angelic protagonist, who are the real stars of the drama.

\textsuperscript{162} John Cassian’s contribution has been intentionally omitted to this point, appearing only in footnotes. It is worth noting, however, Cassian and his demonology – most systematically developed in his \textit{Conferences} with Abba Serenus – were received appreciatively in Greek translation. Much remains unknown, however, about the reception of Cassian in the east, and the extent to which ideas recorded in Cassian were transmitted through him into the broader Greek tradition, since it is possible that these ideas would have persisted in other written and oral traditions. Unfortunately, the only work done on the corpus to date is that of P. Tzamalikos (2012), which is so wrapped in the idiosyncratic conviction that “real
emerged a loose collection of ideas about the demons at the edge of an ascetically-ordered consciousness communicated through enigmatic stories and sayings of the saints of old, dedicated more to resourcing the struggle to embody a radical Christian existence in a hostile world than to ponder the mysteries of the demonic nature. This was a massive corpus of material of which only a fraction survives today; with the remnant likely much more consistent and coherent than it ever was in late ancient monasteries, given the homogenizing influence of generation after generation of editors and copyists who were hardly disinterested in this material as they reproduced it. But even if we assume that demonology within the organic life of the Christian ascetical tradition was maximally consistent and coherent, by John’s time, it could certainly have used a fresh recalibration with a view to the robust tradition of conciliar orthodoxy that had continued its refinement over the fourth through seventh centuries.

2.4 Conclusion

The rich and complex history of demonology left fascinating textures in John of Damascus’s written sources. Somewhere in a distant, half-forgotten past, ancient commentators had imaginatively stitched together scattered and disparate Scriptural evidence into a backstory for the demonic. Christian philosophical polemicists had split the daimon of the philosophers had in two, renaming the benevolent created mediators between God and humanity “angels” and “saints,” while leaving the old category of “the

Cassian” was a 6th century Sabaite, and the Latin edition a medieval forgery as to be unusable for our purposes. Regardless, the appreciation for Cassian serves as the exception that proves the rule, insofar as Cassian’s system was also not especially systematic – and became even less so as it was excerpted into the broader Greek tradition.
“demonic” populated exclusively with malicious and malevolent beings, thus irreversibly imbuing very the term with a negative valence. Ascetical theorists had offered a variety of strategies for conceptualizing the demonic, while practitioners perfected the art of resisting its influence. John, himself a flowering of this rich society of monastic ideas, received the messy outcome of these complex processes as a given, and would go on to build on that foundation by distilling the demonological tradition even further.

Where tracing the genealogy of demonological doctrines becomes a pressing concern of many moderns who approach the topic, John’s primary interest was to understand and articulate an integrated orthodoxy. He cared less about the development of these demonological textures than their coherence. John sought to discern and articulate the Christian doctrine concerning the demonic that was the most faithful to the Scriptures and the teaching of the Fathers, and to coordinate that doctrine with every other teaching of the Church. Such intentions required John to think deeply about the subject, but write relatively little.

Demonology had emerged within Christianity as a distinctive mode of discourse: as a way of dressing down the old gods and combatting their influence – and the influence of every evil impulse – in both the world and in the Christian life. The Damascene was immersed in this tradition – indeed, he reiterates basic content in outline. At the same time, however, John flattens the textures of older treatments significantly. Gone are lengthy commentaries on the demonological prooftexts; gone the colorful and elaborate discussions of demons sometimes found in the older polemics; gone lengthy lectures on the deceptions of the demons sometimes found in the ascetical literature. As John constructs his theory of the demonic, these traditions are present in the background,
but the argument of John’s demonology is so sparse in its detail that it hardly appears to be an argument. John gives the impression of simply setting out established and well-understood truths; of simply regurgitating an already articulated and agreed upon orthodoxy. This is an illusion. John’s demonology does extraordinary work: although he certainly relies upon a tacit demonological consensus within the existing tradition, he nevertheless offers the first surviving and best enduring explicit, comprehensive account of how demons fit within the whole theological system of conciliar orthodoxy. In order to see how John moved this conversation forward, however, we will need to take a closer look at the state of demonology in the traditions that formed him. It is to this question that we will turn in our next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE

TRADITIONS: DEMONOLOGY AS IT WAS HANDED DOWN TO JOHN

When John of Damascus sat down to synthesize his demonological doctrines from the words of the Scriptures and the teachings of the Fathers, he was not, of course, simply a blank slate. John’s approach to the texts was guided by a scaffold of doctrine and piety shaped by living traditions: by the network of individuals, practices, and institutions which passed these texts and ideas on to him.\(^1\) A composite of these traditions formed an interior map for John that assigned value to each particular text – what was authoritative, what was not; what was reliable, what was not; what could be ignored and what ought to be ignored – and give him an intuition for how to resolve (apparent) contradictions in the opinions of the authoritative ancient teachers.

Some of these traditions were textual: besides the sacred Scriptures of the Biblical canon – which stood prominently at the center of the tradition\(^2\) – there were collections of sermons, letters, and other doctrinal treatises of the great Fathers of previous generations, the acts and supporting documents of local and ecumenical councils, stories about the history of the Church and her saints, manuals of practice and doctrine, collections of


\(^2\) On John’s high regard for the Scriptures, see *Exp. fid.* 90, and the analysis in Section 6.1.
florilegia, question and answers: the Greek literary landscape shifted significantly in the sixth and seventh century, with much of its wisdom being consolidated into anthologies — and in some instances, altogether new genres as we shall encounter in greater detail below. Other traditions were oral: truths John’s teachers taught him with no textual reference besides their own chain of authority. Others still were pedagogical: texts and techniques blended through teaching with a view to imparting, not only a doctrine, but a character and a way of life in community. Indeed, most of these traditions were of mixed media, involving both written and unwritten aspects. The liturgy, for instance, was one such reality: the embodied reality of liturgical experience consists of broad cycles of texts read aloud as a part of a common life and experience, within a particular interpersonal ethos that is difficult to describe and impossible to recreate precisely from performance to performance, much less across cultures and across the centuries.

3 It would be of great interest, of course, to know precisely what literature John had access to — and in what form — but this is, of course, impossible to determine. As we observed in Ch 2 was the case with Epiphanius’s Panarion, obvious use of a patristic text does not mean that John had access to the text itself in its original form: he may have been working from an epitome, or from an existing collection of florilegia, such as the DPtr. By sheer quantity and variety of references, it is possible to assert that John’s library contained some kind of Athanasian collection (including at least the De inc., the ap. Ar., and probably the ps-Athanasian Quaestiones); several works of the Cappadocian Fathers (with the Adversus Eunomium of both Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, Basil’s Hex. and Nyssa’s anthropological AnimaRes and op hom., in addition to a complete cycle of Gregory Nazianzus’s homilies); a substantial collection of Chrysostom’s sermons; a library of Cyril of Alexandria’s works (including his Thesaurus and several epistles), the Ps-Dionysian corpus, a collection of Gregory’s orations, several works of Gregory of Nyssa, notably his Catechical Oration, a Maximian collection, including his theological and polemical Opuscula and Disp. Pyr., and Nemesius’s de nat. hom.


5 John would especially emphasize this kind of tradition in response to the iconoclastic controversy, arguing that not all authoritative, apostolic tradition was committed to writing. See for instance, Exp. fid. 89, 57-61, invoking Paul’s allusion to an oral teaching in 2Thess 2:14 and 1 Cor 11:2, and Basil’s argument in De Sanct. Sp. 27.66.
The traditions that formed John of Damascus are all but lost to us: even the traditions of the present day that trace continuity to and through John have not come down to us completely unchanged. If careful reconstruction can give some hazy sense of the organs of tradition and how they functioned, it can never offer an exhaustive account of how these traditions interacted with one another and with contemporary circumstances, or what it would have been like to be formed by them. Notwithstanding the limitations of our reconstruction, however, attempting to imagine these organs of tradition draws attention to the biases of own tradition, and how they differ from those of the eighth century. In particular, where modern readers look for seams and fissures that suggest various kinds of doctrinal, cultural or ideological development, John was formed with an ear for orthodoxy: he listened to the voices of the Fathers and philosophers seeking harmony with the overall understanding of the universe and the Christian faith that had been imparted to him.

We cannot know everything we might like to know about John and his traditions, but we can frame questions to help us distinguish between what he had received from his teachers, and what constituted his distinctive contribution. To that end, we will consider two general questions: first, what did John’s formation in the tradition look like: how was it that he received this Christian faith and inheritance – where and from whom? Second, what were the defining demonological debates within the tradition as John received it, and how did the presence of those debates in John’s formation shape the way that he approached and appropriated demonological language? Working together, these two questions will help us to parse the particular dynamics that undergird the Damascene’s demonological system.
3.1 Tradition, as John Received it

John’s theological development and output took place over roughly two phases, with a shorter, formative period in Damascus (from the late 680s to around 705), and a longer, productive one in Jerusalem (from 705 until his death around 750) – although it may be helpful to further subdivide the latter into a period of active ministry (from his arrival in Jerusalem till the death of his patriarchal advocate, John V, in 735) followed by a period of monastic retirement. Parsing John’s theological biography this way links him with figures like Sophronius, John Moscus, Andrew of Crete, and Cosmas the Melodist – also ecclesiastical leaders with origins in Damascus who migrated to Jerusalem in the seventh through ninth centuries, and perhaps numbers him in what Daniel Sahas describes as a theological circle dedicated to fostering reform and renewal in the Byzantine Church in the face of the challenges of the era. However we interpret John’s biography, the mere fact of his flourishing challenges any simplistic narrative of decline in the Christian communities of Syro-Palestine in the wake of the Islamic conquests:

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6 This sketch largely follows the reconstructed summary biography of Kontouma, “John of Damascus” (2012), 28-30, although I am indebted to V. Adrahtas, “John of Damascus” (2015), 264-277, for pointing out the formative character of John’s time in Damascus. Adrhatas, however, does not follow Kontouma’s speculative reconstruction of John’s biography, extending John’s time in Damascus into the 710s. The more time ascribed to John in Damascus, the more “Damascene” the character of his formation and output.

7 Sahas, “Cultural Interaction,” 42. It is interesting (and possibly significant) that among these, only John retains the epitaph “of Damascus” See below, n 27.

8 Such indeed is Sahas’s evaluation, who see Damascus and Jerusalem together forming a “spiritual axis” dedicated to the tasks of theological and liturgical renewal (Ibid., 39). This is an attractive hypothesis and is probably worth keeping in mind as such, although it extends beyond what the extant data can support.
there must have existed a robust infrastructure in both cities to support John’s theological scholarship.⁹

Still, it is not entirely clear what this means with respect to the particularities of John’s theological formation, and how such peculiarities would have shaped his reception of the tradition. What Averil Cameron has observed of prominent churchmen of the seventh century is only slightly less true in the eighth: the significance of the geographical origins and associations of leading orthodox thinkers is muted substantially by the vast network of theological exchange taking place between major Christian centers.¹⁰ The Arab conquests certainly affected this dynamic, permanently disrupting the centuries-long Roman hegemony over the Mediterranean. Yet the transition, although dramatic, was relatively peaceful: it did not fundamentally sever linkages of pilgrimage, for instance, or invite the systematic disestablishment of ecclesiastical infrastructure. Awareness that the new situation was irrevocable came gradually, and if a Byzantine reconquest of Syro-Palestine looked unlikely during John’s time, this didn’t prevent him from praying for the victory of the Emperor.¹¹

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⁹ R. Browning has been so bold as to suggest that “the education patterns of late antiquity [may have] survived better in cities under Muslim rule than those still under Byzantine sovereignty, which were long harassed by Arab or Slav attacks” to the extent that “the dominant role of Greek culture was strengthened by the conquests of the seventh century” “Literacy in the Byzantine World,” (1978), 47. Archeological research has also challenged the notion of a simplistic “decline” specifically triggered by the rise of Islam – although the conquests certainly exacerbated a more complex decline that had begun by the dawn of the 7th C – ultimately prompting the center of gravity of the new Arab empire to move eastward to Baghdad.

¹⁰ “One of the most important problems for Byzantines in the pre-Islamic period was precisely...[a] question of identity – to what society did a monk of Sinai or Jerusalem, or an official in Alexandria actually owe his loyalty? Or seen from the other side, how far did a Byzantine in Constantinople think the culture of Byzantium still stretched?” (“New Themes and Styles in Greek Literature,” 86).

¹¹ Such is the prayer in the Octoechos attributed to John, Sunday Matins, Tone I,Canon I, Ode 9, Theotokion. I am indebted in this citation to J. Meyendorff, who highlights this prayer and adduces further
In the traditional *Lives* of John, the Damascene’s initiation into the broader intellectual network of the Christian *oikumene* is embodied in his formative studies under a Calabrian tutor.\(^{12}\) It is impossible to determine the historicity of this detail, of course, and there are good reasons to doubt it: it rings of a storyteller wont to overestimate the Western contribution to John’s theological pedigree element, and seems to have been introduced in the later Greek biographies.\(^{13}\) It is clear from his corpus, in any case, that the Damascene received a catholic and not merely parochial education: John demonstrates not only exposure to, but a singular mastery of the Greek Christian tradition. More than that, John is clearly sensitive to contemporary trends and concerns within the imperial Church and remained attuned to them throughout his life, notwithstanding his geographical remove.\(^{14}\)

\(^{12}\) *Vita* 8-11 (PG 94, 439-447) – with particular reference to the pedigree of Cosmas given in Ch 8. Interestingly, John’s fate is even more intertwined with that of Cosmas in the *Life of the Melodists* – the earliest complete *Life* of John by Kontouma’s account, and also the text to introduce Cosmas as John’s teacher. The *Life of the Melodists* conflates John’s teacher and the Bishop of Maiuma to whom the *PGn* is addressed – indeed, attempting to fuse the two into a saintly pair, perhaps inspired by other saintly duos, and perhaps the famed “Cosmas and Damian” in particular (the Greek names *Damianos* and *Damaskenos* sounding very similar). See Kontouma, “John of Damascus,” 15.

\(^{13}\) If Kontouma is correct in ascribing the *Life of the Melodists* to Michael Synkellos – a Constantinopolitan with especially developed Western sympathies – the introduction of a Calabrian into the equation fits especially well. It is worth noting that Cosmas’s tutelage appears in the surviving Arabic *Life*, but outside of its opening introduction, this version is based entirely on the Greek; notwithstanding that the earliest *Vita* materials on John composed in Arabic were a source for the Greek *Lives*. See Portillo, “Arabic Life,” 165-169.

\(^{14}\) This point is obviously sustained by allusion to John’s involvement in the iconoclastic controversy, which – even if John was addressing primarily an audience of local iconoclasts, as Griffiths has suggested, nevertheless included references to the broader situation of imperial Christianity, and was sufficiently read in Constantinople to earn the strictest condemnations from the Council of Hieria.
John’s thinking falls carefully within the lines of the conciliar, imperial theology promulgated by the six ecumenical councils and the approved Fathers\(^\text{15}\) whose theology they endorsed. Such a commitment, it is important to stress, was hardly inevitable among the Christians sharing John’s time and space. Christological factions persisted with special truculence among Syriac-speaking Christians in Syro-Palestine;\(^\text{16}\) a detail reflected in both John’s detailed attention to Christology in the context of his summation of the orthodox faith,\(^\text{17}\) and his treatment of Christological themes in separate treatises.\(^\text{18}\) By John’s time, the ecumenical councils had minutely clarified the contents of orthodox Christology, and the conciliar teachings received the enthusiastic endorsement of the ecclesiastical and monastic hierarchy of the Jerusalem Patriarchate,\(^\text{19}\) but we cannot assume these debates to have stopped altogether among the Christians of the Holy City.

Indeed, even as the churchmen of Jerusalem were among the most stalwart opponents to

\(^{15}\) On the “approved Fathers” and John’s use of the term, see n 13 in Ch. 6.

\(^{16}\) As an introduction, see, for instance, S. Brock, “The Two Poles of Syriac Tradition,” (1987).

\(^{17}\) Exp. fid. 45-74 – the entirety of “Book III” according to the division of the Latin editions – is concerned exclusively with Christological questions, professing point by point against the Christological heresies of Nestorianism, Monophysitism, and Monotheletism/Monenergism. Of particular note is the way that John traces the themes of his anthropology and understanding of the Incarnation through the human experience of Christ – an important clarification and systematization of Maximus’s insight.

\(^{18}\) Viz., the De natura composita sive contra acephalos and Contra Jacobitas (against Monophysites), as well as the Epistula de hymno trisagio, combatting the Christological interpretation of the Trisagion preferred in Monophysite and Monothelete circles; the Contra Nestorianos and De fide contra Nestorianos; and the De duabus in Christo voluntatibus against the Monotheletes.

\(^{19}\) Juvenal’s acceptance of Chalcedonian Christology on behalf of the Jerusalem Church was initially unpopular with the monastic establishment, and produced some controversy in the city for the space of roughly a generation. Once these issues were settled, however, Jerusalem’s ecclesiarchs gained a special reputation for being bastions of orthodoxy, from taking fierce action against “Origenists” (as recalled by Cyril of Scythopolis) and Monotheletes (Sophronius). Sophronius even asserted the theological reputation of Jerusalem over that of Rome (Synodical Letter, 1.5), which may have evolved into a Jerusalemite claim to rival Rome as the center of Christendom, had the city not been subsumed under Islamic rule (Wilkenson, Land Called Holy, 236-239).
the compromise position of Monothelitism, Monothelite theology had particular resonance among the local Christians,\textsuperscript{20} riding a wave of Monophysite sympathies still popular around Palestine.\textsuperscript{21} Milka Levy-Rubin has even argued that it was the ongoing unrest over Monotheletism that prevented a patriarch from being installed in Jerusalem between the death of Sophronius in the 640s and the enthronement of John V in 705.\textsuperscript{22} Levi-Rubin’s claim is largely conjectural – the reason for the interregnum remains disputed – but it draws attention to the fact that Monotheletism – while all but forgotten today – was still a significant player in the sectarian environment of eighth century Jerusalem.

The breadth of lingering Christological questions likely account for the especially close attention John gives to the nuances of the theology of Maximus the Confessor, the most famous and most articulate proponent of the dyothelete Christology adopted by the Sixth Ecumenical Council – Constantinople III – in 681. In the Damascene’s theology, Maximus’s insights take full flower: John rearticulates Maximus’s Christology – which in its original form was famously obscure, and generally articulated in forms more

\textsuperscript{20} This popular sentiment is attested by the survival a Life of Maximus the Confessor composed in Palestine in Syriac composed to discredit the saint, as well as several Marionite fragments from the region, which under the leadership of Marion opposed the Maximian theological trajectory. This theological movement seems to have found traction only in Syro-Palestine. See S. Brock, “A Monothelete florilegia in Syriac” in After Chalcedon (1985) 35-45, and “Two sets of monothelete questions to the Maximianists,” (1986), 119-140. J. Tannous develops this theory explicitly in his essay, “In Search of Monotheletism,” (2014), arguing that Monotheletism was a “regional orthodoxy” at the end of the 7th C; the “standard view” of Chalcedonians in Syria who paid attention to the finer points of Christology (30).

\textsuperscript{21} Gaza had served as the headquarters of Palestinian anti-Chalcedonianism for much of the 6th C under the leadership of Peter the Iberian and John Rufus, although the strident Monophysitism of these centers gradually waned. A. Kofsky speculates that crypto-monophysitism persisted among monastic and church leaders into the 9th C. “What Happened to the Monophysite Monasticism of Gaza?” (2004), 193.

\textsuperscript{22} “The Role of the Judean Desert Monasteries in in the Monothelite Controversy in Seventh century Palestine” (2000), 299.
occasional than systematic – in a clear and concise fashion, and situates it within a comprehensively explicated theological system. Not surprisingly, there is also a close resonance between Maximus’s demonological insights and those of John of Damascus, as we will discuss in greater detail below.

The character of John’s ascetical formation would also have shaped his appropriation of the tradition significantly. Indeed, locating John within a particular ascetical lineage would be of special interest for our purposes, since – as noted in the last chapter – ascetical traditions could vary widely in their understanding of and approach to the demonic. The precise character and content of John’s ascetical training, however, is unclear: it is even a matter of some debate whether he formally took up the monastic schema at all. We should, in any case, keep in mind the obvious feature obscured by the Vita tradition, noted above: John received his primary formation in Damascus, and doubtless took much from that experience with him to Jerusalem – his toponym, after all, remembers him as “John of Damascus,” rather than “John of Jerusalem” or “John the

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23 See for instance, P. Blowers, “Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus on Gnomic Will (Gnōmē) in Christ” (2012).
24 Section 3.3.
25 Kontouma after careful analysis considers it unlikely that John spent a significant portion of his career in the monastery, noting that the tradition associating him with St. Sabas is late and probably interpolated by iconophile Sabaites of later generations (“John of Damascus” 19-20), and if monastic retirement is likely, precisely where he retired is unknown (ibid., 29-30). See also the discussion in Section 1.2.
26 The Octoechos which John is credited with introducing into the liturgical system of the Greek Church has been traced to precedents used in Syria in the fifth century. The most likely scenario is that John adapted this service book for use in the Jerusalem Church, whence it was appropriated to Constantinople by the Studites and propagated to the whole Eastern Church.
Sabaite,” likely referencing some Damascene Greco-Syrian flavor whose precise contours have not yet been fully traced out.

Whatever the historical situation, the tradition remembers Mar Sabas as John’s principle monastic interface. By John’s time, Mar Sabas had an established reputation as the flagship monastic institution of the Judean desert. Indeed, *The Passion of Michael the Sabaite*, a text nearly contemporaneous with John, lauds the Great Lavra by proclaiming, “Just as Jerusalem is the queen of all cities, so too the lavra of Sabas is the prince of all deserts, and so far as Jerusalem is the norm of other cities, so too is Mar Sabas the exemplar for other monasteries.” Given the particular challenges attending the seventh and eighth century, when John would have arrived at Mar Sabas, the monastery was probably more invested in standardizing the received tradition and supporting the consolidation of the Jerusalem Patriarchate in a time of transition than

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27 This is a distinct contrast, we should note, from other Damascene emigrants, such as Sophronius (“of Jerusalem,” if any identifier is given to him), John Moschus, Andrew of Crete (sometimes also “of Jerusalem”), Cosmas the Melodist (“of Maiuma” or “of Jerusalem”).

28 Notwithstanding the good foundation on this question laid by J. Nasarallah in his article, “Damas et la Damascène: leurs églises à l’époque byzantine” (1985) and the contribution of D. Sahas in his analysis of John’s Jeruselmo-Damascene “circle” in “Cultural Interactions,” more work could be done on this question. The argument, unfortunately, has something of a circular quality, viz., Christian institutions in Damascus must have been strong in order to produce a figure like John Damascene, and their particular strengths must be reflected in his writings. Particularly illuminating would be the discovery of more material that can give a sense of internal shape of the institutions themselves. Interdisciplinary studies like that of N. Khalek, *Damascus after the Muslim Conquest* (2011), are also promising in cultivating new insights into the complexities of the transition through the Islamic appropriation of tropes and images from the Byzantine era.


pioneering new ascetical expressions. Mar Sabas as John knew it may have been as more a workshop for theological and liturgical collation than a lavra advancing the semi-eremitic tradition of Hagiopolite asceticism – though, of course, the two aims are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, John’s theological industry may have been responsible for shaping much of what would become the “Sabaite heritage” in later generations: it is possible, in other words, that the theological tradition of Mar Sabas reflects the Damascene’s personality and orientation as much or more than John’s output reflects a Sabaite mentality and character.

3.2 Between Origenism and Messalianism

Many of the differences of opinion between late ancient Christians on the nature of the devil and demons never became a point of contention. It does not seem to have mattered particularly, for instance, whether one believed that the subtle bodies of demons were composed of fire or air, or whether, in their attacks against human beings, they were

31 Judean desert monasticism was, for a number of reasons, inclined toward a more institutional expression than (for instance) its Gazan counterpart, which placed a higher premium on the development of the individual ascetic through spiritual direction relationship. See L. Perrone, “Byzantine Monasticism in Gaza and in the Judaean Desert: A Comparison of their Spiritual Traditions” (2012), 17-18. Correspondingly, the later Gazan monastic school had a particular bent toward the spiritual that could be taken as having anti-intellectual overtones. See Kofsky, “What happened,” 187-88.

32 The rules established for life and liturgy in the Lavra by St. Sabas (see Patrich, Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism, 229-275) seem, on the whole, to have persisted – on their continuity into the 8th C – particularly in the life of Stephen the Sabaite – see B. Pirone, “Continuità della vita monastic nell’ottavo secolo: s Stefano Sabaita,” SH, 49-62. Yet alongside of this was a growing literary activity, on which see Aristarchos Periseris, “Literary and Scribal Activities at the Monastery of St. Sabas,” SH 171-94, and Sebastian Brock, “Syriac into Greek tat Mar Sabas: The Translation of St. Isaac the Syrian” SH 201-208.

33 So J. Patrich in the eponymous volume of essays of his editorship (2001). Said volume may be critiqued for lacking an explicit discussion of this very inflection point. The “Sabaite heritage” is implicitly homogenized: John of Damascus a product and propagator of this heritage, but the extent of his impact on its substance is not explored. Additionally to be considered is whether the juxtaposed celebrations of Sabas and John Damascene may imply a memory of the latter as a kind of second founder of the monastic institution. See Section 1.2.
divided into seven principal tribes or eight or ten, or considered an anonymous and innumerable mob; whether they had stolen secrets from heaven, or simply had the kind of intellectual acuity which could enable them to devise their own deceits. Such differing opinions might be regarded as reflective of different schools of thought within the broader umbrella of Christian demonology: divergent but not entirely discordant patterns of interpreting the evidence of Scripture and experience to gain a coherent sense of the unseen world such that its mysteries could be better navigated. Only a few demonological differences reflect a deeper division, delineating divergent orientations to the unseen world that fell along sectarian fault lines. It was in those circumstances that demonology became a measure of fundamental orthodoxy.

In the fifth and sixth century, as we suggested in the previous chapter, orthodox demonology had felt out an effective middle way between the exaggerated monism attributed to Origen-Evagrius, and the exaggerated dualism of Manicheanism. But since Manicheanism had become brutally excluded and characterized as an intolerable extreme within the Christianized empire, that way ran between Origenism and more gentle, more explicitly Christian forms of good/evil dualism – a dualism imagined to be embodied, for instance, in those ascetical communities maligned as Messalian. It is not known exactly

[34] Notably, John himself frequently characterizes orthodoxy as a *via media*: see *Exp. fid.* 7; *Images* II.3, III.1; *CJ* 3; and *De fid.* *CN* 1 – an image also employed by the Cappadocians (ie, Gregory of Nyssa, or. cat. 3). Indeed, at one point (*Images* II.2), John even describes this middle way as traversing between the doctrines of those who (taught by the devil) claim that “evil, like God, is without beginning,” and those who would “confess that God, who is by nature good, is the cause of evil.” While the latter pole is only obliquely related to the doctrines of the Evagrian-Origenist system, the former clearly encompasses Manichean doctrine. Ps-Athanasius explicitly places the orthodox doctrine of the soul as falling between Origenist myths and Manichean doctrines (*QQDuc* 16, *PG* 28, 607A).

[35] Messalianism and Manicheanism, in fact, become conflated in some of the later heresiology. Anna Comnena renders Bogomilism as a fusion of the Manichean impiety (δυσσεβοῦς) and Messalian
what the historical Messalians believed and taught, or even if they really existed as such: the designation, when it emerged, was more about Greek Christians maligning misunderstood traditions of Syrian asceticism than a meaningful diagnosis of a movement of intentional, heretical malice.\textsuperscript{36} If Messalian communities did exist in some coherent, self-identified form, the summaries of their doctrine that have come down to us are not friendly. The corpus of *Homilies* attributed to Macarius the Egyptian seem to reflect a Messalian connection,\textsuperscript{37} but that relationship is complex – particularly given that Macarian spiritual tropes became widely and fruitfully integrated into mainstream, orthodox monastic spirituality.\textsuperscript{38} In part through the example of John’s usage, Messalianism became the archetypal spiritualist heresy: an epithet attached to individuals and groups perceived to place an emphasis on prayer and spiritual experience in a way that undermines the role of the sacraments and the hierarchy of the Church.

Notwithstanding this ambiguity about the actual content of Messalian belief and practice, the anti-ecclesiastical and anti-sacramental posture correlates to a distinctive conceptualization of the intimate struggle with evil and the demonic. John himself

\begin{itemize}
  \item bestiality (\textit{Alexiad} 15.8); Nicephorus Gregoras regularly joins the two as a precursor to “Palamism” (passim in \textit{Hist. Rom.} 3.324-457).
  \item \textsuperscript{36} See the fine analysis of D. Caner, “In Support of ‘People Who Pray:’ Apostolic Monasticism and the Messalian Controversy” (2002).
  \item \textsuperscript{37} For a detailed analysis of this problem, see K. Fistchen, \textit{Messalianismus und Antimesalianismus} (1998).
  \item \textsuperscript{38} See M. Plested, \textit{Macarian Legacy} (2004).
\end{itemize}
witnesses this relationship: several of the “impious” (δυσσεβοῦς) doctrines he draws “from their book”\(^{39}\) impinge directly on demonological questions. For instance:\(^{40}\)

- Satan dwells enhypostatically with man and dominates him in all things.
- Satan and the demons possess (κατέχουσι) human minds, and human nature is shared in common with the nature of evil spirits.
- Satan and the Holy Spirit dwell together in man, and not even the apostles were cleansed from the power of their operation (τῆς ἐνεργομένης ἐνεργείας).
- A person remains permeated (συμπέφυρται) with sin even after baptism.
- Spiritual persons perceive the operation and activity of sin and of grace both inwardly and outwardly.\(^{41}\)
- Fire is a creative force (δημιουργόν).\(^{42}\)
- Evil is a nature.

In very general (and, admittedly, problematic)\(^{43}\) terms, we might say that where Origenists delighted in the theological project of subjugating demons to broad cosmological processes, Messalians kept their demonology in a visceral mode, preferring the immediacy and expansiveness of poetic language over the precision of the philosophical. Such tendencies would run afoul of guardians of orthodoxy for divergent reasons: the Origenist drift because of its tendency to sublimate Christian history to

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\(^{39}\) Precisely what book” John was talking about is unclear. Timothy of Constantinople furnishes a similar list in his *Recp. Haer.*, the lists do not overlap in their contents. It is possible that John had access to an ascetical manual of the Messalians – or an anti-Messalian forgery of the same. The Council of Ephesus (431) specifically condemns a Messalian ascetikon, but does not disclose its contents. John may be referring to that text or that tradition.

\(^{40}\) See *Haer.* 80.5-40.

\(^{41}\) Implied in this point of doctrine is the full sensible perception of spiritual beings and qualities, explicitly noted in other objectionable points. See n 53 below.

\(^{42}\) John will explicitly denounce anyone who holds such a principle (viz., that angels or any kind of substance is capable of creation) as speaking as “the mouthpiece of his father, the devil” (*Exp. fid.* 17.83)

\(^{43}\) This, of course, is a broad characterization, and in fact may have almost nothing to do with what historical sects that thought of themselves (or were maligned as) Origenist or Messalian actually believed or taught. This usage, however, follows the polemical portrayal of sectarian opinion, which was often sweepingly dismissive in this way. Such comments were at times rooted in a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the sectarian position; at other times, a quality of the doctrine was exaggerated to heighten the contrast to orthodoxy. My read of John’s heresiology (see Section 4.3) is that John rigorously followed the second approach. In crafting his demonology, therefore, John’s characterization of Messalianism and Origenism may have followed something like these contours.
cosmic myth, and the Messalian because it chose language so vivid that unfriendly readers took it to describe evil as substantially existent. In fact, these tendencies are not mutually exclusive: some texts are eclectic, and fuse tropes from a variety of sources: the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*, for example, which we will treat in Chapter Five. Nor are they altogether foreign to orthodoxy: indeed, both Origenistic and Messalian themes survived precisely because they percolated into mainstream monastic doctrine and practice in a tailored form. Working from the integrated center point of orthodoxy, however, systematic thinkers like John of Damascus avoided excesses of either sort.

Within the project of ascetical demonology, the Messalian tendency – following its preference for visceral and immediate demonic imagery – reaches for metaphors of mixture and mingling, clothing or indwelling.\(^{44}\) The demons are materially present within the psyche: by virtue of human fallenness, they are entitled to an internal base of operations within the human person. When Adam transgressed the command, “the serpent entered and became the master of the house and became like a second soul with the real soul.”\(^ {45}\) Macarius-Symeon – whose views are often taken as leaning toward the Messalian pole – evocatively opines,

> The heart is but a small vessel, yet there are dragons and there are lions; there are poisonous beasts and all the treasures of evil. And there are rough and uneven roads; there are precipices. But there is also God, also the angels, the life and the kingdom, the light and the Apostles, the treasures of grace – there are all things.\(^ {46}\)

\(^{44}\) See for instance, ps-Macarius, *Hom* 7.2, 10.11, 16.3, and many others. Especially of note is *Hom.* 15.168ff: once Eve listened to the voice of the serpent, sin – which had been outside, in the mouth of the demonic suggestion – came inside, and now possesses both the “authority and gumption (ἐξουσίαν καὶ παρρησίαν)” to enter the human heart.

\(^{45}\) *Hom* 15. Compare the first three points of objectionable doctrine from John’s *Haer* 80, highlighted above.

\(^{46}\) *Hom.* 43.7.
Even more directly, “Evil is real for us” – note, almost as opposed to being a privation or corruption of the good – “because it lives in our heart and operates there by suggesting wicked and obscene thoughts, and preventing us from pouring out pure prayers.” In context, Marcarius actually affirms the non-entity of evil: the evocative language, nevertheless, could be misread or misconstrued.

The Origenists, by contrast, emphasize the *nous* as completely incorporeal and so ultimately incomprehensible – almost like God himself. “The *nous* is free of both form and matter,” Evagrius teaches, and to purified *nous* and liberate it from every material impression (ἐπιγειον νοήματος) is the aim of pure prayer. For this reason, however, the angels and demons are paradoxically bound to interact with the *nous* through some kind of sensate phenomenon: being unable to manifest themselves immediately to the *nous*, they instead affect it by manipulating things in the physical world, projecting representations into the organs of perception, or stimulating impulses in the lower soul. This mystical doctrine has a specific pay-out with respect to demonology: the demons, being of a courser nature than the *nous*, are fundamentally incapable of peering into our thoughts, but must read them through the indications of our bodies. Likewise, they must always attack us from the outside, even though the suggestion of a thought occurs so

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47 *Hom.* 16.4.

48 *KGn* I.46.


50 *KGn* V.18.

51 *Prak.* 47. This is of only slight disadvantage to the demons, however, since – between the subtlety of their bodies and the aeons of practice they have had deceiving human beings – they are very good at guessing the particulars of our internal state with only the slightest bodily indications. See, for instance, Athanasius, *VA* 31-32; Cassian *Conferences* 7.15-16. Anastasius of Sinai suggests that Satan, being a light and incorporeal spirit, is better at reading medical indicators than skilled physicians (*QA* 79.3).
intimately as to seem interior. The basic problem, from an Evagrian perspective, lies in an over-identification with our physical body: attaining to a greater purity of the *nous*, accordingly, naturally corresponds to an ability to distinguish between demonic suggestions and the proper movements of our intellectual nature.

In fact, from John’s standpoint, neither position is completely satisfactory. The Messalian position is at once too pessimistic and too optimistic: too pessimistic in that the indwelling power of sin cannot be sacramentally destroyed;\(^{52}\) too optimistic in positing that this perfection is ultimately possible through application of (correct) prayer.\(^{53}\) On the other hand, the Origenistic approach exaggerates the inherent ontological continuity between the *nous* and the divine essence. If the *nous* is substantially divine, what, then, of redemption? The tendency that evidently emerged within certain Origenist circles was to

\(^{52}\) Doctrines attributed to them “from their book” include that “not even baptism makes the human being perfect...but only prayer as they cultivate it;” and that “even after baptism, a person is permeated (συμπέφυρται) with sin,” and “the incorruptible, godly garment” is received “not through baptism, but through prayer” (*Haer.* 80.11-18). Compare ps-Macarius, *Hom.* 15.189-190, “Even after baptism [the demon] freely enters in and does what he pleases;” *Hom* 16.4, even “when a man is deep and rich in grace, there still remains in him a remnant of evil;” *Hom* 17.4, although there are some in whom grace works in peace, even still within “evil remains present hiddenly, and the two ways of existence – that according to the principle of light, and that according to the principle of darkness – vie for dominance;” *Hom* 27.

\(^{53}\) John purported this group to believe in the possibility of a “sensation of the Holy Spirit (αἴσθησις τοῦ πνεύματος),” (80.69) corresponding with a sensation of the indwelling sin being driven out like “smoke or fire or a serpent or another such beast” (80.57), after which, the ascetic is held by the to be “blessed, perfect, and free from sin” (80.72). This pattern of doctrine is less evident in ps-Macarius, who frequently returns to the reality of human fallibility, even from the higher reaches of grace (ie., *Hom.* 15.500-505: “Such is human nature … that one may be totally surrendered to the Holy Spirit and intoxicated with heavenly things … and yet turn to evil.”) However, see for instance *Hom.* 8.11: it is “possible for anyone” through striving in prayer, to “escape from the darkness of the evil demons,” and thus “rendered worthy to be with the Lord.”
blur the distinction between Christ and the rational creatures,\textsuperscript{54} and – concomitantly – to dissolve the drama of salvation itself into a kind of automatic cosmic process.\textsuperscript{55}

What would ultimately emerge to mediate between the Origenist tendencies on the one hand and Messalian tendencies on the other was a more nuanced understanding of the psychology of choice and operation of the will. Indeed, Christian theology in its ascetical appropriation seems to have a perennial tendency to invite sophistication on this subject. The individual will is a beautiful yet fragile concept, ever at risk of being absorbed into by the overwhelming pressure of divine providence on the one hand, or else becoming trapped in indissoluble bondage by spiritual foes – if indeed all rational natures are free, and the demons are cleverer than we are. Offering an account of how the human person can act freely and responsibly is one of the most delicate and most important questions in theological anthropology. Augustine laid a robust foundation for this question in the fifth century for the Latin-speaking Church, but his reception in the Greek world was late and partial.\textsuperscript{56} In the East, the critical contribution on the question came from Maximus the Confessor, with John of Damascus subsequently consolidating

\textsuperscript{54} Justinian’s letter of 553 (\textit{Ep. syn. Orig.}, Diekamp, 94) and Anathema 13 against Origen (\textit{Canones xv}, Diekamp 95) both condemn the Origenist proposition that “there will be no difference (διαφορά) at all between Christ and the other rational beings.” Cyril of Scythopolis remembers Cyriacus as charging that the Origenists with the claim that “we shall be equal with Christ (ἴσοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ) at the apokatástasis” (vit. C. 12, 230, 9-10), further recalling the “isochrists” as one of the leading Origenist parties. Notably, Origen holds to the maintenance of individuality; Evagrius less so (see for instance, \textit{KGN} V.81). The proposition takes on an especially radical and brazen cast, however, in the \textit{Book of the Holy Hierotheos}, as we shall see in Ch. 5.

\textsuperscript{55} This view is ascribed to the Origenists, for instance, in the 14\textsuperscript{th} anti-Origenist anathema (\textit{Canones xv}, Diekamp 95), which asserts the eventual reunion of all reasonable beings and the destruction of numbers, bodies, and hypostases. This idea can be found obliquely in Evagrius (ie, \textit{KGN} I.58).

his insights into a compact theological system that would become the foundation for the theology of the churches with Byzantine patrimony.  

3.3 **Demonic Dimensions of the Monothelite Controversy**

The Monothelite controversy did not arise specifically out of the ascetic debates surrounding Origenism and Messalianism, but it intersected with several similar concerns, and the position chosen on the matter would have important consequences for conceptualizing the ascetical project. Unfortunately, because the Monothelite movement was effectively eliminated, it not entirely clear how these implications were embraced in the practice of faith. If, as the old scholarly narrative suggested, the doctrine was formulated merely as a matter of political expediency to persuade Christians of various Monophysite sects of the orthodoxy of the synthesis presented in the Chalcedonian Definition, it is possible that such implications would have been simply ignored. Lately, however, this narrative has been challenged: the likelier circumstance is that the origin and persistence of Monotheletism is more organic and diffuse; that it considered itself the

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58 Notwithstanding the persistence of the Maronites, who historically professed the doctrine at certain points, but abandoned it as their community and tradition was eventually regularized into mainstream conciliar orthodoxy, with modern Maronites in communion with Rome. See M. Moosa, The Maronites in History (1986). For a reading of the Marionites as a specifically Antiochene Church, see P. Naaman, The Maronites (2011).

authentic branch of Chalcedonianism rooted in the Scriptural-patristic and Conciliar heritage, much like the Maximian/Dyotolete position that would ultimately predominate.\textsuperscript{60} If this is the case, it stands to reason that defenders of the Monothelete cause would have grounded their case in an ascetical expression transparent to their Christology, much as Maximus’s asceticism was rooted in his.

The logic of the Monothelete position suggests that will follows person, and that Jesus Christ, accordingly, as a single, integrated person, would have a single will. This makes intuitive sense: it is difficult to imagine the integrity of an individual person without some integrity of his process of action; and certainly, interpersonal experience affirms that differences of will correspond closely to differences of person. Importantly, in Christ, this will was taken to be exclusively divine, not a synthesis of divine and human wills: “human willing” – often described as “fleshly willing” – was rendered so problematic by Monothelite anthropology that it had to be categorically excluded from Christ.\textsuperscript{61} With this understanding, it would seem that asceticism would pertain to the elimination within oneself (by divine grace) of those impulses which are contrary to virtue. The eleventh century monothelete Thomas al-Kafartab seems to imply as much when he asserts that the baptized believer – like Christ and like the pre-lapsarian Adam – is without a “fleshly will,” and freely capable – accordingly – of being in relationship with and contemplation of the divine.\textsuperscript{62} If this is the case, however, how is the ascetic to

\textsuperscript{60} J. Tannous, “In Search of Monotheletism,” (2014).

\textsuperscript{61} See Hovorun, Will, Action, and Freedom, 127. But even if the natural human will is rendered completely sinless, the Monotheletes would still have objected to its addition to Christ as introducing the potential for conflict between the persons of the Trinity. Instead, without a human will, Christ’s human nature was in complete and perfect submission to the divine will.

\textsuperscript{62} Ten Chapters (Chartouni, 22-26).
make sense of the ongoing experience of impulses running contrary to virtue? Are these simply indicative of an imperfect acquisition of religion?

The conciliar orthodox tradition followed by John of Damascus rejected Monothelitism, affirming instead that Christ, as fully divine and fully human, operates within his one person with both a divine will and a human will. This implies the subtle notion that will is a property of rational natures (οὐσία/φύσις), rather than of individual persons (ὑπόστασις/πρόσωπον). But while this doctrine offers, against Monothelitism, a strong affirmation of the goodness of the human will in its natural state, it also involves the awkward assertion that there are multiple wills within Christ himself. In what sense, then, does Christ still act as a unified person?

