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THE DEMONIZATION OF MATTER IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY: ENOCHIC ARGUMENTS AGAINST IDOLATRY AND THE ORIGINS OF EVIL IN THE SECOND CENTURY C.E.

The origin of evils is not easy for a non-philosopher to know, but it is enough to tell the masses that evils do not come from God: they are associated with matter and reside among humans.

-Celsus, The True Doctrine

This quote offered by Celsus succinctly expresses the popular Platonic view that evil and matter share a complicated relationship.¹ Origen of Alexandria, writing about seventy years later, goes on to partially correct Celsus' take: while Celsus is right to suggest that evils do not come from God, he is wrong to suggest that matter has something to do with it (*C. Cels.* 4.65).

According to Origen, even learned men trained in philosophy struggle to understand the origin of evil because it is impossible to understand such things without direct inspiration from God.

Ignorance of God, Origen tells us, is an evil unto itself and has nothing to do with matter.

By the second to third centuries C.E., Jews and Christians were no strangers to philosophical debate. As the previous chapter demonstrated, Philo of Alexandria wrote many philosophical treatises using Platonism to interpret Jewish scriptures, portraying Judaism and Platonism as not only compatible but essentially the same.² In the second century, we see Christians begin to frame Christianity as a form of philosophy in their writings. To model Christianity as a philosophy, early Christians like Justin Martyr, Athenagoras of Athens, and Tertullian of Carthage each invoked philosophical debates and ideas to defend Christianity and

¹ Dated to 170-180 C.E., *The True Doctrine* is preserved in Origen's *Against Celsus*, which, although scholars posit was written by Origen around the year 248-250 C.E., is itself only preserved in the works of Eusebius. Translations are my own in consultation with Chadwick's translation of *Against Celsus* and Marcovich's critical edition: Origen, *Contra Celsum*, ed. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Origenes, *Contra Celsum*, ed. M. Marcovich (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

² The *logos* of the Gospel of John is one clear example of philosophical concepts playing a pivotal role in the theology of first-century Jews. See Daniel Boyarin, "The Crucifixion of the Logos: How Logos Theology Became Christian," in *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 87-147.

forge their Christian identities. This is especially true within early Christian anti-idolatry polemics, which frequently invoked Enochic tradition as part of this philosophical self-fashioning.

Building upon the important reception studies on Enochic tradition offered by Reed, Stuckenbruck, Wright, and VanderKam,³ this chapter traces the transmission of Enochic tradition within early Christian discourses against idolatry, highlighting an unsung aspect of its *Nachleben*. I show that early Christians built upon contemporary Platonic debates about evil and materiality in their philosophical reformulations of Enochic tradition, specifically identifying idolatry as an earthly practice. Within this philosophical context, early Christians clarified the material dangers of idol worship, using Enochic tradition to depict evil spirits as hungry and desirous of sacrifices.

I argue that as Enochic tradition developed from the third century B.C.E. through the second century C.E., the illicit instruction motif, which explains the origins of metallurgy and stonemasonry among other trades (*I En.* 8), came to be associated with the crafting and worship of idols. For Christians like Justin Martyr, the *BW*'s fallen angel myth and evil spirit etiology served as powerful vehicles to elucidate the evils associated with the material aspects of idolatry to their philosophical audiences. In using Enochic tradition to condemn idolatry, these three Christian authors incorporated contemporary Platonic ideas about the relationship between matter and evil to demonize the materiality of idol production and worship.

In highlighting this connection, I demonstrate that there is an idolatry-inflected iteration of the watchers myth within its *Nachleben* that played a role in the Christian conceptualization of the idea that evil spirits hungrily feed upon sacrifices. As we will see, one of the important ideas

³ Key reception studies on Enochic tradition: Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Ancient Judaism and Christianity*; Adler and VanderKam, *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage*; Wright, *The Origins of Evil Spirits*.

undergirding these second century Christian idolatry polemics is that people should be suspicious about idol worship because gods should not want consume material offerings, reflecting the archaic idea that sacrifice constitutes as a type of food for the gods, since they are spiritual beings of repute. According to the worldview of these ancient Christians, it is wrong that spiritual beings without bodies should desire or benefit from sacrifices because food is part of the material world and sustains the physical body.