The straightforward accounts of the Gospel are suddenly problematized as a hidden relationship between Jesus’s divine and human wills is now detected beneath the apparent unity of his historical action: it is little wonder that one primary strategies of anti-Dyothelete polemics was to provide reams of prooftexts seeking to highlight the self-evident absurdity of positing two wills in Christ. Moreover, the generalized metaphysical claim implicit in the Dyothelete position

63 Importantly, however, the particular act of willing still pertains to the person/hypostasis.

64 Indeed, the heresiological claim of Monotheletes against their Dyothelete opponents was that Dyotheletism was a form of Nestorianism. “Their grandfather is Arius and their paternal uncle, Nestorius,” claimed Thomas al-Kafartab (Ten Chapters (Chartouni, 33)). Corresponding, the formula given by the 11th C monothelete Book of Direction: “Not two Christs, not two persons, not two energies, not two wills” (Fahed, Kitab al-Huda (2011), 32)

65 The Ten Chapters Thomas al-Kafartab are especially rich with such citations from the Gospel accounts of the words and deeds of Jesus, collated with the assumption that the implications of the verses vis-à-vis the will of Christ would be immediately obvious. Even the earliest works still abound in Gospel citations, even when their format is more dialectical – see S. Brock, “Two Sets of Monothelete Questions to the Maximianists” (1986). Likewise, one Maronite rite of ordination includes John 6:38 – “I have come, not to do my will, but the will of him who sent me” as an anti-Dyophysite charge to the newly ordained. See tr. of M. Moousa, The Maronites in History (1986), 207, from Vat. Syr 48.
suggests that there is a single human will common to the human nature—indeed, there are more wills in the person of Jesus Christ than there are in all of humanity. How, then, is the faculty of willing individuated among persons; whence the multiplicity of devices and desires within the human community?

It would go beyond our scope of this project to outline in detail the full theory of the will as it was articulated and advanced by Maximus and John. It is important, however, to highlight the contribution to the understanding the process of willing which they made by clarifying the role of the *gnome* (loosely, “opinion” or “inclination”) within it. The *gnome* shapes and particularizes our desires based on our (incomplete and faulty) apprehension of what is true and good, cooperating with our habits to shape our inclinations before an exercise of choice is made—indeed, these faculties serve to determine the possibilities that we can even perceive. Because every human choice is made in this kind of volitional context, the free act of choice is never simply an arbitrary selection between clearly differentiated options, and—despite the metaphysical unity of the human will in itself—the decisions of human actors can vary widely, even in circumstances that are nearly identical.

Ironically, however, according to the Maximian-Damascene schema, the way that Jesus Christ exercised his will while on earth was always considerably simpler than it is for the rest of humanity. Because Christ’s human nature operated at all times with perfect

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transparency to his divine nature, there was no _gnomic_ dimension to his will: he did not suffer from the kind of ambiguity and uncertainty that attends the action of every other post-lapsarian human individual on account of sinful ignorance. This fact has an immediate demonological corollary: the demonic temptation for non-lapsarian humans (viz., Adam and Christ) is radically externalized; the devil must attack those without _gnome_ from the outside. At the same time, then, the ambiguity of the lapsarian human predicament is preserved, and indeed, profoundly affirmed: in the _gnomic_ will, we have an interior weakness that, while not itself sinful, is especially receptive to demonic suggestions, and incorporates those suggestions into our volitional process in such a subtle way that it seems as though these thoughts come from inside of us. This approach salvages for respectable theological discourse the immediacy of Messalian demonological language, but stops short of an overrealized “indwelling demon.” Satan is not materially intermingled in the human soul, but he possesses a precisely defined base of operation within our psychology in the form of a corruption of will which establishes a sympathy with the thoughts generated externally by the demons, whether by deception (sensorially manifest or phantastical), suggestive ideation, or the manipulation of bodily humors to inflame physiological impulse.

68 For Maximus’s account for how the devil tempted Christ from the outside, see _LA_ 10-15, _PG_ 90:920A-924B. John of Damascus is explicit on this point: “The evil one attacked Christ from the outside, not through thoughts, just as he had with Adam. After all, [the devil] did not attack that one [Adam] through thoughts, but through the serpent.” (Exp. fid. 64.17-19). This idea is also present, if somewhat more ambiguously, in ps-Macarius: see n 44, above.

69 John of Damascus is especially lucid on this point: “Adam willingly heeded (θέλων ὑπήκουσε) [the Devil’s suggestion], and having willed, he ate. Accordingly, the will is first thing to suffer in us,” and it is necessary that the Word in becoming incarnate assume a human will in order to heal it (Exp. fid. 58.133-136). The human will is not inherently sinful, it is weakened, and becomes infected with sin by the “oversowing of the devil (ἐκ τῆς τοῦ διαβόλου ἐπισποδῆς) voluntarily established together (ἐκουσώς συνισταμένη) in our freely-exercised choice (αὐτέξουσιῳ προαιρέσει), not prevailing over us by force (οὐ βίᾳ ἡμῶν κρατοῦσα)” (Exp. fid., 64.5-6).
Systematically emphasizing the unity of the will in this way, moreover, serves to undermine the tendency towards conceptualizing human consciousness as fragmented into competing good and evil impulses, which is distinctly possible when admitting a strong framework of demonism. There is not, it should be emphasized, any dis-unity within the volitional structure of human individual, by which it is possible to speak of the human person as comprised of discrete, competing centers of willful consciousness. The later contemporary of Maximus, Anastasius of Sinai, responds to this kind of proposition when asked: “Isn’t it the case that the devil is the cause of every sin and sexual misconduct, and we should blame him for them all?” Anastasius deftly disarms this loaded question by replying.

The devil does not compel (βιάζεται) anyone, but only suggests. A bad habit (κακὴ συνήθεια), on the other hand, does compel a man, such that it is stronger and more evil than even the devil himself. Thus, we should blame ourselves.

Human beings, as Maximus and his theological heirs emphasized, exercise integrated free choice within a finely-balanced spiritual universe, which stands to be definitively (if perhaps imperceptibly) altered by the impact of individual human decisions, whether for good or for ill. The intellect finds itself between an angelic and a demonic spirit, each working towards its own ends: and it has within itself the power to follow one and resist the other.

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70 QA 34.

71 John would firmly agree that the devil cannot force us: see, for instance, *Exp. fid.* 18.30-31, 44.14 the crucial line of *Exp. fid.* 64.5-6, quoted above (n 69). However, he also substantially downplays the role of “habits,” acknowledging it (curiously enough) only with respect to the influence of stars. While celestial patterns may favor certain dispositions here on earth, ultimately, “habits are up to us (ἕξεις τῶν ἑφ’ ἡμῖν), since they are controlled and cultivated (ὁγονται τρεπόμεναι) by reason” (*Exp. fid.* 21.138-139). We shall return to this theme in Section 6.3.

72 Maximus, *Cap. char.* III.92. As M. Pleston points out, this is an ancient theme with particular resonance with ps-Macarius, see *Macarian Legacy*, 233. Crucially, however, Maximus’s appropriation of
3.4 Demonology in Debates about the Saints and the Afterlife

Of course, however, demonology had a resonance echoing far beyond technical conversations about asceticism and high-profile Christological inquiries. In the mid-sixth century – perhaps in connection with the so-called second Origenist controversy\textsuperscript{73} – a cluster of questions began to emerge about the nature of the hereafter and the world of human spirits after death. While debates over these questions never reached sufficient intensity to inspire conciliar clarification, the discussion was far reaching: textual residues of the conversation extend over at least three languages and three centuries.\textsuperscript{74}

The landmark treatises that engage with these questions emerged in the late sixth century: Eustratius of Constantinople (d 582) outlined a systematic treatise – which comes down to us unfinished – \textit{De statu animarum post mortem}, in which he defends the doctrine that the saints continue intercede and perform miracles for the living. Within a few decades, the \textit{Dialogues} of Pope Gregory the Great (d 604) would pick up on similar themes – likely as the result of conversations he been exposed to while serving as \textit{apokrisarius} in

\textsuperscript{73} Besides temporal coincidence, the debates share two common elements: first, a concern for personal eschatology, and the fate (both intermediately and eternally) of created spirits, which in turn impinges upon the general architecture of the spiritual world; second, architechtonic role that the application of philosophical categories plays in the debate. See A. Treiger, \textquote{Palestinian Origenism and the Early History of the Maronites} (2015).

\textsuperscript{74} As a helpful introduction, see M. Dal Santo, \textit{Debating the Saints' Cults in the Age of Gregory the Great} (2012), whose work – while it focuses on Gregory and the Latin tradition – nevertheless gives a good introduction to the ecumenical dimensions of the conversation, with consideration given to both the Greek and Syriac traditions.
Constantinople between 579 and 585. Most important for our purposes, however, are the late seventh and early eighth century *erotapokriseis* that reflect an ongoing interest in this debate up to and beyond John’s time. As noted in Chapter One, there is a major and influential Byzantine homily on this subject is attributed to the Damascene: the *Oratio de his qui in fide dormierunt*. Although it has been adduced as inauthentic – it is a ninth century text, probably penned by Michael Synkellos – the *Oratio* is nevertheless worth keeping in mind, both as a data point for the trajectory of the conversation, and as representing something of how John’s legacy was remembered. Indeed, it is not impossible that – in assuming John’s name – the author of the homily sought to speak out of John’s ethos, perhaps even representing some fragments of his teaching on the subject. As we will see below, John was aware of and engaged in these conversations,

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76 There are two major collections of *Quaestiones* dated from the late-seventh through mid-eighth century: the *Quaestiones et Responsiones* of Anastasius of Sinai (ed. CCSG 59) and the ps-Athanasian *Quaestiones ad Antiochem duce* (PG 28, 597-700). Recognition of the importance of these traditions for the development of John’s thinking has been delayed in large part because of the complexity of the manuscript traditions: there are still basic philological questions that remain unresolved, especially in the case of the the ps-Athanasian questions. This lacunae can be glossed over in appreciating John’s work as a whole, but in focusing on his demonology, these uncertainties create an unavoidable gap. John leans heavily on the ps-Athanasian *Quaestiones* for his demonology, deriving his observation in *Exp. fid.* 18 that the demonic differs from the angelic by will rather than nature (Q 7). Moreover, he explicitly quotes a piece of Q 39 in his florilegia against the iconoclasts.

77 PG 95, 247-277, for the manuscript tradition, cf. J. M. Hoeck, “Stand und Aufgaben,” 39 n 3. Hoeck makes this identification; see also D. Stiernon, “Michel le Synelle (saint), hagiographe byzantin,” in *DSp* 10 (1980), 1193-1197, and Kontouma “St. John of Damascus,” 11. See also the discussion in Ch 1, at n 115.

78 This mechanism has been observed and commented on extensively with respect to the Christian/Muslim *Disputation* attributed to John of Damascus: see Ch 1, n 95; Ch 4, n 175. Granted, no such mechanism is explicitly noted in this case, but it may be implied through the orality if the genre.
although he avoided speaking directly to the questions at the heart of the debate in interest of brevity and precision.

All these texts – from Eustratius and Gregory in the sixth century, to the seventh and eighth century *Quaestiones*, to ps-John Damascene in the ninth – share major concerns about the nature and structure of the spiritual world that have important implications in the day-to-day piety for the lay Christian.\(^79\) The first and most urgent of these questions is about the nature of soul, and about its postmortem experience in particular. As the *Quaestiones* frame the question, what is the human soul: what are its qualities, where it is constituted in the body and how does it operate in the body? When and how is it separated from the body and what does it do until the resurrection?\(^80\)

Concomitantly, what communion do the dead have with the living?\(^81\) Does the tradition of praying for the dead or celebrating a liturgy on their behalf have any benefit for them?\(^82\) What can we expect when we die: will our souls experience some anticipation of

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\(^79\) Per Munitiz’s assessment, the major the Anastasian *Quaestiones* are pastoral in their focus, seeking to answer questions that are real (or – at least – realistic) for everyday Christians (CCSG Tr 7, 12). This would apply to the Ps-Athanasian *Quaestiones* as well, being concerned with a similar range of issues.

\(^80\) These questions are posed explicitly in Anastasius, *QA* 19.1 and ps-Athanasius *QQDuc* 15 (PG 28, 605D-608A); see also *Stat. anim.* 174-179; Gregory, *Dialogues* IV.3.

\(^81\) This question has more ancient roots: being related to the Biblical *topos* of the Witch of Endor (1Sam 28), it received significant attention among the Church Fathers, see R. Greer, *The “Belly-Myther” of Endor* (2003). The earlier debates questioned whether Samuel’s appearance was an authentic (though illicit) vision (Justin Martyr, Origen, John Chrysostom, Ambrose) or a demonic deception (Tertullian, Augustine, Jerome, Hippolytus, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius, Ephrem). The later debates have a somewhat different effect: Eustratius treats it at length as indicative of a posthumous mechanism of recognition (*Stat. anim.* 1873-1888); Anastasius affirms the reality of the vision to locate it as a phenomenon particular to the time before the resurrection of Christ (*QA* 63).

\(^82\) Anastasius, *QA* 42, ps-Athanasius *QQDuc* 34; Eustratius, *Stat. anim.*, 2342-2726, Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* IV.55-58. Indeed, may well have been Eustratius’s orienting and principle concern in *Stat. anim.* (see G. Dagron, “L’Ombre d’un doute” (1992), 62), as well as Gregory (Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cult*, 76-79).
our eternal reward? Will we be reunited with our loved ones, or will they be unrecognizable to us apart from the features of our physical bodies? The second concern is intertwined with the first: how do the saints continue their ministry of miracles to the living when they themselves are deceased? How do we distinguish their ministration from that of an angel, or the deception of a demon? For that matter, what makes the saints themselves recognizable in their apparitions? These texts offer little by way of explicit conversation about the demonic, nevertheless, in a broader perspective, these are all daimonological concerns. If the narrow Christian definition of demons obscures the relevance of these conversations to demonology, a thorough contemplation of these questions would shape an understanding of the spiritual world that necessarily had consequences for understanding the demonic.

Eustratius’s introductory comments to his treatise On the State of Souls after Death demonstrates how these problems converged as a theological preoccupation, and the motivation for discussing them. “There are some,” complains Eustratius, who want to go on debating (ἐσχολακότων) and philosophizing about human souls, generating doubt about them, and saying that, in their transference from this life and in the separation of souls from bodies, souls are inactive (ἀνενέργετο) – whether they are the souls of the saints, or souls of some other kind. According to this argument, then, if the souls of the saints are manifest to

83 Anastasius, QA 20-21, ps-Athanasius, QQDuc 20-21; Gregory the Great, Dialogues IV.25
84 Ps-Athanasius, QQDuc 22-25; Anastasius, QA 19.10-11, 21; See also, Theodore Studite, Parva Cat. 22.
85 Ps-Athanasius, QQDuc 26, Anastasius, QA 19.8-9.
86 Recalling especially the Scriptural logion cautioning that “Satan transforms himself into an angel of light;” (2Cor 11:14) see Ps-Athanasius, QQDuc, 29, 35; also the suggestion of John Climicas in Scal. par. 3.29 (PG 88, 672A).
87 While this question was not asked directly in the erotapokriseis, it is an implicit issue involved in the discussion, and likely precipitated certain dimensions of the iconoclastic controversy, per Dagron, “L’Ombre d’un doute.”
88 Recalling, as noted above (Section 2.2), that the term daimon had a broader application in the Hellenistic imagination than in its Christian appropriation.
someone, it is not a manifestation according to their own substance and being; rather, some divine power takes the form (σχηματιζόμενη) and works under the appearance of the saint: for they say that the souls are in a place where they neither have power over bodies, nor can they manifest to anyone in this life.89

It would seem, in other words, that a fresh skeptical spirit had risen up in the Byzantine world of late sixth century – at least, there emerged a group of people engaged in “debating,” “philosophizing,” and “generating doubt” on what was generally held to be true about state of souls after death with sufficient tenacity to attract the attention of churchmen like Eustratius – and the questions they posed would continue to generate conversation well into the seventh- and eighth centuries. It was, as Gilbert Dagron has famously described, a “shadow of a doubt” about the miraculous world described in the vibrant hagiographical narratives that had come to occupy so much of the Byzantine cultural space and imagination.90 Such skepticism may well have been the secular counterpart to – if not a byproduct of – the same consolidating impulse better preserved in theological literature of the same period.91 These centuries witnessed the beginnings a new phase of scholastic humanism represented by figures like Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus, and along with them, the rise of new encyclopedic projects and collections florilegia,92 as well as advances in medicine involving a combination of Galenic and neo-Aristotelian insight. Anastasius of Sinai in particular seems to be

89 Stat. anim. 50-60
92 This impulse has been described by P. Lemerele as “le premier humanisme byzantine” as treated by his 1971 book of that title. (The English translation H. Lindsay and A. Mofatt Byzantine Humanism (1986) served to bring Lemerele’s analysis to a larger audience). See also, P. Odorico, “La Cultura Della Συλλογή.”
familiar with the latest scientific advances of his day, and in his works attempts to mediate his presentation of the Christian faith between the best of contemporary science and pietistic supernaturalism.93

The skeptical position that prompted these daimonological conversations was not merely advocating a rejection of the resurrection and the world of spirits:94 a view so extreme could have been disregarded as non-Christian, and generally ignored by the leaders of the Church as such.95 In order to stimulate an enduring conversation, the argument would have to be much subtler and more sophisticated, drawing upon a stronger foundation of common assumptions and common authorities. Dirk Krausmüller has theorized that a single lost treatise on the soul and the resurrection stood at the heart of the controversy – or at least, that ps-Athanasius and Anastasius had a common source document they were adapting in their questions on the soul and the resurrection, which bore an uncanny resemblance to the same concerns expressed in several other sixth to ninth century treatises.96 Krausmüller’s hypothesis is impossible to prove, of course, short


94 “What makes the position [of the skeptics so peculiar],” notes Constans, “is that, rather than reject the reality of saintly apparitions as such, they sought instead to account for them on the basis of an entirely different explanatory model. Both sides accepted the phenomenological surface, as it were, of saintly apparitions, but whereas Eustratius saw such apparitions as having their direct ontological source within the persons of the saints themselves, his opponents argued that they were more like visual metaphors the latent content of which was not the soul of a dead saint, but the absolute power of divinity itself” (“An Apology for the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity,” (2002), 272).

95 Nevertheless, as Constans notes, Eustratius periodically does allude to a radical position (“An Apology for the Cult of Saints,” 273 n 14). Dal Santo follows Constans’s analysis on this point (Debating the Saints’ Cult, 35). It is important to clarify, however, that this was not a “majority view” versus “minority view” within the camp of Eustratius’s adversaries. Eustratius means to correct one position (the argument that souls are inactive after death) and reject the other (that the soul is destroyed with the death of the body). See also n 105 below.

96 “‘At the resurrection we will not recognize one another:’ radical devaluation of social relations in the lost model of Anastasius’s and Pseudo-Athanasius’ Questions and Answers,” (2013).
of discovering the lost source treatise and analyzing its contents – but it is a useful
touchstone for imagining a consolidated position against which Christian intellectualsof
the seventh and eighth centuries – John of Damascus included – sought to articulate their
own understanding of these subjects.

At the heart of this daimonological conversation about the soul and the afterlife
was an effort to synthesize Origenistic impulses about the nature of the soul within an
Aristotelian psychological framework. On the one hand, the Origenistic position
entertained a high view of its psychic essence, tending towards the divinity of the nous
and the ultimate perfection of the eschatological body. The Aristotelian position, on the
other hand, emphasized the unity of the soul with the body, and the necessity of the body
for the operations of the soul. 97 Indeed, although the state of the soul after death was the
major contested point, speculation about the soul constitutes most likely starting point for
the germination of a skeptical Christian position, and perhaps its hypothetical lost
treatise. The creedal tradition had made at least a partial definition of the eternal destiny
of the human person – viz., all Christians had come to profess a belief in the “resurrection
of the body” – but there was no corresponding statement about the soul. Nor indeed was
the soul subject to any kind of authoritative definition or dogmatization: quite to the

97 Krausmüller’s analysis is especially helpful here (“At the Resurrection,” 218-220), although
Krausmüller emphasizes the anti-Origenist aspects that have been synthesized into the “lost source” (in
particular, emphasizing that the resurrection bodies will be in Adamic/Chritic form, rather than spheres)
rather than Aristotelian. Constans similarly tries to reconstruct the point of view of Eustratius’s opponents,
emphasizing their Aristotelian background and the Syraic soul sleep tradition, but overlooking the way that
Origenistic and Neoplatonic trajectories might reach the same conclusion (“An Apology for the Cult of
Saints” 278-281).
contrary, many Christian theologians encouraged speculation on the soul, both by word and by example endorsing such meditations as safe and salutary. The description of the soul as a “noetic, bodiless, impassible, immortal essence” preserved by Ps-Athanasius may well come close to the original problematic sentiment. Anastasius of Sinai significantly qualifies this estimation, stressing that the soul is god-like “not by nature but by grace,” and describing it instead as “by essence incomprehensible to us as humans: invisible, inexplicable, and impalpable, it is immortal and incorruptible.” However, these qualities, by Anastasius’s account, attend to the “image of God” in the human soul: and just as the invisible powers of the invisible God are manifest in the visible world, so too the invisible powers of the invisible soul are manifest in the visible human body.

One of the recurring emphases in the conversation, in any case, is the profound and inviolable union of soul and body. Ps-Athanasius will emphasize that the two had been inseparably “melded together (συμπλοκῆς)” by God; Anastasius, meanwhile, is explicit and technical: the bond is so intimate when the soul is separated from the body “it can no longer perform the acts it sets in motion through the limbs of the body – neither

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98 For example, the first theological oration of Gregory of Nazianzus encourages Christians to “philosophize about … matter, the soul, the resurrection, judgement, reward … for it is not useless to hit the mark on these subjects, and missing it is not dangerous” (or 27.10).

99 Especially Gregory of Nyssa, op. hom., and with Macrina (historically or fictitiously) in AnimaRes.

100 QQDuc 16. See also the definition offered by Eustratius, for whom the soul is a “simple, intelligible, noetic, and incorporeal essence” (Stat. anim. 179).

101 QA 19.3.

102 QA 19.4. See also Hodegos II.2, 4-6. Anastasius of course alludes to Gen 1:26, and important topos within patristic anthropology.

103 QQDuc 16.
speak, nor remember, nor decide, nor desire, nor reason, nor feel anger, nor gaze.”

This does not mean that the soul dissolves with the body, as some radical Aristotelians might contend: not only has the soul already been hypothesized as god-like and immortal, Christ himself has taught us about the immortality of the soul, saying, “Do not fear those who can kill the body, but are incapable of killing the soul: rather, fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell” (Mat 10:28). However, the life of the soul outside of the body is so utterly discontinuous with the necessarily embodied human experience of this life that it is impossible to say what it will be like. As Anastasius will tentatively venture, after death, the soul “subsists by itself in some deathless self-consciousness until it once more regains its body” at the resurrection. The resurrection, at last, will be the full flowering of our soul, alluded to in John 12:24 and 1Cor 15:44.

This train of thought, however, has uncomfortable implications for some of the pious opinions and practices current in Byzantium. It suggests, first of all, that we will

104 QA 19.6. Parallel to Anastasius’s opinions here is the Syriac notion of “soul sleep” which seems to have come into Greek theological conversations in the 6th C and was gaining ground among monastics (as Maximus the Confessor complains: ep. 7, PG 91.436). However, this kind of argument does not necessarily depend on an Aristotelian framework: in his Dionysian scholia, John of Scythopolis offers a similar view from a neoplatonic starting point (Scholia DN, PG 4, 196A). See D. Krasumüller, “Christian Platonism and the Debate about the Afterlife” (2015).

105 “This is the opinion of some,” the questioner in ps-Athanasius volunteers (QQDuc 17). “Let no one think,” asserts Anastasius, “that the soul is dissolved and destroyed after death, as if it were a puff of smoke or a cloud, as is the case with the soul and breath of irrational beings” (QA 21.5). Likewise Eustratius notes that some teach that the soul departs “into destruction and nothingness (εἰς ἄναρτα καὶ ἀνυπάρξια)” (Stat. anim. 289, 1493f). Ultimately, John of Damascus will describe this as the heresy of the Thnetopsychists (Her. 90).

106 This proof-text is employed by both ps-Athanasius (QQDuc 17) and Anastasius (QA 21.5), suggesting that it may have been a prooftext used to the same end in the common source document.

107 QA 19.6. This detail is not treated by the ps-Athanasian collection and diverges sharply from the kind of “inactivity” perspective that Eustratius criticizes, suggesting that this is Athanasius’s personal interpretation of the state of the soul in anticipation of the resurrection.

108 QQDuc 16, QA 19.11.
not be able recognize one another after death: even setting aside the problem of perception outside of the body, “souls will not be able to recognize one another in that other life when they never saw one another naked [i.e., bodiless] while in this life.”

Instead, our disembodied souls are “like a swarm of wasps or bees,” each identical with all the others, and without any distinguishing features. Recognition is predicated on the differences of shape and form that have been eliminated along with the body; ergo, the recognition of a disembodied human soul is not possible by any natural power. Even post-resurrection recognitions are questioned: presumably, our pneumatic resurrection bodies will be perfected; every blemish and imperfection of our old natural bodies will be thus removed in conforming us to the image of a restored Adam (or, alternatively, the risen Christ). But since these are the very features we rely upon to distinguish one another, we will necessarily be rendered unrecognizable by the resurrection: the legions of the resurrected will be a uniform, anonymous mob. If this doctrine may have satisfied the monastic who was already trying to live “like the angels” in this life, it probably would not have been a comfort for the layman whose hope for a posthumous reunion with loved ones was a major aspect of his hopes for personal eschatology.

109 QA 19.10.
110 QQDuc 22.
111 QA 19.10.
112 QQDuc 24 – “As God made one man at the beginning, thus we shall rise in the rebirth like one man, that is, each image of man will be like Adam’s image and form and stature and shape … rising as a thirty-year-old perfect man, just as Christ was baptized in his thirtieth year.”
113 This is an inversion, it should be noted, to the way in which the meme was originally introduced into the Christian imagination. For Basil, John Chrysostom, and others who used the image, the purpose evoke the emotions of the audience through anticipatory imagination of social relationships in the context of the final judgement. See for instance, ps-John Damascene DormFid. 30, 33; analysis in Krausmüller, “At the resurrection,” 223.
presuppositions led this position to be ambivalent at best towards the efficacy of offerings and intercessions made on behalf of the dead, another source of spiritual succor that had become increasingly important in the Byzantine religious economy.

Second, and consequently, the possibility that the saints personally appear in the apparitions at their shrines or personally perform the miracles attributed to them by their devotees is excluded. If souls are defined by their relationship to their bodies and are correspondingly inactive when separated from them, posthumous ministries of any sort are impossible. And even if, for the sake of the argument, the saints were said to appear, how could it we even know that it was the saint at work? How would we recognize them without the fleshly components of their bodies? And how could they operate in multiple places at once, as seems to be the case? No, stresses the seventh/eighth century Christian skeptic: insofar as such miracles do occur, it must be the working of an angel or some other divine power, perhaps taking on some of the qualities of the saint, but the saints in themselves cannot act in this fashion after their death.

Sensitive to the pastoral implications of their anthropology, Anastasius and ps-Athanasius both try to mitigate the severity of these consequences, positing that a special divine grace allows the righteous to recognize one another after death, and may even – in certain circumstances – allow the saint to personally intervene on behalf of the faithful,

114 QA 19.8.
115 Ps-Athanasius, QODuc 26, Anastasius, QA 19.8-9.
116 For both sets of Quaestiones, the exception is given as a postscript. QODuc 22 – “God has bestowed on the souls of the righteous the good gift of recognizing one another.” QA 19.11 – “Nobody will recognize another for natural reasons, but many will recognize through God’s command.” Similarly for ps-John Damascene DormFid 29, such recognition will occur “not by the shape of the body, but through the clairvoyant eye of the soul.”
although in most cases, still, they prefer to describe it as the working of an angel or a
divine energy. They even make hesitant allowances for prayers and offerings on behalf
of the dead – in some circumstances – when the burden of sin in the soul of the deceased
is minor – such liturgies may be marginally profitable, but our attention should be on the
quality of our own souls, not on hopes for the forgiveness of sins after death.

Nevertheless, in making these allowances, Anastasius and ps-Athanasius accept the
fundamental logic of the position that Eustratius had excoriated so virulently one or two
centuries before.

Interestingly, both the earlier and the later responses in this controversy are less
accommodating to the kinds of speculative positions proposed within the Quaestiones.

For Eustratius and Gregory the Great, for instance, the active, differentiated, personal
experience of the soul in the afterlife and the authenticity of the posthumous ministry of
saints become important points of doctrine. Eustratius, in fact, employs the language of
Christology to emphasize absolute reality of the saints’ personal involvement in the
miracles attributed to them: the fundamental indissolubility of personal hypostasis is a

117 Ie. QA 19.7, “Those souls that have acquired the Holy Spirit have become like a body or organ
of the Spirit, and enjoy bliss even after death thanks to the illumination of the Spirit, both praising God
mentally in word, and interceding on behalf of others.” This exception would extend, presumably, to a
limited participation in divine ministry.

118 QODuc 34, and QA 42, which draws from ps-Dionysius, EH 7.7. Compare ps-John
Damascene, DormFid 4 (PG 95, 249D-251B), who draws from the passage more extensively, anticipating a
greater role for the liturgies on behalf of the dead that he ultimately endorses.

119 Nevertheless, these texts were not less concerned in debating the technical questions (see Dal
Santo, Debating the Saint’s Cult, 87-88). Like Anastasius and ps-Athanasius, Eustratius and Gregory are
intensively engaged with the skeptical voices, but they maintain a much tighter theological line and prefer
to abstract their position from the Scriptures, writings of the Fathers, and experience of the saints and refute
the position of the skeptics, rather than interpret traditions in light of the philosophical precommitments
proposed by their opponents. Later texts, on the other hand, are less engaged with the skeptical position,
and prefer to rearticulate the received doctrine in a way that falls much closer to the outline offered by
Eustratius and Gregory.
part of the created nature of the individual soul. Gregory the Great, similarly, postulates from the beginning that there are three classes of created souls: the bodiless-immortal (angels), the embodied-but-immortal (humans) and the embodied-mortal (animals), with the anomalous state in human existence between the death of the body and its resurrection being ambiguous, but ultimately resolved on the authority of miracles worked through the physical remains of the saints and the visionary experiences of the Fathers. Indeed, Gregory’s commitment to the continuity of the existence of the human soul between death and the resurrection impels him to posit the possibility of a posthumous remission of sins, which would become the basis of the medieval doctrine of purgatory. The same logic later appears in the East under John’s name, in the sermon on the deceased attributed to him. Ps-John Damascene, in fact – perhaps cheekily remembering the source of the doctrinal importation – tells a story of how Gregory the Dialogist once stopped in his tracks, grateful for the old Roman road he was traversing, and prayed for the soul of his architect the pagan Emperor Trajan, to the end that Trajan’s sins were forgiven.

As we noted above, these debates, despite their tectonic impact on the understanding of the spiritual world, commented on demons only sparingly, and there is

\[ \begin{align*} &120 \text{ Constans, “An Apology for the Cult of Saints,” 277.} \\
&121 \text{ Dialogues IV.6. “Sick persons come to the dead bodies of the saints, and they are cured, perjured persons come, and they leave tormented by devils, demoniacs visit them, and are delivered: lepers come, and be cleansed: the dead are brought, and they are raised up again. Consider then in what condition their souls must be, whose dead bodies in this world show themselves to be alive by so many miracles!”} \\
&122 \text{ Stories of these constitute the bulk of Book IV of the Dialogues.} \\
&123 \text{ Dialogues IV.40-41.} \\
&124 \text{ DormFid. 16 (PG 95, 261D-264A).} \end{align*} \]
little in their textual residue that touch explicitly on the subject of the demonic. Ps-Athanasius preserves the most direct implications, and from his statements, we might develop a few further consequences. First, the skeptical trajectory shared by Athanasius, ps-Athanasius, and a hypothetical lost source (if indeed there was one) would rule out literal readings of many popular demonological episodes, such as an aerial battle of souls with demons. Indeed, many descriptions of the demonic encounter would have to be read in a strictly symbolic or metaphorical fashion, as representative of a psychological rather than a physical phenomenon. Under this scheme, demons would still have the power to suggest thoughts, project phantasies, and disturb dreams; likewise, they can still afflict the body with disease, or appear in terrifying or deceptive manifestations, but the soul itself is emphatically inviolable: the demons cannot manipulate it, cannot see into its interior state – much less intermingle with or interpenetrate it.

The central demonological thesis of the skeptical view, however, was to assert a complete homogeneity between angels and demons: they differ only by will, not by essence. Corollary to this is a transitive property: if demons share an essence with the angels, every quality ascribed to the angelic nature must also apply – if perhaps in some corrupted form – to the demons. For instance, as minsters of God serving at the divine

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125 *QODuc* 7, 10-12, 14-15, 35, 40, 43, 46, 100, 111, 124; with the former question applying to the systematic demonology related to the questions of saints and the afterlife, and the latter forming a miscellany. Anastasius has a different but sometimes overlapping miscellany of demonological questions (*QA* 34, 62-63, 70-71, 79-80).

126 See for instance VA 60, 65.

127 See Section 2.3 and 6.2.

128 *QODuc* 7, with John of Damascus picks up this point in *Exp. fid.* 18.
command, the angels have their individuality mostly eclipsed by their office.\textsuperscript{129}

Correspondingly, then, the demons, as ministers of opposition to the divine will, have their individual character eclipsed by that overarching antagonism. It is not strictly appropriate, then, to divide the demons into a multiplicity of ranks and camps, as was the custom of some of the older ascetical literature.\textsuperscript{130} More precisely, the demonological tradition represented in the \textit{Quaestiones} ignores any kind of demonological taxonomies: there is no way to tell if it tolerated their preservation in some other form. To the extent that such taxonomies were accepted, however, the logic of the position would suggest that any differences identified between the demons are functional and symbolic, rather than ontological.

This transitive property also works in the other direction: any property or ability attributed to the demons has its analog in the angels. Paul asserts, for instance, that Satan can “transform (\(\mu\varepsilon\tau\alpha\sigma\chi\varepsilon\mu\alpha\tau\iota\varepsilon\tau\alpha\iota\)) himself into an angel of light” (2Cor 11:14). In most of the tradition, this logion appropriated in accordance with the spirit of the original passage: it highlights the deceptiveness of the demons, and warns of their capacity to pass themselves off as ministers of goodness.\textsuperscript{131} Under the demonological framework of the \textit{Quaestiones}, however, “transformation” (\(\mu\varepsilon\tau\alpha\sigma\chi\varepsilon\mu\alpha\tau\iota\sigma\mu\varsigma\)) becomes an apparitional mechanism common to the angelic nature: the angels using it to minister to the heirs of

\textsuperscript{129} The ps-Dionysian angelic hierarchy is omitted within the Anastasian and ps-Athanasian discourse; the number of angels ranks being explicitly affirmed in the latter as parabolic and subject to multiple opinions, with Deut 32:8, rather than Paul or Dionysius, being the driving authority for the enumeration of angelic beings (\textit{QQDuc} VI). Compare John of Damascus, \textit{Exp. fid.} 17, who does appropriate the Dionysian angelic system.

\textsuperscript{130} Most notably, Evagrius. See Section II.3.

\textsuperscript{131} See, for instance, Cassian, \textit{Conf.} 8.12, and numerous citations in the \textit{ApPat}.  

salvation, and the demons to deceive and destroy. John very much stands in this tradition, as we will later see in further detail.

The homogeneity of angelic nature, however, does not extend to human souls – although they too are by nature invisible, immortal, and rational. There is a connection, of course: angels and demons are an essential topic of contemplation for the understanding of the human being, but the relationship between them remains deeply ambiguous. Ps-Athanasius proposes that the difference between a human soul and an angel is a great and incomprehensible mystery that might be likened to the difference between the sun and the moon, but this aphoristic definition leaves us to guess which form of being is like the sun, and which like the moon. The divine nature, of course, transcends both: angels, demons, and souls may be “difficult to define” (δυσόριστος) and need to be spoken of with great circumspection and awe accordingly, but the divine nature is boundless and

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132 On the angels, esp. QODuc 26, which parallels QA 19.8, but shifts the emphasis by asserting, subsequently, that angels do not ever appear to human beings in their natural form, but always under some earthly guise (QODuc 28). Interestingly, that demons also manifest in this way (QODuc 29) is omitted by Anastasius. Conversely, it is present in John Climicas, Scal. par. 3.29 (PG 88, 672A), absent the angelical manifestation. It is possible that John Climicas finds such manifestations inherently suspicious. An alternative tradition identifies every such manifestation as demonic, even those performed by angels. See Evagrius, Prayer. 112, which relates that as a monk was walking the desert, “two angels came and walked on either side of him. But he paid no heed to them, for he did not wish to lose what was better. He remembered the words of the Apostle: ‘Neither angels, nor principalities, nor powers . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of Christ.’” Likewise 115, “Do not long to have a sensory image of angels or powers or Christ, for this would be madness: it would be to take a wolf as your shepherd and to worship your enemies, the demons.”

133 Section 6.2 below.

134 QODuc 27. See also QODuc 5, which establishes that the angelic light shines brighter than any created light just as the sun outshines the stars. While it may be natural to assume the angels as more the sun-like essences, as “secondary spiritual lights” (Gregory of Nazianzus, or. 39; appropriated by John, Exp. fid. 17.25) the text is actually unclear, nor should we forget the tradition of some parts of eastern theology, that human beings are more “in the image of God” than the angels, as preserved, for instance, by Gregory Palamas. Anastasius similarly asserts that special glorification of human nature over that of the angels (QA 5). The Quaestiones are likely of a tradition which sees the angels as automatic dispatchers of the divine will, and human souls, in having the freedom to resist the divine will, as being more actively cooperative and co-creative with it. See Krausmüller, “God or angels as impersonators of saints,” (1998).
indefinable (ἀόριστος). John is certainly familiar with this claim: it is one, indeed, that he will develop further expanding the principle into the questions of “circumscription” (περὶγραπτος) – an issue very much appropriate to the debates surrounding icons to which he was party.135

These linguistic and categorical continuities demonstrate that John is conversant with the skeptical demonological tradition represented in Anastasius of Sinai and ps-Athanasius. The greatest benefit of tracing the contours of this debate, however, is the opportunity to witness how the Damascene engages with difficult and ambiguous subjects that impinge on demonological questions. John is aware of these questions and interacts with them in framing his theological system, but he does so in large part obliquely, alluding to the kinds of arguments found in the Quaestiones, rather than quoting them directly. John’s principle strategy, instead, is to speak into the difficult and disputed questions about the spiritual world by being precise about the received boundaries of the Christian tradition and providing the most clear and succinct battery of texts he can assemble to demonstrate his position. In speaking of the soul, for instance, John completes and corrects the Origenist-Aristotelian synthesis attempted by the Quaestiones (and their hypothetical source text) offering one expansive sentence to define it as:

a living substance, simple and incorporeal, invisible to the bodily eye by nature, rational and noetic, without form, having been furnished with an organic body and bestowing upon it life, growth, and feeling, and the capability of reproduction; not having mind as something separate from itself, but as its purest part (for as the eye is to the body, so the mind is to the soul): free, willing and acting, changeable (that is, subject to change, being created), receiving all of these

135 Hodegos, II.1; John of Damascus Phil. Frag. 9.25. Section 6.2 at n 169.
natural properties from its creator by grace, from which it receives both its being and its being what it is.\textsuperscript{136}

John preserves, in his definition, the principal concern for the rational soul as a separate substance: at the same time, he details the involvement of the soul in organic bodily existence meticulously. The soul is both \textit{in} and \textit{other} than the body; or, perhaps, the soul exists bodily, although it is not itself a body.\textsuperscript{137} John’s \textit{Exposition}, moreover, does not offer an independent treatment of the soul, rather, he explores the soul as a dimension of the human person, describing man with a wealth of patristic quotations\textsuperscript{138} and meditations – parallel with those of Anastasius – on his character as a being “in the image” of God.\textsuperscript{139} The soul, in other words, is not abstracted from human being, but immanent to both his Scriptural and biological constitution.

When John approaches those questions about the soul and the afterlife specifically contested within the \textit{Quaestiones}, his treatment is even more efficient. Regarding the working of saints through their relics, he posits that such miracles take place through the “power of God” on account of “the honor that he bestows upon the saints,” carefully

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Exp. fid.} 26.44-57, with parallel text in \textit{Dua vol.} 15.1-4: “Man is a microcosm. This is because he has both body and soul, and he stands between mind and matter, so he is the bond between the visible and the invisible, that is, between sensible and intelligible creation. The mind is the eye of the soul and its purest part” – going on to list the share that man has in all of the other forms of creation (inorganic matter, plants, irrational animals, and the bodiless and soulless powers). John is in part following Maximus, \textit{Op. Anima} (PG 91.353.361), along with some Nemesian echoes (\textit{nat. hom.} 1-2) – influences that tilt the whole anthropology in an Aristotelian direction. Notably absent from this list is an explicit indication of the “immortality” of the soul, although John does affirm this elsewhere (most directly at \textit{Exp. fid.} 60.8; implicitly at 100.5).

\textsuperscript{137} This solution anticipates the anthropology articulated by Thomas Aquinas, \textit{ST} I.75 – not surprisingly, since Thomas is openly and heavily indebted to Damascene anthropology.

\textsuperscript{138} Particular in \textit{Exp. fid.} 26 is Gregory of Nazianzus’s \textit{or.} 38, and Nemesis \textit{de nat. hom.}, but remembering that John’s anthropological discussion extends into his chapters on psychology and the powers of the soul (\textit{Exp. fid.} 27-38), which additionally draws heavily on Maximus.

\textsuperscript{139} See n 102, above. Gregory of Nazianzus also develops this image in his homily on the Theophany (\textit{or.} 38) noted above.
preserving every dignity due the saints and affirming the powers at work through them, but exercising studied reserve with respect to their personal, conscious involvement in it.140 By John’s favorite formulation, nevertheless, the saints are “alive in the hand of God” until the time that they live again bodily in the resurrection.141 Meanwhile, then, with respect to the resurrection, John insists firmly on its reality142 and emphasizes that it is bodies, not souls that are raised, with several passing jabs at doctrines of soul sleep143 and thnetopsychism144 along the way. The bulk of John’s argument, however, consists of a lengthy catena of Scriptural citations, developing the theme of the resurrection of the body across the corpus of Biblical literature.145

In this way, John plays a role within the tradition of bringing the divergent sixth/seventh century skeptical and anti-skeptical voices to resolution. On the one hand, John exhibits (and explicates) a preference for maintaining a breadth of material from Scripture and tradition over a tidy philosophical system that jettisons contradictory

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140 Exp. fid. 88.36-37: “If by the will of God water poured out of the living rock in the desert, and for the thirsty Sampson from the jawbone of an ass, is it unbelievable that fragrant ointment should flow from the relics of the martyrs?”

141 Exp. fid. 88.27-28, 100.38-39. The allusion is to Wis 3:1, with echoes of Matthew 22:32/Mark 12:27/Luke 20:38 – viz., that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

142 John’s language emphasizing the reality of the Incarnation is striking in its simplicity and directness: “Πιστεύομεν δὲ καὶ εἰς ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν: ” Ἐσται γάρ, ὅντως ἔσται νεκρῶν ἀνάστασις” (Exp. fid. 100.2-3): “It will happen. There will be a resurrection of the dead.” Likewise, 20-21: “There will be, there will be, a resurrection.”

143 “I do not suppose that anyone would speak of souls sleeping in the dust of the earth” (Exp. fid. 100.61); “Whoever in his right mind could say that it was the souls that were in the graves!”? (66).

144 Ie, Exp. fid. 100.12 ff: “If there is no resurrection, then how do we differ from brute beasts?” See also n 105 above.

evidence on the basis of its reasoned precommitments: nevertheless, he sees a
tremendous virtue in the careful thinking and clear definitions prompted by philosophical
training. Not only does the Damascene himself use and craft such definitions, he aims to
systematically approximate the breadth of the Christian faith by juxtaposing these
definitions, integrating them, and fine-tuning them with a view to every other defined
truth. This attempt to balance the inheritances of Scripture and tradition with consistency
of philosophical reasoning would ultimately bring John into conflict with the iconoclastic
movement, which instead of John’s conservative integrations, pushed the skeptical
arguments to the point of requiring that significant aspects of the accumulated Christian
piety be rejected and that a thorough (if not revolutionary) reworking of the whole
tradition be undertaken.