Enoch and the Elements⁴

It is not surprising that polemics against idolatry animate many ancient Jewish and Christian writings. In the Hebrew Bible, we see the risks that come with idolatry in the episode of the Golden Calf (Exod 32), in the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 17), and in the imagined eschatological destruction of idol worshippers in prophetic literature (Isa. 44-46) among countless other examples. The texts of the Hebrew Bible often frame the worship of foreign gods as justification for Israel's punishment. The Israelites are consistently depicted as straying from God by worshipping foreign deities, which always results in their collective punishment. Hebrew Bible idolatry polemics often emphasize the material dimensions of idol worship. For example:

Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases. Their idols (עֲצָבִיָּהֶם) are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes, but they do not see. They have ears, but they do not hear; they have noses, but they do not smell. They have hands, but they do not feel; they have feet, but they do not walk; they make no sound in their throats. Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them (Ps 15:3-8).

⁴ Studies that address Enochic tradition's relationship with idolatry: Annette Y. Reed, "From Asael Šemihazah to Uzzah, Azzah, and Azazel: 3 Enoch 5 (§§ 7-8) and Jewish Reception-History of 1 Enoch," *JSQ* 8 (2001): 105-36; Steven D. Fraade, *Enosh and his Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Postbiblical Interpretation* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 163-66. VanderKam and Adler briefly acknowledge the connection when evaluating early Christianity's reception of the fallen angel motif, noting that "in one form or another it gave Christian writers ammunition for explaining the presence of evil, idolatry, and demons in the world and the certainty with wickedness would be punished at the judgment," *Apocalyptic Heritage*, 100.

The psalmist problematizes idols by drawing attention to their uselessness: idols are empty, hollow, and, because they are manmade, hold superficial power. We also find materialist arguments against idolatry in Enochic tradition, but they manifest a bit differently.

I Enoch contains two passages that explicitly condemn idolatry: *I En.* 19.1 and 99.6-7. The first appears in the travel portions of *BW* (*I En.* 17-36)⁵ and the second appears in the *Epistle of Enoch* (*I En.* 91-106).⁶ In the former account, dated to the first century B.C.E., Enoch travels with the archangel Uriel to see the remote edges of the earth and the heavens. At one point on their journey, Uriel brings Enoch to a deep chasm beyond seven great mountains, full of fire, where the watchers are imprisoned for their crimes.

And Uriel said to me, “There stand the angels (ἄγγελοι) who mingled with the women. And their spirits (τὰ πνεύματα αὐτῶν)—having assumed many forms (πολύμορφα γενόμενα)—bring destruction upon men and lead them astray (πλανήσει) to sacrifice to demons (ἐπιθύειν τοῖς δαιμονίοις) until the great judgment, in which they will be judged with finality (*I En.* 19.1).

In this example, Uriel explains that the fallen angels will be punished during the final judgement for leading humans astray to offer sacrifices to demons.⁷ This passage demonstrates familiarity with both the fallen angel myth (*I En.* 6-11) and the evil spirit etiology (*I En.* 15).

The other passage on idolatry is located within the *Epistle of Enoch*’s (second century B.C.E.) list of condemned peoples and practices.⁸ At 94.6, the text begins a series of alternating

⁵ In addition to Classical Ethiopic manuscripts (see Charles), *I En.* 19.1 has been preserved in the Greek Codex Panopolitanus, commonly called the Akhmîm Codex (G^{pan}), which scholars date to the sixth century C.E. Martha Himmelfarb has recently argued convincingly that two separate accounts of the travel portions of Enoch were circulating into the first century B.C.E., which points an ultimate Greek stage of redaction of the *BW*, not Aramaic. See Himmelfarb, “The Greek Translation of Enoch’s Journeys to the Ends of the Earth and the Redaction of the Book of the Watchers,” 1-47.