3.5 Conclusion

The precise shape of John of Damascus’s education is not known, but the
intellectual-religious system that formed him was clearly sophisticated, and capable of
supporting wide variety of demonological traditions and opinions. In the previous
chapter, we explored some of the general trends in demonological ideation circulating in
late antiquity: in this chapter, we shifted our attention to the specific positions John
engaged in formulating his demonology. In final estimation, we can say that the nuance
of the Damascene’s consolidated demonology – as abbreviated as it was – did justice to
the complexity of the tradition he received. John charted a thoughtful middle way
between an excessive monism on the one hand, and an exaggerated dualism on the other,
and integrated that navigation into the subtleties of Maximian Dyothelete psychology.
Similarly, while John was conversant in the recent debates on the soul and the spiritual world circulating between Eustratius, Gregory, Anastasius, and the *Quaestiones*, John avoids the more speculative positions, and rejects any tendency to minimize the role of the saints in the dispersion of miraculous powers. These were the most salient demonological questions within the Christian conversation when John began his project: understanding John’s demonology in context requires an appreciation for how he navigated these questions.

John’s demonological synthesis, nevertheless, did not depend exclusively on ideas he drew together from within Christian sources. While John does not cite sources outside of the conciliar Christian tradition as authoritative, he lived in a context where non-Christians enjoyed a position of political and social dominance, and his version of Christianity was only one option among many. His formulation of demonology, accordingly – even if it was not immediately aimed at this sectarian milieu – would have to be sensitive to it. We will take up, in our two next chapters, the impact of these extrinsic realities on John of Damascus and his demonological work.
CHAPTER FOUR
CIRCUMSTANCES: EXTRINSIC FACTORS SHAPING JOHN’S DEMONOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

As noted in the introduction, we might conceptualize John’s theological project as a movement from *paradosis* – the traditioned content of the faith as contained in Scripture, the teachings of the Fathers, and the ongoing structures of ecclesiastical life in its worship, customs, and liturgy – to *ekdosis* – an orderly, cohesive articulation of that faith in summary form. We have considered already the ancient inheritances on which John was drawing by way of the textual survivals of the Fathers, and also some of the dynamics internal to the tradition that contributed to the formation of John’s demonology. We will turn now to the historical and cultural currents that formed his concerns, beginning with a survey of the broad sweep of history, and then moving in more closely to consider John’s sectarian and non-Christian neighbors, with special attention to the impact that his interactions had on the shape and content of his understanding of the devil and the demons.

4.1 *Historical Background*

As John of Damascus conducted his theological career in the first half of the eighth century, his social and political world was beginning to settle into the relative peace brought about by the consolidation of the Umayyad Caliphate. The situation could scarcely have been more different than that of the previous century, which had been characterized by tremendous violence and upheaval, especially in the city John called home through the better part of his adult life. In 602, the Persian Emperor Khorsrow II
had used the murder of Emperor Maurice and the ensuing Byzantine infighting as an excuse to begin a campaign against the Romans with a view to reclaiming historic Persian territories. The ongoing internal unrest made Byzantine holdings vulnerable and allowed the Persians to consolidate their position in Mesopotamia and Armenia: indeed, although Emperor Heraclius ostensibly removed the *causus belli* by ousting the usurper Phocas in 610, the Persians ignored any suit for peace, continuing an expansionistic advance into Egypt, Palestine, and Asia Minor through the 610s.\textsuperscript{146}

In 614, Jerusalem came under siege by Persian forces, and would succumb shortly thereafter to a combination of external military pressure and internal Jewish insurrection.\textsuperscript{147} The precise historical details are hazy, but the city’s defeat was a traumatic experience that would mark the city for years to come. The memory of the Jewish community’s role in Jerusalem’s downfall in particular would inflame strong anti-Jewish sentiments both in the city and throughout the Empire in the following decades.\textsuperscript{148}

As Clive Foss argues, however, the Persian-Jewish alliance was probably a mercenary

\textsuperscript{146} For an overview, see A. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century I: 602-634*, pp. 3-134, which offers an excellent analysis of the overall situation surrounding the Roman-Persian conflict in the 7th C, as well as a detailed synopsis of the events leading up to the war as summarized in the various Chronicles in which they are recorded.

\textsuperscript{147} For their proximity to the historical events, the siege in the accounts of Antiochus Strategos preserved in Georgian (ed. and tr. by G. Garitte, *La Prise de Jérusalem par les Perses en 614*, CSCO 11) and the history by Sebeos (ed. and tr. by R. Thompson, *The Armenian history attributed to Sebeos*) are better than the Chronicles – although they are by no means neutral sources. The Jewish involvement in the city’s overthrow and destruction is sufficiently attested to be accepted, however, the evaluation of that participation needs to be treated carefully in view of the strongly anti-Jewish sentiments that arose surrounding the period, which undoubtedly influenced the ways said involvement was interpreted and portrayed.

\textsuperscript{148} Heraclius, for instance, would issue a decree in the early 630s that all Jews and Samaritans be forcibly baptized. It is not clear whether this was an occasional or universal declaration: the *Doctrina Jacobi* asserts the latter (1.7), although it is unclear where and to what extent this order was seriously executed.
and short-lived arrangement: if the Persians had any kind of long-term strategic goals, the focus of the occupying force must have turned to the needs of the incumbent majority population after the invasion, and – wartime casualties notwithstanding – that population remained overwhelmingly Christian.\textsuperscript{149} The Persian administration of the region was short-lived, however: in 628, the Emperor Heraclius – executing perhaps the most epic outflanking maneuver in history – broke through the enemy front and sacked the Persian capital at Ctesiphon. The Persian offensive quickly disintegrated, and the conquered lands returned to Byzantine control.

Despite its brevity, the Persian occupation had several formative consequences for the Syro-Palestinian region into which John’s would be born. First, the Persian tradition of deporting leaders and skilled workers to back to the capital while importing Persian settlers to the conquered territory substantially increased the diversity of the region, and specifically, the exposure of the local populations to cultures and ideas that had been effectively excised from Byzantium, but still thrived in Persia.\textsuperscript{150} Second, the experience of Persian administration weakened the dependency of local governments on a Constantinople-based Christian empire: they would be ready, when the time came, to negotiate independently with other regional powers.\textsuperscript{151} In this way, Jerusalem was both

\textsuperscript{149} C. Foss, “The Persians in the Roman near East (602-630 AD)” (2003). Important in the primary source material are the engagements Acta of Anastasius the Persian, which describe the saint as going significantly out of his way to encounter the Persian religious practices that railing against would result in martyrdom.

\textsuperscript{150} Both Stratos and Sebeos narrate the forced immigrations in the wake of the Persian invasion; in secondary literature, W. Kagei makes this point on several occasions in Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium (Cambridge: 2003). See for instance p. 208.

\textsuperscript{151} There is a striking example of this in Damascus in the person of John’s own grandfather Mansur – the treasurer of the city – who is said to have taken a beating from Heraclius because he could not pay back taxes from the time of the occupation, since these had been paid to Persia. Eventually, Mansur
dispositionally and administratively well-prepared for assimilation into the new Arab empire. To the Christians of Jerusalem, the Arabs were just another non-Christian power from the East: their rule, like that of the Persians, may not have been not optimal, but it was certainly survivable.\textsuperscript{152} Meanwhile, the protracted struggle over Jerusalem also served to consolidate the importance of the city to the imagination of imperial Christianity, fuel apocalyptic fantasies about the fate of Jerusalem at the end of time, and invite all kinds of speculation as to the purposes of God in the within the chaotic vicissitudes of history.

In the year 630, after a raucous triumph in Constantinople, the Emperor Heraclius traveled to Jerusalem in humbler circumstance to return the relic of the True Cross, which the Persians had carried away among the spoils of war.\textsuperscript{153} It was the first time a Roman Emperor had personally made the pilgrimage to the Holy City: it would also prove to be the last. High hopes must have gripped Heraclius and his subjects along the journey:\textsuperscript{154} with the long-standing rivalry between Rome and the Persians at last resolved decisively paid the Emperor out of his personal wealth, although this left him with a grudge which made him understandably eager to betray the city into Arab hands when the time came (Eutychius of Alexandria, \textit{Annales}, PG 111, 1089).

\textsuperscript{152} Indeed, as occupiers of Christian lands, the Arabs had some advantages over their Persian predecessors: they were fellow monotheists, after all, and they claimed some respect for Christ, even if they refused to identify him with God. They were heretics, perhaps, but of a relatively benign sort, without an established polemical legacy to leverage against them. And, most importantly, at least they were not pagans or Jews.

\textsuperscript{153} Stratos, L248-254 offers a critical evaluation of the scholarly narratives, although I am following more closely the more imaginative story told by G. Regan, \textit{First Crusader}, 132-134. See also JW Drijvers, “Heraclius and the Restitutio Crucis: Notes on Symbolism and Ideology,” (2002). The return of the True Cross to Jerusalem would become a fixture in the historical imagination of Christendom, commemorated along with the Empress Helena’s discovery of the relic in 326 and Constantine’s foundation of churches at the Holy Sepulcher and Mount Calvary shortly thereafter as the third event commemorated on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14): one of the twelve major feasts of the Christian year, according to the Eastern Christian tradition.

\textsuperscript{154} For an overview, see W. Kagei, “Five crucial years” in \textit{Heraclius}, 192-228.
in favor of the Byzantine State, perhaps the Empire would even turn its sights westward to reconsolidate Mediterranean hegemony,\textsuperscript{155} and Christendom could at last be whole and coordinated. Perhaps, absent the terrible pressures of warfare, the lingering rifts over Christology could be mended.\textsuperscript{156} Perhaps the Holy City, rebuilt under a fresh outpouring of imperial largesse, would prove even more unified in its faith and commitment to the cause of Byzantine Christendom, and in turn, serve to further legitimate the claim of Constantinople to be the center of world power divinely appointed by the God of the Christians.\textsuperscript{157}

None of this was to come to pass, however. Even as Heraclius laid the fruit of his victory upon the altar at Jerusalem, a new and vigorous force was gathering in the deserts of Arabia. During the feud with Persia, nomadic tribes on the boundaries between the empires had been paid to help enforce the peace between the neighbors, and had taken on the more settled, urban lifestyle that characterized the respective empires. Once a decisive

\textsuperscript{155} Efficiently achieved by Constantine in the 4\textsuperscript{th} C, and again by Justinian in the 6\textsuperscript{th}, this territorial footprint remained normative in Byzantine imaginary, even though it was only shortly enjoyed in the history of the actual Empire.

\textsuperscript{156} Heraclius certainly was of this opinion, and following his military successes, invested much of his imperial energies into underwriting the ill-fated compromise option of monenergism and monotheletism. See Booth, \textit{Crisis of Empire}, 186-224. Heraclius’ propaganda in fact billed his military and theological initiatives as parts of a single effort of cosmic restoration. Significantly, when this doctrine was at its height, among the five Patriarchs, it was only Sophronius who resisted the compromise – along with his famous monastic associate Maximus the Confessor, who was also probably of Palestinian extraction.

\textsuperscript{157} One important piece of hagiography-cum-propaganda illustrates this dimension: another major aim of the Emperor’s task in Jerusalem was to oversee the translation of the relics of St. Anastasius the Persian (martyred 628) to Palestine and the endorse the institution of his cult, which certainly had the intention of celebrating Byzantine identity superseding the Persian, and God’s promotion of the Christian over and against his enemies on this earth. Anastasius’s \textit{Life} is an important source for the imagination of this period (See B. Flusin, \textit{Saint Anastase Le Perse et l’Historie de la Palestine au Début du VII Siècle} (1992)): his cult was widely propagated, and earned international notoriety, before slipping into relative obscurity (C. Frankin, \textit{The Latin Dossier of Anastasius the Persian} (2004)). His feast remains on the calendar on 22 January.
peace had been achieved, however, payments for these services ended abruptly: the threat had been eliminated, on the one hand; on the other, the treasuries of the combatants had been depleted by the efforts of war. In such a circumstance, it is hardly surprising that the people group living at the margins of Empire would be well-primed to organize against their former benefactors. Within a few short years, the Emperor would again find himself on the battlefield: this time his armies exhausted and unequal to the zealous energy of foes stimulated to confidence under the banner of a new Prophet who had managed to gather and galvanize a united Arab front. By 636, Jerusalem would once again find itself under siege – a turn of events to which the Patriarch Sophronius briefly alludes in his Synodical Letter, describing it as having come about “unexpectedly” (ἀδοκήτως): “Through our sins, the Saracens have now unexpectedly risen up against us, and are carrying off booty with cruel and savage intent; impious and godless daring.”

Expected or not, the people of Jerusalem were prepared to take matters into their own hands and negotiate with the invading forces to prevent the kind of destruction wrought by the Persian conquest some twenty years before. It is said that, after six months with no imperial support on the horizon, the Patriarch personally brokered a

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158 Stratos, II.41-44 offers a good catalogue of the extant sources, in which it is of course difficult to disentangle genuine motivation from retrospective interpretation and propaganda. Nevertheless, “the main causes of the Arab incursions were economic and social,” he concludes (43).


160 Sophronius, Synodical Letter, 7.4; Allen, 155. The letter was thus likely composed in the early phase of Arab invasions – around 634 – before control in the region had been consolidated. The theme of the invasions as punishment for Christian sins resounds through Sophronius’s work, see Hoyland, Seeing Islam, 67-73. It is also a popular theme among other authors, who see in the Arab invasion divine retribution for the Empire’s moral failings (gruesomely narrated, for instance, in ApocMeth 11.6-7) or theological failings (see the listing at n 235 below).
peaceful surrender of the city to the Caliph ‘Umar.\textsuperscript{161} The particular incident may legendary, but the archeological record confirms that on this occasion, at least, the beleaguered city fell with little to no violence\textsuperscript{162} – and on the whole, it does not leave the same kind of traumatic impression on the Christian imagination as the corresponding conquest in 614.\textsuperscript{163} It was the Persian invasion that had torn away the mantle of divine protection from the city: notwithstanding the brief Byzantine interregnum, when the Arabs arrived, they found Jerusalem spiritually vulnerable and exposed. Still, another transition of power – even a relatively benign and non-violent one – must have been disorienting: particularly for a city like Jerusalem, so charged with sacred imagination and apocalyptic expectation. The Patriarch Sophronius – speaking at an especially high rhetorical pitch – described the succession of Arab victories as an apocalyptic terror brought on as a consequence of Christian sins: the Saracens being “the abomination of desolation clearly foretold by the prophets” who are “vengeful and God-hating,” eager to “increase their blasphemies against Christ” and “wicked blasphemies against God,”


\textsuperscript{162} Exhaustively, see R. Schick, \textit{The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study} (1996). Summarily, and considering a broader chronological timeframe after the arrival of Islam, A. Linder, “Christian Communities in Jerusalem” in \textit{The History of Jerusalem: The Early Muslim Period 638-1099} (1996) – ie. pp. 135 and 139. Both Schick and Linder note a general trajectory of decline but note that destruction and expropriation of church buildings was minimal. Completely lacking in nuance are the studies of Bat Ye’or, whose work on dhimmitude for instance – \textit{The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam} (1996), attempts to flatten the whole scope of historical evidence into a convenient one-dimensional narrative.

\textsuperscript{163} It is significant that, unlike the tales of apocalyptic violence that attend the Persian conquest, the principle legend to be preserved from the Islamic conquest is the assurance of peace and safety secured between the Patriarch Sophronius and the Caliph ‘Umar. The major exception to this memory of a relatively peaceful and cooperative transition is the survival of a short text commemorating “Sixty Martyrs of Gaza,” surviving only in Latin. The character of this text, however, as well as its relative obscurity, confirm its little impact on the imagination of the period. Indeed, the dryness of the surviving text suggest that it is an embellished catalogue of executed prisoners of war, rather than a full scale martyrlogy.
imitating the leadership of “the devil, and emulating his vanity because of which he has been expelled from heaven and assigned to the gloomy shades.”\(^{164}\) In the later seventh century, an *Apocalypse* pseudonymously attributed to Methodius of Olympus would emerge to famously weave these themes together as well: \(^{165}\) it is not for love of the sons of Ishmael that God is granting them victory – the self-styled Methodius assures – but because of the sins of the Christian inhabitants.\(^{166}\)

But Methodius crescendos into a hopeful prophecy: soon would a voice from heaven announce, “This punishment is sufficient;” the Last Roman Emperor would appear and rally the Byzantine forces and defeat their foes, restoring the glory of their Empire.\(^{167}\) Though the prophet warned of an even greater threat mustering in a distant, mythical place – Gog and Magog and twenty unclean nations, imprisoned by Alexander the Great beyond the Gates of the North – these too, he assured, would be vanquished by this great hero.\(^{168}\) Then, with his earthly calling fulfilled, the Last Roman Emperor would return to Jerusalem to pray upon the Temple Mount, where he would lay his Crown upon the Cross for both to be assumed together into heaven – the perfect synthesis of Church and Empire, forged at Jerusalem, “joy of the earth,” and the “city of the great king” (Ps.

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\(^{164}\) Sophronius, “Holy Baptism,” AHS 5, 162.


\(^{167}\) *ApocMeth*, 13.10-16.

\(^{168}\) Ibid., 13.19-21.
48:2) – and having completed his mission on earth, he would die, ushering in the final climactic struggle between Christ and antichrist as taught by the Apostle Paul, and the Fathers following him.\(^{169}\)

The Methodian vision struck a chord in a world grappling with the emergence of the new Arab power, and it would go on to be one of the most famous apocalypses of the Middle Ages – translated and retranslated; adapted and readapted, and no doubt an essential piece of the imaginal background that would inspire the adventures of Franko-Latin Crusaders.\(^{170}\) It was also a product of the same world that shaped John of Damascus: originally penned in Syriac within a hundred miles of John’s hometown, and translated into several languages at Mar Sabas, the *Apocalypse* shares John’s geography almost perfectly, and was written within fifty years of his career. Indeed, given the scale of the ecclesiastical world in eighth century Syro-Palestine and the evident breadth of the Damascus’s network, it is not impossible that John would have met the author of the *Apocalypse* – at least, it’s likely the two stood within one- or two-degrees of separation.

Apocalyptic fantasies of divine retribution may have been cathartic for many who found themselves disoriented by the sudden appearance of the new Arab powers, but they

\(^{169}\) Ibid., 14. Note that John also recounts this tradition in *Exp. fid.* 99. In general, the apocalyptic vision among the Greek Fathers is less shaped by Revelation, whose canonicity was received unevenly (on the reception history, see Constantinou, *Guiding to a Blessed End*, 1-46). Although the Damascene explicitly affirms the canonicity of Revelation (*Exp. fid.* 90.76), his eschatological sequence still bears more hallmarks from Dan 11, 2 Thess 2, and 1 Jn 4 as interpreted by the Fathers (esp. John Chrysostom and Cyril of Jerusalem) rather than Revelation.

would also, for the most part, need to stand subordinate to the day-to-day challenge of learning how to get along with new neighbors and the ruling class that the conquest introduced. The Arab administration added a layer to the already complex landscape of religious imagination in the Near East; more still, its ambivalence to the infighting among Christian groups exacerbated the tensions and rivalries already existing between sects. No longed-for Last Roman Emperor proved forthcoming to resolve the situation. As the years dragged on, the ecclesiastical leadership in Jerusalem became less concerned with keeping its affairs in sync with those of the Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople: if the Jerusalem Church was going to withstand the chaotic aftermath of the Arab conquest, the local Christian infrastructure would have to offer the firm and enduring ground upon which the Christians of the region could claim that their faith offered a coherent and integrated picture of God, the world, and humanity. And, for the first time, this picture would have to be developed principally and primarily from within the community itself, rather than negotiated within the broader imperial oikumene.

If this reconstruction is reasonably accurate, we can take the extant work of John of Damascus to stand as the primary residue of this process in its mature expression. John’s task was to lay out the full content of the orthodox faith in comprehensive and systematic terms, thus consolidating the tradition of the lately isolated Jerusalem Patriarchate against its many sectarian detractors. As such, the Damascene’s contribution was – by design – at once rigorously faithful to the existing contours of the system of orthodox beliefs, but also an expression sui generis: the first of its kind as a comprehensive overview of conciliar, patristic doctrine.
4.2 The Relationship between Christianity and Islam in John’s Time

The same historical picture also helps to put John of Damascus’s relationship to Islam into context. John was aware of the basic religious sentiments of the new Arab ruling class: indeed, he included Islam – the “heresy of the Ishamelites,”¹⁷¹ the “religion of the Saracens”¹⁷² or the “Hagarene” confession,¹⁷³ as he knew it – in his catalogue of one-hundred heresies,¹⁷⁴ and he likely drafted some sample religious disputations featuring debate between a Christian and a Muslim as a training exercise for monastic theologians.¹⁷⁵ It would be a distortion, however, to claim on this basis that John’s...

¹⁷¹ This is John’s leading and capital designation for the religion – and also his most respectful option, as directing attention to the posterity of Abraham, notwithstanding that to John, this is a "λαοπλανήθηση ἡρεσία," a “people-deceiving religion” (Haer 100.1).

¹⁷² The Damascene proposes that the etymology of “Saracen” is from “Σάρρας κενούς” – left empty by Sarah – referring to Sarah’s rejection and dismissal of Hagar in Gen 21:9-19. Indeed, John interpolates Hagar’s dialogue with the angel to include a complaint that Sarah had “sent [her] away empty,” which undoubtedly rests on a broader tradition (Haer. 100.4-5). Sophronius likewise prefers to describe forces arriving from the east as “Saracens,” as an ethnic designation without reference to the content of their faith system (indeed, he regards them as simply “godless;” faceless “avenging” agents, punishing Christians as the gentile nations had once been the instruments of divine wrath against the people of Israel. See n 160 above.)

¹⁷³ John suggests Hagarene and Ishmaelite as roughly equivocal terms, although it would seem the latter would convey a greater respect, given that it offers a patrilineal descent through a son of Abraham, rather than a matrilineal one through Abraham’s servant. Adding to this the fact that John leads with Ishmaelite as the plausible that Muslims of John’s acquaintance may have prominently identified themselves as Ishmaelites.

¹⁷⁴ Kotter, IV.4, with the text of Haer. 100 occupying pp. 60-67 of the volume. Translations in Chase, Writings, (as Heresy 101), 153-160; Sahas, John of Damascus on Islam, 133-141; Le Coz, Ecrits, 210-227; Janosik, John of Damascus: First Apologist, 260-268, and Schadler, John of Damascus and Islam, 218-233. Kotter’s research identifies Haer. 100 in a 9⁰/10⁰ C manuscript (gr 315), and it is excerpted in in a pre-9⁰ C florilegia, which indicates that the chapter is of sufficient antiquity that it must have been written near John’s time, if not by John himself. For this reason the authenticity of the chapter has not been seriously disputed since A. Abel in the 1960s argued the text to be a fragmentary redaction of the 12⁰/13⁰ C Nicetas Acominatus’s “On the Religion of the Hagarenes,” book 20 of his Thesaurus Orthodoxae Fidei (PG 140, 105-121). For Abel’s argument, see “Le chapitre CI du Livre des Hérésies de Jean Damascène: son inauthenticité” Sl, 19, 5-25). For the new consensus, see Sahas, John of Damascus on Islam, 60-67; Le Coz, Jean Damascene, 191-193; Hoyland, Seeing Islam, 485; Janosik, John of Damascus: First Apologist, 93-97.

¹⁷⁵ Disputatio Christiani et Saraceni, Kotter, IV.427-438; translations Sahas, 143-155; Le Coz, 229-251; Janosik, 269-276. This text has several problematic features – not the least of which is its close relationship to several Opuscula of Theodore abu Qurrah (9, 18, and 35-38; PG 96.1336-1348 and 97.1588-
theological system was a response to Islam, as though his whole mode of thinking were shaped with a specific view to adapting Christian thought to an Islamicizing context, or that he intended to frame Christian doctrine and practice in such a way as to systematically answer common Muslim objections to it.\footnote{176}

John’s intended audience is exclusively Christian: it is aimed primarily (if not exclusively) at the challenges facing the Christian community from within. John was not ignorant of trends in the world around him – it would be an exaggeration to follow John Meyendorff in considering John’s work emanating from a Byzantine ghetto transcending the exigencies brought about by Arab dominance\footnote{177} – but the complexity of the Damascene’s corpus suggests that sectarian interaction in his context was more complicated than a simple apologetic exchange between two well-formulated creeds. In

\footnote{1596). It was almost certainly not the direct product of John’s pen, but does seem to bear enough parallels with Damascene themes and methodology to be numbered among his texts. Indeed, even the superscriptions attesting Damascene attribution describe it as δία φωνῆς Ι. Δ. – implying that it is the product of an oral tradition with roots in John’s teaching (Kotter, IV.421, with reference to M. Richard’s article on the formula). The likely scenario is that the disputation was compiled from a collection of “lecture notes” on the subject produced in John’s school, and thus justifying the retention of the Damascene attribution – again after Sahas, \textit{John of Damascus on Islam}, 99-102; Le Coz, \textit{Ecrits}, 199-203; Janosik, \textit{John of Damascus: First Apologist}, 116-119. Notwithstanding critical questions that might be raised about this argument, this level of association with the Damascene tradition is sufficient for our purposes. Shadler’s assessment of the text is decidedly negative and he accordingly treats it only in passing, but he does leave open the possibility that it is rooted in the Damascene’s tradition (\textit{John of Damascus on Islam}, 6. See also his more complete treatment in \textit{Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History}, 367-370).

\footnote{176} Although Sahas and Le Coz are careful not to exaggerate what can be known about John’s engagement with the religion on the basis of the two extant texts, the devotion of full scholarly studies to the subject implies that John’s response to Islam is more detailed and more useful than it actually is. Janosik makes this implicit exaggeration explicit by portraying the Damascene as the “first apologist to the Muslims.” Schader’s work is much more circumspect in attempting to place John’s assessment in its proper context as Christian heresiology, but is still prone to exaggerations – for instance, suggesting that John’s whole heresiological treatise was principally an extended prologue to his treatment of Islam (\textit{John of Damascus on Islam}, 14).

\footnote{177} Such is the suggestion of Meyendorff, “Byzantine Views of Islam,” who likewise estimates John’s impact on the history of Byzantine polemics against the religion to be minimal. See Ch 3, n 11 above.
fact, John gives us no reason to consider his work a response to Islam more than it was a response to any other heretical opinion he catalogues. Above all, John believes that a robust and coherent integration of orthodox Christian wisdom will offer the ultimate account of reality, including everything true and good and beautiful that might be discovered through other philosophical system but avoiding every poisonous admixture of falsehood found so frequently in the opinions of man. To John, in other words, speaking the truth of orthodoxy with confidence and clarity was an adequate response to all heresies.

John makes only occasional references to Islam, and his treatment is usually dismissive. While he treats some heresies as being useful errors to illustrate the truth of orthodoxy,\textsuperscript{178} he never looks at Islam this way: if he means his theological system to have a polemical against the new religion, he never says so.\textsuperscript{179} Indeed, John’s comments suggest a greater interest in demeaning Islam than offering it a patient and careful evaluation. When he speaks of the faith of the ruling Arabs, exasperation is palpable in

\textsuperscript{178} To cite a few examples, John contrasts orthodox theology with the ideas of the Greek philosophers (ie., \textit{Exp. fid.} 4.14, 20.10), Nestorianism (47.35, 58) and Monophysitism (via Dioscorus, Eutyches, and Severus: 47.54-56) or will specifically and by name denounce a heretical idea as a part of rejecting it (ie., Judaism at 7.34, Arianism at 8.265, Origenism at 15.35 and 26.23, Greek astrology at 21.117, Nestorianism at 56.48, 54, 65.33, 66.10; Monophysitism at 48.54-56). Elsewhere, he positions orthodoxy between two heretical views as the correct mean between to extremes or exaggerations (ie., between polytheism and Judaism at \textit{Exp. fid.} 7.28-32 and between their iconographic positions at 89.17-18. See also Section 3.2. With the exception of the (dubiously attributed) \textit{Disputation}, however, John never uses Islam in this way. While attempts have been made to find tacit contrasts with Islam in the Damascene’s theological articulation, the absence of these explicit contrasts weaken the argument substantially.

\textsuperscript{179} Louth tentatively suggests that the shape of the opening seven chapters of the \textit{Exp. fid.} might be an answer to the charges of Islam (and Judaism) emphasizing the unity of the Godhead (\textit{St. John Damascene}, 102-103); Janosik similarly suggests that the Damascene contributed to Trinitarian theology in light of the challenges of answering an Islamic context, going further to suggest that John’s engagement with other heresies were a form of argument by proxy (\textit{First Apologist}, 170-198). Both suggestions, however, are weak in relying on reading implicit evidences exclusively.
his prose: thrice in his short chapter on the heresy on the Ishmaelites, he describes passages from the Qur’an as γέλως άξια – laughable;\textsuperscript{180} it is all τερατολογία – absurd fiction;\textsuperscript{181} Muhammad’s thinking is ληρώδιας – silliness.\textsuperscript{182} John does not use these terms or constructions anywhere else in his corpus: the religion of the Arabs is uniquely targeted for derision, leaving one with the distinct impression that John considers the heresy of the Ishmaelites a point of view hardly worthy of serious consideration.

Still, the Damascene’s dismissal of Muhammad, the Qur’an, and its associated legends does not mean that the religious preferences of the ruling class exerted no pressure on the beliefs and practices of his community. Indeed, John himself describes the religion of the Ishmaelites as κρατοῦσα\textsuperscript{183} – prevailing or ascendant; perhaps even coercive, if we follow Janosik.\textsuperscript{184} Various forms of abandonment of the Christian faith in response to the ascendency of the new religion was a well-attested reality: widespread apostasy seems to be a matter of concern, for instance, for Anastasios of Sinai\textsuperscript{185} and in the canons of Jacob of Edessa (d. 708),\textsuperscript{186} as both grapple with the reception of those who return to the faith after having defected to the Arab religion. Ps-Methodius’s

\textsuperscript{180} Haer. 100.16, 32, 152.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 100.32.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 100.86, 88, 95.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 100.1.
\textsuperscript{184} Janosik, John of Damascus: First Apologist, 260. This rendering, we should note, is not especially likely, as more in tune with Janosik’s assumptions about the weight of Islam in John’s imagination than with the usual valence of the term.
\textsuperscript{185} See the collection of quotations from Anastasius to this effect in Hoyland, Seeing Islam, 100-101. The precise content of Anastasius’s corpus is an open question, but regardless of the authenticity these texts attributed to him would nevertheless express this generalized anxiety.
\textsuperscript{186} See the texts collected by Holyand, Seeing Islam, 162-163.
apocalyptic tone makes the matter seem especially bleak. Some of this religious unrest undoubtedly involved conversions to the religion of the conquerors, although the extent and character of that conversion in the early Islamic centuries is difficult to determine, as is the extent to which efforts at converting the subjugated peoples was coordinated by a centralized intention or systematic effort on the part of the new ruling powers.

Whatever the specifics of the situation, however, the forces at play in the wake of the rise and establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate presented major and persistent challenge to the Christian community in the Damascene’s time – and John, as a leader in the community, was sensitive to these pressures. John gives Islam little by way of explicit attention, but it would be surprising if his theological output were not in some way shaped by these concerns.

The absence of clear and reliable documentary witness to the interreligious climate of eighth century Jerusalem is mitigated, in part, by what the Umayyads themselves wrote in stone – the imposing monumental evidence of the Dome of the

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187 Studying Jewish and Christian legal frameworks for apostasy and reconversion in the early Islamic period, U. Simonsohn has observed that significant complexities attended shifting personal and communal religious identities (“‘Halting Between Two Opinions:’ Conversion and Apostasy in Early Islam,” (2013)). In his “Conversion, Exemption, and Manipulation: Social Benefits and Conversion to Islam in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages,” (2017), he contends that – because the new theocratic framework of Islam was structurally comparable to the previous social arrangements – conversion became a complex mechanism for the navigation of social benefits between religious communities.

188 The popular notion that Islam, from the beginning, was a concrete and consistent religio-political system that was spread “by the sword” has been effectively deconstructed by critical scholarship. Rather, it seems that the religion began as a radically monotheistic movement concentrated among the Arabs that stood in basic continuity with Judeo-Christianity, but incorporating a distinctive prophetic revelation and especially radical monotheistic principle. That identity evolved over time, however, in synergy with the development of Islamic social and political structures. See R. Bulliet, Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period (1979) esp. 104-114, and M. Morony, “The Age of Conversions: A Reassessment” (1990), 135-150. See also Janosik’s analysis of the trends in scholarship on Islamic origins in First Apologist, 68-78. Janosik rightly identifies that John’s picture of Islam fits well with the “revisionist” picture of Islamic origins, but fails to account for this adequately in his treatment of John’s engagement with the emerging religion.
Rock. As a shrine complex completed in the last decades of the seventh century on the site of the ruined Jewish Temple, the Dome would have still been a relatively new feature of Jerusalem’s urban landscape of when John arrived in 705. The first generation of Arab leadership had been content to worship in large wooden structures on the site of the Temple, which the Christian Byzantines had deliberately left in ruins. The Umayyads, however, driven by a vision of the permanence and prestige of their empire, desired to erect a monument expressive of their dominance that would rival the grandeur of the ecclesiastical architecture that then characterized the city. Notably, however, the chosen form of memorial was a new construction, and did not involve the expropriation of an existing ecclesiastical site or edifice, as it had – for instance – in Damascus. The choice of location for the monument may have had some supercessionist overtones, but the leading rationale was probably practical: the Temple Mount was effectively empty. As a rule, the Arab conquerors tried to avoid disrupting the existing civil infrastructure of the cities they conquered: their communities, instead, settled on new areas, or made camp in the outskirts of existing cities, with the garrison becoming a suburb of the main urban

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189 Even here, however, we must be cautious not to overstate what we know: which is less than we think we do, as M. Milwright concludes in his monograph study of the inscription (*The Dome of the Rock and its Umayyad Mosaic Inscription*) (2016), 253).

190 So observed by the Frankish pilgrim, Arculf, in the 670s. Adomnán, *De locis sanctis* 1.1.14.

191 See O. Grabar, *Shape of the Holy* (1996), 21-43. Note, however, J. Lassner’s incisive critique of the assumption which appears in Grabar – as well as much popular scholarship – that Umayyad activities in Jerusalem represented an attempt to co-opt Jerusalem as a holy city for the Islamic faith, and possibly the center of an Islamic empire. “One can hardly conclude,” Lassner notes, “that the first of the Umayyad line had a specific plan to shift the capital of the Islamic realm from Damascus to Jerusalem, let alone that he envisioned Jerusalem as a center of Muslim religious activity” (*Medieval Jerusalem* (2017), 80).

192 Some scholars suggest that, following Heraclius’ activity in Jerusalem in association with the return of the True Cross, there was new Byzantine activity on the Temple Mount after 630, and in fact, the octagonal design of the Dome may have originally been the beginnings of a Byzantine Church. See for instance, C. Mango, “The Temple Mount: AD 614-638” (1991).
center. In the case of Jerusalem, the southwest corner was given over to the new developments to accommodate the settlers that arrived in the wake of the conquest, and the vacant Temple Mount appropriated for their shrine. The Dome of the Rock, accordingly – like the swell of Arab settlers in their circumscribed area of the city – communicated presence more than force, even as that presence cast a significant shadow over the city’s broader religious life. A strong Christian majority maintained for several centuries within the religious and social ecosystem established by the Umayyads, with Islam thoroughly reshaping the urban landscape only centuries later, in the aftermath of the Crusades.

Nevertheless, the lengthy inscriptions that adorn the monument testify to an explicit theological intention in the scope of the Umayyad designs. “Do not exaggerate in your religion,” the inscription on the inner octagonal arcade warns the “people of the book:”

The Messiah Jesus, Son of Mary, was a messenger of God: his word he bestowed on her as well as a spirit from him. So do not say “Three:” desist, it is better for you. For indeed God is one God, glory be to him. [It is foolish to think] that he should have a son. To him belong what is in heaven and what is on earth, and [God] is sufficient as its guardian. The Messiah does not disdain to be a servant of God, nor do the highest angels...Bless your messenger and your servant Jesus son of Mary and peace be upon him on the day of birth and on the day of death and on the day he is

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193 On patterns of Arab settlement in the conquered territory, see F. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 221-250, esp. 245-250 for the particularities of settlement in Syro-Palestine.


195 So the Islamic geographer al-Maqdisi complain as late as the tenth century that Christians were of a strong majority (*Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm*, 167, following Schick, “A Christian City,” 318). Civil reorganization in Jerusalem and several other cities of the region was catalyzed by the Crusades, as the brutality of the warfare left substantial parts of the city in need of rebuilding, and the indigenous Christian populations had become suspect consequent to the hostilities. See Grabar, *Shape of Holy*, 161-169; Abu-Munshar, *Islamic Jerusalem* (2007), 143-173.
raised up again. This is Jesus son of Mary….It is not for God to take a son: glory be to him. When he decrees a thing, he only says “Be” and it is … there is no God but he.196

The exterior inscriptions, likewise, iterate the same more concisely: “There is no god but God, One, without associate,” it reads, repeating the refrain four times.197 Some permutation of the verse “Say: he is God alone, God the eternal, he does not beget nor is he begotten and there is no one like him,” appears, not only on both the interior and exterior face, but on the copper plaques above the northern and eastern doors as well.198 The plaques on the doors are especially instructive, as having a pointed message to perceived religious opponents: “Glory to [God] and may he be exalted over what polytheists associate [to him],”199 for he gave Muhammad as his messenger “whom he sent with guidance and the religion of truth to proclaim it over all religions, even though the polytheists hate it.”200

The communicative act intended by the monument is complex: indeed, it is unclear precisely who would have been reading the inscriptions, or how their impact may have been disseminated among local Christians. The proclamation of radical monotheism through monumental inscriptions had become an important practice in Umayyad territory, as Marcus Milwright has demonstrated, and, in formerly Byzantine areas, the

196 The inscription, which proceeds counterclockwise along the inner wall beginning at the south side, follows Q 4:171-172 and Q 19:33-36; concluding with Q 3:18-19: “God bears witness that there is no God but he, [as do] the angels and those wise in justice […and] the religion of God is Islam. Those who were given the Book did not dissent except after knowledge came to them [and they became] envious of each other.” Translation follows Grabar, Shape of the Holy, 57-60.

197 The refrain appears on the south, southwest, north, and east walls of the outer octagonal arcade.

198 The text is from Q 112, slightly altered.

199 East door, echoing Q 16:3.

Christian community was the natural target of that proclamation. In the case of the Dome of the Rock, the sequence of the inscriptions seem to be specially selected with Christian Jerusalem in mind: allusions to the life of Jesus on the interior face trace through his birth, crucifixion, and resurrection, perhaps following the sequence of the city’s principal shrine churches. As such, the Dome offers an alternative orientation to and interpretation of Jerusalem as sacred space, and testifies to the self-understanding of an ascendant class in Jerusalem who considered themselves the true faithful over and against the majority population, whom they labeled “associationists” who had compromised pure monotheism.

The Dome proclaims its theological conviction with confidence and zeal, but the inscription is not stridently proselytizing: indeed, notwithstanding the Islamic theology of the message evident in retrospect, it is possible to read it as stressing a vision of civil interreligious harmony based on a shared monotheism. Again, the Umayyad call to Nicene Christians through the mosaic inscription was to stop “exaggerat[ing their] religion:” which it is not unnatural to interpret as an exhortation to relent to greater

\[201\] The Dome of the Rock and its Mosaic Inscriptions (2017), 223-226. Milwright also notes, however, that the aims of the inscription seems to have shifted with the rise of al-Walid to tend to internal disputes among Muslims.


\[203\] John addresses the charge of associationism in Haer. 100. See n 205 below.

\[204\] On the radical edge of revisionist readings, C. Luxembourg makes the fascinating argument that the religious sensibilities emerging from the Umayyads in the 8th C was a non-Nicene form of Christianity rather than a separate religion, and that the distinctiveness of “Islam” emerge in conjunction with the reinterpretation of the terms “Islam” and “Muhammad” only sometime after the end of the dynasty (post-750) (“A New Interpretation of the Arabic Inscription in Jerusalem’s Dome of the Rock” (2010), following the method he develops for approaching the Qur’an in Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran (2004)). Luxembourg’s argument – made on philological grounds so technical and so idiosyncratic that it is difficult to evaluate – ultimately stretches the bounds of credibility, but the fact that it can be made in earnest testifies to the extraordinary range of interpretive possibilities that the extant evidence can support.
consistency within the monotheism of the prophetic, Scriptural faith they already possessed. The Dome’s underlying invitation to accept Islam might thus be read quite broadly, not necessarily as promoting the adoption of a new, separate and distinctive religious system, but as proposing a peace that subverts confusions over Christology and Trinitarian questions by insisting on the forceful rearticulation of the monotheistic principle.

This reading fits well with what we see in the Damascene’s corpus. While John is aggressively dismissive of the particular revelation on which Islam stakes its religious claims, his comments are more measured when he speaks to the theological pith of the Islamic theological genius, or draws associations between Islamic beliefs other heretical sects and systems. Claims about Muhammad or the Qur’an are laughable to John, but the implicit claim that Christianity is inconsistent or incoherent associated with switching the basis of authority to a new revelation does grab his attention: in fact, the Damascene’s whole theological project is arrayed against this supposition. John answers Islam, not by addressing particular arguments point by point, but by re-presenting Christian orthodoxy as refined and articulated by the Fathers and the Ecumenical Councils as a whole, integrated, and reasonable system of knowledge. Incidentally, the same answer applies to heretics of other flavors as well.

205 John responds to the Islamic charge that the Christians are ἑταρμαστῆς – associationists – for ascribing an associate to God in declaring Christ to be his Son (Haer. 100.61-63, 70, 76) – by reversing the claim, and describing Muslims of being “κόπται τοῦ θεοῦ” – “mutilators of God” in denying the divinity of Word and Spirit, and demoting these to the level of creature (100.73-77).

206 John to suggests that the Ishamelite creed may be a species of Arianism, through his own rendition of the Bahira legend identifying Muhammad’s monastic interlocutor as an Arian monk. Bahira is more frequently identified as a Nestorian. See P. Schadler, John of Damascus and Islam, 166-172.
4.3  *John of Damascus against Heresies*

Modern scholarship has not yet given John Damascene’s heresiology the attention it deserves. Peter Schadler’s *John of Damascus on Islam* offers a good starting point: he contextualizes the Damascene’s work by offering a thorough engagement with emerging scholarship on reading and interpreting late ancient heresiological projects. At the same time, however, Schadler proves more interested in commenting on John’s treatment of Islam than parsing the orientation of his larger anti-heretical agenda, and this significantly truncates his discussion of the Damascene’s heresiology. Most of John’s anti-heretical writings, in fact, remain without translation or commentary in a modern language, and these texts comprise a considerable portion of his surviving corpus.

John’s arguments against iconoclasm and his treatment of Islam have received considerable attention, and some consideration has been given to the overall scope of John’s anti-heretical project through translations and discussions of the treatment of heresies associated with the *Pege Gnoseos*, a comprehensive study of John’s heresiology is still lacking. This lacuna represents a profound gap in our understanding.

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207 Schadler offers two helpful preparatory chapters for considering John’s heresiology: “Heresy and Heresiology in Late Antiquity” surveying the themes and texts of the tradition of heresiology John is picking up (20-48), and “Aspects of the Intellectual Background,” exploring John’s intellectual project in the context of his broader community of scholars, and the place of heresiology within that project (49-96).

208 Kotter collects these texts into Volume IV of his edition, which at over 400 pages, is one of the heftier volumes of the series. To this could be added John’s works against the iconoclasts, which Kotter treats separately in Volume III.

209 John’s *On Heresies* appears in Chase’s *Writings* (111-163) as part of a full translation of the *PGn* between the *Dial.* and *Exp. fid.*, incidentally anticipating the fashion that Louth will later argue the full work ought to be reconstructed (*St. John Damascene*, 32-37).

210 The major exception to this is A. Louth, who dedicates a whole section to the Damascene’s attention to heresies, which he describes as “defining error” within the scope of John’s comprehensive project (*St. John Damascene*, 54-76). Louth’s treatment, however, can scarcely be regarded as more than a starting point, as giving only the briefest attention to the question of how all of the pieces fit together, and
of John and his world: not only has a significant area of the Damascene’s interest been overlooked, an insufficient attention has been paid to the way in which John mapped the social-intellectual life of the persons outside of the Church. A thorough study of Damascene heresiology would, accordingly, contribute significantly to our appreciation for how he imagined his world.\textsuperscript{211}

Maintaining our focus on the Damascene’s demonology, we must leave the comprehensive study of his heresiology as a desiderium: nevertheless, attention to that aspect of his thought has two important functions for this project. First, surveying John’s engagement with heresies reiterates the conclusion of the previous section: John’s theological project was not so much concerned with answering Islam as a religious system as responding to a world thrown into confusion by the advances of the new Arab-dominated religio-secular power. Second, the belief-content of the sects John identifies as leading heresies gives us some clues about the ways that Christian beliefs were shifting in response to the crises of the seventh and eighth centuries – or at least, it gives us clues about what John was worried about in the theological drift of his contemporaries. Several of those tendencies, I will submit, had a pronounced demonological edge.

Before diving into the demonological traces in John’s heresiology, however, it is important to give a sense for the flavor of that dimension of his project. John’s interest in heresy was not especially unique. The Ecumenical Councils had long enshrined the treating – primarily – of only three of the heresies to which John gives extended treatment – namely, Manicheanism, Messalianism, and (of course) Islam.

\textsuperscript{211} Effective parallel work has been completed for Epiphanius by Y. Kim, “The Imagined Worlds of Epiphanius of Cyprus,” (2006), and more generally across the earliest Christian heresiographies by T. Berzon, \textit{Classifying Christians} (2016).
practice of defining orthodoxy in part by denouncing heresy, and this practice percolated through the patristic tradition. One of the more recent examples in John’s memory would have been Sophronius’s *Synodical Letter* – a concise overview of conciliar theology in some ways anticipating the scope of John’s project – which likewise contained an inventory of heresies.\(^\text{212}\) John diverges from the pattern of these sources somewhat by offering his catalogue of heresies as a prelude to orthodoxy, rather than a postscript,\(^\text{213}\) but the expressed logic of his approach is the same: careful wrestling with heretical opinions is an important step in defining the boundaries of orthodoxy. John embodies this principle most directly in his polemical treatises, which – in giving John an opportunity to refine his articulation of key points of doctrine – also engables him to develop points of doctrine that will appear in his *Exposition*.\(^\text{214}\)

The Damascene’s most important heresiological inspiration, however, was the *Panarion* of Epiphanius. Not only did John take his first eighty heresies directly from the *Panarion*,\(^\text{215}\) his list – like its fourth century precedent – stresses theological aesthetics

\(^{212}\) See P. Allen, *Sophronius of Jerusalem and Seventh century Heresy* (2009). The text of the heresiology is in section 6 of the *Synodical Letter* (pp. 136-150); with Allen’s commentary on the heresiology on occupying 54-64.

\(^{213}\) Notwithstanding that within most of the manuscript tradition, *Haer.* appears separately from *Dial.* and *Exp. fid.*, John clearly expresses this as the overall structural objective of his *Pege Gnoseos* in *Dial.* proem, 46f: “First, I shall set forth the best contributions of Greeks philosophers…Next, I shall set forth in order the absurdities of the heresies hated of God, so that by recognizing the lie we may more closely follow the truth. Then, with God’s help and by his grace, I shall expose the truth: that truth destroys deceit and puts falsehood to flight.” For an analysis of the structure, see Louth, *St. John Damascene*, 32-37.


\(^{215}\) In addition to taking over Epiphanius’s heresiological list, John appropriates his overarching structural division, which divides the eighty into seven sections. Almost every commentator, accordingly,
over and against the preservation of historical or sociological data. As Andrew Louth wryly opines, “It looks as if a certain amount of ingenuity, as well as genuine historical information, went into the compilation of John’s century of heresies.”

It could hardly have been any other way for the imagination of ancient Christians: if God is regarded as supremely sovereign over history such that even evil and rebellion is ultimately subordinate to him, there must, therefore, be some determinate pattern to sects and heretical movements – despite their own internal contradictions and chaos. This pattern should, ideally, correspond with some figural indication within the Scriptures.

For Epiphanius, the enumeration of eighty heresies bears a certain perfection and eschatological significance on the basis of the eighty concubines of the bridegroom in the Song of Songs. John does not offer an explicit numerological rationale for expanding the Panarion to an even century, but the number one hundred certainly has a self-evident completeness to it; perhaps he wanted to mirror the number of chapters in which he addressed the orthodox faith. Indeed, John may have been willing to be a little squishy notes the dependence: see, for instance, Louth, St. John Damascene, 56-60. There is some question as to whether John composed this summary himself or if he was working from existing one or more existing anakephaliosis. On the basis of a double inclusion of Donatism (originally included in Epiphanius under the Cathars in ch 59, but left out of the summary in the corresponding passage in Haer, and then reintroduced in as Haer. 95) Louth argues that John’s knowledge of the text cannot have been especially deep, if indeed he had access to it at all (60).

216 St. John Damascene, 60.

217 For a detailed treatment of this kind of figural thinking, see E. Radner, Time and the Word: Figural Reading of Christian Scriptures (2016)

218 Cant 6:9, Epiphanius haer proem 1.3 (Holl, I.155), with the image also recapitulated at the conclusion of the work.

219 The century form did have a pre-existing life as a genre for monastic apophthegms, at least from Evagrius. See Louth, St. John Damascene, 36. If Haer. can indeed be considered a century, however, John of Damascus would be the first to appropriate the genre to that end.

220 We return to Contouma’s suggestion, noted earlier, that the century format may in fact have been imposed by a later editor. As a list, however, the heresies are more evenly and objectively delineated.
with his enumeration to make the project come out to an even century; an epilogue
proudly draws attention to the final tally: “These heresies detailed above have been
described in brief because, although they amount to but a hundred altogether, all the rest
come from them.” And even without explicating the eschatological dimensions of his
heresiological numerology, John’s collection seems to retain that for culminating in a
heresy designated as the “forerunner to the Antichrist.” John’s catalogue of heresies,
like those of previous generations, reads almost as a genealogy of heretical
movements; but the purpose of that genealogy was not to mark lines of influence so
much as note perceived conceptual affinities between heretical schools of thought and
affirm the fundamental unity of heresy as a contagion. Accordingly, John suggests
various connections and interdependences between these schools of thought that only
sometimes correspond to the patterns of propagation and evolution that closer historical
research suggests.

The weightiest of the Damascene’s alterations to the Panarion pick up with
Messianism, the last heresy in Epiphanius’s catalogue. Interestingly, outside his
treatment of Islam, John’s chapter on Messalianism is the longest and most detailed of
the De Haeresibus, appending treatment two sources of Messalian doctrine to the

A structural correspondence between the Exp. fid. and Haer, accordingly, would suggest the enumeration
of the former is of a part of Damascene intention.

221 PG 94, 777B. Kotter regards this epilogue as spurious, and does not include it in his edition.
222 Haer 100.
223 The tendency to trace heresy back to a single historical source is popular in early and medieval
Christianity: Simon Magus is a favorite ur-heretic (See A. Ferrerio, Simon Magus in Patristic, Medieval
and Early Modern Traditions (2005), 9-26). Epiphanius’s view – and John following him – is more
complex, with barbarism, scythianism, Hellenism and Judaism identified together as the fundamental roots
of heresy.
summary of Epiphanius’s – one purportedly internal, from “one of their books,” and one external, from the *Ecclesiastical History* of Theodoret. Despite this additional research, John’s understanding of Messalianism is probably poor: he is far removed from Messalianism historically and working primarily with unfriendly sources. Nevertheless, John’s argument does not hinge on the content of Messalian beliefs so much as what can use them to represent. In this respect, what he accomplishes is quite interesting, and quite useful for our purposes: the Damascene invokes Messalianism to exemplify a dissolution of Christian asceticism into ascetical spiritualism, and then he goes on to trace this tendency he through several of the latter-day heresies that he adds to the catalogue.

John is not the first ecclesiarch to interpret Messalianism in this way, nor will he be the last. In Epiphanius’s treatment, Messalianism bears an ultimacy as the eightieth of eighty heresies: it epitomizes the pious movement that collapses under its own weight without the clear guiding light of the catholic hierarchy and sacraments at its core, and as such, is a sign of terminal Christian decadence at the “end of the age.” Later debates, meanwhile, in part drawing on John’s example, will likewise take up Messalianism as the archetypal spiritualist heresy: it is the charge, for instance, leveled against Gregory Palamas. Of course, the structure of the Damascene’s expanded heresiology does not mirror Epiphanius perfectly, nor does it take on the clear, explicit shape of the later usage. Above all, none of the disintegrative heresies John adds ascend to the position of

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224 *Haer* 80.6. See Section 3.1.


226 *Panarion* 80 (484f). See T. Berzon, *Classifying Christians* (2016), 75. Notably, even Epiphanius’s caricature is based upon a Greek caricature that may already be based more in vague anxieties about peculiarities in the Syriac ascetical tradition that have been amplified by rumor, rather than a sober assessment of the practices of a particular community. See Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks* (2002), 84.
unambiguous ultimacy that Messalianism had in the original *Panarion*. Instead, these sects linger in the background as John lays out a concern for heretical sects that were better organized and capable of providing a more direct and immediate challenge to the Church – specifically, Islam, iconoclasm, and the ecclesiastical bodies separated from the mainstream conciliar Church over issues of Christology.

Two sects that John observes reflect Messalian tendencies especially strongly. The *Hicetae* (87), first, he identifies as “ascetics and in everything orthodox,” except that “they congregate with women in monasteries and offer to God hymns accompanied by music and dancing.” John’s brief record is our only known source of information about this sect, although the association with Messalianism has been made since Lequien at least, since the group seems to be characterized by the same kind of disregard for ecclesiastical ordinances and laxity about the mingling of genders noted by John in his complaints about the Messalians. The second group – the *Lampetians* (98) – offer a somewhat clearer case: their founder, Lampetius, is identified as Messalian by the learned testimony of the Patriarch Photius, and although Photius writes later than John, he draws on earlier sources. John also links the sect to Messalianism, albeit somewhat more obliquely, through the *Aerian* sect (75). A later explanatory note inserted into some manuscript traditions adds that among the leaders of the Aerians was a certain Eustathius,

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227 PG 94, 756D.
228 *Haer* 80.22f.
229 Photius describes Eustathius in his epitome of the dossier of documents in his possession relating to the Council at Pamphylia (383) as “the first of the Messalian sect who succeeded in worming his way into the dignity of the priesthood” (*Bibliotheca*, LII).
from whom are the *Eustathians* – an alternative designation for the Messalians.\(^{230}\) Among other things, this sect took a radical stand against making oaths, and accordingly practiced ambivalence towards the symbols and structure of ascetic orders.\(^{231}\) Other sects reflecting a more generalized rebellion against the tradition and discipline of the Church – the *Agonyclites*, for instance, who refused to kneel for prayer (91) – could have Messalian overtones in their anti-ecclesiastical postures.

John’s catalogue also discloses a tendency of certain groups within the Christian community to undermine the textual sources of the tradition, which – although not necessarily Messalian – could correspond to similar spiritualist impulses. Chief among these are the *Gnosimachi* – those who fight against knowledge – who assert “that those who search the sacred Scriptures for some higher knowledge are doing something useless,” and that “it is better to take a simpler course and not to be curious after any doctrine arrived at by learned research” (88). The *Parermeneutae*, similarly, “misinterpret passages of the Scriptures” and “manipulate them to serve their own purposes” because of a “certain lack of education and judgement” (97). There are, finally, the *Theocatagnostae*, who go beyond the lionization of ignorance to find fault with the Lord and his disciples for certain of his words and actions, as well as the Scriptures themselves (92).

\(^{230}\) This association seems to follow, at least in part, from the same anti-Messalian tome read by Photius, noted above. The connection, at any rate, serves to link Lampetianism not only to Messalianism, but also to Arianism. There is also some formal correspondence in structure of belief, since Aerius’s sect was also anti-clerical.

\(^{231}\) Lampetius authored a *Testament* which may well have been circulation during John’s time. This could help to explain the number of connections John wants to identify for the sect.
Other heresies on John’s list imply a revival (or, possibly, survival) of certain pagan beliefs and practices. While most distant from specifically Messalian concerns, it is not impossible that this tendency would involve some of the same root of anti-ecclesiastical and anti-sacramental spiritualist impulses. In any case, the proliferation of such a position suggests a dissolution of the ecclesiastical authority capable of regulating and prohibiting such practices, and a corresponding move within Christian circles away from formal and institutionalized religion into practices identified by churchmen as magical and superstitious. In this category are the *Ethnophrones* (94), who are said to bring in “fortune and fate; astronomy and astrology; divination and augury,” as well as making “recourse to auspices, averting evil by sacrifice, omens, interpretations of signs, spells, and similar superstitions of impious people,” and the *Heliotropites* (89), who practice a veneration of sunflowers, believing that the tendency of the plant to turn its blossom to face the sun corresponds to a magical or divinatory property.

The heresies John collects between the mid-fifth century and the reign of Heraclius (r. 610-641), then, serve to extend the Epiphanian anxiety regarding the rise of Messalianism anti-ecclesiastical, anti-sacramental spiritualism into a whole series of minor heresies sprinkled in among the major controversial movements that had emerged since Epiphanius’s time. It would seem, on this basis, that John shares the anxieties about

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232 The Messalian emphasis on demonology, on the other hand, might be rendered in some sense pagan, thus making the same connection from the other direction.

233 The *Exp. fid.* makes passing denunciations of some of these opinions as well: fate and fortune in treating the freedom of the will (39.12f), astrology (21.119f), and divination with respect to the nature of thought (33.6).

234 The echoes of a Manichean cosmology should be noted here: this presumption is likely built upon a materialist dualism which makes a hard identification of light and goodness – although of course the full theological system of the sect is unknown.
the proliferation of these movements, and the vivid demonology they could potentially involve.

There is one other major consideration to make regarding John’s heresiology, however: and while it seems initially to work against the thesis developed above, in the end, it strengthens it significantly. In marking a major transition in that ages after Heraclius, John had displaced Epiphanius’s ultimate concern with a new one. According to Kotter’s edition, John lists two heresies in this terminal period: Monotheletism (99) and Islam (100). John might be implying a causal link by juxtaposing the two in this fashion: such a relationship had certainly appeared in some earlier sources. John is not explicit on the relationship between the two, however, and it is likely that this theory would have been shortly abandoned when the resolution of the Monothelete controversy in the 680s failed to bring divine succor from the Arab onslaught. It is not to a duo that John gives the ignominy of the final place in his heresiology, then, but one sect in particular: Islam, the “heresy of the Ishmaelites” – which, as previously noted, John considers the “forerunner to the antichrist.”

Still, as we noted above, while Arab religion loomed large in John’s mind and imagination, Islam was not directly determinative of John’s project. One important but

235 Thus Maximus the Confessor is reported to have advised Peter of Numidia not to send troops to support Egypt during the invasion, because God’s favor was not with the empire under Heraclius – presumably because of his promotion of Monotheletism (PG 90.112A-B). Sectarian authors were often quite vocal in seeing the success of the Arabs as retribution for imperial endorsement of theological errors: ps-Athanasius, for instance, blaming the ascendency of dyophysitism; John of Nikiu, ps-Ephrem, and Dionysius of Tellmahre similarly flagging the persecution of Monophysites as the cause; George of Resh’aina and the Syriac life of Maximus blamed the progress of dyotheletism, and Bar Penkaye, Theopaschism. It seems likely that such charges would have been leveled against monotheletism, although such views are not explicitly articulated in the extant literature. On Islam as a tool of divine wrath, see Hoyland, Seeing Islam, 524-526.
often overlooked problem is that that many manuscripts of the manual include three additional heresies. After Kotter, these short chapters have been regarded as later interpolations and not authentic to the Damascene. The first point – that these additional heresies represent an addition to the original plan of the work – is reasonably secure: between the internal evidence for this numbering, the coherent logic of the arrangement, and the parallelism with the one hundred chapters of the Exposition, Kotter’s conclusion that the original plan of the work was as a manual of one hundred heresies culminating in Islam is well-established. The second conclusion is worth revisiting, however: it is not unreasonable to suggest that John himself may have been motivated to amend his work based on the evolving situation of the Church around him in his own lifetime. Iconoclasm is not enumerated among the original one hundred heresies, and, given John’s vociferous public role in defending the Church’s received practice against iconoclastic critique, this is a curious omission; an oversight so major it almost certainly indicates that John completed the original heresiological catalogue at some point before the outbreak of iconoclasm in the 720s.

It is not difficult to imagine that when John sat down towards the end of his life to compile the three-part Pege Gnoseos, developments in the life of the Church prompted him to make the additions to his heresiological catalog. Of course, the final three final chapters are very poorly integrated into the overall plan of the work, and this creates a problem: one would think revisions by the authors own hand would be more thoughtfully crafted with the scope of the collection in mind, or at least that some small editorial effort

236 Schriften JD IV, 5-10.

237 See notes on the internal evidence and scholarly discussion above at n 174.
would have been made to soften the internal discrepancies they introduce. It is possible, however, that John felt the urgency of adding these heresies outweighed his interest maintaining the original shape and structure of the book. There is no question that John experienced iconoclasm as a major trauma, and its emergence – in leaving him less confident as to the overarching providential shape of history – may have likewise inspired him to be less concerned about leaving Islam in the ultimate position of his list.

Another possibility – perhaps slightly stronger – is that the editor who made the amendment was a member of John’s circle: someone motivated by the same concerns and working from John’s unfinished notes on these later heresies, but operating with less sensitivity to the plan of the work. The emendations, at any case, occurred relatively early on in the life of the treatise: the text must have been altered at some point before the turn of the ninth century, since Patriarch Nicephoros of Constantinople, in his Third Antirrhesis against Constantine Copronymus, would excerpt Chapter 102 of John’s manual of heresies as such and verbatim, reflecting the enumeration of the extended version as it is represented in the majority manuscript tradition picked up by Lequien.

If we accept the first narrative and consider these revisions as made by the Damascene’s own hand – as most readers, historically, have assumed – it offers us a vibrant picture of the urgency John faced in producing the final edition of his On Heresies: the exigencies of the situation were such that he was unable to live up to his systematic proclivities in the revision. But even if we take the safer route of ascribing the additions to an unknown editor, the early emendations still point to a chaotic and

238 Much as we saw above in the case of the Disp.: see n 175 above.
239 PG 100, 528C
challenging period within the life of the Jerusalemite Church in years proximate to John’s life and writing. After all, it is important to observe that, in addition to marking the rise of iconoclasm, the amended heresies testify to a deepening and intensification of the anti-ecclesiastical trends already reflected in some of the heresies noted above. The first of these, that of the Autoproscopae – noted in Lequien’s edition as Heresy 100\textsuperscript{240} – describes the tendency of yet another anti-ecclesiastical group to profess generally orthodox theology while cutting themselves off from the communion of the Church. While claiming to follow the canons of the Church and honor the ecclesiastical offices, these groups – by the author’s evaluation – have in fact quickly dissolved into disorder, “offending in the very things of which they accuse others.”\textsuperscript{241} It is for this reason they are called Autoproscopae – those who offend against themselves – as violating their own principles.

Yet more alarming than this is the appearance of a group called the Aposchistae (for abandoning the communion of the Church) or Doxarii (for delighting in their own opinions), included as the final heresy – Heresy 103 – by Lequien. It is worth quoting their description at some length:

These [Aposchistae] seek after their own glory and do not submit to the judgement of God, or to his priests; and they are thoroughly acquainted with the heresy of the Autoproscopae: like them, they require the observance of canonical ordinances, although they are neither bishops nor presidents of the people, but only some of the herd, separating themselves from the catholic

\textsuperscript{240} PG 94, 771-774. Kotter flatly omits chapters 102, 103, and the epilogue from his edition as spurious, although he does admit Lequin’s 100 in a footnote.

\textsuperscript{241} There seem to be notes of a Donatist mentality here, insofar as the rationale for separation (if not the outcome) seems to have been maintaining the purity of the Church. John does not make the connection, and in fact describes Donatism (Heresy 95, although subsumed by Epiphanius into the Cathars, his Heresy 59) as instead involving a peculiar ritual involving the veneration of a bone in conjunction with receiving communion.
Church. Rivaling the...Messalians, they tell the ascetics not to attend ecclesiastical *synaxaria*, but to be satisfied with prayers offered in their own monasteries.\(^{242}\)

What’s more – the complaint goes on – this group is in a state of “utter confusion” and “their falsehood is split into many factions” – an extremely chaotic movement, in other words. Most telling, however, is the final comment: “And may we be delivered both from the ravings of the iconoclasts and from the insanity of the *Aposchistae*, which, although they are diametrically opposed evils, are equal in their impiety.”\(^{243}\) This diametric opposition suggests that, while the two tendencies are radical departures from the tradition of conciliar orthodoxy, they point in opposite directions: iconoclasm as a heresy leveled against apostolic tradition, but endorsed by authoritative structures in the imperial Church; *aposchistism*, meanwhile, abandons the Church in the name maintaining apostolic traditions – although the *Aposchistae* are subsequently unable to agree on what, precisely, the apostolic traditions are. The coupling of the two, nevertheless, suggests that they are on a similar level to one another in terms of their impact in the disrupting local ecclesiastical context, and that the need to rebuff the two is equally urgent.

The text of the amended chapters offers too small a sample to speak with confidence, but character of its declamation seems consistent with the kind of work we saw John doing in the earlier, undisputed chapters of the *On Heresies*. As he named the heresies of the fifth and sixth centuries, John was also looking to name anti-ecclesiastical and anti-sacramental tendencies of his own time: the added chapters simply take a much more immediate and much more urgent approach to the same goal. In either case,

\(^{242}\) PG 94, 776.

\(^{243}\) Ibid., 776B.
however, these latter heresies are unlike the others. They are not vigorous movements organized around a coherent teaching; if there were charismatic leaders involved, John did not record their names. Indeed, these latter sects can scarcely be called heresies in John’s sense of the term, insofar as John’s heresies are as much a matter of naming a discrete group of misbelievers as it is the content of their misbelief. Instead, these later heresies seem mostly a product of exhaustion and disillusionment at a grassroots level. The absence of a strong, visible pattern of teaching and leadership makes these groups diffuse but resilient. John knows and feels their strength in his community, and yet, at the same time, they are nearly invisible to him. Without a concrete name for these tendencies, John grapples with them continually, often coming back to the theme as he works his way through Epiphanius’s *Panarion* and his own summary catalogue of the later heresies. He tries repeatedly to name them, with recourse both to historical designations and to neologisms, but comes ultimately to contemplating them most of all under the species of Messalianism.

Observing how John’s treatment of Manicheanism parallels these concerns helps to strengthen this hypothesis. As we noted in the previous chapter, John suggests Messalian theology is in some respects a lighter form of the materialist dualism characteristic of Manicheanism.\(^{244}\) The reverse implication also holds true – for John, Manicheanism represents the extreme form of the dualistic theological drift, abstracted from the sacramental and ecclesiological lapses characteristic of groups with Messalian tendencies. John alludes to Manicheanism several times over his corpus: in his *Exact

\(^{244}\) See Section 3.1.
Exposition, he makes a pointed denial of Manichean-style dualism in treating of the nature of evil and the demonic, and then he reiterates the point in the miscellany at the end of his treatise. On more than one occasion in his orations in defense of images, John explicitly denounces iconoclasm as a Manichean attitude, and themes from his anti-Manichean writings echo in the Disputation with a Saracen attributed to him. Indeed, the Damascene devotes an entire dialogical treatise to debunking the heresy: nevertheless, he fails to give it a detailed treatment in the course of his catalogue of heresies, and he does not make any explicit genealogical connections between Manicheanism and other sects.

As we posit these heresies working in tandem to give John a framework to interpret the chaotic forces within his sectarian environment, “Manicheanism” becomes the name of root theological disorder of exaggerating the evils of this world beyond the pale of redemption, while the moniker “Messalian” refers to the disintegration of Christian communities – more sociological in character – into anti-sacramental, anti-hierarchical spiritualist sects. John does not explicate the relationship between the two,

245 Exp. fid. 18.11-18.
246 Exp. fid. 92-93.
248 Le Coz makes this suggestion, Ecrits, 136-44; as does Louth, St. John Damascene, 70. The focus of their arguments are parallels to the discussions about providence and free will prevailing in Umayyad theological circles. An additional point should be added to this correspondence noting that the nature of evil serves as the first concern for dialogue in John’s disputation with a Saracen, just as it serves as both the starting point and controlling theme of his Manichean dialogue.
249 He does include an epitome of Epiphanius’s chapter on the sect at the same place it appears in the Panarion, as Heresy 66. However, the discussion is neither very interesting, nor very detailed. Louth identifies the epitome as a typical 5th C description of Manicheanism (St. John Damascene, 64).
250 Importantly, although there are important ways in which the Messalian beliefs intersect with Manichean dualistic materialism, John does not make the genealogical connection between the sects explicitly.
but it is not difficult to imagine how such movements might be logically related and mutually reinforcing: despair at the pervasive realities of evil promotes the breakdown of community life into an individualistic battle with (or flight from) the powers of darkness, and the breakdown of the common life of the Church promotes a sense that evil is an overwhelming and insuperable force. To John’s mind, in either case – as indeed, in all cases – orthodoxy is the answer to these acidic heretical forces: what is needed is a careful return to the resilient font of Christian wisdom welling up from the Scriptures and flowing through the lives and the writings of the holy Fathers that circumvents the powerful temptation to despair and dissolution that were experienced by a Christian community grappling with their subjugation to a foreign power.

4.4 Conclusion

Let us briefly recapitulate the above narrative at this point to offer a consolidated sense of the spirit of the age in which and against which John wrote, and highlight again the kinds of demonological positions this spirit would have supported. Beyond merely upending the incumbent Byzantine Christian order and ushering in a new structure of civil power, the invasions of the seventh century had deposited a diversity of spiritual ideas and opinions in Syro-Palestine and allowed divergent opinions already present in the region to flourish. The robust institutional infrastructure of conciliar Christianity succeeded in weathering this transition but lost its place of dominance and stood substantially challenged by the sudden shift in power dynamics. Indeed, the combination of chaotic forces proved overwhelming for many, prompting the widespread apostasy observed by Ps-Methodius. I have suggested that this apostasy involved a despairing
abandonment of ecclesiastical communities and rituals, as much (and probably more than) the appropriation of the ascendant religious opinions of the new ruling class. In any case, these apostate Christians did not fully cease to be Christians: whether they sought the privilege of worshipping with Muslims or simply stopped going to church, they retained much of the framework and content of their previous faith. It is not difficult to imagine that, under the weight of existential evidence that their religion was not giving them the access to divine power it promised, many Christians would have begun to grope after alternative doctrines better suited to their questions, and alternative practices better suited to their needs.

I submit that, facing the breakdown of the old order and the sudden flowering of sectarian diversity, the temptation of the hour was towards spiritual eclecticism. The believer became a pragmatist: she was less concerned with the boundaries of doctrine and community, and more concerned with assembling – out of the variety of beliefs and opinions swirling around her – some framework for belief and behavior that made sense of the visible and invisible world she inhabited. The context was ripe for the proliferation of unnamed movements: collective yearnings emerging out of a shared Byzantine Christian past, yet reaching out towards an unknown future. Something was needed to tame the demons that plagued the experience of the everyday, for it seemed that the stronghold of the Church had fallen, and the religion of the Arabs was as yet too parochial, too confined to the ethnic enclave of the conquerors who had brought it with them to inspire a widespread shift in allegiance.

As these unnamed groups grasped after a working faith, John in turn grasped to name and catalogue them: this was his motivation for expanding Epiphanius’s
heresiological list, as well as engaging with Manicheanism and Messalianism as root theological disorders. However, much as these unsettled believers were never completely successful in coming to a clear self-definition and sustainable collective identity, so too John was never successful in assigning them a name. The fact that John found Messalianism a helpful touchstone suggests that many of his spiritually unsettled contemporaries drifted into anti-sacramental and anti-ecclesiastical attitudes: nevertheless, the variety of alternatives sought to the erstwhile structures of Christian orthodoxy were so pluriform as to defy reduction to a list. It is appealing, for this reason, although it is far from proven, to imagine an exasperated John ultimately abandoning his tidy list of one hundred heresies to finally offer an awkward one hundred and three – leaving, in last place, a lament regarding the “utter confusions” and “factiousness” of the Aposchistae. As to the spiritual doctrines and beliefs of these movements with respect to the demons, their origin, their activity in the world, meanwhile, it stands to reason that they were at least as vibrant as the Manichean and Messalian movements John ties them to: if anything, their demonologies were that much more elaborate and diverse for the intensity of the yearning to find answers in and access power from the world of the unseen and the unknown.

John’s efforts to define error were, in any case, ultimately unsuccessful: it was a doomed task to begin with, perhaps, given the unlimitedly diffusive character of the subject. His work to consolidate a core of Christian orthodoxy, however, would hit its mark: if he could not define every force at work outside of the Christian faith, he managed to give a coherent overview of the content of what stood within it. The power of the latter project to address the needs implicit in the former should not be underestimated.
Those groups of believers grasping after something would eventually find it: the dust that had been stirred up through the seventh century would eventually settle down as the majority of once-apostates either returned to a regular ecclesiastical sect (John’s synthesis of conciliar orthodoxy most prominent among them), or managed to assimilate to the emerging Islamic creed, as the religion of the Arab rulers succeeded in expanding beyond its ethnic core to become a universal faith.  

Admittedly, this vision of the faith landscape of eighth century Jerusalem is speculative, and relies on a number of imaginative inferences. Barring the appearance of some other data, or some other mode of interpreting the scant evidence that remains, however, all such reconstructions are bound to be speculative, and the inevitable involvement of communal and religious ideologies in narrating the remembered past make the reconstruction of these pasts famously tendentious. This proposal, however, at least offers a narrative to give a sense of the world implied by John’s heresiology, recognizing the extreme caution that must be used in drawing from John’s heresiological imagination as a historical source. This narrative is not entirely without corroboration, moreover: in our next chapter, we will consider several works representative of alternative demonological traditions operative in John’s context: an exploration that both reinforces and deepens our sense for the variety of demonological options operative in John’s sectarian milieu.

251 See A. Linder, “Christian Communities in Jerusalem,” who notes that the Greek Melkite community was the largest and most historically consistent, but the presence of other Christian sects.

252 For the dynamics of Christian conversion to Islam in the early centuries, R. Bulliet’s essay, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period* (1979) is seminal.

253 On these dynamics and their effects, see J. Lassner, *The Middle East Remembered* (2000), 9-59.
CHAPTER FIVE

CON-TEXTS: ALTERNATIVE DEMONOLOGICAL SYSTEMS IN LATE ANCIENT SYRO-PALESTINE

As noted at the end of the last chapter, John’s century of heresies suggests that the spiritual ecosystem of Jerusalem in the early eighth century was pluralistic, characterized not only by the presence of Jews, Muslims, and historic Christian sects, but by new movements that grew up in response to the situation of crisis. The spiritual beliefs and practices of these communities drew, to a greater or lesser extent, from the texts and traditions of Christian orthodoxy, but dabbled in a variety of spiritual practices frowned upon by the monastic and episcopal hierarchy, thus – ipso facto – these communities rejected the formal structures and traditions of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, either implicitly or explicitly. For most of these sects, it is only John’s mention that has survived the centuries – if, indeed, they existed at all. The all-but-complete obliteration of these traditions, I have suggested, may indicate that their palette of beliefs and practices was an eclectic blend peculiar to John’s time and place, which tended to assimilate over time to the traditions of Christianity or Islam that we retrospectively recognize as mainstream, and that they gradually lost their distinctive modes of accessing spiritual power along the way.

Given how little remains of these movements, we can say nothing with confidence about their demonological schema and the ways in which John may have engaged with them in forming his own. Rather than resigning to total silence, however, we will offer in this chapter a tentative landscape of demonological traditions traceable to Jerusalem, proposed as a selection of alternative demonological traditions against which
John’s demonology might be read. In particular, we will sketch this landscape by attending to texts that witness demonological systems in place in Jerusalem during or around John’s time. In other words, we are exploring these texts as con-texts – literary sources whose traditions came in proximal contact with John, even where direct lines of engagement cannot be drawn.

Again, this chapter offers a sketch: the emphasis is on making connections between substantially different demonological ideas sharing the same time and place, not making exhaustive study of each source, or even asserting that these traditions were known to John. Our aim in this discussion, rather, is to expand our imaginative horizon as to the kinds of divergent demonological theories that may have been present among these extinct Jerusalemite sects of the sixth and seventh centuries, and against which, consequently, John may have been tasked with articulating his own demonology, rooted as it was in the particular stream of scriptural-patristic, philosophical, and ascetical tradition that he recognized as orthodox.

5.1  *The Testament of Solomon*: Demonology Oriented by Temple and Enacted by Rite

The *Testament of Solomon (TSol)* is the most demonologically elaborate Judeo-Christian pseudepigraphon to come down to us from antiquity, preserving an eclectic

1 A distinction between the “Standard Orthodox Tradition” and “Alternative Traditions” of demonology within Byzantine Orthodoxy is proposed as a first-level heuristic by Richard Greenfield in his *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology* (1988). Problems with this distinction aside, uncritically applying it to John would be obviously anachronistic, as what emerges as the “standard” tradition is effectively established by John. “Alternatives,” in this sense, should be thought of – not as obviously heterodox to John and his contemporaries – but as potential possibilities, contraindicative of John’s system, that are omitted from his consideration, whether deliberately or not.

2 As with all pseudepigrapha, the dating of *TSol* is very difficult to establish. The majority of scholars place the text in antiquity, with Dulling’s influential translation placing it in the 1st to 3rd C (OTP
and expansive folio of lore about the demonic antagonists interspersed with apotropaic technique and formulae. Framed as an expansion on the narrative of the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the Testament contributes to the plot of King Solomon’s architectural exploits a description of how he used a magical ring given to him by the Archangel Michael to enlist a horde of demons to aid his construction efforts, and then bound the demons and their power to the sanctums of the Temple.

I.940-943), and Klutz supporting this (Rewriting, 34). There is enough room for doubt, however, that the text is still at times considered a late document – 10th C or later – and appropriated to the medieval context of Solomonic magic (ie., S. Schwarz, “Reconsidering the Testament of Solomon,” (2007)).

3 Not surprisingly, given the nature of the text, TSol exists in a number of divergent manuscripts which vary in somewhat in their contents. Noting the similarities in interest of the demonic catalogue with the often esoteric interests of Michael Psellus, Migne groups TSol (in 19th C edition of F. Fleck) with Psellus’s works of in PG 122, 1315-58. C. McCown offers the latest critical edition of the text: The Testament of Solomon, (1922), which serves as the basis of D. Duling’s translation in OTP I: 935-987; although R. Daniel has suggested that a new critical edition of the text is needed. See his “The Testament of Solomon xviii 27-29, 33-40” (1983), 1.294-304. More recently, as diTommaso has summarized, conversation on the Testament has shifted to note that the divergences within the manuscript tradition are so great as to leave us with substantial doubts as to whether it is even appropriate to speak “the” Testament of Solomon as a unified whole. L. DiTommaso, “Pseudepigrapha Notes IV: 5. The Testament of Job. 6. The Testament of Solomon” (2012).

4 On the genre of the narrative frame, see T. Klutz, Rewriting the Testament of Solomon (2005), 58-73: although Klutz describes the Testament as “rewritten Bible,” following J. Kugel, The Bible As It Was (1997) and particularly B. Fisk, “Rewritten Bible in Pseudepigrapha and Qumran,” in C. Evans and S. Porter, ed., Dictionary of New Testament Background (2000), 947-53. Duling’s assessment – which is more colorful, if perhaps less precise – is that “the Testament of Solomon is the product of the growth of a legend about a famous biblical character combined with a variety of syncretistic beliefs about astrology, demonology, angelology, magic, and medicine” (OTP 1.944).

5 Notwithstanding a variety of Biblical allusions, TSol is particularly reliant on and takes its structure from a single textual source: 1 Kings 4:29-12:24. Notably, this text was already reworked in the Biblical tradition itself in 2 Chronicles 1-9, a text which, while it is less ambitious in ascribing more the fantastic supernatural abilities to Solomon, is nevertheless much more optimistic about his ultimate moral character. On the rewriting of the Solomon tradition, see in J. Verheyden, ed., The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage and Architect (2012), I. Kalimi, “The Rise of Solomon in the Ancient Israelite Historiography ” (7-44) and P Särkiö “Solomon in History and Tradition” (45-57). As W. Brueggemann helpfully observes, “The Biblical traditions [about Solomon] themselves are immense acts of interpretive imagination … [and] these ancient textual acts of imagination continue to be open to and generative of subsequent acts of interpretive imagination whereby ancient memories could be readily aligned with contemporary agendas” (Solomon (2005), 243). For his full analysis of the reworking of the Solomon tale within the Biblical texts themselves, see 160-180.
Ostensibly, the demonic participation in the Temple construction solves a problem posed by the Biblical narrative itself. Exodus 20:25 and Deuteronomy 27:5-6 suggest a prohibition against the use of iron tools for the hewing of stones designated for hieratic purposes, a stricture noted to have been consciously observed in the Temple construction: “there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the Temple precincts while it was being built” (1 Kings 6:7). But this naturally prompts the question of how, precisely, the stones for the Temple were dressed. A supernatural workforce of demons is one way of solving the problem, and, as fantastic as it may sound to modern readers, this hypothesis has significant support in a variety of ancient interpretive traditions. 

Indeed, the imagination of demon-workers is hardly the most colorful legend associated with the construction of the Temple: some Rabbinic traditions introduce a mythical stone-cutting worm called the shamir to perform the work, with Solomon having to undergo a terrific ordeal in order to trick the demon Asmodeus into revealing the worm’s location. Some of these legendary embellishments become very elaborate – for instance, with Asmodeus persuading Solomon into giving up his magic ring, and then using it cast the King into exile and rule in his place as an imposter for an extended

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7 Through its association with the Temple, the shamir in fact becomes inscribed into cosmology: anticipating the holiness of the task it would be called upon to perform, God specially created the shamir on twilight of the sixth day (Ginzberg, Legends I.34). The shamir, thus – as a monster – is integrated into a broader daimonological system as a benign supernatural creature.

8 B. Gitt 68ab; retold by Ginzberg, Legends IV.165-169. The connection between the demonic workforce and a wonderworking worm is also alluded to in the Qur’an in the Surah Saba’ (34:13-14). See below.
season. Alongside such fantastical tales, the suggestion that Solomon cajoled some demons to assist in the construction of the Temple construction becomes relatively mild.

The Testament of Solomon does go somewhat further, however: the demons were not merely party to the building of the Temple, but bound to it and entrapped within its vessels and precincts as enduring signs of their ultimate impotence. The demon Kunopegos is sealed into a large, reinforced bowl inside the Temple (TSol 16:6-7). Obyzouth is “bound by the hair and hung up in front of the Temple in order that all the sons of Israel who pass through and see might glorify the God of Israel” (TSol 13:7). The powerful demons Ephippas and Abezethibou – who “could have upset the whole world with one tip of the scales” (TSol 24:2) – are bound indefinitely to suspend a certain pillar of the Temple in midair, after they had completed the work of laying its cornerstone. The Temple thus becomes an axis mundi – to borrow a phrase from the contemporary study of religious symbolism – actively serving to limit and restrain the forces of chaos and evil even through its mere physical existence, to say nothing of its cultic dramas.

If the Testament is, in fact, an early Christian text that reached a relatively complete form in the first three centuries after Christ, it is surprising to find the Temple structure playing such a dramatic role in maintaining the cosmological and soteriological

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9 Ginzberg, Legends IV.169-174. One could imagine this tradition as a means of distancing the great king from the more dubious texts circulating under his name: some Solomonia, accordingly, might literally be a demonic forgery.

10 TSol 23-25, esp. 24:3-5, 7-9. Duling follows the suggestion of McCown and James that this cryptic pillar invokes both the OT pillar of cloud, and its ascension into the heavens as the Milky Way. OTP I.985 n 23a.

11 On the axis mundi, see L. Sullivan, ER.2 712-713. This against Klutz’s rather disappointing poststructuralist reading which sees the Temple as a phallic symbol (Rewriting the Testament, 119-121), which would spiritualize the Temple infrastructure and make the program of TSol closer to that of the BHH, discussed below.
order of creation. In the centuries between the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70AD and the rise of the Byzantine project of inventing a Christian Jerusalem in the fourth century, Christian attitudes toward the Holy City were ambivalent: on the one hand, this was the land of Jesus and the ancient Hebrew Scriptures which God had promised to restore; on the other hand, many Christians – particularly as an international and cosmopolitan community – preferred to understand themselves as a non-geographic people awaiting the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem, rather than the restoration of its earthly counterpart. Even as the institutions of pilgrimage took root and began to flourish among Christians, liturgical renderings of the Temple worship were wont to abstract the ritual efficacy from the context of the Jerusalem Temple, rather than reinscribe it there – and necessarily so, since the erstwhile center of the Judaic cult lay irreparably ruined as a testimony against them. It is possible, accordingly, that the Temple orientation of the Testament reflects an earlier and more strongly Jewish provenance than has usually been thought. Certainly, aspects of TSol have a strong

13 For instance, Justin, Trypho, 80, Irenaeus, haer. 5.32-33; see Wilken, Land Called Holy, 46-78.
14 I.e., Diog. Tertullian, De res. car. 26. Origen, CC 7.28. Eusebius’s views are especially interesting: while an heir to Origen’s strong inclination to spiritualize Jerusalem, he would ultimately revise his position in order to appropriate the geographical landscape to the Christianizing empire of Constantine. See Wilken, Land Called Holy, 78-100.
15 For instance, Cyril of Jerusalem, procat. and cat. appropriating sacramental efficacy to the Christian rituals over and against their Jewish precedent in the city of Jerusalem itself; Egeria, Itinerarium imaging and representing a distinctly Christian relationship between ritual, sanctity, and space through the description her pilgrimage; Dionysius, EH, almost liberating Christian ritual from materiality altogether, and the sequel in Maximus, Mystagogy envisioning the church building (presumably, even of a local parish) as an adequate representation of the Temple motif.
Jewish parallel if not precedent,\textsuperscript{16} and in many ways, the frame story makes sense as an essentially Jewish narrative,\textsuperscript{17} notwithstanding that every surviving copy of the text – sprinkled through with famous New Testament demons like Legion (\textit{TSol} 11:3) and Beelzeboul (\textit{TSol} 3:1-6; 6:1-11) and prophecies of a coming Emmanouel (\textit{TSol} 6:8) – is in obviously Christian recension. Regardless of the provenance of the tradition, however – and, ultimately, the provenance of the text – its propagation in and through the Christian idiom attests to the persistence of traditions within the late ancient and medieval Greek-speaking Christian communities that give priority to Jerusalem sanctums as sources of spiritual power.

Indeed, for our purposes, the \textit{Testament of Solomon} is most valuable as a witness linking the complex traditions of Solomonic magic to the historical landscape of Christian Jerusalem through the physicality of the Temple. The next generation\textsuperscript{18} of magical texts associated with Solomon invoke him more by reputation than by historical identity: in the \textit{Sepher ha-Razim}, for instance, he is mentioned only once as beneficiary and tradent of the magical traditions passed down from Noah, thus a seal on the

\textsuperscript{16} In addition to the Rabbinic traditions noted above (n 6), Josephus records an incident wherein a traveling Jewish exorcist used a magic ring to conduct an exorcism after the manner of Solomon and in his name (Antiquities VIII.2.5) – on which see the excellent study of by D. Duling, “The Eleazar Miracle and Solomon’s Magical Wisdom in Flavius Josephus’s ‘Antiquitates Judaicae’ 8.42-49 (1985) and there are fragmentary exorcistic formulae attributed to Solomon among the Dead Sea Scrolls (11QPsApa). See the discussion in P. Torijano, \textit{Solomon, the Esoteric King} (2002), 43–53.