⁶ A good chunk of the *Epistle of Enoch* (*I En.* 91-108), including chapter 99, has been preserved in Greek in the Chester Beatty Papyrus XII. I use Campbell Bonner, *The Last Chapters of Enoch in Greek* (London: Christophers, 1937), for the Greek text of chapter 99. For an introduction to the EE, see also Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *I Enoch 91-108*, CEJL 4 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 1-34; *idem*, “The Epistle of Enoch: Genre and Authorial Presentation,” *DSD* 17 (2010): 387-417.

⁷ There is some ambiguity about this referring to the spirits of the angels or the spirits of their sons. I opt for the latter, following Dillman and Nickelsburg. See Nickelsburg, *I Enoch*, 287.

⁸ Stuckenbruck, *I Enoch 91-108*, 3.

woes to sinners and exhortations to the righteous. Idolators and idol-makers are identified in this list by Enoch as one of the types of sinners who will be punished.

Those who carve (γλύφοντες; cf. E: 𐤎𐤏𐤍𐤑, “worship”) stones—and who carve images of silver and gold and wood and stone and clay and worship phantoms and demons and abominations and evil spirits and all errors, not according to knowledge: no help will you find from them (*1 En.* 99.6-7).⁹

1 En. 99 draws attention to the types of earthly elements people use to make images, which resonates with the list of illicit knowledges Asael taught to humans in *1 En.* 8.

‘Asa‘el (עֲשָׂאֵל) taught men to manufacture (לַאֲבֹד) swords of iron and breastplates of copper and showed them what is dug up (יְתַחֲפֹר) and how they could work the gold to fashion it ready; and as for silver, to fashion it for bracelets and other jewelry for women. To the women he showed about antimony and eyeshadow [and all precious stones]... (4Q202 II, 26-28 || *1 En.* 8.1).

These lines come from 4Q202, which likely dates to the early Hasmonean period.¹⁰ When we compare this second-century B.C.E. account to that of the Greek Codex Panopolitanus (sixth century C.E.), we see that the technologies and knowledges imparted to humanity essentially remain the same across both accounts.

And Azazel (Ἀζαήλ) taught men to make swords, weapons, shields, and breastplates; and he made known to them the metals (τὰ μέταλλα)¹¹ and the art of working them, and bracelets, and ornaments, and the use of antimony, eyeshadow, and all kinds of costly stones and dyes (παντοίους λίθους ἐκλεκτοὺς καὶ τὰ βαφικά) (G^{Pan} v. 1).

This Greek account, however, makes clearer the point that the cultivation and use of the earth’s natural elements is an issue. Taught by Asael, humans used heavenly knowledge to create instruments of war, cosmetics, and how to acquire stones and dyes. Along with the watchers’ giant sons growing up to become cannibals, *BW* implies that the spread of these trades among humans contributed to the proliferation of evil on earth, eventually necessitating the flood. Both

⁹ This translation closely follows the Greek of P^{CB} 12. See Bonner, *Last Chapters*, 45. The Ethiopic lists “evil spirits (ለጎፍሳት፡ እኩያት), demons (እጋንጋት), and all idols (ለኩሉ፡ ጣዖት).”

¹⁰ Milik, *Books of Enoch*, 164.

¹¹ G^{Syn}: τὰ μέταλλα τῆς γῆς

Enochic passages on idolatry glossed above are in continuity with and thematically expand the ideas present in *1 En.* 8.