\textsuperscript{17} G. Bohak memorably analogizes that the \textit{Testament} in its surviving Christian recension is to its Jewish precedent what a Disney fairy tale is to its original telling by the Brothers Grimm (\textit{Ancient Jewish Magic}, 181). See also, Torijano, \textit{Solomon, the Esoteric King}, Bacqué-grammont, \textit{L’image de Salomon}.

\textsuperscript{18} According to Torijano’s assessment, Solomon’s reputation as a sorcerer – partially evident in \textit{TSol} – derives from his demonological and astrological wisdom, and develops in earnest sometime between the 4\textsuperscript{th} and 6\textsuperscript{th} C – to which period he ascribes the origin of the textual tradition of the \textit{Sepher ha-Razim} and the \textit{Hygromantia}. 
authenticity of the work;\textsuperscript{19} the \textit{Hygromanteia} abstracts the magical practices associated with Solomon from Scriptural material and its legendary embellishments altogether.\textsuperscript{20} The prevalence of Solomonic amulets and incantation bowls, meanwhile, suggest that Solomon was actively and for a long period of time invoked as an exemplar and medium of spiritual power in Jerusalem and the surrounding region:\textsuperscript{21} the \textit{Testament}, in tethering those practices to a particular place and particular relics helps us to imagine the continuity between the kinds of rituals detailed in the \textit{Testament}, and later magical texts of Solomonic ascription.

According to Peter Busch, the relationship between the \textit{Testament of Solomon} and demonological beliefs and practices surrounding John in late antique Jerusalem may be even more immediate. Busch offers an alternative account of the \textit{Testament’s} origin, suggesting that the text was compiled and propagated to bolster an alternative pilgrimage industry in the Holy City. In his theory, the dominant industry – endorsed and supported by both the ecclesiastical and imperial establishment – placed a strong emphasis on monasteries as centers for the cultivation of spiritual virtue and the homes of living saints. The significance of the spiritual sites in themselves, then, while it was retained, was downplayed: the pilgrim was to be impressed, rather, by the austerities of monastic virtue, and the grandeur of imperial appropriation and embellishment of the life and ministry of Jesus. The hypothetical alternative industry, by contrast, went to an opposite

\begin{quote}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Margalioth, \textit{SR}, 65; see Torijano, \textit{Solomon the Esoteric King}, 200-208.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Torijano includes both synopsis of Greek versions of the \textit{Hygromanteia} (254-309) and an English translation (231-253) in \textit{Solomon the Esoteric King}.
\item \textsuperscript{21} See the multiple references on Solomon in C. Isbell, \textit{Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls}, J. Naveh and S. Shaked, \textit{Amulets and Magic Bowls}, and D. Levene, \textit{A Corpus of Magic Bowls}.
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}
extreme, seeking to promote the view that spiritual power could best be accessed in prescribed places, totems, and rituals, more or less independent of the virtue of its practitioners. At the center of this industry, as Busch imagines it, was Church of the Holy Sepulcher: a new, Christian version of the Temple, which at least one ancient pilgrim remembers to have possessed the fabled ring of Solomon among its treasured relics, along with a dozen silver bowls in which he had sealed them.

Busch’s hypothesis is far-fetched, but it is helpful nevertheless in imagining the ways in which TSol may have underwritten alternative systems of demonological belief and practice in the Holy City in John’s time. Certainly, it is difficult to read John’s Jerusalem as being especially caught up in this effective schism Busch imagines between ascetically-oriented Christians focusing on the cultivation of virtue and more “magically” oriented Christians whose practices were tied up in the kinds of artifacts and rituals described in the Testament: one would expect more evidence for a difference in mentality and practice of this intensity and scale. In a general way, however, John’s heresiology supports the proposition that certain groups or movements in the turbulent and uncertain circumstances of the early eighth century Jerusalem may have tried to leverage the vast inventory of sacred relics and sacred sites as sources of spiritual power in ways that seemed untoward to their fellow Christians. John omits a detailed investigation of beliefs

22 Busch, Das Testament Salomos (2006), 20-30

23 This association traces back as far as Eusebius, v. Const. 3.33.

24 This claim is supported by one pilgrim account from the early 6th C, the Brevarius A. Interestingly, the parallel Brevarius B omits these Solomonic references, suggesting that these were indeed sites of special interest for a certain constituency. Solomonic references appear in other pilgrim accounts, but are generally more muted, omitting references to his anti-demonic exploits. For a synopsis, see Wilkinson, Jerusalem Pilgrims, 59-62, 363-364.
and practices, but some such groups may have entertained a worldview and ritual practices not unlike what is laid out in the Testament, especially if some version of the text and descendant traditions of Solomonic magic were being actively studied and circulated in the city. It is not impossible, in other words, that Christians with a bent towards nascent traditions of Solomonic magic would have been among John’s interlocutors. The point cannot be established from John’s corpus alone, however, and a great deal more research into the religious landscape of eighth century Jerusalem would be needed to evaluate the role that such a tradition would have had in the religious conversations of that context.

More concretely, however, the narrative framing of the Testament shares an implicit historiographical logic that resonates well with other Christian texts and traditions. If the demonic forces are in some sense regulated by the integrity of the Jerusalemite cultic infrastructure, the disruption of this system through the conquest of city and the destruction of its sanctums is bound to correspond to a larger global crisis. Thus Antiochus Strategos’s Account of the Sack of Jerusalem ties the fall of Christian Jerusalem to its abandonment by angelic protectors;25 Anastasius of Sinai remembers the Umayyad construction project on the Temple Mount as taking place with the assistance of demons.26 The late seventh century Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius similarly imagines Jerusalem as the world center where, at the end, the last Roman Emperor will

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set his crown on the True Cross and see them ascend together into heaven.\textsuperscript{27} These themes also appear in Judaism and (eventually) in Islam as well, although the cosmodynamic dimension of Holy City is usually not so elaborately developed in the latter, probably because the sanctity of Jerusalem is of tertiary significance in the Islamic tradition.\textsuperscript{28} John is also clearly aware of this tradition which inscribes axial significance to Jerusalem and its Temple: in one homily he refers to the thwarting of the rebuilding of the Temple endorsed by Julian;\textsuperscript{29} at another place, he implicitly repudiates a demonic Temple tradition by emphasizing the character of the “celebrated” (περιώνυμος) Temple of Solomon as being constructed by “human hands.”\textsuperscript{30}

Of course, even if John read the \textit{Testament of Solomon} – or anything like it – he did not comment on it, and he had no use for it within the scope of his theological project. John’s brief but dismissive comments about astrological traditions\textsuperscript{31} and the system of material physics he implies\textsuperscript{32} – exclusive of any kind of secret angelic names and agencies – indicate that John’s silence on these traditions is deliberate insofar as it is

\begin{footnotes}
\item[27] ApocMeth, 14.3. Notwithstanding his geographical residence, John of Damascus’s endtime narrative (Exp. fid. 99) omits this kind of political messianism and contains no references to the earthly Jerusalem – although he does assert that the Antichrist will center his government at the Jewish Temple, following 2Thess 2:4.
\item[28] For a comparison of themes in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish political apocalypticism in the late ancient / early medieval period, see the helpful chart in Reeves, \textit{Trajectories of Belief in Near Eastern Apocalyptic} (2006), 18.
\item[29] PassioArt 68
\item[30] Exp. fid. 89.13. Importantly, this does not undermine any potential axial properties of the Temple, however: John invokes the example in favor of the value of icons. If demons are excluded from its construction, this does not imply that it is not a conduit of supernatural power: to the contrary, John also understands the Temple to be an orienting force in Christian prayer (ch 85).
\item[31] Exp. fid. 20. See the discussion in Section 2.2.
\item[32] Exp. fid. 20-24.
\end{footnotes}
knowing: he does not consider such traditions worth mentioning. As such, John stood within a broad tradition of the ecclesiastical dismissal of magical practices, nascent within early Christianity, but which would become more explicitly developed in medieval scholasticism. 33

5.2 The Book of the Holy Hierotheos: Demonology in Mystical Psychology

The Book of the Holy Hierotheos is a testament to an extreme trend within monastic spirituality that curiously fuses some of the more controversial ideas of Origen and Evagrius with Manichean tropes. 34 As with the Testament of Solomon, John does not engage the BHH directly: the text instead represents a tradition that John rejected, insofar as he knew it. As for the text itself, Hireothos offers a colorful handbook of esoteric mystical theology penned pseudonymously in Syriac sometime after the fifth century. Closely related to the Corpus Dionysiacum, the BHH shares the same historical and cultural milieu as the Pseudo-Areopagite, and shares with him a number of themes: indeed, the eponymous Hireotheos who purported to be its author and for whom the text is named, is Hierotheos of Athens, first bishop of that ancient city, and teacher of the

33 Association of magic with the demons extends as far back as I Enoch, being systematically developed by the apologists (ie Justin Martyr, II Apology, Origen CC), whose major concern (like John’s) was the assertion of the ultimacy of divine providence and the debasement of demonic powers after the coming of Christ. Systematic medieval studies of demonology and witchcraft (such as the Malleus Maleficarum, and the handbooks and canons drawn up against superstition and magic in Spain) draw from Thomas Aquinas (ie SCG III.104-107), whose development of the theme invoke the Damascene in its underlying theory (SCG III.84-90). See Keitt, “The Devil in the Old World” (2013).

34 Hierotheos’s especially Evagrian dimension was first noted by I. Hausherr, “L’influence du ‘Livre de Saint Hierothee’” (1933), 34-69, and intensified by Guillaumont Les ‘Kephalia Gnostica’ (1962), who described it as “l’origenisme évagrien, sous une forme extreme” (302). Following Marsh (1927), Guillaumont also noted the Manichean comparisons, which have been further developed by Bundy (1986) and Perczel (2004), as noted below.
fabled Dionysius.\textsuperscript{35} Pseudonym notwithstanding, some ancient witnesses ascribe the text to the mystic Stephen bar Sudaili, an association that is usually accepted – at least tentatively and in part – by modern scholars.\textsuperscript{36} In general, the \textit{Book of Hierotheos} is thought to have been composed after the Dionysian corpus, using the Areopagite an inspiration and a source.\textsuperscript{37} The question is a complicated one, however, and need not deter us here besides suggesting the existence of a robust Greco-Syrian tradition of monastic spirituality in late antiquity with which John – as a Damascene theologian – was at least partially familiar. John, however, very much leans towards the Dionysian pole, to the effective exclusion Hierothean themes and concerns.

As a secret\textsuperscript{38} monastic book, \textit{Hierotheos} is concerned with providing mystical access to heavenly mysteries which perform their anti-demonic function incidentally, consequent to the ascetic’s rank of spiritual advancement. This orientation is completely different than that of \textit{TSol}, and yet Hierotheos shares with that author an impulse to

\begin{itemize}
\item There are no claims to authorship internal to the text, however: indeed, where “Dionysius” quite elaborately develops his pseudonymous personality, “Hierotheos” is much less attentive in historical details of his pseudonymous personality. See Marsh, 214-222.
\item The text is first so ascribed by John of Dara around the beginning of the 9th C, with Kyriakos of Antioch repeating the ascription; Bar Hebraeus marks a controversy, but accepts the judgement for at least a portion of his career. See Frothingham, \textit{Stephen bar Sudaili} (1886), 66f, Marsh, \textit{Book of the Holy Hierotheos} (1927), 222f. Frothingham was especially confident in the association between bar Sudaili and \textit{BHH}.
\item Marsh, 245-246. The learned A. Frothingham, first modern commentator on the text (1886), was of the reverse opinion, considering \textit{Hierotheos} to be an important source for ps-Dionysius, but is rarely followed. I. Perczel in fact strengthens the dependence, considering \textit{BHH} “the earliest Syriac reception of Dionysius” (2008); R. Arthur (2001, 2008) has lately made a provocative case on the question, arguing that “Hierotheos” is a later editorial invention to a collection of texts originally composed by bar Sudaili in his own name, a thesis that draws attention to the complexity of the relationship between the two texts.
\item \textit{BHH} I.1, II.1, V.1. The “secrecy” of the book has two valences: on the one hand referring to the esoteric quality of the doctrines (\textit{ܬܸܐܘܿܪܝܼܡܵܐ} being oft coordinated with \textit{ܪܵܐܙܵܐ} in the text; see Marsh, I n 1); on the other, specific instructions to keep the teaching of the book away from the uninitiated (\textit{BHH} I.1; with parallels in Dionysius). R. Arthur (2001) opines that the exhortations to secrecy are a later editorial addition responsive to the condemnation of Origenism in the Fifth Ecumenical Council.
\end{itemize}
communicate a rich and vivid demonological schema and teach a method for controlling these demonic beings by using means to circumscribe them within psychological and cosmological space. Both texts, moreover, are driven by a narrative frame wherein the demons are bound and defeated so that the cosmic order can be restored. For Hierotheos, however, it is not the Temple which plays the central role in the process of organizing the spiritual universe, nor do liturgical or magical practices feature as the means of appropriating apotropaic authority. Instead, it is the inward, apocalyptic spirituality of the advanced monk that assures the defeat of the demonic powers.

Hierothean mysticism entails a series of symbolic ascents and descents through which the Mind internalizes and identifies with the Scriptural narrative, and ultimately with the image of the figure of Christ himself. The demons – who are generally benign to man in his natural state – become aggressive to the ascending Mind, and make war against him through illusion and passion. When faith has been solidified in the ascetic through intensive inward identification with the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ –

\[\text{39} \text{ Hierotheos does presuppose liturgical experience and context, see, for instance BHH II.18. However, the noetic perfection of the Mind is described as exceeding the sacramental/liturgical event; indeed, these are only part way up his ladder of mysteries. Accordingly, it is not the liturgical act itself which bears the power, so much as it is the direct mystical encounter with the realities that the liturgy symbolizes. This attitude would seem to converge with Messalian sensibilities.}\]

\[\text{40} \text{ Speaking of the capital-M “Mind” in this section, I am following Marsh’s convention, who thus consistently renders the Syriac ܐܝܢܐ to draw attention to the centrality of the term to Hierothean system.}\]

\[\text{41 BHH II.11. Note that the Hierothean concept of “nature” is uniquely complex, involving a distinction between phenomenological and virtuous nature (II.4, II.5), infranatural and supernatural (II.6, II.7), and anti-natural (II.8), which correspond to the primary distinctions between created-embodied Minds (human, bestial, and demonic; I.5) and the three demonic essences (terrestrial, celestial, and supersolar: II.9-10). The non-ascending Mind is entrapped in ignorance by the supersolar demons, but once it begins its ascent, it attracts the attacks of the lower orders of demons.}\]

\[\text{42 BHH II.20-22, 24; III.1, which sections are beautifully woven together of Scriptural allusions.}\]
after it has been ministered to and worshipped by the angels, and initiated into the glories of the noetic liturgy – then it comes to recognize the enduring presence of the opposing powers within itself as “the Tree of Evil.” The ascetic wages intensive battle with this Tree, chopping off its branches, and hewing down its trunk, but again and again, it springs up from the roots it has buried deep within the soul. Unable to continue its ascent because of this grip of evil, the Mind determines to descend to the depths, and destroy the root demons from which its ills perennially spring. It grapples with and overcomes the demons of the East and the South – evidently the weakest of the cardinal devils – but the demons of the North and of the West being fiercer, it is overcome by the demons of the Northern quarter. At this point, however, Christ intervenes to rescue and restore the fallen Mind, resurrecting it and effecting in it what Hierotheos likens to a second baptism, after which the Mind is purified to penetrate into the heavenly Holy of Holies.

43 BHH II.17. The chapter has certain echoes of the Areopagite’s CH, but for Hierotheos, the noetic rank is not fixed, and the ascending mind transcends the angels and receives their worship as being derived from the higher, divine essence.

44 BHH II.18. Echoes in this chapter are of the EH, however, the Mind is purified, illumined, and perfected for the service of the angels, rather than the service of the Church.


46 BHH III.3. Rooted in the Biblical narratives in which evils tend to descend on Israel from the west and from the north, demonic directionalities (and temporalities) are not foreign to the tradition of apocalyptic and spiritualistic texts. John himself retains a sense of the importance of this tradition of directionality in advocating the orientation of Christian prayer (Exp. fid. 85), although he does not involve an explicit demonic or apocalyptic component to his argument.

47 BHH III.4-6.

48 BHH III.7.
It is worth digressing for a moment to draw attention to tones in the Hierothean discourse that may have struck John as Messalian. Hierotheos is by no means anti-sacramental – indeed, his account of the sacramental coordination between noetic and celestial realities offer a fascinating compliment to the Dionysian meditations on the sacraments in the EH – but he is so free in rendering the spiritual significance of the sacred mysteries that he tends to confuse – if not mutilate – their order and sequence. This aforementioned baptism, for instance, takes place after a celestial ordination – and indeed, after the Mind has already rendered the service of communing and illuminating the angels. Perhaps Hierotheos merely intends to add layers of significance to the sacraments by returning again and again to the fundamental experiences of Christian worship, but his incautious appropriation of sacramental sequence suggests that communities given to Hierothean-style spirituality would exhibit a similar carelessness in their maintenance of ecclesiastical order and sacramental signs. For that matter, even if Hierothean communities maintained good ecclesiastical order themselves, the sloppiness of the BHH read outside of that context would leave them vulnerable to the charge of harboring the anti-sacramental and anti-ecclesiastical sentiments often maligned as Messalian.

Indeed, as Hierotheos enters into his description of the third and final ascent of the Mind, the sacramental language falls away entirely, being replaced by intensive Paradise symbolism – perhaps suggesting that the Hierotheos, again echoing the purported position of the Messalians, sees no need for Sacraments among the perfected. In the upper echelons of spiritual experience, the Mind encounters the ultimate deception: Satan appears “as an angel of light;” the upper- and inward-most “Tree of Life,”
indistinguishable from the true and final good. The Mind is deceived and for a time and unites itself with this counterfeit good, but at last by the intervention of Christ is delivered from its thralldom, and directed to the genuine Tree of Life. Immediately, the Mind discovers the mystical Sword, and so armed, it makes a second descent beneath the earth to destroy with ease all of the demons of the infernal roots which had previously wounded it. This dominion, Hierotheos is careful to point out, only serves to eliminate the demons from the realm of the soul, not from existence itself: at the same time, however, such a victory serves as the basis whereon the mature ascetic can intervene in a Christic fashion in the spiritual struggles of a brother or sister. Indeed, likewise, there is no indication that the Christ who intervenes on behalf of the ascending Mind does not appear mediated through a Christomorphic spiritual father or guide.

Indeed, at each stage of ascent, Hierotheos does not attach his allusions to an archetypal exorcist to a messianic figure – to a Christ or a Solomon – but to Adam. He describes each encounter with the demonic with a riot of Biblical symbols and imagery regarding evil, the demonic, and the enemy, but the driving narrative merges protology (via images of the garden – such as the Tree of Evil and the Tree of Life – as well as promises of dominion, and the exercise of divine authority through the human being) and eschatology (drawing in verses pertaining to Christ’s final defeat of the enemies of God).

49 BHH IV.3. Hierotheos here applies the deceptive character of Satan from 2Cor 11:14 to the problem of discerning between the two trees of Gen 2-3.

50 BHH IV.5, 7, 8.

51 BHH IV.7.

52 BHH IV.12.

53 The Mind that has ascended is “God of those who are below” (BHH IV.10).
On the one hand, this suggests a created human capacity for victory over the demonic spirits, and on the other, it attests to a complete confidence in divine intervention in the face of inevitable human finitude and failure. Christ, in this context, is liberated from his historical personality and becomes chiefly a symbol of the one who first bodily achieved this ascetic victory. Christ is not a unique, saving mediator, then, but an example: he intervenes as an ascended master and through other ascended masters. Indeed, Hierotheos explicitly affirms that Christ’s level of spiritual experience and expertise can be attained to and even exceeded by the advanced ascetic\textsuperscript{54} – and this is doubtless a significant part of what conciliar orthodox Christians found to be pernicious about it.\textsuperscript{55}

The problems with the Book of Hierotheos are not chiefly Christological, however: these dubious conclusions about Christ flow from a philosophical and mystical orientation that is, in the end, effectively pantheistic.\textsuperscript{56} For Hierotheos, all of existence and every nature is a procession from the unitary divine essence which is seeking, through the succession of ages, to resolve into its primordial, harmonious unity,\textsuperscript{57} and the

\textsuperscript{54} BHH I.4, inter alia.

\textsuperscript{55} This idea seems to reflect the theology of the so-called “Isochrist” Origenist sect (see Cyril, vit. Sab. 197, 13-18; OrAnathema 13). See I. Perczel, “A Philosophical Myth” (2004), 209-214.

\textsuperscript{56} Philoxenus is the first to complain of this aspect of bar Sudaili’s thought, noting that his doctrine “openly assimilates the creation to God,” and is thus “worse than paganism and Judaism.” (Letter to Abraham and Orestes. Translation after Frothingham, Stephen bar Sundaili, 29). Frothingham can hardly resist amplifying the critique: Hierotheos is “openly pantheistic” (49), “ultra-pantheistic” (72) – or better, “pan-nihilistic;” tinged by “kabbalistic and gnostic systems and perhaps even of the early Chaldean cosmogony” (80). Marsh’s judgement is that “no other Christian writer ever accepted so completely, or stated with such audacity, the pantheistic philosophy that is the logical basis of mysticism” (274) is comparatively measured. Given this legacy of uncritical and slanderous application of the term, it is worth being cautious with this ascription.

\textsuperscript{57} Yet not all essences are identical (II.23). This would seem to indicate that Hierotheos nevertheless holds to some kind of differentiation-within-unity over and against the Plotinian One, for which such differentiation would be contrary to the nature of the One.
goal of monastic spirituality is to become a witness to – and indeed, an agent of – that cosmic process. Indeed, Stephen bar Sudaili, the probable author of the *Book of Hierotheos*, is said to have written as a foundational apothegm on the wall of his cell, “All nature is consubstantial with the Divine Essence,”\(^{58}\) a sentiment which, while it does not appear verbatim in the *Book of Hierotheos*, is certainly reflected at the heart of it. For Hierothes – probably the most radically consistent mystical theologian of the Origenistic-Evagrian tradition – the theory of the origin of essence as a series undifferentiated processions from the Divine not only implies an ultimate return of all things to their primordial Divinity, but that every rational being ultimately becomes its own Christ. The whole system, accordingly, leads not only to an explicit and hard profession of universalism, it verges on a kind of total confusion, undermining every natural, created, and moral distinction in interest of affirming the ultimate mystical unity of essence.

It is difficult to say how prevalent Hierothean mysticism was in Jerusalem by John’s time. A letter from Philoxenus to ecclesiarchs in the Holy City indicates that Stephen bar Sudaili traveled to Jerusalem in the early sixth century with the intent to spread these ideas and this spiritual system:\(^{59}\) some scholars suggest that his zealous activity may have even triggered the so-called second Origenist controversy,\(^ {60}\) or even stimulated the production of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus as a mystical system with


better footing in the tradition of mainstream orthodox Christianity.\textsuperscript{61} The evidence is too thin to speak with confidence on these propositions, but if we take them as remotely accurate in guiding an estimate of the appeal of bar Sudaili and Hierothean mysticism, we would expect these ideas to have persisted in some form. There may indeed have been ascetical communities in the milieu of John’s Jerusalem whose demonological schemes resembled the traditions preserved and articulated in the \textit{Book of Hierotheos}.

Istvan Perczel’s suggestion that the \textit{BHH} has an anti-Manichean apologetic edge is especially intriguing. According to Perczel’s theory, Hierotheos deliberately mirrors elements of the Manichean cosmogonic myth of in order to subvert the dualistic character of its religious imaginary and reintegrate the constituent parts into its own diametrically-opposed theological vision rooted in radical monism.\textsuperscript{62} If Perczel is correct, the profile of the Hierothean system is profoundly eclectic: fundamentally, it is radically Origenist, but expressed under a Manichean mythology, and with Messalian overtones. Indeed, at that point, \textit{BHH} touches so many different fringe heresies that it might be tempting to find it lurking behind John’s more unusual heresiological concerns: an ur-heresy undergirding several of the more obscure sects John adds to his catalogue of heresies.\textsuperscript{63} The evidence for this is thin, however: and more importantly, John does not argue against the contours of Manichean mythology so much as he attacks the underlying dualism associated with

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\textsuperscript{63} Caution must be exercised here: some sprawling dissertations that have similarly attempted to reshape our understanding of this period prove, in the end, to be eccentric and overreaching – the conspiratorial tone of I. Ramelli in seeking to rehabilitate \textit{apokatastasis} as a mainstream, orthodox Christian doctrine (2008), for instance, or P. Tzamalikos’s attempt to argue that the works of John Cassian were originally composed in Greek by a Sabaite monk (2012).
\end{flushright}
the Manichean system. If Perczel’s analysis were correct, we would expect John to establish the same kind of parity between Manicheanism dualism and Origenistic monism that Perczel identifies in the anti-Origenistic sections of Cyril and Justinian. As it is, however, John argues heavily against dualism, but hardly touches on the monistic tendencies of Origenism. Perczel’s argument thus does not extend to the eighth century, but one wonders – given that his proposition similarly lacks support in Sophronius and Maximus – if this might point to deeper problems with his thesis.

If the Damascene did ever encounter an expression of Hierothean mysticism, his evaluation must have been complex; there are several points worth drawing out. First, John is sympathetic to the radically anti-dualistic posture of the *BHH*, but he would not follow either the text’s basic cosmogonic myth, or its corresponding assertion of extreme, pantheizing monism. Second, while sensitive to the need for the ascetic to internalize the larger Scriptural narrative and broad theological worldview associated with the Christian revelation, John preferences exoteric prayers and public doctrines. These are decidedly opposed to the esotericism and secrecy with which Hierothean doctrines are shrouded: John may have detected in them something of a Gnostic cast. Finally, while John is a stalwart defender of the possibility of the human person’s divinization by grace and the reality that this has been actualized in the saints, he would firmly deny any suggestion

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64 “A Philosophical Myth,” 207-208.

65 Perczel wants to use *BHH* as the smoking gun that shows Origenistic Christian sects in the orient adapted philosophical myths for apologetic purposes against Manicheism, and that this approach was ultimately ineffective – not because it was rejected by the Manichean audience – who may well have found it quite persuasive – but because it was rejected by the structures of Christian orthodoxy. Yet Perczel would need to situate this thesis in the broader context of heresiology as it continued to develop in the 7th and 8th C, for instance, in Sophronius and John. The handful of happenstance juxtapositions of Origenism and Manicheanism in 6th C sources do not sufficiently support his argument.
that this divinization impinges on the unique mediatorial office of Christ. These factors suggest a significant gulf between Damascene and Hierothean demonology that leave the two systems opposed in many important respects. Above all, Hierotheos greatly expands the foundation for demonological imagination, inviting the mystic to speculate on the ranks of spiritual beings in a way that is open-ended and effectively infinite. John, on the other hand, disciplines and restrains the role of the demonic in his theology, offering a view of the unseen world which, while it might be infinitely confirmed and repeated in the outworking of human experience, is nonetheless tightly circumscribed with respect to the ontology of the demonic.

5.3 Qur’anic Demonology: Traditions Retold

The demonology introduced to Jerusalem through the Arab conquests might be thought, at first, a simply foreign imposition: indeed, some aspects of the demonology of the Qur’an could be traced to pre-Islamic Arabic folklore. It should not be forgotten, however, that the nascent Islamic faith overlapped substantially with the cultural and religious circumstance of contemporary Judaism and Christianity. The Arab tribes

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66 As the most sustained account, see S. Zwemer, The Influence of Animism on Islam (1920). Zwemer might be critiqued, however, as representing an orientalizing impulse that underappreciates a common inheritance of ritual, narrative and spiritual culture common with Judaism and Christianity, while not abandoned – and not useless, given that there were indeed pre-Islamic Arab pagans in Muhammad’s audience with whom Muhammad presumably shared some common stories and assumptions about the spiritual world – it has been significantly downplayed in more recent scholarship. From another angle, pro-Arab apologists that emphasize the continuity of Islam with pre-Islamic Arab culture – and in particular, the persistence of an independent Abrahamic monotheism among the Arabs – over and against Judaism and Christianity.

67 Indeed, revisionist scholarship – prone to privilege archeological evidence and external witnesses over curated accounts of Islamic origins from within the tradition – frequently draws attention to the Judeo-Christian background of the content of the Qur’an and the ideas circulating in early Islamic discourse. Especially important for this study is J. Wansbrough, Sectarian Milieu (1978), whose
inhabiting the deserts east of Byzantium were regular contributors to the empire’s religious landscape, and many had embraced some form of Christianity; 68 in Palestine in particular, Arab monotheists had been exposed to and involved in Christian monasteries for several generations. 69 Damascus Christians like John, moreover, had an especially prominent role in the seventh through ninth centuries mediating between Greek-speaking Christianity, and the Christianity of those groups speaking in Semitic languages, such as Syriac and (probably) Arabic. 70 The geopolitical and cultural lines were certainly shifting in Syro-Palestine in the eighth century, but they were not settled: there is no reason to presume that the ascendancy of a new imperial power would bring to a sudden halt to the centuries-long pattern of cultural exchange between the Byzantine Christian and Arab communities. Indeed – if anything – the need for exchange would only become that much more urgent.

In recent decades, scholars have begun to draw attention to the resonance between John of Damascus and the Islamic philosophical-theological discourse taking place in Damascus around his time. Of note are the questions of the freedom of the will and its imagination of the socio-religious world of 6th C Arabia parallels the sectarian landscape I have suggested in Ch 4. See also P. Crone and M. Cook’s seminal *Hagarism* (1977). Janosik makes a further helpful distinction between revisionist and “neo-revisionist” scholarship, the latter of which has considerably increased the amount of archeological data supporting the revisionist narratives (*John of Damascus: First Apologist*, 51-52).

68 I. Shahid’s monumental seven volumes on *Byzantium and the Arabs* (1984, 1989, 1995) offers a rich and detailed introduction to this history.

69 Cyril of Scythopolis, for instance, notes several friendly interactions between Arabs and the earlier generations of Jerusalemite monastics, being especially keen to depict the Arabs as overawed by the supernatural power attached to the monks, and thus converting to Christianity. Not all recorded interactions are so positive, however – Arabs are elsewhere depicted as threatening and diabolical, for instance, in John Moschus.

70 Griffith, “From Aramaic to Arabic,” Sahas, “Cultural Interaction.”
relationship to divine foreknowledge.⁷¹ For John, this question is a dimension of his
Maximian commitments: a result of the highly technical language about the will that had
become standard Christian language in the wake of the Monothelete controversy.
Although inconclusive so far, this kind of connection suggests that there was deep
sympathy – and possibly high level, philosophical exchange – between the traditions at
that early moment.⁷² Given its place, classically, in contemplating and coordinating
cosmological and psychological phenomenon, demonology represents some of the basic
architectonic spiritual-mythical topography upon which these debates depend. It is not
surprising, given the parallel tracks on which Christian and Muslim philosophical
theology were operating in John’s time, that we find some fundamental similarities in
ideas about the nature and activity of the demonic, notwithstanding that there are some
significant differences.

It is helpful to see Qur’anic and Damascene demonology contrasted in the broader
spectrum of con-texts we have been considering in this chapter. In informing an
imaginary for the spiritual world, the Testament of Solomon and Book of the Holy
Hierotheos both offer vibrant demonologies: the former expanding on a Biblical story as
narrative apologetic for apotropaic magical practices, the latter offering a symbolic
framework for the encounter and defeat of demons in mystical ascent. By contrast, both
the Qur’an and John Damascene affirm the demonic while limiting its influence. John,

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⁷¹ Griffith, “John of Damascus and the Church of Syria,” Sahas, “Cultural Interaction,” Adrahas,
“John of Damascus.”

⁷² It is certainly the case that this kind of exchange took place later on, in 10th-13th C Baghdad – if
still under studied, a fair amount of clear textual evidence remains of this. As an introduction, see Griffith,
The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque, 106-128; more specifically, the fine essay of Vallat, “Between
Hellenism, Islam, and Christianity.” The same kind of evidence does not survive for early Islamic
Jerusalem or Damascus.
for his part, sets boundaries on demonological speculation by offering a carefully
developed and rigorously consistent theological system; the Qur’an, meanwhile,
circumscribes the imagination of the demonic through a homiletic midrash theologically
calibrated by its radically monotheistic principle, proposing a lens that would continually
filter and refine Jewish and Christian traditions. The consequent demonology is broad
within its overall scope, but nevertheless, has a clear central rationale.

Muhammad was intensely interested in the popular extra-biblical legend that it
was the devil’s refusal of the divine command to worship Adam at his creation and his
envy of man’s exalted state that prompted him to tempt the protoplast: the story is told
or alluded to no less than seven times in the Qur’an. Moreover, while it is perhaps
happenstance, the devil before his fall is usually known as Iblis; after the fall he
becomes as-Shaytan, retreating into the role of accuser and (especially) whisperer. The

73 The earliest appearance of this tradition seems to be in the *Life of Adam and Eve*, appearing in
some textual traditions as the *Life of Adam and Eve* 12-16 (OTP.2 262). The tradition also appears in the
Syriac *Cave of Treasures* (Budge tr., 55-56); and *Q. Bartholomei* 53-55. See H. Speyer, *Die biblischen
and “Ezekiel 28, the Fall of Satan and the Adam Books” (2000); P. Awn *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption*
(1983), 20-21; C. Melchert, “God Created Adam in His Image,” (2011): 120. The tradition is explicitly
rejected by Anastasius of Sinai (*QA 80*) and in the popular Ps-Athanasian *QQdub* 10 (PG 28, 604C). John
does not mention the tradition – likely following the rejection from these sources. For more on John’s
relationship to these texts, see Section 3.4.


75 Cutting against traditional Qur’anic etymologies which identify the name Iblis as stemming
from the root *bls*, and bearing the force of “the one who despaired [of God’s mercy]” or “causes despair,”
orientalists have typically seen the term to be a corruption of the Greek *diabolos* through the Syriac. For
the most recent treatment, see G. Reynolds, “A Reflection on Two Qur’ānic Words (Iblīs and Jūdī), with
Attention to the Theories of A. Mingana” (2004).


77 cf. Q 7:20, 200: 8:11; 20:120; 23:97; 41:36; 50:16; 114:1-6. For an extended treatment of the
distinction between *iblisi* and *shaitani* archetypes of evil within Islam, see W. Bodman, “Stalking Iblīs: In
Search of an Islamic Theodicy” (1999).
importance of this narrative, combined with its repetition across the Qur’ān suggest that this fall of Satan narrative should establish the primary orienting matrix against which the whole of Qur’ānic demonology should be read. Beginning with a mytho-symbolic protology which locates the origin of evil in arbitrary resistance to the absolute will of God, the Qur’ān unfolds into a strongly psychological orientation to evil as it is encountered within human experience. Tragedy and cosmic evils are relativized as subordinate to the grand scope of providence, and the primary spiritual task of the believer becomes an ever more fulsome submission to the divine will, which necessarily involves offering resistance to the whispers that speak to the human heart suggesting deviation from the ways of God.

If this is analysis correct, the core demonological trajectory of the Qur’ān actually parallels John Damascene’s project closely, although the vast difference in literary shape between the two literary obscures the similarities. As a non-systematic text, however, the Qur’ān preserves strands of several other demonological traditions that do not fit cleanly into this core framework. It is interesting, for instance, to note how much Solomonic lore persists into the Qur’ān. Solomon is one of the most prominent Biblical figures to appear in the text, with both his reputation and his importance being elevated in the Qur’ān over and against the Biblical tradition. In fact, the Qur’ānic presentation

78 So also P. Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption*.
79 Solomon’s contest with the Bilquis, Queen of Sheba, occupies the better part of the *Surat al-Naml* (Q 27), and his exploits also receive significant commentary in the *Surat Saba’* (Q 34:12-18) and the *Surat Saad* (Q 38:30-40) he is also given a substantive appraisal in Q 21:78-82, and there are significant allusions to his office and teaching at Q 2:102, 4:163, and 6:84.
80 Likely intermediate in the Qur’ānic appropriation of Solomon lore were Ethiopic Solomon traditions as reflected in, for instance, the *Kebra Negast*, to which Muhammad had been exposed when he and his followers took refuge in Ethiopia the early years of his preaching. See Havemann, “Die ‘Königin
includes a clear allusion to the kind of demonological tradition we see in *TSol*,
specifically noting that, among his other supernatural powers,81 God gave Solomon an
authority over the demons (*jinn*)82 which enabled him to employ their labor in hieratic
craftsmanship.83 The 14th ayah of *Surah Saba*’ further contains a brief but fascinating
notice on Solomon’s demise and its impact on the unseen world:

> When We [viz., God] decreed [Solomon’s] death, his death was not indicated to the *jinn*, except that a worm [or: creature of the earth (*دابة الأرض*)] gnawed off [the bottom of] his staff. Then, when he fell (ْخَرَ), it became clear to the *jinn* that if they had known the unseen, they would not have remained in humiliating punishment.

No Jewish or Christian version of this particular incident seems to have survived
as such, but the text is rich in resonance with Solomonic themes familiar in those

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81 Among other things, Solomon could talk to birds (Q 27:16; like his father David, who prayed with them (Q 38:19f) and ants (Q 27:18-19); was given supernatural understanding (Q21:78-79); converts Bilquis, the Queen of Sheba (implied to be a witch) by the cleverness and the supernatural grandeur of his palace (Q 27:38-45); and commands the wind (Q 38:37) such that he can even make a month’s journey in a single morning (Q 21:81, 34:12, 54:12) – which is a small hermeneutical step from giving him the magic carpet which he (and other men of supernatural power) ride in much Islamic folklore. See Venzlaff, “Zur Islamischen Salomo-Legende” (2000).

82 Although the Qur’an’s demonological lexicon speaks of devils (*shaytan* – plural of *shaytan*) and *jinn* – and some interpretive traditions add in additional spirits, such as *ifreet* (strong [*jinn*]), and ghouls – it is sufficient for our purposes to consolidate this diversity into the category of demons and demonology. The apparent interchangeability of the terms in the Qur’an, and the explicit identification of Iblis as among the *jinn* at Q 18:50 justify this consolidation, although the text also implies that Iblis is an angel (at Q 2:34, 7:11-12, 15:28-31, 20:116, 38:71-14). This reflects a categorical ambiguity that – on the one hand – took on different systematic forms within the Abrahamic traditions, and on the other hand, reflected a broad common malleable category of the demonic in the family of Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions. The unique valence of *jinn* as a demonological term is that it emphasizes the unseen quality of beings – from the root *j-n-n*, meaning “hidden” – which removes much of the moral baggage that had accumulated to the language in the Judeo-Christian demonological terminology.

83 Q 34:12-13: “Among the *jinn* were those who worked for [Solomon] by the permission of his Lord. And whoever deviated among them from Our command - We will make him taste of the punishment of the Blaze. They made for him what he willed of elevated chambers, statues, bowls like reservoirs, and stationary kettles.” Also Q 21:82, “Among the devils (*الشَّيَاطِينْ*) were those who dived for him and did other work;” Q 38:37-38, God subjected to him “the devils as well (*الشَّيَاطِينْ*), every builder and diver, and others bound in shackles.” In Q 27:38ff, Solomon commissions the *jinn* to steal the Queen of Sheba’s throne in order to induce her to submission to the rule of Solomon as prophet of God.
traditions: Solomon’s ultimate humiliation in spite of his heroic qualities and exploits; the appearance of a worm, perhaps an echo of the shamir tradition, but also bringing in resonances of the providential worm that God used to teach a lesson to the Prophet Jonah; cosmological significance of the turning of the age – although transposed, in this case, to the death of the Prophet, rather than the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of its Temple.

Most striking is that in the Qur’anic account, it is not a messianic Son of David that succeeds the demonological prowess of Solomon, but the revelation of and submission to the true way of God revealed by the Prophets – and especially the final Prophet, Muhammad. According to the Qur’an, the jinn were once able to ascend to the lowest heavens and so steal divine secrets, but the advent of God’s final revelation has

84 Yet Solomon’s humiliation is not of his own moral indiscretion, as it had been in the earliest tradition (this had already been a trend in the historiography: see n 5 above) but in the sense of his mortality. The Qur’an remembers Solomon as a supernaturally powerful, yet human character who sometimes preferred the good of this life to God, but was among those who frequently returned back to God (Q 38:30, with the surah naming several others with the same accolade). Accordingly, the Qur’an shifts the lesson of Solomon’s demise from the perils of pride, indiscretion and idolatry to speak about the finitude and limitations of even the greatest of the prophets and servants of God.

85 Jonah 4:7. The Qur’an juxtaposes the fitna of Solomon with the fitna of Job in Q 38:41ff, perhaps tracing this thread.

86 Notwithstanding the tradition of the Hebrew accounting in the 2 Kings, in which Solomon’s moral indiscretions lead ultimately to the downfall of his kingdom, there is no linguistic evidence here that Solomon’s fall should be taken here allegorically in a moral sense, as we might talk about the “fall” of Adam. The Qur’an seems to imply the Rabbinic tradition of Solomon’s demonic body double (see n 6 above) at Q 38:34: God “tried (fitna) Solomon and placed on his throne a body, then he returned” – part of the purpose of this interjection being – as it was for the Rabbinic interpreters – to be able to write off as demonic any deeds of Solomon or traditions attributed to him that fall short of his prophetic reputation.

87 Given the Qur’an emphasis on prophets over and against the Jews as a national group, the transposition from the geography of the city to the person of the hero-exemplar is eminently reasonable. The Qur’an omits any mention of Rehoboam, although memory of his disastrous reign is preserved in historical collections such as that of al-Tabari.

88 We might hear echoes in this tradition of questions of demonic foreknowledge present in the ascetical tradition (see Section 2.3), and to which John briefly alludes in Exp. fid. 18.
now sealed the heavens. Demonic eavesdropping is no longer permitted, and the *jinn* who attempt to violate this rule are chastised by having flaming rocks thrown at them – an etiology for shooting stars, presumably.\(^8^9\) With the same intent, the Qur’an lambasts the kind of exaggeration of the power that ancient pagan peoples had ascribed to the demons: some had “set up the *jinn* as partners with God, whereas God created them;”\(^9^0\) or they had “invented a blood-relationship between God and the *jinn,*”\(^9^1\) and “sought refuge” among the *jinn.*\(^9^2\)

Indeed, the most salient feature of the Qur’anic hypothesis regarding the nature of the demonic is that they are cast as not only entirely creaturely, but entirely material beings.\(^9^3\) The *jinn* are like humans in every respect, except for their elemental composition, which is of fire, rather than of earth.\(^9^4\) If their material composition may offer certain advantages over human beings,\(^9^5\) they are, nonetheless, intelligent, mortal, and volitional: some of them, indeed, are so amazed by the recitations of the Prophet

\(^{8^9}\) Q 15:18, 72:8-9, 55:33, 35; *Hadith Bukhari* 657. It is, moreover, asserted as proof of the divine origins of the Qur’an that it is inimitable by either man or *jinn* in all their cleverness (Q 17:88).

\(^{9^0}\) Q 6:100.

\(^{9^1}\) Q 37:158.

\(^{9^2}\) Q 72:6.

\(^{9^3}\) Most clearly articulating this position is the *Surah ar-Rahman,* which – in addition to asserting outright that, just as human beings are created from “clay like pottery,” *jinn* are created “smokeless flame of fire” (Q 55:14-15) – goes on to address humanity and *jinn* as a dual creation, within the dualities of creation. Again at Q 15:26-27, man is said to have been created of “an altered black mud” whereas the *jinn* are created of “scorching fire.” Iblis accordingly asserts his igneous material composition as the basis of his superiority over humanity at Q 7:12 and 38:76

\(^{9^4}\) Some folkloric traditions stretch this even further, positing that Eve is the mother of both human beings and *jinn.* Her fertility was so superabundant that she gave birth to more children than she could care for. Eve was forced to abandon half of them, and they were instead protected by God and given license to walk the earth at night and unseen, but are otherwise ordinary people.

\(^{9^5}\) In the Qur’an, see Q 27:39-40.
Muhammad that they convert to Islam. The Qur’anic picture of demonic malleability, accordingly, is much more flexible than any Christian tradition we have here surveyed. The Testament of Solomon testifies that demons can be controlled and confined, but does not suggest they might be converted; in Hierotheos, the demons are principally defeated, but their ultimate redemption is suggested on the basis of the overarching unity of all natures within the divine essence; their salvation is, accordingly, an ultimate metaphysical miracle in interest of the harmony and unity of the whole of existence, rather than a conversion based on persuasion and an act of will. John, meanwhile, stands radically on the opposite end of the spectrum, explicitly and specifically ruling out any mechanism by which the demons might be converted in either the present or the future. Yet even here, viz-a-viz alternative traditions like TSol and Hierotheos, the Qur’an has something of a parallel interest to John: both portray the demonic realm as ontologically – rather than only ritually or symbolically – bound and limited, such that a larger space is opened for the free exercise of human will. The primary difference is that, whereas the Qur’an is optimistic about the ongoing and expanding subordination of unseen powers as the message of Islam spreads, John posits the persistence of demonic trials and temptations up until the final judgement of the eschaton.

In the broader frame, the operative theological principle of the Qur’anic appropriation of demonological traditions – consonant with its overarching theme of the

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96 Surat al-Jinn (Q 72). More still, Q 6:130 names jinn are among the audience of the prophets, Q 46:29-32 says that some of the jinn inquired after the Qur’an.

97 On the inability of demons to repent (and, correspondingly, of angels to fall): Exp. fid. 17.20-21, 57-62; also 18.35-38, 44.52-57. See the discussion in Section 6.2 below.
text, as well as the driving emphasis of Islam itself – is an especially radical permutation of monotheism. Accordingly, the elaborate heavenly hierarchies of Jewish and Christian mysticism are flattened out, or at least, emphatically demoted.\textsuperscript{98} There is one true resident of the heavens, God himself, who is without peer or parallel, without offspring or associate or intermediary, needing no co- or sub-divinities as his assistants, lest there be any insinuation that superabundant divinity were in some way lacking.\textsuperscript{99} The heavens are depopulated of all but their most august residents, who tend to be seen as personifications rather than personalities; the rest of the tribe of spiritual beings are demoted to the place of being terrestrial spirits by design. In the Qur’an, the ultimacy of the God of Abraham as the true God, creator of the universe and exultant above all creatures, spirits, and so-called gods is established, not by the drama of cosmic conflict that unfolds in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures – a messy and contentious collection of writings frustratingly long historical period in any case – but as a fresh assertion of the supremacy of God which, by Muhammad’s understanding, has been true from the beginning and consistently witnessed by the Prophets, but obscured by the rebellion of men and spirits.

Ibn Katheer’s attitude is typical:

Most of [these stories about the demons] are from Jewish and Christian legends (\textit{Israaeeiliyaat}) which must be investigated more closely. God alone knows the truth of these types of reports. Many of them are clearly false since they contradict the truth that we possess in our hands [viz, the Qur’an and the hadith of the Prophet]. Whatever the Qur’an contains is sufficient and we need not delve into the stories of the earlier peoples. Their reports have not been safe from changes, additions, and deletions. They have fabricated many things in their reports. They did not have among them those trustworthy people who safeguarded their Scriptures and reports from being contaminated by the extremists as this nation [of Islam] has had.\textsuperscript{100}


\textsuperscript{99} Evident already in the inscription of the Dome of the Rock. See Section 4.2 above.

\textsuperscript{100} Quoted in ʻUmar Sulaymān Ashqar, \textit{The World of the Jinn and Devils} (1998), 15.
5.4 Conclusion

Direct and specific evidence of a vibrant tradition of demonological speculation in eighth century Jerusalem is all but lost to us. The three texts surveyed, however, give us some sense of the kind of diversity that may have existed within and around John’s community. Many questions remain to be answered: to what extend did these kinds of traditions interact, and how? When a person with strong demonological beliefs encountered someone of a different system, was their conversation usually conventional – consisting in the rehashing of predictable apologetic arguments, asserting one schema over another? Or was it creative – prompting the new, hybrid perspectives, drawing ideas from multiple sources to strengthen its comprehensiveness in addressing the unseen world? Were differences encountered and negotiated consciously and explicitly, or tacitly, as external pressures from other groups prompted internal questions within particular religious communities? And what, finally, was the precise mix of traditions and beliefs that John had in his peripheral vision as he set about to systematize and pass on the tradition that he had received?

We probably cannot answer these questions adequately based on the data that survive, but an imaginative sketch can help us connect the dots and infer some of the details. The absence of a body of systematic, dialogical reflection on the demonic renders it unlikely that there was a mature apologetic infrastructure, or settled grooves of

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101 These kinds of canned apologetic arguments became especially typical of the literature of early Christian-Islamic encounter; see for instance, S. Griffith, “Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts” (2015). The nature and content of the spirit world does not seem to have been an object of major contest between the religious and philosophical traditions.
conventional argumentation that could mediate between different demonological trajectories within the Abrahamic faiths. Certainly, long before John’s time, monotheistic polemics against the pagans had succeeded in investing the category of demon with a strong and unambiguous negative valence,\textsuperscript{102} and – notwithstanding exceptions allowing for demonic conversion – the negative sense of the demonic persists into every demonological system we can trace to eighth century Jerusalem, as diverse as they are in identifying the character, destiny, and activity of demons. In this case, then, the blend of demonological ideas within the popular imagination was probably the product of informal negotiation from a broad array of sources, mediated by charismatic individuals and movements, most of the residue of which is no longer extant. The texts considered above, meanwhile, represent the maturation of late antique demonological systems that were trying to make sense of the data of antiquity on the one hand, and the diversity of apotropaic and ritual behaviors on the other. Of these, \textit{TSol} probably best represents the popular demonology, with its interest in categorizing and blending beliefs and practices.

John of Damascus, on the other side of the spectrum, aims at the architectonic theological structures by placing an especially strong emphasis on systematic and philosophical consistency. Hierotheos’s mysticism, meanwhile, by its own aims and definition, addresses only a small community of spiritually elite: but in so doing, it performs a fascinating apologetic task by recycling a dualistic demonological mythology in a way that is subordinate to the monism of an Origenistic-Evagrian framework so radical that it effectively collapses into pantheism.

\textsuperscript{102} On this process, see Section 2.2.
The demonological imagination of the Qur’an – whether reflective of certain longstanding trends in Semitic demonology already in circulation in Syro-Palestine, or imported to the region as the Arab conquerors consolidated their religion – was beginning to exert a significant pressure on Jerusalemite demonology in John’s time. As the ascendant faction of the seventh and eighth centuries, the theopolitical system of early Islam could boast about the efficacy of their system for organizing seen and unseen reality on the basis of the longevity and ongoing expansion of their rule. Perhaps nowhere would these pressures have been more organically present and effective than in shaping everyday dealings with middling spiritual forces. The Islamic emphasis on the supremacy of God and terrestriality of demonic powers – and, concurrently, the emptiness of a lower heaven space between an ultra-transcendent God and his creation – made a significant impression on the Christian imagination, even if only to stimulate particular lines of reflection within the tradition that were already there. It is appropriate, accordingly, to look for these kinds of resonances in a formal statement of demonology from someone like John of Damascus, even without evidence of direct engagement between the traditions: and such resonances should be taken into consideration in considering, for instance, the way John develops his position on angelic bodies, and locates angelic and demonic beings within a broader cosmological frame.

More pertinent, however, is the ongoing diversity and flexibility of demonological belief and practice that these texts together witness. The situation into which John spoke was complex, pluralistic, and dynamic. The three works we have considered represent possibilities for rendering the demonic that were open to the Damascene: possibilities that, for the most part, he discarded. John offers a real and important place for the
demonic within cosmology and psychology, but it is carefully circumscribed: he offers a framework that can tie together the Scriptural witness, but carefully limits the extent to which speculative pathways on the subject can proliferate. John didn’t take the kinds of speculative license in demonology evident in texts like *TSol, Hierotheos*, and the Qur’an. Instead, considering himself profoundly beholden to the Scriptural and patristic tradition, he offered a modest and restrained integration of the data of Scripture, with a view to the tradition of the Councils and Fathers. The precise way in which John crafted this balance, however, is the subject to which we will turn in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SIX:
A DEMON-DESTROYING THEOLOGY ARTICULATED: ANALYSIS OF DAMASCENE DEMONOLOGY

Collectively, the previous chapters have suggested that John became a “destroyer of demons” by integrating ideas latent in the ancient texts he inherited according to the stringent rubrics of philosophical and theological precision that had come down to him by tradition, and that, nevertheless, his synthesis was not completely oblivious to the exigencies of historical trends and circumstances. In particular, in formulating his demonology, John weighed and discarded the vibrant fantasies sometimes entertained by popular movements and sectarian groups, and standardized and simplified the demonological lore present even in the theological mainstream. What remains is to offer a comprehensive reading of John’s demonology itself in the light of our survey of these broader concerns pertaining to John’s tradition and context.

To highlight the Damascene’s active work in assembling the Scriptural and patristic themes he inherited, the shape of this analysis generally mirrors that of Chapter Two, considering first the Scriptural dimensions of John’s demonology, then its engagement with broader philosophical questions, and finally, its appropriation and application within the ascetical tradition. It is John’s sense of the salient demonological debates inside and outside of the tradition, however, through which he revisits these ancient textures and reconstitutes them as constituent dimensions of his own system. The intermediate chapters, accordingly, are also essential in preparing us to measure these dimensions within the Damascene’s demonology. From Chapter Three, we came away with a sense of John’s voice as a middle way in debates that emerged in the sixth and
seventh century, which will be especially helpful as a counterpoint when we consider John’s demonology as a partisan position over and against the alternate iconoclastic voice in the third part of the first section (6.1.3) and section three (6.3) below. Chapters Four and Five, meanwhile, oriented us to John’s contextual sensitivities, opening our imagination to the veritable sea of alternate views in which the Damascene was swimming. We will not engage these background considerations directly – John himself does not explicitly engage them, after all – but neither should we ignore them. Even as we draw a straight line between the *paradosis* John inherited and the synthesized view he promulgated in his *ekdosis*, his position is not obvious or inevitable. Given how powerfully John’s demonology reflects the content of classical Christian demonology, this is not easily apparent in retrospect, but in John’s pluralistic context, taking his stand involved a significant commitment, and indeed, a certain risk.

6.1 *Scriptural Dimensions of John’s Demonology*

It would be easy to misunderstand John’s complex assimilation of the Scriptural inheritance, given that his approach is substantially different from the exegetical strategies of both modern and earlier patristic readers.\(^1\) When John speaks of the Bible, his devotion to the text is palpable: his language effusive and beautiful, undoubtedly

\(^1\) Notwithstanding a recent uptick in interest in the exegetical insights of Maximus the Confessor, many studies of patristic exegesis “do not extend far beyond the 4th century, dismissing the bulk of patristic Biblical commentaries (usually tacitly) as derivative and/or encyclopedic rather than exegetical in character. The brief account of John of Damascus’s use of Scripture in the *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis* is a good example of the typical approach, focusing on his typological work in his homilies on the Dormition, and scarcely mentioning the role of Scripture in his other outputs (974-977). Significant work could be done in analyzing John’s use of Scripture, particularly with a view to the iconophile framework of his broader theological system. Louth offers a good beginning of this in *St. John Damascene*, 15-30 and 193-282.
rooted in his personal liturgical rhythms as a priest and probably monastic, as well as a robust life of ongoing devotional study. “All Scripture, inspired of God, is very profitable,” John notes, following the Apostle Paul (2Tim 3:16), such that “to search the sacred Scripture is exceedingly beautiful and profitable for the soul.”

He continues:

“Like a tree planted near running waters (Ps 1:3),” so also the soul drenched (ἀρδευομένη) with sacred Scripture grows fat and gives its fruit in season – which is the orthodox faith – and evergreen leaves, by which I mean God-pleasing actions. By the sacred Scriptures, we are formed (ῥυθμιζόμεθα) for virtuous action and pure contemplation. In them, we find exhortation (παράκλησιν) toward every virtue and protection (ἀποτροπὴν) from every vice.

John thus encourages the reader of the Scriptures to diligence (ἐπιμελεία), lauding the hidden riches of the “beautiful paradise of the Scriptures” and urging us to knock upon their door, “not casually, but with eagerness (προθυμως) and persistence, not growing weary,” that it might be opened to us and its treasures bestowed upon us.

Should we read once and then a second time and still not understand what we are reading, let us not be discouraged. Rather, let us persist, let us meditate, let us inquire…Let us draw from the fountain of paradise ever-flowing and most pure waters, springing up into life everlasting. Let us delight in them, let us revel greedily, for they contain inexhaustible grace.

Yet John’s devotion to the Bible is not exclusive: he encourages in his readers a broad intellectual diet (provided they pursue this diet with care and discernment), and expresses a general enthusiasm for the pursuit of wisdom that echoes his rhetoric for

\[\text{References}\]

\[2\] Exp. fid. 90.12-13
\[3\] Ibid, 90.13-19
\[4\] Ibid, 90.23
\[5\] Ibid, 90.31
\[6\] Ibid, 90.32-39

7 Consider, for instance, Exp. fid. 90.40-45: “Should we be able to get some profit from [sources other than the Scriptures and the Fathers], this is not forbidden,” he instructs. “Let us become, as it were, [spiritual] bankers amassing genuine and pure gold, but rejecting the spurious (κιβόδηρος). Let us receive the most beautiful sayings, but let us throw to the dogs the ridiculous gods and alien fables, for from the former, we are able to acquire great strength against the latter.” See also Dial. proem., 43-51 in which John defends his attention to Greek wisdom on the basis that everything true within it is of divine origin.
encouraging an attentive reading of the Scriptures. It is in this spirit that John opens his

Philosophical Chapters, floridly intoning:

Let us not be satisfied with merely approaching and arriving at the gate [of knowledge] but let us rather knock vigorously, so that the door of the bridal chamber may be opened to us and we may behold the beauty within it...Let us knock vigorously: let us read once, twice, many times, and by this digging, we shall find the treasure of knowledge and delight in its wealth. Let us seek, let us search, let us examine, let us inquire...if we are lovers of learning, we shall also learn much, for all things have been so constituted that through diligence and labor they become attainable – and before all [our labor] and with it, through the grace of God, the giver of grace.⁸

The breadth of John’s readership becomes evident in tracing the ultimate contours of his theology, which is – by volume – much more a tapestry of patristic ideas and quotations than ones drawn directly from the Scriptures. John does theoretically differentiate between the authority of the Scriptures and the authority of the Fathers and Councils of the Church, for instance, arguing that God has given us all that we need to know in the writings of the Law and the Prophets, and through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and that these “ancient boundaries” (ὁρια αἰώνια; Prov. 22:28) ought not be transgressed.⁹ At other times, however, the categories are confused: the givenness of the Scriptures elides with the givenness of tradition. John affirms that “divine ordinance (θεσμοθεσίαν) has not only been handed down in writings, but also in unwritten traditions;”¹⁰ and more still, following St. Basil, “if we try to dismiss that which is unwritten among the customs [of the Church] as of no great authority, then without

⁸ Dial. 1.35-65.
⁹ Exp. fid. 1.17-28 “Through the Law and the Prophets in earlier times, and then afterward through his only-begotten Son, our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ, [God] has manifested knowledge of himself to us befitting our capacity (κατά τὸ ἐφικτὸν ἡμῖν). Therefore, everything that has been handed down (τὰ παράδοσεράν) to us by the Law and the Prophets and the Apostles and the Evangelists, we receive and we know and we revere them, seeking out (ἐφιζοῦμεν) nothing more than these. Let us then love (στέρξωμεν) these things and abide in them, and not transgressing the ancient boundaries or overstepping the divine tradition (παράδοσης).”
¹⁰ Images I.23.1-6.
noticing it, we shall damage the Gospel.”\textsuperscript{11} For John, then, it is incumbent upon Christians to “stand firm and hold to the traditions” which they have been taught, “either by word of mouth” or by apostolic letter;\textsuperscript{12} and certainly, “the words of holy and approved (ἐκκρίτος) Fathers” have a value for articulating theological truth right alongside the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, over and against the demon-delighting, devil-glorying “contaminating lies and emptiness” of heretical texts and teachings.\textsuperscript{13} John accordingly attends to the Fathers and their texts with a degree of reverence and care not unlike the attention that he offers the Scriptures: probably because, as an ecclesiastical intellectual of the eighth century, John’s mode of studying engaging with and transmitting these ancient texts and their ideas would have closely paralleled his approach to the Scriptures themselves. Scripture and Tradition, in other words, constitute for John an undifferentiated whole.

Consequent to the complexity of John’s relationship with the Biblical text, assessing the Scriptural themes and dimensions represented in his demonology is no simple matter: our approach to the question will take three different angles, accordingly. First, we will consider the extent and character of John’s use of explicit Scriptural proof-texts to establish his core doctrines about the devil and demons, attending especially to his development of the subject in \textit{Exp. fid.} 18. We will then zoom out to the broader

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 24-30, quoting Basil in \textit{De Sp. Sanct.} 27.66.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 52-57, quoting 2Thes 2:15.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Images} II.10.36f. John likewise appeals to the “approved Fathers” in \textit{Images} 3.9 and 1.60=2.56=3.53, \textit{CJ} 95.4, and \textit{HTris.} 1.39. This language, echoing the opening of the Chalcedonian definition, and finding some resonances in the \textit{Acta} of the Fifth Ecumenical Council, and enters into orthodox discourse definitively at III Constantinople with the definition of faith promulgated by that Council, which employs the phrase twice.
Scriptural themes with which demonology interacts, and consider how John renders the role of the demonic within the unfolding of the economy of salvation. Finally, we will look at how John appropriated the apostolic sign of “casting out demons” to the saints and their images as a way of bolstering the claims of his party to maintain orthodox Christianity in the midst of the intense controversy that over Iconoclasm that began to erupt in his time.

6.1.1 The Scriptural Framework of Exp. Fid. 18

As John gives his summary topical treatment of “the devil and demons” in chapter 18 of the Expositio Fidei, he does not develop an especially elaborate or robust Scriptural argument for understanding them: instead, he relies tacitly on such a framework to define an imaginal space, and then moves on to offer several brief arguments about their nature and activity. After a lengthy exposition on the demonic abandonment of the good – characterized, curiously enough, not by an exposition of Scriptural texts that imply such a fall so much as a contemplation of the demons’ original good nature and their abandonment of it – John moves on to discuss the extent of and limitations to the

14 Following the patristic idiom, John’s terminology – as expressed, i.e., in Exp. fid. 45 – prefers the language of divine economy (θείας οἰκονομίας), which language we will try to imitate – although it may at times be clearer to express these ideas with respect to the modern concept of Heilsgeschichte, “salvation history.”

15 Following the Hiera, Isa 14:12f and Luke 10:19 are the most promising candidates, or Eze 28.

16 John’s argument does possess a certain expositional logic in the sequence of terms that the terms that describe how good angels become wicked demons: significantly, the “fall” of the devil and his demons (ἔκπτωσις) is spoken of only retrospectively (18.36), while the previous lines describe that the devil “failed to keep,” his appointed station (μὴ ἐνέγκας, 5), “turned away” (ἐτράπη, 7) from what was his by nature, and “lifted” or “stirred” himself up (ἐπήρθη, 7) to “rebellion” (ἀνταρσία, 8) and “apostasy” from the good (9), a “privation” (στέρησις, 10), and, finally, a “collapse” (σύμπτωσις, 15) into evil and spiritual darkness, highlighting that even demonic perdition is the result of outcome of a process of willing, rather than a created or pre-accomplished state. It is unclear, however, which text John is expositing, or if he is just
demonic powers, alluding – per the description in Job 40-41 – to the multiplicity of fearsome forms they are capable of adopting.\(^{17}\) The demons cannot force anyone to do anything, John emphasizes:\(^{18}\) although they attack (προσβάλλειν) human beings through the impure passions\(^{19}\) and seek to seduce them through terrible and impressive displays, “it is up to us (ἐν ἡμῖν) whether we receive their suggestions (προσβολή) or not.”\(^{20}\)

Ultimately, however, the human being has an advantage over the demon through the apparent weakness of his or her physical body: in susceptibility to change there is also an offering a brief synopsis drawing from the several terms that have come into circulation to describe the demonic rebellion. Curiously, the characteristic terminology that the LXX applies to the satanic presumption (ἀνάβασις-ascent in Isa 14:13-14 and ὑψωσις-exultation in Eze. 28:2, 5, 17) is completely absent from John’s rich description.

\(^{17}\) Exp. fid. 18.21-23: “Gaining the permission from God, they have strength, and they change (μεταβάλλονται) and transform (μετασχηματίζονται) themselves into whatever illusory (κατὰ φαντασίαν) form they wish.” John is carrying forward the logic of 2Cor 11:14 here, wherein the apostle reports that Satan is said to be able to “transform (μετασχηματίζεται) himself into an angel of light.” Such expansion is well within the tradition of monastic experience, wherein the demons manifest themselves in all kinds of terrifying apparitions. Paradigmatically, see Vit. Ant. 9. See also the discussion on μετασχηματίζεται as a transitive angelic property in Section 3.4 around n 129.

\(^{18}\) John is especially adamant on this point as a necessary implication of the Maximian ascetical tradition he follows and its emphasis on the question of the freedom of the will. Thus at Exp. fid. 18.19-20 he states that demons have no power but under divine permission (cf. also 43.80-81); in 30-31, he states that the demons cannot force anyone, likewise 64.5-7. Nevertheless, the “law of sin” has been inscribed on the members of our flesh, but only following upon our “unforced (ἀβιάστου) and voluntary (ἑκουσίου) acceptance of it” (95.5f).

\(^{19}\) ἀκάθαρτα πάθη; Exp. fid. 18.30-31. This is an ascetic meme, especially developed by Maximus. See for instance Cap. char. 3.47. At Exp. fid. 95.10-12, this is described as the “law of sin,” by which the devil is able to attack us through the body; the “odor (ὀσμή) and sense (ἀίσθησις) of sin inherent in our body,” the “concupiscence (ἐπιθυμία) and pleasure (ἡδονή) of the flesh” (15-17).

\(^{20}\) Exp. fid. 18.31-32.
opportunity for repentance. This is something that the demons do not have, “for there is neither repentance for human beings after their death, nor for the angels after their fall.”

John’s argument engages with Biblical texts at three key moments, and each of these instances stand out in the overall texture of the chapter: as Scriptural proofs, they interrupt the flow of the shorthand through which he approaches the rest of his points. John includes these references, however, because they offer the strongest possible evidence for what he discerns as the most pressing questions within demonology: questions that both have a long legacy in the historical debates about demons, and immediate importance in establishing the boundaries of right belief.

The first verse John invokes, Gen 1:31, seems rather remote from the subject on the surface, instead reporting the divine retrospective on creation, that “God saw all the things which he had made, and they were very good.” In fact, however, it cuts immediately to the central problem the Damascene is trying to address through his demonology. John affirms that God is the “maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible:” God did not restrict himself to making the better parts of the

\[ \text{21 Exp. fid. 18.36-37. John is following Nemesius \textit{nat. hom.} here (PG 40, 521C-524A). Although Maximus probably would have been amenable to this approach as a solution to Origen’s millennialism, it seems that John is the first to systematically appropriate this insight into a broader anti-Origenist demonology.}\]

\[ \text{22 Exp. fid. 18.13 reproduces the Biblical text verbatim. As detailed in the prose above, John uses this quotation to the same effect in two other places in the \textit{Ex. fid.} and at three points in his other treatises (see below). By contrast, the verse appears only once in the \textit{Hiera}, under the eponymous title, Περὶ δημιουργίας Θεοῦ, καὶ ὡς οὐδὲν εἰκῆ γέγονεν παρ’ αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ καλὰ λίαν (PG 95, 1349).}\]
universe, leaving the creation of everything inferior, broken or evil to the devil some lesser deity; he created all things – τὰ πάντα ἐποίησεν. At the same time, however, John denies that God is the creator of evil: everything that God made was “very good” – ἵδοὺ καλὰ λίαν. Where, then, did evil come from? Demonology fills this gap: one of the angelic powers – the chief of the terrestrial order, who had been entrusted with custody over the earth – chose to rebel of his own free will against the goodness in which and for which he was he was created. This is the being that we know of as “the devil,” and the angels that followed after him and imitated his choice we call “demons.” These corrupted spiritual intelligences, in turn, misuse their influence over God’s creation to produce evil and destruction within in the natural order, and, by means of their varied assaults (προσβολή) on human beings, they seek to persuade men and women to follow their ways: to abandon the goodness of God and sinking down with them into the abyss of vice and destruction.

Given that he understands “the devil and the demons” to be persistently, permanently evil, John’s first concern as he takes up the topic is to foreclose on any possibility that he might be understood as embracing a Manichean-style dualism because of this position. Against those schools of thought which argue that such evil beings have a substantial existence in and of themselves – an existence that is independent of God, coeternal with him, or both – John insists, via Gen 1:31, that all things were made by God, and were made good. He will employ this quotation to the same effect at several other points in his corpus, most notably at Exp. fid. 93, which specifically repudiates the
notion of two original principles,\textsuperscript{24} and as a key proof-text in his dialogue \textit{Against the Manicheans}.	extsuperscript{25} In fact, John tends look to Gen 1:31 at any point that he detects dualistic overtones in the arguments of his opponents, and in such a spirit, he quotes the verse against the iconoclasts,\textsuperscript{26} and certain strands of argumentation within monenergist Christology.\textsuperscript{27}

Lest the insistence that God created everything be taken to mean that he also created evil, however, John further emphasizes that evil is the product of a willful abandonment of or separation from the “very good”-ness with which the Creator endows his creatures. In particular, John’s use of Gen 1:31 at \textit{Exp. fid.} 18 motivates the conclusion that, while God created goodness and light, the spiritual “darkness” of the demons “came into existence by means of willful self-determination” – \(\alpha\upsilon\tau\varepsilon\omicron\zeta\omicron\sigma\upsilon\omega\ \theta\epsilon\lambda\acute{\iota}\mu\acute{\iota}\mu\acute{\iota}\tau\varsigma \varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\epsilon\acute{\eta} \tau\omicron\omicron\omicron\).\textsuperscript{28} John’s phrasing here is striking: the \(\varsigma\acute{\kappa}\omicron\omicron\tau\omicron\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\epsilon\omicron\tau\omicron\omicron\omicron\) (darkness came into existence) that follows the act of demonic will deliberately inverts the Biblical \(\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\epsilon\omicron\tau\omicron\omicron\omicron \phi\omicron\delta\varsigma\) (there was light) which occurs following the divine command “Let there be light” in Gen 1:3, almost as though the willful demonic self-determination were a kind of “Let there be darkness.” By an act of free will, rational creatures become the inventors of evil, but not in the same sense in which God is the

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Exp. fid.} 93.26

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{CM} 14.6 and 27.1.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Images} II.13.4

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Exp. fid.} 59.213.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Exp. fid.} 18.14. Likewise at 93.34f – following again the invocation of Gen 1:31 – John identifies the origin of diabolical evil as the consequence of the devil’s “self-determined inclination” (\(\alpha\upsilon\tau\varepsilon\omicron\zeta\omicron\sigma\upsilon\sigma\omicron\upsilon \gamma\nu\omicron\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma\)), which causes him to change from being a “bright and luminous angel” to being shrouded by the “gloom of evil” for being cut off from the divine as the only source of “goodness and luminescence (\(\phi\omicron\omicron\tau\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\)).”
Creator of all things. God, after all, brought all things into existence out of nothing, including the rational creatures who, by their ill-will, war against his works. Analogously, while we might say that the sun produces light and a rock produces a shadow, the mode of production is in no way comparable: as John puts it elsewhere, “darkness is not a substance but an accident, being an absence of light.”

Through this line of reasoning, John finds a satisfactory solution to his chief concerns: in asserting that God created all things good and evil came in subsequently by the free choice of his creatures, he can affirm both (a) the proposition that God created all things, and (b) the proposition that God, as morally perfect, has no part in evil. This solution, however, hinges on a radical conception of the freedom of will in the rational creature that requires further development, and to ensure the coherence of his position, John has to make this argument thoroughly. In this case, John is without a clear Scriptural proof-text, so he expands upon this principle by turning to the technical framework of moral psychology from the philosophical and ascetical traditions, which he receives chiefly through Nemesius and Maximus.

The devil “was not evil by nature, but being good and made from the good, he did not have even a foothold for wickedness in himself from his Creator,” John asserts, but “by his self-determined choice (αὐτεξουσίῳ προαιρέσει) he turned from what was according to nature to what was against it.”

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29 John says this of physical darkness at *Exp. fid.* 21.12, and again as an analogy for good and evil at 44.14-15. “Evil is nothing else than a privation of good, just as darkness is a privation of light.” At 93.31-33, the language of evil as accident rather than substance is used substituting “natural/unnatural” dichotomy for the “light/dark” image: “Evil is not some sort of a substance, nor a property, but an accident: a deviation from that which is according to nature to that which is against it – namely, a sin.”

30 This ties in to John’s broader ascetical framework, as noted below.

31 *Exp. fid.* 18. 5-7
Likewise, the demons took up the cause of evil by voluntary choice
(προαιρεσιν ἐκουσίως). John hits on this theme repeatedly through his treatise, noting,
for instance, that the devil “self-determinedly (αὐτεξουσίως) became the discoverer
(εὑρετής) of evil,” and that sin is an “invention (εὑρημα) of the self-determined
inclination (αὐτεξουσίου γνώμης) of the devil,” and came into being when the devil –
who, as a rational being, is self-determined (αὐτεξουσίος ὡς λογικός) – “voluntarily
(ἐκουσίως) departed from his natural virtue.”

By rendering evil as derivative of created self-determinations rather than part of
the fabric of the “very good” creation, therefore, John teaches that evil is emphatically
non-ultimate. He amplifies this point in Exp. fid. 18 through a second Scriptural proof.
The demons “have no power or strength against anyone,” John asserts, “unless this be
permitted by the dispensation of God.” He demonstrates the truth of this fact by
alluding to two Biblical episodes: the case of Job – whom, famously, Satan tortured, but
only with God’s permission – and the case of the swine which the demons were
permitted to destroy at Jesus’s permission when they left the Gerasene demoniacs. This
conjunction of texts seems to be a favorite of John, as it appears again in Chapter 43 at
the end of his discussion of divine providence to much the same effect, with John

32 Ibid., 18.16-18.
33 Exp. fid. 41.24-26
34 Exp. fid. 93.34-35
35 Ibid., 93.37-38
36 Exp. fid. 18.19-20. This principle faintly echoes 1Cor 10:13: “[God] will not allow you to be
tempted beyond what you can bear.” More explicitly, however, see VA 23f.
37 Job 1-2, noting especially the divine permissions granted at 1:12, 2:6.
38 Mark 5:12-13, Mat 8:31-32.
alluding to these stories as proof that at times, God even uses even the demons to do good and instruct.³⁹

Ultimately, John’s argument excludes the possibility that the rational creature might use its radical freedom of will to the point of completely undermining God’s ultimate purposes. As timeless, omnipotent goodness, God’s purposes always prevail, and as omniscient, evil never cuts him short or takes him by surprise; indeed, to the point that the demons must seek his permission even to assault a single person, or destroy a herd of pigs. However things may seem within the limited scope of our human experience and perception, providence remains in complete control. The victory of evil, while terrible and traumatic, is only temporary: indeed, as John asserts later on, “for those who accept them with thanksgiving, all adverse visitations (σκυθρωπαὶ ἐπιφοραὶ) bring them nearer to salvation, and become agents of benefit without fail.”⁴⁰

John might have invoked Romans 8:28 on this point: Paul, after all, lends apostolic authority to the proposition that “all things work together (συνεργεῖ) for good for those who love God and are called according to his purposes.”⁴¹ This would include, presumably, the attacks of demons. But if this sentiment of Paul may have helped to inspire John’s thinking, it is not sufficiently strong to serve John’s argument on this point. Ultimately, the scope of John’s interest is more universal: every demonic motion is subordinate to the scope of providence, such that it is not only “for those who love God”

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³⁹ Exp. fid. 43.80-81.
⁴⁰ Ibid., 43.64-66
⁴¹ Interestingly, this verse is not quoted in John’s major works, it is but quoted several times in the Hieria; Rom. 7-8 also features broadly in John’s analysis of the “law of sin” in Exp. fid. 93.
that all things work together for good, but for the whole of creation according to God’s final purposes. John will, accordingly, rework the verse in *Exp. fid.* 43:

The choice of things to be done is up to us (ἐφ’ ἡμῖν), but the completion of the good [comes] through the cooperation (συνεργία) of God, who – according to his foreknowledge – justly cooperates (συνεργοῦντος) with those who choose the good with right conscience. Evil things [happen] through the abandonment of God who – again, according to his foreknowledge – justly abandons.42

In other words, the divine providence underwrites all things, whether good or bad: either actively participating in it as συνεργία, or passively giving permission (παραχώρησις) as abandonment (ἐγκατάλειψις – and finally, ἀπογνωστική).43 This point is so critical to the integrity of John’s theological system that he takes up the same subject a second time in Chapter 92: “The Scriptures frequently call God’s permission his action,” John notes. Thus, John softens the verses that troublingly imply that God creates or performs evil44 by noting that these are evils, not in the absolute sense, but in relation to our creaturely sensibilities, and God permits them because they will ultimately work out to our good and our instruction.45

As the possibility of a real and final abandonment implies, John openly opposes the notion of an *apokatastasis*, which he will elsewhere repudiate as Origenistic.46

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42 *Exp. fid.* 43.48-52

43 Conjoined with his minimalist demonology, the Damascene is an optimist with respect to his view of abandonment and does not iterate the topic or dwell on it at length. The permissive, temporary abandonment (ἐγκατάλειψις) he acknowledges as appropriated to Christ (*Exp. fid.* 69.8, 72.9); the “final abandonment (ἀπογνωστική) to absolute punishment” only as an ultimate consequence of the doctrine of providence, developed in ch 43.

44 Specifically, John is alluding to the “I create evil” of Isa 45:7 and Amos 3:6, “There is no evil in the city the Lord has not done.”

45 *Exp. fid.* 92.21f.

46 *Exp. fid.* 15.35-36 – although John’s argument in that context rejects the notion as a matter of the measure of time, not as on principle as rejecting the universal restoration as a logical possibility or a hoped-for outcome.
According to the Damascene’s system, not only are the demons personally incapable of repentance, they are also not destined for reincorporation into the divine life by means of a cosmic process. Indeed, the third Scriptural proof in *Exp. fid* 18 specifically develops this point: the demons are destined for hell and eternal damnation. “The unquenchable fire and everlasting torment have been prepared for the devil and his evils spirits and for them who follow him,” John asserts, following Matthew 25:41.\(^{47}\) Within the overarching scope of providence, the reality of eternal damnation maintains – for the devil and demons, at the very least, and also for those who follow them, to whatever extent human beings are capable of being so persistent in evil. As John summarizes at the end of his treatise, once the Antichrist – the man fully given over to the operation of Satan\(^ {48}\) – has come and has established his rule, Christ shall return from heaven\(^ {49}\) and sit upon his throne of judgement to reward the patient and repay the wicked,\(^ {50}\) “and the devil and his demons, and his man the Antichrist, and the impious and sinners will be given over to the everlasting fire – not of a material (ὑλικὸν) type familiar to us, but of a type God alone knows.”\(^ {51}\)

Some readers both ancient and modern have struggled with the principle of final damnation: John, obviously, does not. For him, the ultimate end of demonology – the final damnation of the devil and his followers – is an extension into the eschaton of the

\(^{47}\) *Exp. fid.* 18.33-34

\(^{48}\) *Exp. fid.* 99.33. Note also John’s passing comment as to the emergence of the Antichrist accords with his overall scheme for discussing providence: “God permits the devil to inhabit him.”

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 99.50-51.

\(^{50}\) *Exp. fid.*, 100.117-119.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 100.125-128. This is the eschatological state corresponding to “final abandonment to absolute punishment:” its character, at bottom, is mysterious.
mystery operative in the present dispensation that allows rational creatures to self-determine evil. The only difference is that in the eschaton, good and evil are no longer intermingled: God fixes the good in a permanent place in his presence, while the forces of sin, corruption, destruction, and decay he exiles forever, and the devil and his agents – as chronic instigators of these things by the permanent, freely chosen corruption of their nature – receive the just reward of their rebellion, and stand permanently separate from the Kingdom of God. More incisively, however, John maintains the doctrine of the eternal damnation of the wicked because he understands it to be what the Scriptures and the Fathers teach: and it is precisely that he has set out to exposit. Indeed, all three of John’s Scriptural proofs intend towards the end of answering controverted points of demonology with the clearest evidence from Scripture. John is well aware of the existence of systems of thought that claim God did not create the devil and the demons and everything evil in the world, but rather some other equally powerfully evil god did (that is the position associated with Manicheanism), or that God was ultimately responsible for evil as its cause (which John sees in the exaggerations of providence characteristic of Islam, as he sees it), or that evil – even if properly understood as privative – still has some kind of absolute power on an equal footing with the good (a view John might have associated with Messalianism), or that ultimately, all things – even the demons – would be restored to unity with God (Origenism). Against each, John asserts the orthodox position with a Scriptural quotation that has been enriched through the centuries by its patristic invocation to the same end.
6.1.2 Demonology in the Scope of the Economy of Salvation

In accord with his Christian conviction, John of Damascus considered God to have acted definitively in Jesus Christ against the evils of the world, overthrowing every spiritual power of wickedness that sets itself against the goodness and power of God. As rational personifications of the rebellious forces of evil, the devil and the demons are the natural antagonists in the drama of salvation. Once again, however, John is careful not to cede too much power, or even too much reality to the demonic: such evil, John emphasizes, is neither a substance or created quality, but a willful perversion of good. “It is as if someone who had been entrusted with wealth and authority by a king should tyrannize over his benefactor,” John will posit. When Jesus says of the evil person, “It were better for him if he had not been born,” he does not say this in depreciation of his own creature, but rather of that creature’s choice and rashness,” for which the creature will be justly requited.

By John’s reckoning, then, the work of God in Christ is ordered, first and foremost, to the salvation of human beings, and he accomplishes – through the restoration of humanity – a renewal of his creation with tremendous cosmic implications. The combat between Christ and the devil is a unique, historical contest in John’s rendering: it

52 The allusion is to Mark 14:21 and Mat 26:24 where it is said of Judas, although the same formula is applied more generally in Mark 9:42, Mat 18:6, and Luke 17:2.

53 Exp. fid. 94.11f

54 John repeatedly highlights the dignity of humanity in uniting visible and invisible natures (Exp. fid. 26.11, after Gregory of Nazianzus or. 38.11) and standing midway between the divine and material (Exp. fid. 44.59) as bearing the imprint of the divine image (25.2, 26.19, 44.24, 58.172, 62.10f, 77.9) and destined to rule over created nature (Exp. fid. 25.2f, after Gregory of Nyssa Op. hom. 2; PG 44, 132-133). The dissolution of human nature, accordingly, bears implicit consequences for the cosmos. John does not elaborate on these consequences, but he does signal their reversal in the lives of the saints in Exp. fid. 88. See below.
is a particular reality ordained by God and oriented toward human redemption within the economy of the Incarnation, and as such, emphatically not a symbol of a universal or perennial struggle between eternal principles of good and the evil. “By nothing else [but the Cross],” John intones, “death has been rendered impotent, the sin of our first-parents dissolved, hell plundered, resurrection given.” But although not perennial, it is eternal: the effects of Christ’s victory over the devil are indelible and paradigmatic, with the Cross making the bond between visible and invisible creation secure, when that bond forged in humanity proved fallible. The unique integrity of the Incarnation and the Cross must be maintained, but has it a vital and vibrant iconic appropriation consequently in the life of the saint and the ascetic, who is marked with the name and the sign of Christ “just as Israel was given the circumcision,” such that the “faithful may be distinguished from the faithless and recognized.”

It is worth following the Damascene’s elaboration of these themes in some detail: the account of the θείας οἰκονομίας that he develops in his Exposition is one of the key points in which he engages with the demonic. Indeed, the central treatment of the economy of salvation that John offers in Chapter 45 is especially saturated with allusions to anti-demonic themes in the Biblical and patristic corpus. In the disobedience of Adam

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55 Exp. fid 45, 77.
56 John specifically repudiates the notion that there are two eternal principles in Exp. fid. 95.
57 Exp. fid. 84.23-24, with a partial parallel in Athanatius, CG 1. Athanasius’s demonology, however, is significantly more muted in that text, and his apologetic intonations more intense.
58 Ibid., 84.38-39.
59 Ibid., 84.40-42.
and Eve, John notes, mankind had “succumbed to the attack (προσβολὴ) of the archevil (ἀρχέκακος) demon”...[thus becoming] stripped of grace...and clothed with the roughness of this wretched life...excluded from paradise by the just judgment (δικαιοκρισία) of God, condemned to death, and made subject to corruption.” Indeed, through that sin, “death came into the world like some wild and savage beast to destroy the life of man,” and the demons did as they pleased, manipulating men and women into worshipping them and satisfying their twisted desires. Yet God, unwilling to allow

60 The term προσβολὴ is used with some frequently as synonym for temptation (Lampe, 1166), but it is applied here with specific reference to the primordial sin; cf. also Exp. fid. 25b.15, 64.17-18. Obviously stemming from interpretations of Gen 2-3, it is applied in this sense from at least Gregory of Nyssa (Enc. in mart. PG 56.764) and John Chrysostom (In ep. ii Tim. PG 62, 627), appearing also in Anastasius of Sinai (in Hex. 10). The construction is found especially frequently in Maximus (Q. Thal. 21, 49, 52; Cap. char. 3.93; Amb. Io. 55), with John also applying this in a more general sense at Exp. fid. 18.32, 58.130, and 95.5; also CM. 33. For the ascetical appropriation of the problem of demonic προσβολὴ, see below.

61 cf. also Exp. fid. 45.19-20. The image of death as a “wild and savage beast” has deep Biblical and demonological resonances, but becoming explicit in the “evil beasts” sent by the Lord to yield death and destruction described by the Prophet Ezekiel (5:17, 14:21, 33:27). The imagery becomes quite mature in the beast of Revelation 17

62 The language of the protoplasts being stripped of grace and clothed with the roughness of mortality is at base an inverted retrojection of Paul’s clothing language of Eph. 4:24/Col. 3:10 onto the “garments of skins” received after the fall in Gen 3:21. This becomes a popular patristic trope found, for instance, Ignatius (sp.) Pros Trall. 10:8, obliquely, Gregory of Nyssa, or. cat. 6, Didymus Cae. Comm. in Job, 33, 44, 91; Maximus, Q. Thal 26, Q. et Dub. 1.28. Most pertinent is Basil De invi. PG 31, 376 – a favorite source of the Hiera -- where the passage is quoted in the entry Περί φθόνου και ζήλου, PG 96.416. John also recycles the term in Images II.2[=III.1], where both δόρις and δαίμων are predicated.

63 The notion of exclusion from paradise, condemnation to death, and subjection to corruption delineate a more of standard catalogue of consequences of the fall, scripturally rooted in Gen 3:23, Rom 2:5, 5:18, 8:21, and frequently invoked or alluded to among the Fathers -- but demonological implications remain in that while the source of evil and original instigation to sin is demonic, its outworking becomes connatural to us, and not the work of demons at every point.