These ideas are further developed in the *Similitudes* (*1 En.* 37-71) and *Jubilees*. The *Similitudes*, which scholars date to 66-70 C.E., depicts Noah recounting this scene.¹²

And he will confine those angels who showed iniquity in that burning valley that my great-grandfather Enoch had shown me previously in the West by the mountains of gold (ወርቅ) and silver (ብሩር) and iron (ሐዲን) and soft metal (ነጡብግብ) and tin (ናእክ). . . . From that fiery molten metal and the troubling of (the waters) in that place, the smell of sulfur was generated, and it mixed with those waters; and the valley of those angels who had led (humans) astray (እስሐቱ) burned beneath that ground. And through the valleys of that area rivers of fire issue, where those angels will be judged who led astray (እሐትዎሙ) those who dwell on the earth (*1 En.* 67.4-7).

We see again a declaration of the watchers' punishment connected to a list of earthly materials and elements. Even though *1 En.* 67.4-7 does not mention evil spirits or demons, this presentation of the angels leading humans astray to act sinfully resonates with Second Temple period Jewish expectations of demonic behavior, especially that of *Jubilees*, which itself reformulates traditions preserved in *BW*.¹³

In the beginning scenes of *Jubilees*, God tells Moses that because of the promises he made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Israelites will “eat and become satisfied” (ואכלו וישבעו).¹⁴ They will “go after foreign gods” (ופנו אל אלהים אחרים), following the gentiles (4Q216 ii, 3-4 || *Jub.* 1.8). Serving these gods will only bring the Israelites misery. They will make for themselves “high places, groves, crafted images” (במות ואשרות ופסילים), and “sacrifice their children to demons” (4Q216 ii, 10-11 || *Jub.* 1.10).¹⁵

¹² Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 275-76.

¹³ James VanderKam, *Jubilees 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), 47-53, 89.

¹⁴ Harold Attridge et al., *Qumran Cave 4. VII. Parabiblical Texts, Part 1*, DJD 13 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). The Ethiopic closely follows the Hebrew: ወደጠፈዑ : ወደጸጸዮ. See James VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees: A Critical Text*, CSCO:SAT 87 (Louvain: Peeters, 1989).

¹⁵ E: They will make for themselves “high places, groves, idols,” and “sacrifice their children to demons” (ወደዙብሐ : ወላሉ ደሙ : ለእግዚአብሔር : ወለሁሉ : ግብረ : ስሐተተ : ልቦሙ ::) (*Jub.* 1.11).

After the flood, *Jubilees* tells us that “impure spirits began to lead (አጋንንት ፡ ርኩሳን ፡ ያስሉትዎሙ) the children of Noah’s sons astray to gain power over them and to destroy them” (*Jub.* 10.1). Noah made a petition with God to protect his descendants, which led to the evil spirit chief Mastema striking a deal with God to allow only one-tenth of the evil spirits to remain upon the earth. After the destruction of the tower of Babel, idolatry becomes widespread in *Jubilees*.

They made molten images (ሰብከዋተ) for themselves, and each person worshipped the idol that he made as his own molten image. They began to make statues, images, and impure objects. The spirits of vicious creatures would assist and deceive them so that they would commit sinful, impure, and guilty acts (*Jub.* 11.4).

Here, we see another close association between evil spirits and idolatrous acts. *Jubilees* claims that Prince Mastema oversees acts of idolatry (*Jub.* 11.5). Anticipating the arguments against idolatry that we will see in Tertullian’s *Idol.* and the *Klementia* and *Recognition*, *Jubilees* asserts that Mastema uses evil spirits to “convey to those under his control the desire to carry out every kind of iniquity and sin, and every type of crime, and to corrupt, destroy, and shed blood upon the earth” (*Jub.* 11.5). Thus, though *1 En.* 67.4-5 does not explicitly mention demons or evil spirits, when placed into conversation with *Jubilees* and, as Reed has already suggested regarding *1 En.* 19.1,¹⁶ it is clearly at home with contemporary ideas about demons “leading humans astray” through idols.