64 Exp. fid. 45.19-20. The image of death as a “wild and savage beast” has deep Biblical and demonological resonances, but becoming explicit in the “evil beasts” sent by the Lord to yield death and destruction described by the Prophet Ezekiel (5:17, 14:21, 33:27). The imagery becomes quite mature in the beast of Revelation 17

65 John omits explicit discussion of this particular stage within his demonological narrative, likely because it is unnecessary in the predominantly post-pagan world of the 8th C. These themes, however, are openly developed in other works, such as Clem. Hom. 11.15, Gregory of Nyssa, or. cat. 18, and John will
the humanity he created to be utterly destroyed by the madness of evil, “took up the
struggle (πάλη) on behalf of his handiwork (ὑπὲρ τοῦ οἰκείου πλάσματος):” indeed,
John reflects, God “did not despise the weakness (ἀσθένεια) of his creation, but when he
fell, he had compassion on him and stretched out his hand to him,” first “teaching and
calling him to conversion in many ways,” but ultimately “bowing the heavens to come
down” in Christ, both to “heal our disobedience,” and “become a model of that
obedience without which it is impossible to attain salvation.” More, as John will
express elsewhere, God sought to “ransom (λυτρώσηται) us from the tyranny of the devil,
[calling] us towards the knowledge of God, and strengthening and teaching us to
overthrow the tyrant through patience and humility.”

allude to them by noting, for instance, that Christians were formerly in the power of demons, as, for
instance, Exp. fid. 77.29-34, as we will treat below.

66 Exp. fid. 45.26. The term πάλη – unlike more general terms to denote a struggle, such as μάχη or
ἀγωνας -- is typically confined to wrestling ie., the specific contest of personal, grappling combat. It is
attested only once in the Scriptures, at Eph 6:2, which John reverses here, as describing not the ascesis of
ἡμῖν ἡ πάλη against the powers and principalities, but effectively ἡ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πάλη with us being
powerless against the same.

67 Exp. fid. 45.30-31. If we can posit passion (πάθος) as functionally equivalent to weakness
(ἀσθένεια) in this context, John may have in mind here the discussion of God taking on human weakness in
Gregory of Nyssa’s or. cat.: “The human being both begins life from πάθος, and ends in πάθος;” he posits
in 13.7-8, and this stimulates a greater Christological analysis in ch. 16.

68 Exp. fid. 45.11-12. This is a common patristic sentiment with its roots in the Christian
Scriptures, ie. Heb. 1:1-2: “God, who of old spoke to our Fathers in various times and in various ways
through the prophets has in these latter days spoken to us by his Son.” Given the echoes of Gregory
Nazianzus, or. 38 already detected in this passage, John’s proximate inspiration for this sentiment would
seem to be section 13 of the same text (PG 36,325).

69 Exp. fid. 45.40-41. With its roots in the idiom of the LXX, (2Sam 22:10, Ps 17:10, 143:5, Job
38:37) the application of the image of “bowing the heavens” (κλίνειν οὐρανοῦς) to refer to the Incarnation
has deep patristic roots.

70 Exp. fid. 45.51-53. Much of this language appears verbatim in John’s homily on the Nativity
(2.8-12; Schriften JD V. 325-26), although in that context, John speaks only of the healing of our
disobedience, and not Christ’s role as exemplar.

71 Exp. fid. 77.26-28. The same language of “ransom” (λυτρώσω) also appears at Exp. fid. 45.21 to
describe the release of humanity from the grasp of the bestial ravages of death brought about by sin. See
also Gregory of Nyssa, or. cat. 23.39-41, which describes Christ as a ransom (λύτρον) for those bound in
In addition to the depth of Scriptural and patristic imagery woven through Chapter 45, the section has strong parallels in the classic texts of Athanasius’s *On the Incarnation*,\(^{72}\) Gregory Nazianzus’s homily on the theophany\(^{73}\) and Gregory of Nyssa’s *Catechetical Oration*.\(^{74}\) Nevertheless, the only extant texts which share significant chunks of text word for word with this chapter are John’s own sermons.\(^{75}\) Indeed, the chapter itself reads like a kind of homily in miniature, vividly rehearsing the narrative of salvation with images and phrases so common in the patristic lexicon that John was likely drawing on them from memory as he penned it. Because Christ has conquered Satan, the familiar story goes, the Christian is liberated from the powers of darkness and enabled to wage his or her own successful struggle against them by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that, in the midst of expositing why it was that the Son (as opposed to the Father or the Spirit) became incarnate in Chapter 77 of the *Expositio Fidei*, John erupts into a digression to proclaim that, as a result of the ministrations of Christ,

> The worship of demons has ceased: the creation has been sanctified with the divine blood. Altars and temples of idols have been overthrown, and knowledge of God has been implanted: the consubstantial Trinity, the uncreated Godhead is worshipped, one true God, creator and Lord of all. Virtue has become a rule of life (πολιτεύονται), hope of the resurrection has been granted through the resurrection of Christ, [and] the demons tremble at the men who were formerly in their power.\(^{76}\)

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\(^{72}\) *De inc.* 5.

\(^{73}\) *Or.* 38, PG 35, 312-333, 12-13.

\(^{74}\) *Or. cat.* 49, 56-61.

\(^{75}\) Namely, *in nat.* 2.8-12 = *Exp. fid.* 45.46-52 and *in ficum* 1.12-39 ~ *Exp. fid.* 45.10-36. These parallels are readily identified in Kotter’s edition; other citations are mostly by way of allusion, and direct, word-for-word parallels are not identified in the TLG.

\(^{76}\) *Exp. fid.* 77.29-34. See Athanasius, *CG*, x, *De inc.* 13, Gregory of Nyssa, *or. cat.* 18.8-32. Also compare ps-Cyril *De sanct. Trin.* 28 (PG 77, 1173f), which draws from this text of John.
The ministrations of Christ thus stand at the center of salvation history: but human experience and history itself, of course, did not wrap up quickly after the advent of the Messiah. A great agony remains for those who follow after Christ, as John himself personally experienced in the traumatic conflicts and transitions that characterized his era, and that he himself endured. John alludes to these pains as he continues by turning to the Cross as the chief instrument of redemption: “most wonderful” in John’s mind is that all the fruits of human restoration are “brought through a cross and suffering and death.”77 Christ has established the strategies for the Christian, who is an emulator of his life, model, and ministry on the stage of history. Accordingly, as John notes, it was not through “wars and weapons and strategic encampments” that this Gospel became globalized, but rather through a few persons “poor, unlettered, persecuted, maltreated, and good-as-dead,” because through their preaching of the Cross, “the all-powerful power of the Crucified One was with them.”78

6.1.3 Scriptural Demonology against the Iconoclasts

In many respects, John’s account of the demonic involvement in human experience and history overlaps with demonology articulated by his iconoclastic opponents. At the Council of Hieira, the iconoclasts framed their understanding of salvation history as an anti-demonic contest, depicting Satan as the primordial misguider

77 Exp. fid. 77.34-35.
78 Ibid., 77.36-40.
of humanity: the one who “took the initiative as inventor and teacher of every evil;”\(^{79}\) the “demiurge of evil,” who lured mankind into idolatry.\(^{80}\) Through the Law and the Prophets, and later again through Christ and the Apostles, God summoned humanity back to “worshipping in spirit and truth,” a teaching preserved by the Church and the Fathers of the Ecumenical Councils.\(^{81}\) Not to be outdone, however, the devil – through his subtle cunning and wicked ingenuity – “secretly reintroduced idolatry under the appearance of Christianity,”\(^{82}\) subjecting the faithful once again to the “ravaging (ληιζομένην) of the demons.”\(^{83}\) This dire situation, according to the iconoclasts, required God by his Holy Spirit to raise up faithful kings – comparable to the Apostles in their spiritual wisdom and zeal – “to tear down the demonic fortifications that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God and refute diabolical cunning (μεθόδειας) and error.”\(^{84}\)

John would, of course, adamantly disagree with the equation of icons and idolatry: however, the basic components of his demonological scheme otherwise parallels that account. John begins by detailing the wiles of the ancient enemy and his deception of mankind, details the restraint of the powers of evil by the Law and the Prophets, and their defeat by Christ, and finally notes the ongoing experience of struggle against the demonic

\(^{79}\) Mansi, XIII.212E-213A (Hieria Horos, 30). Loosely translated: the phrase of the horos is “πάσης κακίας αὐτουργός, εὑρετής καὶ διδάσκαλος.”

\(^{80}\) ὁ τῆς πονηρᾶς δημιουργός, Mansi XIII.221C (Hieria Horos, 32).

\(^{81}\) Mansi XIII.216C, 217B (Hieria Horos, 32). Poignantly, “He rescued us from the corrupting teaching of demons, that is, from deception of idols and their worship, and traditioned (παραδέδωκεν) us to worship ‘in spirit and truth’ [John 4:24].”

\(^{82}\) Mansi XIII.221D (Hieria Horos, 32): ἐν προσχήματι Χριστιανισμοῦ τὴν εἰδωλολατρείαν κατὰ τὸ λεληθὸς ἐπανήγαγε.

\(^{83}\) Mansi XIII.229A (Hieria Horos, 34).

\(^{84}\) Mansi XIII.225D (Hieria Horos, 34). This passage echoes strongly of Pauline demonology, with close parallels in word choice with 2Cor 10:4 and Eph 4:14 and 6:11
within the life of faith and life of the Church. Indeed, if we lift the demonology of
*Expositio Fidei* 18, 45 and 77 out of the larger context of John’s thought, we might read it
as congenial to the iconoclastic cause. John himself indicates, after all, that
“overthrowing the idols” of the Greeks was an essential ingredient in the establishment of
ture worship.85 From the iconoclastic perspective, the only missing piece is the
interpretation of the Christian use of images as a resurgence of the old tendencies towards
idolatry.

The Damascene’s comments elsewhere explicitly obviate such a reading, of
course. Superficial similarities between the Christian veneration of icons and pagan
idolatry are insignificant, John argues: “it is not necessary on account of pagan abuse to
abolish the pious practice of the Church.”86 Unlike Greek idols, icons are not venerated as
material objects, but as types pointing to the saints as immaterial archetypes who are
themselves the image of God, and the honor paid to them passes through to the original.87
Conversely, the very materiality of the relics and images of the saints becomes a channel
through which the divine graces are communicated to living beings. They serve as organs
of pious memory, providing a “terse memorial” (ὑπόμνησιν σύντομον)88 that “remind and

85 For instance, *Exp. fid.*, 77, 29-34, quoted above; likewise *Exp. fid.* 89.16-23: “Sacred Scripture
condemns all who adore graven images and those who sacrifice to the demons…the statues of the Greeks
were rejected and condemned as representations of demons.”

86 *Images* II.17.6-9; cf. also *Images* I.24.6-9. John consistently applies the same attitude to the
fruits of Greek culture and philosophy, see for instance his positive evaluation of Greek philosophy at *Dial.*
proem.34 and his evaluation of the potential benefits of studying Greek literature at *Exp. fid.* 90.40-45.

87 *Exp. fid.* 89.7-9. Here quoting Basil by name, with reference to his *de sp. sanc.* [194.9s]. He also
elaborates on this principle below at 46-48.

88 *Exp. fid.* 89.37-38.
instruct us” (ἐις ὑπόμνησιν ἡμῶν καὶ διδαχήν)⁸⁹ of the reality that Christ indeed really and truly “abode on earth, conversed with men, worked miracles, suffered, crucified, rose again, and was taken up.”⁹⁰

This difference may seem slight, but it has tremendous implications: the focus and center of John’s demonological scheme, on closer inspection, proves completely different than its iconoclastic counterpart. For the iconoclasts, history is a series of lapses into idolatry and recoveries from it, and they highlight the most recent revival of authentic religion – lately achieved by the iconoclastic emperors and the bishops who support them – as the ultimate victory, paving the way for the Hierian Council’s work in laying a new, repriminated foundation for Christian faith and piety.⁹¹ For John, however, as much as historical agonies remain, no overhaul and latter-day renewal is required, and with it, the mechanism of cycles of falling away and renewal becomes unnecessary within Christian history. There is one, clear alternative for John: either we preserve stability and continuity of orthodoxy, or abandon it for the chaos and confusion of the heresies. John, in fact, will identify the rise of iconoclasm as a “demonic ruse,” but the particularized

⁸⁹ Ibid., 89.33-34.
⁹⁰ Ibid., 89.30-31.
⁹¹ It is worth acknowledging, however, that the iconoclasts’ war on the particular tradition of Christian images did not involve a broader assault on tradition generally. The Horos explicitly details its conformity with the six preceding ecumenical councils (Mansi XIII.232E-237A; Hieria Horos, 34-38), and includes a lengthy collection of Scriptural and patristic proofs (Mansi XIII.280E-324D; Hieria Horos, 50-56), evincing a commitment to the tradition that is not unlike that John’s in its form, concerned to “follow the institutions of the councils, gladly accepting and proclaiming the doctrines and the traditions which they confirmed and decreed” (Mansi XIII.232E; Hieria Horos, 34). Unlike John, however, the iconoclasts invoked this traditional ground in order to claim authority for a whole series policies and decrees against established pious practice.
character of the heresy allows John to render it as an attack from the outside, rather than a corruption at the heart of the Church.

The enemy of the truth, who wages war against the salvation of men, who once deceived not only the nations, but often even the sons of Israel to make and worship icons of demons…now that the Church of Christ has peace, has set about to throw it into confusion by mixing evil and divine words through unjust lips and a crafty tongue, seeking to conceal his dark and shapeless form in order to shake the hearts of the unfaithful from the true and patristically-traditioned (πατροπαραδότου) customs.\textsuperscript{92}

By excluding a mechanism of historical cycles of ecclesiastical fall and renewal, John can locate the center of gravity of his historical narrative exclusively and emphatically upon Jesus Christ as incarnate God, tracing out the life of the Church – and particularly, the lives of his saints – as the ongoing and incorruptible outworking of the Incarnation. The Church, in turn, guided by the Holy Spirit, celebrates through the overlapping mediums of Word, Sacrament, and Image the central mysteries of her faith.\textsuperscript{93}

Within her collective life and worship, she continually retrieves her heroes and makes them present through piously imaging them – and she harnesses their demon-defeating prowess, by consequence.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Images} II.4[=III.1].1-10. The Second Council of Nicaea also picks up on this kind of anti-demonic storyline in encountering iconoclasm: Mansi XIII.205B-208C.

\textsuperscript{93} This reflects the means through which salvation is appropriated in the life of man, as John develops it (implicitly) in \textit{Exp. fid.} 82-91. John’s view of the sacraments is not systematically articulated, but rather hinges on the principle that the noetic content of faith must receive tangible embodiment: thus venerating the Cross (84) and images of Christa and the saints (89), as well as praying towards the east (85), are for John part of the same conversation as the sacraments of baptism (82) and eucharist (86). In fact, rather than comprising a sacrament-centered worldview – as it is often articulated by contemporary ritualists – these are for John common implications of the Incarnation, a recapitulation of which doctrine stands at the center of this section in the form of a meditation on the Mother of God and the genealogy of Christ (87).

\textsuperscript{94} Once again, the iconoclast position should not be overestimated: they likewise saw themselves in communion with the saints and recipients of their apotropaic benefice. Indeed, the iconoclast would promote their aniconic devotion to be the superior in form, effectiveness, and spirituality for immaterially venerating icons of their souls through the study of their writings and imitation of their virtue, rather than physically venerating icons of their bodies (ie., Mansi XIII.345D; \textit{Hieria Horos}, 64).
Sensitive to the iconoclastic critiques, John is careful to emphasize that icons have apotropaic effect, not as magical amulets or talismans, or otherwise as a manifestation of daimonic power, but as making the manifest power of God in history and proclaiming the glory of God and the defeat of the devil at the hands of Christ and his saints. “The icon is a triumph and manifestation and inscription to the memory of the victory of the bravest and most eminent [saints], and of the ignominy of the worsted and overthrown [demons]:” accordingly, whomever will not venerate the images of Christ and his saints is his enemy, and a vindicator of the devil and his demons: he “shows by his deeds sorrow that God and his saints are honored and glorified and the devil put to shame.” 95 Likewise, conversely, the devil “does not wish his defeat and shame to be spread abroad, nor the glory of God and his saints to be recorded:” thus John takes it to be clear to anyone of spiritual understanding the dispute over images in the life of the Church is a ruse (ὑποβολή) that the devil has initiated. 96 Emphatically, John contends, where the pagan Greeks, in their graven images (γλυπτά), would “sacrifice to demons” 97 and “raise up images to demons, whom they call gods,” 98 the Christian practice is to “dedicate images to the God Incarnate and the servants and friends of the true God, [which] drive away the hosts of demons.” 99 Indeed, the graven images of the pagans stand “rejected and

97 Exp. fid. 89.17. Here, as in Images, John follows closely on the LXX language for prohibition of graven images, ie. Ps. 105:6-7: “They served graven images (γλυπτά) and it became an offence to them: and they sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons.”
98 Images I.24.20-25; Exp. fid. 89.16f.
condemned” because they are “representations (ἐξεικονίσματα) of demons:”\textsuperscript{100}

conversely, however, through the relics and images of the saints, “demons are put to flight, diseases driven out, the sick cured, the blind restored to sight, lepers cleansed, temptation and trouble driven away.”\textsuperscript{101}

John’s account of the power of icons and relics may read as a simple confession of credulity, but it in fact reflects in its own right a complex appropriation of material from the Scriptures, the Fathers, and the tradition, as well as staking a precise ground within the contentious question of how the spiritual powers interact with the world of everyday experience. His treatment is ripe with Biblical resonances, specifically homing in on the inventory of Kingdom miracles as Jesus enumerates them to John the Baptist in Mat. 11:5/Luk. 7:22 and the commission he gives to his followers in Mat. 10:8 and Mark 16:17-18, which of course already offer a summation of those miraculous signs that would “attend those who believe.” John expands on these signs – not multiplying them, as is the case in hagiographical narratives and the lists of miracles performed by the saint – but by pushing the limits of the canon of the miraculous to include those miracles performed posthumously by the faith heroes of old. After all, for John it is not merely or even primarily living saints who perform these miracles, but the saints who have “fallen asleep in the Lord”\textsuperscript{102} working through their shrines, remains and images. To this end, for

\textsuperscript{100} Exp. fid. 89.22-23.

\textsuperscript{101} Exp. fid. 88.46-48.

\textsuperscript{102} 1Cor 15:18/1Thes 4:15 – or as John explicitly appropriates this formulation, “The death of the saints is rather sleep than death, since ‘they have labored unto eternity and shall live unto the end’ [Ps 48.9-10] and ‘precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints’ [Ps 115.15]…God is light and life, and they that are in the hand of God dwell in light and life” (Exp. fid. 88.24f)
instance, John affirms the miraculous phenomenon of myrrh-streaming relics. “Let no one disbelieve,” he implores: to those who know the power of God and the honor he bestows on the saints, such miracles are not impossible – they even have Scriptural precedent in the water-gushing rock that followed the children of Israel in the wilderness (Exo 17:6), and the ass’s jawbone that slaked the thirst of Sampson (Jud 15:19). In a similar spirit, John offers as one of his chief arguments for the propriety of icons the story of the miraculous image of Jesus given to Abgar of Edessa. In John’s telling, Abgar sent an artist to paint a portrait of Jesus, but the artist was unable to do so because Jesus’s face shone dazzlingly (ἀποστιλβοσαν λαμπρότητα). Honoring Abgar’s pious zeal, however, Jesus pressed his face into a cloth and left in it an imprint of his likeness on it to be delivered to the king. Thus the Lord himself, though by nature indescribable and unportrayable, deigned to meet the human longing to encounter the divine by voluntarily circumscribing his incomprehensible radiance and communicating it through material means. This, for John, this is the fundamental truth preserved in popular practice: indeed, he reckons it the authoritative “unwritten tradition” passed down from the Apostles in the Christian practice surrounding the veneration of images and relics.

Against opponents who had begun to attack received traditions of the Church surrounding saints and their images as the deception of demons and a slip back into idolatry, John insists that these practices of memory are sure signs of Satan’s downfall,

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103 Exp. fid. 88.36-41.
104 Exp. fid. 89.51-56.
105 Ibid., 89.57, with references following to Paul’s allusion to an unwritten tradition in 2Thess 2:14 and 1Cor 11:2 and Basil, De Sp. Sanct. 27.66. John makes a similar but much abbreviated invocation of the “unwritten tradition” with respect to praying toward the east at the end of ch 87, and also in Images I.23 and II.16.
humiliation, and impotence. More than that, John proposes that such practices have the power to invoke against the lingering influence of the demons the same graces once active in the lives of the saints. His position will prevail, ultimately, in the institutions of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, but a key insight of his opponents should not be forgotten: even if John’s approach to saints and relics and images is not ruled to be a “deception of the demons” drawing Christians back to idolatry, it is, as a theory about the structure and operations of the society of spirits in the unseen world: daimonology in a broader sense.

6.2 *Philosophical Dimensions of John’s Demonology*

Since the Scriptures as understood in the tradition of the Church serve as the principal engine of the Damascene’s demonology, we have already encountered above most of the key points that he would make about the nature of created spirits and how John believes we should conceptualize them over and against other philosophical systems. Nevertheless, John’s philosophical training and commitments additionally spurred him to attend to questions about the precision and cohesion of his system he might have missed, had his interest been in simply collecting Scriptural and patristic quotations on the topic. John was determined to integrate his understanding of spiritual creaturehood into a broader account of theology; and indeed, a comprehensive account of reality: as such, he considers demons – along with angels and souls – to be bodiless (ἀσώματον), intelligent (νοερά), self-determining (αὐτοτεξούσιος) creatures to be
contemplated under the theological branch of the philosophical sciences.\textsuperscript{106} His passing though oft-iterated mention of these beings and their place in creation – viz., how they relate to God, the elements, tangible phenomenon of every day experience, and one another – serve to advance the coherence of his theological-philosophical system, making \textit{daimonology} (in this broader conception) a fundamental ligature of Damascene thought. It remains at this point to observe how John unfolds his understanding of the topic within his system to strengthen the coherence of his overall worldview and deepen an otherwise familiar account of spiritual being.

John’s central and most complete exposition of the underlying demonic nature in fact occurs in his chapter on angels, in \textit{Exposition 17}, as an implicit subset of the angelic nature. Since John understands nature as “the unchangeable (\(\alpha\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\beta\lambda\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma\)) and immutable (\(\alpha\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\theta\epsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma\)) principle (\(\alpha\rho\chi\eta\)) and cause (\(\alpha\iota\tau\omicron\varsigma\)) and virtue (\(\delta\omega\nu\alpha\mu\imath\varsigma\)) which has been implanted by the Creator in each [species] for its activity (\(\kappa\iota\nu\eta\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma\)),”\textsuperscript{107} the demons – notwithstanding their permanent, voluntary rebellion against God – do not lose the essential properties of angelic being. Indeed, from the beginning the angelic nature – being self-determined because it is rational (\(\alpha\upsilon\tau\epsilon\xi\omicron\upsigma\omicron\varsigma\ \omega\zeta\ \lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma\)) – was invested with the “power to preserve and progress in good or turn to evil:**\textsuperscript{108} yet the incorporeality of

\textsuperscript{106} This is a composite definition drawing primarily from \textit{Exp. fid. 17}, with the place of demonology within the taxonomy of philosophical sciences explored at Dial 3.33-34 and 66.20. Notably, demons are omitted from the taxonomy at Dial. 3 – likely because they are implicitly comprehended beneath the angelic nature, as we shall discuss below. John likewise conflates “angels, demons, and souls” and “intellectual beings” (\(\nu\omicron\eta\gamma\tau\omicron\delta\omicron\upsigma\omicron\varsigma\)) characterized by change in their character on the basis of their free choice (\(\pi\rho\omicron\alpha\iota\rho\iota\varsigma\sigma\omicron\nu\)) in 3.29.

\textsuperscript{107} Dial 30.7-10

\textsuperscript{108} Exp. fid. 17.18-19, also 41.23-24, 93.37-38; CM 31.47, 69.17.
the angelic nature means that, once fallen, they have no opportunity for repentance; and once they have selected the good, no opportunity to fall. Thus, per John:

One of the angelic powers – the chief of the terrestrial order, who had been entrusted by God with custody of the earth – who had not been made evil by nature, but good, who had been made for good, and had not at all any imprint (ἴχνος) of badness in him from the Creator, failed to keep the brightness of the dignity the Creator had bestowed on him. By his self-determined choice (αὐτεξουσίᾳ προαιρέσει), he turned from what was according to nature to that which is against it: he stirred himself against the God who created him, and will to rebel (ἀντάραθε θεόθεν) against him, and became the first apostate from the good and become evil...and together with him a boundless multitude (πλῆθος ἄπειρον) of angels whom he had marshalled were torn away, followed after him, and fell. Hence, although they are of the same nature of the angels, they have become evil through neglecting good for evil by voluntarily choice (προαιρέσιν ἐκουσίος).

John’s general account of the angelic nature, meanwhile, elaborates and expands on the angelology of Gregory of Nazianzus, following even his controversial assertion that angels were made before the sensible world – although he does acknowledge the strength of the dissenting opinion. Like Gregory, John describes the angelic nature as “bodiless” and “an immaterial fire;” as “secondary noetic lights (φῶτα δεύτερα νοερὰ)” who can, with some difficulty, be moved toward evil. To this, John adds three definitions of angelic nature. The first of these is Psalm 103:4 with elaboration: God makes his angels “spirits” and his ministers (λειτουργοί) “flames of fire,” determining

109 Ibid., 17.20-21, 57-62; also 18.35-38, 44.52-57. See also below at n 143.
110 Exp. fid. 18.2-16.
111 Principally spelled out in Or 38.9.
112 Exp. fid. 17.75-81. The universal consensus, John notes, is that angels were created before man, whether or not they were created before the sensible creation. John indicates a personal inclination towards the Theologian’s argument, describing it as more “fitting” that the order of creation should run “spiritual substance – sensible creation – human beings (comprised of both),” rather than “sensible creation – angels – human beings.” The notion that souls preexist bodies, however, he describes as the “ravings of the Origenists” (Exp. fid. 26.22-23).
113 Exp. fid. 17.4, 25, 57.
114 The term “spirit” has several valences, as John points out. It can refer, for one, to the Holy Spirit, or the powers of the Spirit. But “a good angel can be called a spirit, as can a demon, or the soul. The mind is also called a spirit, as are wind and air” (Exp. fid. 13.99-103).
their subtlety (κούφον)\textsuperscript{115} and white-hot ardor (διάπυρος); their heat, their sharpness (τομώτατον), and penetrating desire (όξο) for the divine and for his service; he lifts them up and sets them free from every material consideration.\textsuperscript{116} Secondly, then, evidently expanding on a definition offered in the \textit{Doctrina Patrum},\textsuperscript{117} John defines an angel as “a noetic substance, ever in motion, self-determined (αὐτεξούσιος), incorporeal, ministering (λειτουργοῦσα) to God with, by grace, the gift of immortality in its nature.”\textsuperscript{118} Finally, offering a sentence which appears to be his own, but seems to echo positions taken by John of Scythopolis,\textsuperscript{119} he amends that the angel is “a nature which is rational, intelligent and self-determined; (φύσις λογική νοερά τε και αὐτεξούσιος) variable in judgement (γνώμη), subject to voluntary change (ἐθελότρεπτος).”\textsuperscript{120}

In fusing these voices, the Damascene offers an original synthesis on the qualities of angelic nature, and one of the thickest definitions of spiritual creaturehood to survive from the first millennium. Thence, the angelic becomes an essential point of reference for John, frequently invoked across his exposition by way of analogy: sometimes as a specimen of non-divine spiritual nature, at others, a bodiless, self-determining

\textsuperscript{115} This adjective, echoing Isa. 18:2, inclines towards connotations of “swiftness,” rather than material composition, as does the frequent descriptor of angelic bodies, λεπτός, found in Ps-Macarius, Didymus the Blind, John Chrysostom, and several later sources. Interestingly, while John employs the term frequently to describe the material composition of air and fire, and even appropriates it to the post-resurrection “spiritual bodies” (\textit{Exp. fid.} 100.97), he never uses the term to describe angels.

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Exp. fid.} 17.6-8

\textsuperscript{117} \textit{DPtr} 250.1-2: “An angel is a noetic substance, self-determined, ever in motion, ministering to God.” The second definition, not included by John, considers angels “holy powers dispatched (ἀποστελλόμεναι) by the Lord.”

\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Exp. fid.} 17.9-10.

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Scholia DN} 4.21.

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Exp. fid.} 17.15-16. Unlike human beings, however, angelic beings do not experience an interval of time between their inclination and their act (58.124-127). Accordingly, John understands the angelic inclination that happened in the instant after their creation became for them a fixed judgement.
intelligence. Angels, demons, and souls have in common that they are created noetic spirits capable of self-determination, and as such can be generically differentiated from God, to whom all the same terms – except created – also in apply in some sense. Yet these spirits must also be differentiated from one another in a clear and concise fashion. Accordingly, Chapter 17 on angels undergirds and anticipates – not only the treatment of the demonic in the following chapter, but the treatment of the human soul in Chapter 26. The human soul differs from the angelic principally in its essential relationship with the body that it animates: indeed, man was created to be “another adoring angel,” offering a unique stewardship of material creation in and through his body.\textsuperscript{121} Correspondingly, the moral differentiation between angels and demons becomes closely connected to the process of human action, particularly with respect to the exercise of the will – a point we shall develop below with respect to the ascetical dimensions of John’s demonology.

The most vibrant theme that the Damascene contributes to the philosophical understanding of spiritual creatures, however, is an expansion of the principle that every created spirit is \textit{circumscribed} (περιγραπόμενος), which John revisits on several occasions. Earlier thinkers had certainly explored the circumscription of creatures and the corresponding fact that God is uncircumscribed – such terms are used several times, for instance, among the Cappadocians.\textsuperscript{122} The Damascene, however – perhaps trying to solve the perennial problem of angelic bodies as framed in the ascetical sources, perhaps motivated by questions of how spiritual power becomes attached to certain objects – is

\textsuperscript{121} Exp. fid. 26.26, after Gregory of Nazianzus \textit{or.} 38.11.

\textsuperscript{122} Ie., Basil, \textit{De sp. sanc.} 54.23, Gregoray of Nazazianzus, \textit{or.} 28.10.
the first to develop a systematic theory of circumscription boasting several dimensions and tracing through several points. Every spiritual creature, John posits, is circumscribed in at least three ways, being necessarily bounded by place, time, and comprehension. Only God—who alone is uncircumscribed (ἀπερίγραπτος)—is completely free from these bounds, “without beginning and without end, embracing all things and grasped by no comprehension…alone incomprehensible, undefinable, and known by none.” Nevertheless, the angel or demon is not circumscribed in a place in the same way that a body is—that is, by occupying three-dimensional space—but it is “noetically present” (διὰ τὸ παρεῖναι νοητῶς) in the place where it acts (ἐνεργεῖν), and is unable to act in multiple places simultaneously. By grace, spiritual creatures are immortal, yet still they are circumscribed by time by virtue of having a beginning in being created. Finally, they are circumscribed by comprehension: although mysterious to us—or even unknown—they are known at least some extent by one another, and entirely defined by the Creator.

123 Exp. fid. 13.42.
124 Especially favored by among the divine names, John devotes the whole of Exp. fid. 13 to arguing that God alone is ἀπερίγραπτος, and God is moreover so described at Exp. fid. 2.12, 5.15, 5.21, 5.27, 8.3, 8.254, 14.4, 20.4, 89.24—among other places.
125 Exp. fid. 13.43-46.
126 Exp. fid 17.42-45; also cf. 13.30-32, and below.
127 Exp. fid. 17.10 and 22-24.
128 Exp. fid. 13.47. See also 8.86-88.
129 John’s source and inspiration at this point seems to be Gregory of Nazianzus, who posits understanding as a form of circumscription in or. 28.10
130 Dionysius, CH IV.2
131 Exp. fid. 13.47-49
Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most salient questions of circumscription attend to the relationship of spiritual beings to the world of everyday, sensible experience. To this end, John posits that all creatures – visible and invisible – exist within the same cosmic space bounded by the “outer heavens” as a “shell.”¹³² In their special ministrations around the throne of God, the angels dwell especially in the heaven,¹³³ and performing the divine will on earth requires that they descend from heaven, as they cannot be present in both places at once.¹³⁴ Indeed, John’s description of this limitation on angelic activity is quite detailed:

The angel is not contained in a place in a bodily fashion (σωματικῶς) as though taking figure and form (τυποσθαι καὶ σχηματιζεσθαι), but he is said to be in a place by virtue of being present there noetically and acting according to his nature [there] and not in another [place]. He is noetically circumscribed there where he is acting, and cannot act in different places at the same time...[rather] the angel by natural swiftness – that is to say, by readily passing over swiftly [from one place to another] – acts in [those] different places.¹³⁵

Likewise,

Being minds (νόες), [angels] are in places noetically, not being circumscribed after a bodily fashion (for they are not naturally bodily, neither are they extended in three dimensions), but noetically they are present and act wherever they are commanded, and they are unable, accordingly, to be here and act there [simultaneously].¹³⁶

Nevertheless, they are in a certain sense “unbounded” or “undefined” (ἀόριστος), since they are not confined by doors or walls, and they appear to the worthy – not as they are, but as God wills for them to appear, “in a transformed figure (μετασχηματισμῶ)” that

¹³² Exp. fid. 20.2-4.
¹³³ Exp. fid. 13.18-20.
¹³⁴ Exp. fid. 17.30f
¹³⁵ Exp. fid. 13.30-36. Note that angelic swiftness is often identified as the mechanism by which demons make oracular predictions of the future in order to deceive victims looking for prophetic proofs. While noting that demons make such deceptive predictions, he is more generic in describing their process (“sometimes they see things from a distance, sometimes they guess,” Exp. fid. 18.27-28) and does not explicitly assign this mechanism as a cause.
¹³⁶ Exp. fid. 17.42-45.
is capable of being seen by the one having the vision.\textsuperscript{137} John notes demons to possess the same transformative power: when God gives them permission, they are strengthened both to change and transform (μεταβάλλονται καὶ μετασχηματίζονται) into whatever phantasmal form they wish.\textsuperscript{138} Subject to the divine will, then, spiritual beings have tremendous latitude with respect to their power, and how they are able to manifest themselves: besides the general rules that a created spiritual being can only operate in one place at a time, and that they are not being capable of forcing the will of another volitional creature, John does not explore the limits on the potential powers of such creatures.

Paradoxically, however, the activities of angels and demons are bound by the contours of providence – at least insofar as their activities impinge upon the realm of human experience – even though they are free and self-determining. Angels discharge their missions from God in perfect conformity to his will, and demons – while they refuse divine commands – are only able to work their malice to the extent that God permits. John likely accounts for this feature of spiritual being under the rubric of “circumscription by understanding (κατὰ φαντασίαν).” The God who “assigned all principalities and orders” also “transcends every principality and order:”\textsuperscript{139} they are “completely defined” (ὅριζονται τέλεον) by their Creator.\textsuperscript{140} God foreknows their

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 17.33-36. Demons are explicitly noted to possess the same transformative power:

\textsuperscript{138} Exp. fid. 18.21-23. I am reading John’s use of the phrase κατὰ φαντασίαν in a technical sense: not that the demonic appearances are illusory, but that the human observer experiences them in the faculty mediating between sense perception and cognition, rather than either as strictly tangible or strictly imaginary beings. See Section 2.3 at n 149.

\textsuperscript{139} Exp. fid. 8.15-16, paralleled in Ps-Cyril of Alexandria, De Trin. 77.1132.

\textsuperscript{140} Exp. fid. 17.
choices, but he does not predetermine them: angelic activity is perfect, voluntary cooperation with the divine will, whereas the demonic is absolute and unflinching rejection of the same. This is difficult for us to comprehend as human beings because the operation of our will is consistently hampered by the motions of our irrational soul and the tireless interference of demons. The exclusion of the possibility of a purely arbitrary, spontaneous action on the part of the angels may seem to us to be a limitation on angelic freedom, in fact, it is a form of freedom so high, so pure, and so absolute that we cannot comprehend it: in angelic beings, “inclination (ἕξει) and execution (προχειρήσεως) coincide, without a moment of intervening time.” This is also why demons cannot repent and the angels cannot fall: their first action was so profoundly integrated with the whole structure of their volition that it was entirely constitutive of their being across time. Diachronic spiritual phenomenon like repentance and conversion are unique to embodied spiritual beings, whose good (or bad) intentions must be actualized again and again in the formation (or deformation) of their character over time.

Indeed, embodiment is the quality that most sets human souls apart among the intelligent, created spirits – both for better and for worse. The locational

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141 Exp. fid. 30.2-3, which goes on to build on this principle in a chapter that weaves together the workings of providence with the responsibility of the individual as a moral agent. Exp. fid. 94 offers an additional meditation on the same topic with a focus on theodicy.

142 Exp. fid. 58.127-132. John notes that quality of being “endowed with free will” or “self-determining” (αὐτεξουσιότης) is equivocal: it means something different when applied to God, angels, or human beings respectively (58.122-123).

143 Exp. fid., 17.20-21, 57-62; also 18.35-38, 44.52-57 and implicitly 41.23-27.

144 In fact, in the oft-mentioned triad of spiritual creatures, “angels, demons, souls,” the last is equivocal, at least in principle, especially in a passage like Exp. fid. 13.49-50, where the term “soul” is more closely associated with “body” than it is with “human.” It is possible, accordingly, that John is referring not just to human souls, but to the souls of irrational (and even inanimate) creatures as well, since generically, a “souls” is the formal pattern according to which the material extension is organized. John
circumscription of the human person, for instance, is considerably reduced for being a soul united (συνδέδεται) with a body: a human being is in a place in a much more definite way than an angel is, and the range of operations open to said person in that place are generally limited to those actions which can be performed in and through the body.\textsuperscript{145}

The elemental composition of physical bodies, moreover, makes them especially vulnerable to decomposition and dissolution,\textsuperscript{146} and – owing to the fluctuations of their material components\textsuperscript{147} – they are subject want and weakness.\textsuperscript{148} Surpassing the three ways in which angelic beings are circumscribed, then, physical bodies have four markers of circumscription: “beginning, end, physical location, and comprehension.”\textsuperscript{149}

For John, however, being embodied is not so much a burden or a disadvantage as it is simply a fact of the created order. Indeed, God’s intention in creation was to sustain man in incorruptibility by grace – much as he sustains the angels – in order that he might nowhere else defines the term soul in this way, however, and so – while John’s logic and system might be extended to discuss other sensible creatures, he probably has the human being in mind especially. Indeed, in some places, he specifies that the triad as minds, which excludes the possibility of irrational souls being included in the enumeration (i.e Exp. fid. 3.29-30).

\textsuperscript{145} The divine activity that works through the saints to perform miracles is the exception to this principle that proves the rule. In that case, it is not the saint who performs the work, it is God who works through the saint, but even so, working through the bodily reality of the saint as a human being of flesh and bone.

\textsuperscript{146} Everything that is created, John posits, is “compounded, variable, changeable, circumscribed, having form, and corruptible” such that it is evident that “all creation is naturally subject to corruption” (Exp. fid. 8.167-168): indeed, “composition is the cause of disintegration” (8.215, following a theological aphorism of Gregory of Nazianzus). John expands this principle beyond simply material things, noting that “all things that have a beginning are subject to corruption” (20.74-75) – and the heavens and their inhabitants are no exception: even the angels have immortality in their nature only by grace.

\textsuperscript{147} See Exp. fid. ch. 20-24 on the properties of the material elements. Notably, all of the elements are identified as bodily (σώμα) – for instance, “Fire is a body that is subtle (λεπτομερής) and hot and dry;” the are also reprised as the elements of the human body in Exp. fid. 26.61-70; and again 26.86-90 on change, flux, and section which are proper to the body alone.

\textsuperscript{148} Whence the passions of both body and soul, Exp. fid. 36.2-5.

\textsuperscript{149} Exp. fid. 13.49-50.
have in him an earthly minister who could mediate between the sensible and intellectual creation in his very person.\textsuperscript{150} When the first man failed to keep the commandment of God, however, he also failed to win the incorruptibility that would have been the reward of his labor.\textsuperscript{151} Turning his mind in disobedience away from God and towards matter instead, he became subject to the corruptibility common to material things, since God did not want to invest with immortality the embodied being that was given over to the destruction of the very material things it was given to steward.\textsuperscript{152} In Christ, however, we catch a glimpse of what that original incorruptibility looked like: the as material, body of Jesus was vulnerable to destruction (φθορά), and freely he endured the destruction heaped upon him by human sin in order to destroy the power of sin. He was not, however, subject to corruption (διαφθορά) in the sense of a complete dissolution of his body into its constituent elements.\textsuperscript{153} Likewise, by both breaking the power of sin and showing it to be powerless, the resurrection of Christ anticipates the restoration of the human body at the general resurrection, when the “corruptible will put on

\textsuperscript{150} Exp. fid. 44.34-39

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 44.49-54, 58-63

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 44.50-56, 63-67. This was previously the fate of the devil, although the devil being (relatively) non-corporeal, is not subject to natural corruption to the same extent. Physical death thus provides a limit on the spiritual corruption of the human being.

\textsuperscript{153} Exp. fid. 72.. The case of the saints makes for an interesting comparison, as their bodies evidently are corruptible in that second sense. Even allowing for the existence of incorrupt saints (which John does not explicitly promote), it is nevertheless the case that the bodies of many saints have been dissolved into the elements over the centuries. Perhaps in this case, the preservation of the memory, image, and relics of the saint – and the continued divine work through those artefacts – constitute a kind of partial incorruptibility in anticipation of the resurrection.
incorruptibility,” and the bodies of all humans will be reconstituted in the incorruptible, material form intended by God at their creation.\footnote{Exp fid. 100, following Paul, 1Cor 15:54.}

The body, then, is not a disadvantage to human beings among the spiritual creatures so much as it is their providential allotment within the scope of creation: it only becomes a burden and a disadvantage when it misused and misunderstood. Indeed, perhaps most remarkably, the operation of the soul in the body enables a unique analogy between the human being and the divine: the soul pervades, is present to, and operates in the body in a way that parallels the divine presence to the universe.\footnote{In particular, compare Exp. fid. 13.27-29} The body does not possess (περιέχεται) the soul so much as the soul possesses the body: much as heat pervades iron, the soul transcends the body while inhabiting it to execute its own particular activities (τὰς οἰκείας ἐνεργεῖς ἐνεργεῖ). The whole soul pervades the whole body, and does not inhabit it part for part;\footnote{Exp. fid. 13.39-41} although it has as its purest and noblest part – its eye – the mind, through which the whole is governed, and by which intelligent and sensible natures are joined.\footnote{Exp. fid. 26.48-49, 83-85} God entrusts this unique, mediating role to the human being, not in spite of the body, but because of the body and through it: indeed, it was for this reason that man was created as an embodied being. As much as John identifies the “image of God” in man with the “rationality, understanding, and freedom” particular to his noetic nature,\footnote{Exp. fid. 44.24-25, et alia.} moreover, that image cannot be completed without the involvement
of the body: for although humanity is endowed with intellect and self-determination through divine image planted in them, their perfection in his likeness is a moral quality, which is to say, likeness to God in virtue, insofar as this is humanly possible.  

Virtue – for human beings – is only possible in the co-operation of body and soul.

Indeed, the emphasis that John places on Incarnation, circumscription, and image leads him to reverse the intuitions of the ancient mind: to John, the human being is not a spiritual being whose perfections are limited by a state of being embodied; the other created spirits, rather, for want of a body, are in an ambiguous position within the orders of created being. Only God, John posits, is completely and truly incorporeal and immaterial. In calling spiritual beings “incorporeal,” John says, “I am making a comparison with the density of matter (ἡ τῆς ὕλης παχύτητα), for only God is both incorporeal and immaterial.”