Across the books of *1 Enoch*, we find various formulations of anti-idolatry ideologies. I have shown that *1 En.* 19.1 is itself likely developing the traditions found in *1 En.* 8 that stress humanity’s cultivation of the earth’s natural resources after being taught heavenly knowledge. When we consider the connection between *1 En.* 8 and 19 alongside the *Epistle of Enoch*’s condemnation of both idol manufacturers and worshippers (*1 En.* 99.6-7), we see a common pattern of castigating the utilization of the earth’s natural elements to create idols and images

¹⁶ Reed, “Uzzah, Azzah, and Azael,” 120.

within Enochic tradition.¹⁷ I suggest that as these textual traditions were circulated, condemnations of idolatry came to be associated with Enoch's prophetic authority.

Identifying this pattern also helps to explain *3 Enoch's* thematic emphasis upon idolatry. *3 Enoch*, a fifth to seventh-century C.E. pseudepigraphon, reformulates the watchers myth to cast idolatry as the worst of the antediluvian world's crimes. It suggests that idolatry became widespread throughout the world during Enosh's generation, giving rise to the flood. According to this text, the sons of Adam scoured the earth for precious metals and stones to build colossal idols (*3 En.* 5). As we will see, *3 Enoch* 5's argument against idolatry shares much in common with those employed by the second-century Christians examined in this chapter, demonstrating Enochic tradition's utility within idolatry polemics into the early middle ages. Prior to the canonization of the Old and New Testaments by Christians in the fourth century C.E., the reception of Enochic tradition flourished among Christian communities. This is evident across the second-century Christian writings discussed below, particularly Tertullian's *De idololatria*, in which Enochic authority is explicitly invoked to disparage practices of idolatry.

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr (100-165 C.E.), born in Flavia Neapolis of Syria-Palestine, converted to Christianity after his forays into different philosophical schools about the nature of God left him unsatisfied. He is best known for his *Dialogue with Trypho*, an alleged recorded conversation between himself and a Jewish refugee of the Bar Kokhba revolt, and his *Apologies*, which are defenses of Christianity addressed to the Roman emperor Antonius Pius, Verissimus (a nickname

¹⁷ Late antique Jews and Christians continue to develop the association between Enoch and idolatry's origins. We find in *3 Enoch*, for example, the idea that the spread of idolatry caused the flood after humanity harvested the earth's natural resources to construct massive idols. This late antique Jewish work shares interesting commonalities with the Pseudo-Clementine *Klementia's* account of the watchers of myth, which stresses that the angels of heaven transformed into precious stones and metals before becoming humans after they descended to the earth.

for Marcus Aurelius), and Lucius Veres.¹⁸ It is clear from his writings, which engage the teachings of the Stoics, Peripatetics, and the Platonists as well as the works of the great poets, that he was *paideia*-educated.

Before being martyred, Justin established his own school in Rome, taking on students such as Tatian. Philosophy played an important role in Justin's worldview and writings; he understood philosophy to complement the Christian's relationship with God. In the opening chapters of *Dialogue with Trypho*, for example, Justin suggests that the purpose of philosophy is to "investigate the deity," which God deems most honorable (*Dia.* 1-2).¹⁹ He presents Christianity as a type of philosophy that far exceeds all others, even Platonism, which he holds in high regard. Justin, along with Clement of Alexandria (150-215 C.E.), were among the first Christians to explicitly engage philosophy to "resist charges befitting of irrational people."²⁰ Justin's understanding of Platonism—that its goal is to "gaze upon God" (*Try.* 2.6) by dedicating one's life to the love of wisdom—accorded well with early Christian theological systems that emphasized God's transcendence. In his *Apologies*, Justin even describes Christianity as a "divine philosophy" (φιλοσοφίαν θεϊάν) (*Apol.* 2.12.5).

Throughout *Apologies*, Justin sets right illogical assumptions about Christianity by highlighting the irrational aspects of Greco-Roman traditions. Notably, he draws on discourses about the utility of myth for philosophers as was common among the Middle Platonists like Philo and Plutarch, though Justin uniquely adopts these ideas to suggest that evil spirits feeding on the

¹⁸ Denis Minns and Paul Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 34-41. For an introductory biography of Justin, see David Rokéah, *Justin Martyr and the Jews*, Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1-11.

¹⁹ St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. by Thomas b. Falls, revised and with a new introduction by Thomas P. Halton, Selections from the Fathers of the Church 3 (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

²⁰ See, for example, Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, *Origen, the Philosophical Theologian: Trinity, Christology, and Philosophy-Theology Relation*, AK 160 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2025), 91. For different academic voices on this topic, see M.J. Edwards, "On the Platonic Schooling of Justin Martyr," *JThs* 42 (1991):17-34; C.N. Nahm, "The Debate on the Platonism of Justin Martyr," *Second Century* 9 (1992): 129-51.

vapors of sacrifices are part of a grand cosmic conspiracy to thwart humanity from learning about the truth of Christianity. According to Justin, throughout history, evil spirits have been present each time the prophetic spirit (the pre-incarnate *logos*) has relayed messages to the prophets. Having heard these messages, evil spirits spread demonic imitations of them to the masses. Justin's daemonology highlights the daemonic nature of Greco-Roman religious practices, suggesting that when one offers sacrifices, they unknowingly feed evil spirits, clearly demonstrating familiarity with ideas about hungry spirits. In what follows, I examine Justin's daemonological ideas by situating them within the intellectual tradition of Philo and Plutarch,²¹ whose utilizations of hungry spirit ideas similarly reckon with concepts of *mimesis* (processes of Form imitation) and myth. I show that Justin's daemonology reflects knowledge of Enochic and Platonic daemonological ideas, offering a novel Christian characterization of evil spirits that emphasizes their weaponization of mimetic processes. In control of the material world, evil spirits sow misinformation and trick humans into offering them sacrifices.

The Logos Spermatikos and Mimesis in the Apologies

In the introduction to their critical edition of Justin's *Apologies*, Denis Minns and Paul Parvis note the peculiarity of Justin's interest in "wicked demons." Considering "Justin's claim to be a philosopher, the modern reader cannot fail to be struck by the frequency with which he makes reference to" these sorts of creatures.²² Though this critical edition was only published about fifteen years ago, this claim is quite dated.²³ Over the past three decades, religious studies scholars have sought to break away from popular nineteenth to twentieth century models that

²¹ By situating Justin within the same intellectual tradition as Philo, I am not suggesting that Justin knew or directly made use of the Philonic corpus. I am instead interested in highlighting that the two were engaging similar ideas and questions, most significantly a shared interest in daemons and Platonism.

²² Minns and Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr*, 69.

²³ On Justin's daemonology, see Annette Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity*, 149; *idem*, "The Trickery of the Fallen Angels and the Demonic Mimesis of the Divine: Aetiology, Demonology, and Polemics in the Writings of Justin Martyr," *J ECS* 12 (2004): 141-171.

emphasize angels and daemons as irrational features of religion that need to be explained away. As I suggest, if we place Justin's daemonological ideas into the same intellectual tradition of Philo and Plutarch—Middle Platonists who frequently wrote about and theorized daemons—it makes sense that Justin's philosophical self-fashioning includes copious references to evil spirits. It is clear that Justin sees no contradiction between his daemonological ideas and his rational approach to philosophical investigation.

There are two philosophical concepts informing Justin's argument in the *Apologies* that need to be elucidated before we fully unpack his daemonology: the *Logos Spermatikos* (σπερματικός λόγος), which primarily derives from Stoic philosophy, and Platonic ideas about *mimesis*. In regard to the former, Justin proposes that all of humanity has been endowed with a “seed of reason” (σπέρμα τοῦ λόγος). In other words, Justin understands that all of humanity shares a common ability to think rationally. Even though humans have always possessed this ability, the truth of the prophetic spirit, which has spoken through Moses, the Hebrew prophets, and Socrates, can only be fully realized after the incarnation of the *logos* (i.e., through the birth of Jesus). In this way,

when Justin says of pagan writers that ‘what each of them proclaimed was good, when he saw from a part of the divine spermatik logos what is connatural to it,’ he means that human rationality enabled them to perceive, though only dimly, truths or realities that are connatural with the Logos.²⁴

This enables Justin to claim that “anything good that has been said by anyone belongs to us Christians” (*Apol.* 2.13.4). Through the “presence of the implanted seed of the logos, all these writers were able to dimly see what actually is” (*Apol.* 2.13.5). Justin ends his *Apologies* with this important disclaimer about the limits of human rationality and “participation” in the “imitation” of things.