In contrast to sensible realities, the noetic and incorporeal natures are “akin to God (οἰκεία θεῷ)” as “rational natures (λογικὴ φύσις)” that are “accessible only to the mind (νῶ engages λιπτή).” Nevertheless, where John considers God to be “incorporeal by nature,” he argues that “the angels, evil spirits, and souls are said to be so by grace and in comparison with the density of matter (ἡ τῆς ὕλης παχύτητα).” Even more starkly, “while [angels, demons, and souls] are called

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159 Exp. fid. 26.16-21.
160 Ibid. 26.91-93. Likewise, John considers it is proof of the fittingness of the resurrection that since the soul “followed neither virtue nor vice without the body,” it follows that the soul should not be rewarded or punished without the body (Exp. fid. 100.22-26).
161 Exp. fid. 17.11-14.
162 Exp. fid., 26.7
163 Exp. fid 26.53-57 (=DPtr 253 4-7)
immaterial in comparison with the body, in comparison with the properly immaterial—
namely, the divine—they are material."\textsuperscript{164}

John dismisses out of hand the notion of an immaterial body, and along with it,
any kind of spiritual or aetherial matter that might account for the psychic bodies of
angels and demons.\textsuperscript{165} Virtual materiality is implied, however, in describing these beings
as circumscribed and corruptible, and asserted by comparison to God as the only true
immaterial and incorporeal being. Some analogy might be made with the spiritual body
of the resurrection (cf. 1Cor 15:44), wherein the “dense and mortal” (παχύ καὶ θνητόν)
natural body will be replaced by the “unchanging, impassible, subtle” (ἄτρεπτον, ἄπαθές,
λεπτόν) spiritual body.\textsuperscript{166} John describes this spiritual body principally with reference to
the resurrected body of Christ, which could pass through doors and did not need food or
drink or sleep, but also to the angels, via “they shall be like angels” of Mark 12:25—but
he makes that comparison that primarily to indicate that there will no longer be marriage
or begetting of children.\textsuperscript{167} John stresses that the resurrection does not represent a
reconstitution into some other form (εἰς ἑτέραν μορφὴν μεταποίησιν)—i.e., a human being
does not become an angel or a demon—but a change (ἐναλλαγήν) from corruption to

\textsuperscript{164} Dial 66.22-23

\textsuperscript{165} Exp. fid. 4.14-21. The target of John’s polemics is the notion of a “fifth element” (which he
calls a “fifth body”) that pervades other bodies in order to set them in motion. John specifically excludes
the possibility that God is bodily composed of this quintessence, arguing that there would have to be
another unmoved mover behind this a quintessential mover. In principle, then, angels could be
quintessential, being set in motion by God. However, John categorically writes off a fifth element as simply
impossible (4.15).

\textsuperscript{166} Exp. fid. 100. 96-97.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 100.98-100
incorruption. In other words, the bodily character of the human being is maintained, but the body itself is transformed. Even in their spiritual bodies, then, human beings remain generically distinct from the angels by virtue of their embodiment.

John will elsewhere note (and later encyclopedists will reiterate) that the substance of spiritual beings is δυσόριστος – “difficult to define.” This is not to say that there is still some unresolved problem, as though this question would need to be left for some future physicist to determine with greater precision the nature of the matter of which spirits are comprised: in fact, the designation of δυσόριστος bears a very specific content. On the same scale, God is rendered ἀόριστος: completely incomprehensible, undefinable, and cannot be known completely by any created mind, whether human or angelic. Physical bodies, on the other hand, are comprehensively defined: their origin and destruction, their location in relationship to other objects, and their particular properties and composition can – at least in principle – be known. Spiritual creatures are constrained in some sense by the limits that apply to physical bodies, but only partially and imperfectly; accordingly, such creatures can only be partially and imperfectly defined.

168 Ibid., 100.104-106.

169 Frg. Phil. 9.24, with origins in Anastasius Hod, 2.1.59. The definition is picked up by the ps-Athanasian Liber de Definitionibus (PG 28, 536B), as well as the Lexicon of PsZonaras. This term does not make it into the Pege Gnoseos, John preferring in that work to consider spiritual beings with respect to the rubrics of “circumscription.”

170 Frg. Phil. 9.23 (in contrast to δυσόριστος), as a Divine Name in the Exp. fid. 13.46, 14.5. John appropriates the quality of being ἀόριστος to angelic being in 17.34 in a qualified sense – viz., that they are not bound by physical barriers, and that they can appear in many different sensible forms. He notes, however, that only God is truly ἀόριστος.
Our discussion to this point has centered principally on *daimonology* more broadly conceived – the divinized examples of spiritual creaturehood, angels and saints – rather than their negative counterpart in the demons as spiritual forces of evil. What of the particularities of the demonic as a species of created spiritual being? We have noted that the souls of the saints – although they differ from the angels by nature – come to share in their ministrations by the grace of God and the habitual conformity\(^\text{171}\) of their will to the good of his intentions. The case of the demons is precisely opposite: by nature, they are numbered as angelic beings, but by their own willful self-exclusion, they have become disqualified from the angelic office, and do not participate in the transmission of divine illumination. This fall colors every aspect of their being, from their appearance, to the shape of their society, to the mode of their engagement with human beings. So warped are they by their voluntarily depraved disposition the descriptors of angels no longer to apply. All vestiges of light and goodness and the heat of love are evacuated from the demonic personalities: having abandoned the furnace of divine service, they have become dark and despicable, and rather than illuminating, their presence brings confusion, disquiet, disease, and dread.

The Damascene gives no indication of hierarchy among the demons – besides, of course, distinguishing between the devil as the first and chief instigator of evil and the intended angelic governor of earth, and the demons as those angels who followed after him to their ruin.\(^\text{172}\) John frequently describes the devil as a tyrant, signaling his abusive

\(^{171}\) Note, however, that *habit* here is spoken of not only in a technical sense as standing between power and act, but also as fundamentally immutable for the divinized creature. See also above at n 143.

\(^{172}\) *Exp. fid.* 18.2f. There may be some contextual intimation in John that the demons are more closely associated with particular sins through particular passions associated with the ambiguities of being
employment of the power and authority entrusted to him in his created nature in his relationship with human beings, other spirits, and his influence over the sensible world. John does not explicitly exclude any possibilities regarding the structure of demonic society: his demonology, for instance, may leave space for the kind of ranked Evagrian categories of demonic thoughts popular in monastic circles, but he nowhere develops these categories. As John presents them, the demons are an amorphous and anonymous mob with no clear organization and no differentiated functions or purposes. Their common work is to attack (προσβάλλω) and tempt (δελεάζω) and deceive (ἀπατάω/πλανάω) mankind through every means available to them, making every effort to drag human souls down to the same miserable ruin into which they themselves have fallen. Their attacks, however, are fundamentally weak: while the angel or saint embodied, whereas the devil represents a more focused and direct opposition to natural human virtue. John never explicitly says as much, however.

173 Exp fid 45.32, 56.17, 62.6 71.11, 77.26
174 See Section 2.3.
175 This is the leading term that John uses to describe demonic interaction with the human soul: see below.
176 The term is employed with some frequency in John’s hagiology – both his sermons, and liturgical poetry – but within the context of his systematic work, the term applies chiefly to the work of the devil in the broader scope of salvation history: Exp. fid. 44.72, 45.3, 27-28.
177 Within the economy of salvation, Exp. fid. 56.17 – it was essential that “the very nature which had sinned and fallen and become corrupt should overcome the tyrant that deceived it;” thereafter, deception is especially associated with heresy, i.e., Exp. fid. 99.42. Anything that is contrary to the truth, John asserts is a “satanic deceit (πλάνη),” a “dark invention (εὔρημα) and fiction (ἀνάπλασμα) of the demon-possessed mind.” (Dial, proem 47; following Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 39.3); cf. also Images III.9.71: Christ and his saints were “conquerors who over through the demons and their deceit.” Elsewhere, the goal of demonic deception is seen in their “prevailing” (ἰσχύω) over man: “The wickedness of the evil one has so prevailed over human nature as even to drag some down into the most unspeakable (ἀλογώτατον) and most evil of all evils, the abyss of perdition: that of saying, 'There is no God’” (Exp. fid. 3.5-8): yet this precisely the kind of “overpowering” of human nature that the devils cannot accomplish without voluntary cooperation from their human victims, i.e Exp. fid. 18.32
178 Exp. fid. 44.73-74.
can alight upon the human soul and communicate the divine light without warning and without preparation, illuminating the soul as a matter of sheer divine benevolence, there is no endarkening to correspond to the angelic illuminations.\footnote{Such gracious intervention notwithstanding, it should be noted that angels are not able to force virtue any more than demons are able to force vice (ie \textit{Exp. fid.} 44.4, 92.20).} The demons can force no one, their only recourse is to multiply and inflate their pretenses – and that only by the divine permission.\footnote{\textit{Exp. fid.} 18.19-23.} The demon is unable, accordingly, to do more than co-operate with the soul to beguile it into weaving its own chains and engineering its own destruction, and thus seeks to induce the human being to voluntarily corrupt his will, just as its own will has been voluntarily corrupted. In this, too, the demon is limited: while his ruin is irrevocable, the human being, while he still lives, has the power to repent and return “from the devil to God.”\footnote{\textit{Exp. fid.} 44.20.}

Circumscription for the demonic thus comes to take on additional valences. Not only do the demons share in the limitations of angelic nature, which stipulate – for instance – that a demon can only operate in one place at a time, and that they do not see the future: their designs are also circumscribed by the overarching purposes of providence, which – in the case of the demons – run contrary to their designs. The demonic rebellion is manifest in creation and in the field of human experience only subject to the Divine permission, their intended evils are checked by the broader Divine purposes for good, and their ability to seduce human souls to their own destruction limited by the human capacity to reject through repentance the diabolical schemes and return to conformity to the good. Finally, although the demons (via their angelic nature)
are by grace immortal, their activities – if not their existence – is finite. Not only were they created (as angels) from nothing, their final fate is written as well: they will be cast into the lake of fire, whose flame is “not the material fire known to us, but a fire such as only God might know.”

John does not answer every conceivable question about the demonic nature: many mysteries certainly remain, some tied up in the nature that they share with the angels, others in their election of evil, which is fundamentally arbitrary and absurd. But because the operations of the devil and his demons are completely circumscribed by these larger designs of providence, these mysteries can be, in large part, ignored. John, for the most part, passes by such questions as speculative digressions. The heart and focus of the Damascene system, instead, is the will: its permanent corruption in the devil and the demons, and its vacillation – at times moved by demonic suggestion – within human experience and psychology. John’s discussion of the demonic, accordingly, serves in its primary extent as both a part of and prelude to his ascetical framework, to which we should at this point turn.

6.3 Ascetical Dimensions of John’s Demonology

Notwithstanding the uncertainty about the actual extent of John’s personal practice of asceticism, asceticism stands at the beginning and end of the Damascene’s

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182 Exp. fid. 100.127-128.

183 In addition to the general paucity of detail about John’s life and circumstances, John’s reputation as a monastic has been specifically questioned, as detailed in Section 1.2 and 3.1 at n 25 above. Even if there were no doubts surrounding John’s monasticism, however, we have little sense of the exact practices that would have involved in his community, or to what extent John would have personally identified with them. While John leaves us some homiletical paraenesis that gives us some sense of what he
theology. John begins in asceticism in that, in addition to the rich context of social practices and tradition implicit within the body of his theological output, Maximus the Confessor – monastic theologian *par excellence* – stands at the heart of his system. He ends in asceticism in writing on behalf of the consolidation and integrity of a Christian worldview and social system that had the twin industries of monasticism and pilgrimage at its center. We may not be able to say with total confidence that John wrote with an exclusively monastic audience in mind, but certainly, in the subsequent centuries, it was principally monks who edited and studied and copied and preserved and imitated the Damascene theological achievement in both style and content.

Within the context of an ascetically-ordered theological project, the demons are inherently characters of interest – regardless of the volume of comments about them – as the monk takes special note of all he can about the wiles of those spiritual powers who are the sworn enemies the life of virtue to which he has committed himself. As we have discussed above, John’s demonology is profoundly compressed, and efficiently foreclosed on many of the demonological questions that had occupied previous generations of ascetics. In so doing, John shifts the focus of ascetical *practice* off the powers of evil and onto the positive qualities of God and his promises, and the outworking of those truths in Christ and in the human person. The question, then, is left for the ascetic to pose: how do the demons affect us, and how do we strengthen ourselves their influence?

understood the Christian life to involve, he does not – as some monastic theologians – leave us with anything approaching a detailed ascetical manual.
The central term that John uses to describe the way that the demons interfere in the operation the human psyche is προσβολή.\textsuperscript{184} He notes, for instance, how Adam and Eve “succumbed to the προσβολή of the archevil demon,”\textsuperscript{185} and how, likewise, sin becomes established in us as a kind of law “through the προσβολή of the devil and our unforced (ἀβιάστου) and voluntary (έκουσίον) acceptance of it.”\textsuperscript{186} Thence the demon has gained a voice in our interior person: “the προσβολή of the evil one, which is the ‘law of sin,’ comes upon the members of flesh and strikes (προσβάλλει) us through them.”\textsuperscript{187} Christ also experienced the demonic προσβολή, but after the manner of Adam, and not in the way that we typically experience it: “The evil one attacked (προσέβαλεν) Christ from the outside, and not through the thoughts (λογισμοί).”\textsuperscript{188} This was in order that he might “achieve and give to our nature power to conquer the adversary, so that through the very προσβολή through which the old nature had been conquered, it might overcome the former victor.”\textsuperscript{189} Accordingly, when Christ “defeated the passions which assailed him (προσβάλοντα αὐτῷ τὰ πάθη),” he restored the old Adam, making it easy for us to overcome them (ἐύκαταγώνιστος).\textsuperscript{190} Both as a created feature of our psychology, and

\textsuperscript{184} On the term, see Lampe, 1166. John’s technical employment of the term bares some parallels with that of the 6th C ascetical writer, Mark the Monk, who consolidates the Macarian psychological usage. See M. Plested, \textit{Macarian Legacy}, 98-99. John, however, decouples the προσβολή from the notion of “indwelling sin,” which persist in Mark. Moreover, where Mark emphasizes the προσβολή as a dimension of the psychology of sin, John fully separates his articulation of the process of will from any demonic interference, such that the demonic προσβολή describes a punctiliar and externalized experience, rather than part of process of temptation.

\textsuperscript{185} \textit{Exp. fid.} 45.2.

\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Exp. fid.} 95.5-6

\textsuperscript{187} \textit{Exp. fid.} 95.10-12

\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Exp. fid.} 64.17-18

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 64.14-16; see also 62.3-10.

\textsuperscript{190} \textit{Exp. fid.} 64.18-20.
within the contours of redemption, we retain the capacity for self-determination 
(αὐτεξούσιος), despite “the προσβολὴ of the devil and the burdensome motions of the 
body.”\(^{191}\) John thus affirms without qualification that “it is up to us (ἐν ἡμῖν) whether we 
receive the προσβολὴ [of the demons] or not.”\(^{192}\)

The term προσβολὴ is a challenging one. Missing the technical quality of the term 
in John’s demonology, Fredrick Chase variously translates the term as “attack,”\(^{193}\) 
“assault”\(^{194}\) “suggestion,”\(^{195}\) “interference,”\(^{196}\) and “visitation”\(^{197}\) – at times even using 
two different English terms when the root appears twice in one sentence.\(^{198}\) In the 
Scriptures, we find it only in 2 Maccabees, there as a term to describe military 
engagement, meaning something like an “attack.”\(^{199}\) The term can describe something 
much more subtle, however: being at times used in a sense as neutral as an 
“application.”\(^{200}\) Overall, the valences of the term are somewhat similar to the English 
word “strike,” which can signify a sudden and forceful physical assault, a grand scale

\(^{191}\) Exp. fid. 58.128: these do cause “the execution of choice (προχείρησις) [to be] subordinate to 
habit (ἔξις).”

\(^{192}\) Exp. fid. 18.33.

\(^{193}\) Chase, John of Damascus: Writings, 324, 388.

\(^{194}\) Ibid., 267, 324.

\(^{195}\) Several times on 388-389.

\(^{196}\) Ibid., 301.

\(^{197}\) Ibid., 210.

\(^{198}\) Ie, “The suggestion (προσβολὴ) of the Devil, or the law of sin, also acts upon the members 
of our flesh and through it attacks (προσβάλλει).”

\(^{199}\) 2Mac 5:3, sequence with καταδρομή – “attacks and counterattacks;” 15:19 as ἐν ὑπαίθρῳ 
προσβολῆς — a skirmish in the open country. Likewise the verbal form in 2Mac 10:17, 28, 35; 12:10, 
13:22.

\(^{200}\) So Aristotle’s technical appropriation of the term in his Rhetoric (1405b).
disaster or military operation, or something interior, a sudden compunction or impulse – but it also exceeds this range of meaning in having that potentially more neutral connotation.

The Damascene, for his part, is consistent in describing the demonic action against human beings as προσβολή. Indeed, not only is προσβολή the key term he uses to describe how demons effect human beings, he almost never uses the term in any other sense. Only at one point across his does John draw upon a significantly different, technical valence the word: he uses προσβολή to describe the operation of the sense of touch, noting that the “application” (προσβολή) of touch can distinguish between various physical characteristics. When this usage is coupled with John’s insistence that the demonic προσβολή cannot overcome us but must be voluntarily accepted to produce sin in us, it would seem that what John as in mind as he incorporates this term into his demonology is not especially violent or forceful, rather, the demonic instigation of sin via προσβολή is best conceptualized as a kind of “invitation:” a “suggestion,” or – to retain some of the physicality of the metaphor – a “touch;” an “impulse” – perhaps a “sudden impulse” – that is of a character fundamentally extrinsic to the natural human

201 Exp. fid. 32.43
202 Ie, Exp. fid. 44.14: the devil “beckons (καλοῦντι) us to practice evil without forcing us.”
203 Ie, Exp. fid. 24.41: in which the voice of the serpent is described as introducing to the protoplasts the “most evil suggestion (κακίστην ὑποθήκην) of the archevil devil.”
204 Outside of the potential implicit dimensions of προσβολή, however, John does not otherwise employ the vocabulary of touch to describe human encounter with the demonic; although he does recognize it as a potential channel of spiritual beneficence (i.e., the ministration of miracles through the touch of Jesus, or the touching of a sacred object). These valences would discourage thinking of the demonic interference as “touch,” since John uniquely reserves the category to discuss incarnate communication of graces, which is something the demons cannot do. A metaphorical appropriation, however, maintains.
passions – although the demons nevertheless at times employ the passions in an unnatural fashion as a part of this assault.\textsuperscript{205}

Human beings are subject to demonic προσβολή both by nature and by curse: by nature, because the devil and the demons are spiritual creatures whose rank transcends that of human beings and they are accordingly afforded influence over them; by curse, because succumbing to the προσβολή has left within human psychology a residue of the sinful action in the form of a habitual inclination. Sin is not natural to us, but grew up in our will as a result of a “second-sowing” (ἐπισπόρα) done by the devil.\textsuperscript{206} “Once we had accepted the προσβολή of the evil one and voluntarily transgressed the law of God, we gave it [the προσβολή] entrance, selling ourselves to sin.”\textsuperscript{207} Through sin, human beings become a cause of the evils that befall them: often, our voluntary evils are the source of involuntary ones.\textsuperscript{208} Indeed, the human being is his own worst enemy, having “transferred his yearning (ἔφεσιν) from God to materiality (ὕλην) and his ire (θυμὸν) from the true enemy of his salvation to his own kind,” he was being dragged down, by that confusion, to the abyss of utter ruin.\textsuperscript{209} It was the devil who sold man this deceit, indeed, but the devil did not force him in any way: this self-destructive entrapment in

\textsuperscript{205} It should be noted, however, that impulse (ὁρμή) is a technical stage of the end of the process of action for the Damascene, as the motion to act following on a choice (\textit{Exp. fid.} 36.82). The προσβολή is not an impulse in the sense of interjecting into the process of action at this point, but in the sense that demons are driven by a perpetual ὠρμή to subvert the divine will and persuade others to do likewise.

\textsuperscript{206} \textit{Exp. fid.} 64.5-6. The term involves an allusion to the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (cf. Mat 13.25), with turn of phrase having become proverbial long before John’s time – notwithstanding that the appropriation of the image from the Kingdom context of Matthew’s Gospel to the psychology of an individual psychology is not an especially obvious interpretative trajectory.

\textsuperscript{207} \textit{Exp. fid.} 95.12-14.

\textsuperscript{208} \textit{Exp. fid.} 92.31-32: Τόν γὰρ ἐκουσίων κακῶν τὰ ἀκουσία εἶσιν ἐκγονα. Cf. also \textit{CM.} 82.5.

\textsuperscript{209} \textit{Exp. fid.} 44.68ff.
rebellion was freely chosen by man, and every subsequent choice was colored by that first error. “Adam willingly obeyed [the voice of the serpent], and having willed, he ate: therefore, the first-infected [aspect of our nature] is the will.”

The principal object of the demonic προσβολή, accordingly, is the human will. Whatever misfortune or calamity the demons might engineer in the world of experience; whatever ghastly manifestation or they might take in the physical or imaginal realm, or whatever temptation they may conjure there; whatever interference they may run in the human body and human mind by the manipulation of the humors and the stirring up of the passions: all of this is directed towards winning the voluntary consent of the human person, and so ensnaring him or her in the traps of sin, vice, and faithlessness, which “abound under many forms…enslaving man and heaping every sort of evil into his life,” bringing death in their wake, which seeks to destroy human life “like some wild and savage beast.” The devil – that “envious and good-hating demon” – cannot bear to see us attain to the good and higher things from which he has been exiled, and so desires to blind us with every conceit and deception, that we might be ruined like him, and share in the destruction of his ultimate damnation.

John makes no attempt to catalogue all the possible ways in which the demons might make their assault, but he does emphasize repeatedly that it is only by divine permission that such assaults can be made. Only with God’s permission can they tempt or

210 Exp. fid. 58.133-134.
211 Exp. fid. 45.16-20.
212 Exp. fid. 44.70ff. It is interesting to note that the same demonic psychology is the most salient demonological theme in the Qur’an. See Section 5.3.
destroy, or transform themselves and take on all kinds of fantastical forms;\(^{213}\) indeed, God works good and instructs through all creation, often using even the demons themselves for this purpose, as we see in the case of Job and the Geresene demoniac.\(^{214}\) From the beginning, God recognized the testing of man as essential in his development as a spiritual being, “since one who is untried and untested deserves no credit.”\(^{215}\) God himself, accordingly, planted the forbidden tree of knowledge in the midst of the garden as a “trial (ἀπόπειραν), test (δοκιμήν), and exercise (γυμνάσιον) of man’s obedience or disobedience.”\(^{216}\) The first man – of course – failed the test, to his doom and destruction: from then on, the devil would have a foothold within the human psyche, tyrannizing human beings by suggesting evil thoughts that twist our natural and blameless passions towards unnatural ends and deeds.\(^{217}\) Christ, however, succeeded where Adam had failed: his victory had the double effect of negating the tyranny that the devil had won over us by sin, and demonstrating the possibility of living a human life which – while nevertheless characterized by passions inherent to being a created, material being – is free from having those passions warped by sin. Christ “took up all [of human nature] so that he might sanctify all [of human nature],” John proclaims, “He was tempted and he was victorious in order that he might gain the victory for us, and give to our nature the power

\(^{213}\) Exp. fid. 18.29-23.

\(^{214}\) Exp. fid. 43.79-81.

\(^{215}\) Exp. fid. 44.58-58, echoing Ecc 34:11

\(^{216}\) Exp. fid. 25.14-16. The Hiera also treats this theme topically: see PG 95, 1309.

\(^{217}\) Notably, John does not offer a category that is exactly equivalent to “original sin” and is ambiguous about how the effect of an “original sin” is transmitted. Vulnerability of human nature to demonic προσβολή may in fact be the nearest equivalent in John’s thought.
to be victorious over the adversary, so that through the very προσβολή by which the adversary claimed victory over the old nature, [our nature] might be victorious over the old victor.”

The extent to which John expects the Christian to be able to actuate this victory in his day to day life by being free of every vice and sin, however, is not entirely clear. Certainly, having been washed from sin in baptism, we should “make every effort to keep ourselves pure from filthy works,” and so avoid “making ourselves once more slaves to sin.” By repentance we should strive to “return through asceticism and labor from that which is against nature to that which is according to nature, from the devil to God,” and indeed, John emphasizes that virtue is simply what is natural to us:

Asceticism and its associated labors are not calibrated to the acquisition of virtue as though these are something to be introduced from the outside, but for the expulsion of evil which has been introduced and is against nature, in the same way that the rust of steel is not natural, but comes about by neglect and must be removed through hard work if we are to make manifest the natural brightness of the iron.

Attaining and maintaining the ability to be and act naturally is no small labor in John’s mind, and our spiritual enemies aggravated that labor. “The προσβολή of the evil one…comes upon the members of flesh and strikes (προσβάλλει) us through them,” and therefore, “our body is readily led to sin.” This is the “law of sin” operative in our flesh, that wars against the “law of God,” as Paul describes in Romans 7-8; it is “stored up in our bodies is an odor and sense (ὀσμὴ καὶ αἴσθησις) of sin: the concupiscence and

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218 Exp. fid. 64.13-16.
219 Exp. fid. 82.59-60.
220 Exp. fid. 44.19-20.
221 Exp. fid. 58.172-177.
222 Exp. fid. 95.10-12.
pleasure (ἐπιθυμία καὶ ἡδονή) of the body,” and the “movements of the irrational part of the soul.” Through these, although the Christian “wills the law of God and loves it and does not will to sin” in their hearts and minds, nevertheless, they are deceived and persuaded and once again brought into slavery to sin. John ends on a modestly hopeful note, however: “What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh,” John proclaims, again echoing Paul, “God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh…has condemned sin in the flesh,” since, as John once again underscores, Christ was able to fully and truly assume human flesh, but without sin. The possibility of fulfilling the law of God is accordingly open to those who walk according to the Spirit of Christ, since the Spirit, helping us in our weakness, “strengthens the law of our mind [which inwardly rejoices in the law of God] against the law [of sin] which is in our members.” This, however, is a process: the Spirit teaches us what to pray for, and gradually works in us through those prayers, such that “it is impossible to observe the commandments of the Lord except by patience and prayer.”

For John, the demons are real: they are not symbols and they are not metaphors, they are a universal and integral part of the human experience, and the ultimate origin of the psychology of our sin. Envying God’s graciousness towards humanity and the possibility of our salvation, the demons launch their dangerous and potentially deadly attacks against us, seeking to lure us towards willing the same evil that they will to our

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223 Exp. fid. 95.15-17; 21, 25.
224 Ibid. 95.23-25.
225 Ibid., 95.26-29, following Rom 8.2-3.
226 Exp. fid. 95.30-32.
227 Ibid., 95.35-36, following Rom 8.26-27.
own destruction. Often, they excite our passions and appetites through machinations so subtle and deceitful that it can be difficult to distinguish between their suggestions and our own thoughts and internal impulses. At other times, by the divine permission, they engineer against us a frontal assault – a cataclysmic loss of everything dear to us, as experienced by Job. Still again, they may perform the grand, elaborate, frightful illusions, of the kind experienced by Anthony, perhaps even attempting to mislead us through false vision or a deceitful prophecy.

The reality of their opposition is a sobering and unavoidable fact for ascetics and all who would strive to live a godly life in accordance with the divine commands. Within the scope of John’s system, however, they are not such a big deal. Demons are hampered by the bounds of providence: they can do nothing against us that God does not permit – and God’s will for us, ultimately, is our salvation. As subtle and as frightful as they may be, they cannot force us to do anything: we retain agency within our own actions, and it is “up to us” whether we accept their suggestions or not. Made vulnerable to their attacks by virtue of our finitude, our materiality, and our social and personal habits of sin, we have often succumbed to their invitations, and it is likely we will do so again. Nevertheless, Christ has entered into human reality, breaking the thrall of the devil, and showing his wiles to be without ultimate power – and we, following after him in patience and humility and seeking by discipline to be reformed after his image, can enter ever more deeply and fully into that story and that life, thus bit by bit strengthening our ability to recognize the attacks of the demons and our resolve to refuse them.

John’s ascetical vision is thus ultimately positive rather than negative: rather than cataloging human deficiencies and prescriptions for their correction, he casts a grand and
ambitious vision of who God is, the nature of creation and of history, and what human
nature looks like, and he invites the ascetic to imbibe and embody this vision. As human
creatures, we do not live as “naked souls” but are rather “clothed with the veil of flesh,”
yet we have “the mind as a sort of eye that sees and has the faculty of knowing and is
capable of receiving knowledge and having understanding of the things that are.”228 We
should, therefore, be imitators of Moses, who “withdrew from the contemplation of
human things and abandoned the stormy sea of life, and wiping away every material
impression (ὑλικὴ ἔμφασιν), purified the eye of his soul” in order to behold that
“immaterial fire (ἀυλος πῦρ),” which, while it “enkindled and burned the thorny bush and
transformed it into its own splendor, it neither consumed nor destroyed it, nor destroyed
its proper nature.”229 Leaving aside every passion that drags us back down to the strata of
material things and every error that would separate us from the unity of the truth, John
summons us as his readers to turn our spiritual eye with great attention to the great and
lofty divine realities, and be transformed into the likeness of that which we behold – and
in so doing, he encourages us to give as little time and as little attention as we can to
those shadowy and pitiful spirits that would seek, by their great pretensions, to distract us
from so lofty a contemplation.

Within this positive asceticism, then, it is fitting that John would emphasize the
positive daimonology over its negative counterpart in order to increase the resolution of
that cloud of witnesses who are there to assist and strengthen the believer in his or her
ascent into these boundless mysteries. Such is precisely what John offers in his theory of

228 Dial. 1.13f.
229 Dial. proem. 8f.
the saints and their images and relics. John’s strong commitment to the view that the
divine graces continue to flow through the images and relics of the saints – as well as his
concomitant contribution to regularization and systematization of their liturgical
commemoration – has a dual effect for the ascetic. First, it keeps in constant view an
ultimate picture of the Christian life lived to its fullest extent, completed and perfected by
the divine grace, wherein the saint has voluntarily returned to a state of nature so as to
become so completely involved with God that their bodies, their images, even the
memory of them still radiates with the same divine power that was at work in their lives
and yielded their salvation. By God’s grace working in and through Christ and applied to
the life of the Christian through the work of the Spirit, this is possible for the ascetic, and
it is what he longs and labors for in extirpating from himself every sinful pattern, and
steeling himself against the assaults of the demons. Further, the ascetic can leverage all
things associated with the saint as totems of divine power with expulsive authority over
every spiritual force of evil. Such powers are not automatic or magical for John: the
faithful must take care to honor the saints and invite their benefices in a way that honors
God, rather than offends him, and ultimately, the aim of this piety toward the saints is
that we become their “living images,” and construct our monuments to them out of our
own virtuous lives and behavior.\footnote{Exp. fid. 88.58-60.}

Given that this kind of \textit{daimonology} undergirds John’s ascetical vision, it is no
accident that he would became one of the most vociferous defenders of the cult of saints
and the use of images in Christian worship. The Damascene’s theological system is
implicitly grounded and sustained by a liturgio-ascetical experience characterized by engagement with the saints as demonstrations of the ultimate possibility of human union with the divine. The saints at once inspire the Christian to delve into the depths of the wisdom of the orthodox faith and support them along the journey, imprinting their stories onto the hearts of the faithful both by their example, and by the divine power still working through them. Such, indeed, constitutes a distinctly Byzantine liturgical ethos: the same patterns of hagiological memory are inscribed within the liturgical rhythms of Byzantine hymnody, within which John was steeped, and to which he made a significant (if not fully understood) contribution. The mysterious and glorious divine power, by John’s reckoning, was uniquely and inexorably at work within the Church comprised of that growing body of saints: and the principle call upon the faithful was to remain a faithful and responsible member of that community in a world that was falling apart.

6.4 Conclusion

Memory is not a neutral act of retrieval and recollection of a preserved artifact of a past event: in fact, the process of remembering, plays a part in constructing the memory; the memory, in turn, is changed, however subtly and imperceptibly. This observation, by analogy, might help us appreciate how John of Damascus’s demonology functioned within the life and imagination of the Church. As much as John sought to simply restate the established theology of the Fathers and say “nothing of [his] own,”

231 A common subject of fascination for both ancient and moderns, we can find this insight in several sources: Augustine, Confessions X.19, for instance; or in more recent conversation, D. Schacter, Searching for Memory (1996).

232 Dial. proem.; 60, 2.9.
his act of remembering and thinking through each of the subjects he addresses served – however subtly – to reshape them.

The impact of the Damascene’s acts of memory on demonology is especially notable. Although the total number of comments John makes about demons is relatively small, these comments have a broad set of implications, and ripple through his well-integrated theological system. John succeeds in presenting demons as a reality interwoven into a whole imagination of a spiritual world that is δυσόριστος: it is vast, beyond our comprehension, and substantially unexplored. At the same time, he also circumscribes the character and qualities of the daimonic in order to keep the substance of theology closely aligned to the revealed truths of the Scriptures.

In the case of the Damascene’s demonology, the act of memory doesn’t just go beyond recollection, it goes beyond recapitulation. John distills, synthesizes, and summarizes trends in the existing tradition of Christian demonology in a way that is so tightly and carefully structured as to attain to a sort of ultimacy: he forges a new paradigm on which the scholastic demonological schemes of the middle ages will come to heavily depend. As I have noted elsewhere, John’s demonology is not conventional in the sense that John was not simply regurgitating what everybody around him already knew and believed about demons. It was conventional, rather, in the sense of establishing the conventions: of making explicit the most effective demonological rules already present within Christian thought. We might say that it was radically conventional: it laid bare the root convictions about the demons, and by making them visible, reinforced them as right and true.
No synthetic-systematic Christian thinker before John had figured out how to give an appropriate, articulate account for the reality of the demonic within a full theological system. Things had been said about the demons that the Church generally regarded as true, of course: the catalogue of loved and lauded works of Christian literature that made productive, measured reference to the demonic is almost too vast to be tabulated. Those truths, however, were usually uttered occasionally and logistically, in sermons, monastic discourses or ascetical apophthegems more concerned with conveying practical advice rather than ultimate realities. By contrast, the early theologians who had tried to draw the pieces together into an integrated demonology found their attempts to be less than successful. The Church considered the systems of Origen and Evagrius, of the Manicheans and the Messalians, of Hierotheos and books of Solomonic magic, each to be profoundly problematic, and they ended up condemned, ignored, or both.

The key component of John’s system, as we have noted previously, is his rigorous consistency in defining the demonic essence. To John, the demons are nothing more and nothing less than fallen angels. They are not a separate species from the angelic beings, but a malevolent form of the single category of created, intelligent, volitional spirit. Their agency is not ultimate: their effects may be impressive and terrible, but they are limited by the ultimate designs of providence, and through providence, their final destruction is already secured. Finally, and most importantly, they are subsumed into the ultimate drama of salvation. They have been defeated by Christ and by his saints, and they remain in this world, not as overwhelming kosmokratores, but as impotent shadows soon to be chased away by the dawning light of Christ shining in and through his Church.
CONCLUSION

DESTROYER OF DEMONS, REVISITED

It need not be an exercise in pious credulity devoid of historical content to follow the liturgical accolades hoisted on John of Damascus by his spiritual heirs and herald him as a “destroyer of demons.” As we have explored in the foregoing chapters, the demonological tradition John inherited had several loose ends waiting to be either stretched out or tied up; meanwhile, all kinds of ideas about spiritual beings circulated in John’s cultural and historical context that deviated to some greater or lesser extent from the mainstream view that had emerged from Christian late antiquity. Within the purview of his systematic project, the Damascene had good reason and ample opportunity to develop an elaborate theory of the demonic, or otherwise synthesize an expansive demonology, and chose not to do so. Despite its sincerity and seriousness, John’s acknowledgement of the reality of the demonic was decidedly minimalistic: he offered the demons a theological equivalent of damning with faint praise. By circumscribing the demons and their role to only a small corner in a much larger and much more interesting theological universe, he consigned them to an effective oblivion within the unfolding tradition of formal dogmatic theology, becoming thus a “destroyer of demons.”

At the end of the last chapter, I suggested that John’s demonology might be considered an ultimate act of memory; that the way the Damascene made the demonological tradition of classical Christianity present within his theological system had the effect of consolidating a loose collection of ideas into a durable paradigm that exerts a foundational influence in Christian demonology even to this day. Similarly, at
the outset of this exploration in Chapter One, I explored the role of memory in consolidating John’s reputation as a “destroyer of demons.” I am not unconscious, moreover, of my own exercise of memory as an interpreter in bringing the epithet into focal attention, and that remembering John in this way serves to change his historical profile. In each case, memory serves as the consolidating enactment of tradition, the essential link between *paradosis* and *ekdosis*, whereby what is “handed down” becomes cognized into something that can be “handed out.”

Memory, however, is not the leading term of this project. In my capital description of the Damascene’s demonology, I have chosen instead to name his efforts an exercise in “imagining demons.” As an activity, imagination conveys a more conscious, more intentional, more creative process. The work of this project throughout has been to support the proposition that John, as imaginatively engaged with demonology, was careful and intentional in the boundaries he set on the subject, such that his effect on the understanding of demons in his context and – by extension – within the classical Christian demonological project more generally – was carefully measured and designed. In other words, John knew what he was doing when he crafted his demonology, and he achieved exactly what he meant to do. He set out to “destroy demons,” and his campaign was successful.

Of course, the term imagination remains potentially problematic in bearing for us a connotation of fantasy: of elaborate whimsy and free-spirited creativity. The Damascene’s demonology is not imaginative in this sense, as should be apparent from the foregoing. John is not fanciful, nor do the developments he makes in understanding the demons rely on a personal intuitive vision or idiosyncratic insight. The Damascene’s
imagination, rather, is disciplined by the contents of the Scriptures and the contours of the tradition; he constrains himself to say “nothing of [his] own.”¹ The genius of John’s theological imagination stood in his special capacity to distill the coherence of the whole picture from an overwhelming surfeit of data: to articulate the pith of the Scriptural-patristic tradition of understanding of the spiritual world, and ignore any countervening voices. Exercised in this way, John’s imagination served as the consort of memory, co-mediating with it between paradosis and ekdosis by constructing the context and framework within which the cognized tradition is understood and becomes articulable.

For our purposes, imagination bears another and more important freight because of its relationship to image. John, as we have noted, was one of the great defenders of religious images: his theory of icons stood at the heart of his theological system, and intersected with his vision of the spiritual world in several important respects. More still, indeed, the theology that John distilled is embodied and reflected in the aesthetic ethos preserved in his tradition. Byzantine iconography frequently represents demons, but rarely if ever does it descend to the macabre in doing so, as do some other traditions of the artistic depictions of the demonic. The demon – in the Byzantine icon – is a black, shadowy and misshapen figure, usually small and ethereal, almost comical in its size and proportions. It is flattened creature – appearing only in profile, the icon suggesting it is a less than fully real, less than fully personal being. When depicted, the demon is often in the midst of being bested by a saint or angel. They are there, then: they represent a real, and indeed, an integral presence to the whole plan of the image, but– at the same time –

¹ Dial. proem.60, 2.9
they are utterly overwhelmed. Even in those cases when they are not depicted in the process of being actively defeated, the demon is absorbed into the radiant gold or ochre that constitutes the background of most icons, representing the effusion of eternal, heavenly light. They are an unpleasant speck in the foreground, swallowed up in the radiance of the background, and the beauty of a whole theological and hagiographical narrative compacted in the image.

The depiction of demons in Byzantine icons mirrors their appearance in John of Damascus’s theological system. The demonic is an inescapably real component of John’s apprehension of the orthodox faith, but its reality is all but crushed under the vastness of every other aspect of his theological vision. The devil and his demons are a fleeting, impotent aberration: defeated by Christ and powerless in the face of providence, the example of their accursed malevolence is a warning to the sinner; to the saint, they are enemies to be vanquished by the grace of God to his glory. We might, in principle, imagine a rendering of John’s theology that is totally non-realist with respect to the demonic: his handful of comments about demons surgically removed, or reinterpreted through the social-symbolic lens popular among many modern theologians. Thoroughly and consistently applying this heuristic, however, would in the end require that reworking the whole balance and coherence of John’s system. Demons are a small part of John’s thought, but an integral one. As in Byzantine icons, they are small, dark, misshapen, and totally overwhelmed by the weight of John’s positive theological vision, but they are really, substantially, and unavoidably present.

John of Damascus’s demonological imagination thus thoroughly and profoundly challenges modern tendencies and prejudices regarding the demonic. Against those who
would obsessively fantasize about demons as representing endless and fantastic classes and categories of malevolent spiritual beings, John constrains and disciplines his comments, encouraging the faithful to shift their attention to the philosophical rigors of classical theology, inviting his readers to wrestle with the mechanics of the Trinity and questions of how the humanity and divinity in Christ correlate, and through clear, careful, diligent argument conform their thinking to the teaching of the Church. Against the skeptical naturalist, however, John’s demons are not merely assumed, but asserted as realities within the natural sphere that must be given consideration within a comprehensive system alongside elemental phenomena and the basic impulses of human psychology, integral to the whole framework through which reality itself is contemplated and comprehended.

Observing the care and complexity of the Damascene’s demonology, moreover, has served to deepen our appreciation for the depth of John’s thought and effectiveness of his method. John was no mere compiler of other people’s opinions, but a disciplined and creative intellect who was able to imagine out of a complex tradition and in a complex situation a coherent, durable framework for appreciating the spiritual world. Nevertheless, the Damascene’s imagination was not expansive: he sought to avoid adding anything substantially new to the tradition he had received, either by drawing in voices from the margins, or by supplying his own creative ideas. Rather, from his own mastery and internalization of the Christian faith in its broad coherence, John sought to clarify the internal structure and order tacitly present within the faith, sifting through the mix of materials he had received to determine the most exact definition of each salient term, and exact answer to each perennial question.
Of course, John is not the only one whose imagination is active in the space of this project. At the close, we should step back to consider the fact that a study of John’s demonological imagination is necessarily also an imaginative act of our own. John’s imaginative synthesis drew together and assembled fragments from his rich inheritance and assembled them in accordance with his intuitive sense for the coherence of demonology within the Christian tradition. Our study, in turn, has drawn together the demonological fragments from John’s works and from his world in an effort to gain a better sense for the coherence of his demonology, and of his theological system more broadly. As John became an active co-creator of demonology in imagining the outline of its comprehensive content, so too we have become active co-creators of a memory of John and his methodology in seeking to imaginatively engage with the Damascene’s process.

The act of imagination – in John’s case, as well as ours – is no mere fantasy. Quite to the contrary, in fact: John’s demonology – in our imaginative reconstruction of it – is an imagination against fantasy; that is to say, it is an invitation to inhabit a certain kind of coherent theological world that promises to give the best possible account human life and human experience, including its shadow side. Within that theological world, there is such a thing as pure, unbridled spiritual malevolence – absurd as it is. There is such a thing as the evil spiritual personality, which ever seeks to entrap and deceive and destroy the human soul. These beings are stronger and more cunning than we are; they ever insinuate themselves into our thoughts and schemes as mortal beings, aiming for our ultimate destruction. By their invisible activities, they cast all kinds of fearful shadows into the human mind – including at once the lie of their ultimacy, and the lie of their non-
existence. Yet through Christ, it is within our power to turn away from their evil influences, and commit to the good in spite of their enticements and tortures and terrible displays; and through Christ, we can anticipate being drawn up into the final enjoyment of the good, despite our many faults and failings.

Even to our day, many find this view – or one very much like it – helpful, even salutary. To affirm such a demonological system lends credence to the existence of an unseen realm, but prevents it from collapsing into the unlimited expanse of fantasy. The spiritual world, through John’s framework, becomes cognizable, and integrates an otherwise unseen world of human experience and imagination. Perhaps, then, we can yet learn from the Damascene how to engage this world without being overwhelmed by its terrible grandeur; perhaps indeed there is some virtue in joining our voices with the biddings of the ancient liturgy that would ask this “destroyer of demons” to pray on our behalf that our souls be saved. If we are not so inclined, however, the exercise of sympathetic imagination still opens for us a greater sense of the spiritual world, not only as it was understood by the ancients, but as it is conceived by the faithful through the ages and even to this day.
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