²⁴ Minns and Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr*, 66.

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For the seed of something (σπέρμα), and an imitation (μίμημα) of something—to the extent that an imitation is possible—is not the same as the thing of which the participation and imitation (μίμησις) are made, in accordance with its own bounty (*Apol.* 2.13.6).

According to Justin, rational thinking will only get you so far, which is why people should convert to Christianity. Christians, guided by the incarnate *logos*, are able to recognize the ineffable nature of the one true God. Thus, Christianity is not just one religion/philosophy among many, it is the *only* source of truth because other religious customs and philosophies are merely poor imitations of Christianity that have been relayed to the masses by evil spirits.

This brings us to the second important concept operating in Justin’s *Apologies*: *mimesis*. Philosophical conceptions of *mimesis* were popularized within Platonic discourses during the Classical age.²⁵ In particular, these ideas about imitation stem from Plato’s Allegory of the Cave in book 10 of the *Republic*.²⁶ Justin works with these ideas, noting that Socrates was said to “throw Homer and the other poets out of the city” (ἐκβαλὼν τῆς πολιτείας καὶ Ὅμηρον καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ποιητάς) (*Apol.* 2.10.6). Within this context, *mimesis* concerns the processes of Form imitation and the resultant debates that consider the types of sources people should use to philosophically investigate the truth. Because the work of artists, poets, and craftsmen are twice imitated—meaning they are two degrees removed from the perfect Form in the realm of being—Socrates argues that people should not use their works as exemplars of truth. In *Apologies*, Justin adapts and thematizes this Platonic concept to articulate his daemonological ideas in several ways.

²⁵ See, for example, Michael Herren, *The Anatomy of Myth: The Art of Interpretation from the Presocratics to the Church Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Luc Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

²⁶ Plato, *Republic, Volume II: Books 6-10*, ed. and trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, LCL 276 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

First, he uses language of imitation to defend Christians against charges of Atheism. Believing God to be something not imitable (“for we do not suppose that God has a form such that it can, as some say, be imitated to do him honor”) (*Apol.* 1.9.1), unbegotten (*Apol.* 1.14.1), and incorruptible (*Try.* 5.4), Justin explains that it is illogical and dangerous for Christians to participate in the cultic rituals of the Greek and Roman gods. He takes further issue with craftsmen using their expertise to create idols, suggesting that it insults God (*Apol.* 1.9.2-3), making similar arguments later expressed by Tertullian. The true God is ineffable, so not only are these manmade idols imitating evil spirits posing as gods, but they are made by “licentious” craftsmen who “possess every vice” (*Apol.* 1.9.4-5).²⁷ Justin appears to believe that the characteristics of immoral craftsmen are somehow imbued within the idols they manufacture, which further highlights the mimetic connection between creator and Form.

Second, Justin uses the concept of imitation to highlight proper Christian behavior. Justin rejects the idea that God would need or desire sacrificial offerings (a dig at both Greco-Roman and Jewish religious customs). He instead proposes that God only cares to “admit into his presence those who imitate (μιμουμένους) the good things that are his attributes, temperance and justice and loving-kindness and all the things proper to God, the God who has no given name” (*Apol.* 1.10.1). He “rejoices in those who imitate (μιμουμένοις) his attributes and is displeased with those who cling to evil in word or deed” (*Apol.* 2.3.1(4.1)).

Third, and most importantly, Justin proposes that evil daemons have consistently imitated the prophetic spirit’s messages through daemonic *mimesis*—that is, the processes through which evil spirits have intentionally miscommunicated the prophetic spirit’s messages about the truth of Christianity. Each time the prophetic spirit has revealed the truth, evil daemons have corrupted the message of the prophetic spirit, providing a slightly different version to spread among the

²⁷ Justin is deeply troubled that these craftsmen are known to fornicate with their slave-girl assistants.

masses. For example, Genesis 49 reads: “A ruler shall not fail from Judah...And he shall be the expectation of the nations, binding his foal to the vine, washing his garment in the blood of the grape” (*Apol.* 1.54.5). Justin argues that this prophecy relayed by the prophetic spirit to Moses, the “oldest of all writers,” was warped through daemonic mimesis to concern Dionysus, who the poets documented was the “discoverer of the vine” (*Apol.* 1.54.6). Justin provides other instances of prophecies being imitated in this way. Justin suggests that Isaiah 7:14, which he believes *clearly* foretells the birth of Jesus (“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son”), was misconstrued to refer to Perseus, who was sired when Zeus rained down upon Danaë (*II.* 14.319-20).²⁸ Justin further writes that the customs of the Cult of Mithras, handed down by wicked daemons, imitate the Christian Eucharist.

For the apostles, in the memoirs which they caused to be made, and which are called gospels, handed down in this way what Jesus commanded them. Taking bread and giving thanks, he said: ‘Do this in memory of me, this is my body,’ and taking the cup similarly and eucharistizing (εὐχαριστήσαντα) it he said: ‘This is my blood,’ and he shared it with them. The evil daemons (οἱ πονηροὶ δαίμονες), imitating (μιμησάμενοι) this in the mysteries of Mithras (ἐν τοῖς τοῦ Μίθρα μυστηρίοις), handed down that the same should be done, for you either know or are able to learn that bread and a cup of water are presented in the rites of initiation along with some accompanying words” (*Apol.* 1.66.3-4).

The initiatory rites of the Mithraic cult, relayed via evil spirits, are a warped imitation of the true Christian ritual.²⁹ It is clear from his writings that Justin sought to present Christianity as the philosophy *par excellence*. To accomplish this, he incorporates popular philosophical ideas from Platonism as part of his argumentation, likely to appeal to the supposed rationality of the Roman imperial leadership to whom the *Apologies* are addressed.

The Enchanted, Daemonic World of Justin Martyr

²⁸ On the LXX sources Justin used to articulate this point, see Oskar Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile*, NTS 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 32-35.

²⁹ These ideas are also attested in *Dia.* 70.1-2, 78.5-6.

Even though daemons feature throughout Justin's *1 Apology*, his explanation for the origin of evil spirits occurs in *2 Apology*.³⁰ His etiology of evil spirits explicitly weaves together Jewish and Platonic traditions.

When he made the whole universe, God made earthly things (τὰ ἐπίγεια) subject to human beings. He also set in order the heavenly bodies for the growth of crops and for the change of seasons, and he established for them a divine law (θεῖον νόμον). It is clear that these things he too did for the sake of human beings. But providential care over human beings and of things beneath the firmament he handed over to the angels (ἄγγέλους) whom he had established over them. But the angels transgressed (παραβάντες) this appointed order, having succumbed to intercourse with women (γυναικῶν μίξειςιν ἡττήθησαν), and begot children who are called demons (δαίμονες). They then went on to enslave (ἐδούλωσαν) the human race to themselves, partly through magical changes, partly through fear and through the punishments which they inflicted, partly through instruction about the sacrifices (θυμάτων) and incense (θυμιαμάτων) and libations (σπονδῶν)—things they have needed ever since they were enslaved by (δουλωθῆναι) passions of desire (πάθεσιν ἐπιθυμιῶν). And they sowed (ἔσπειραν) amongst humans murders, wars, adulteries, licentiousness, and every kind of evil. Hence it is that poets and storytellers (ποιηταὶ καὶ μυθολόγοι), not knowing that the things which they have recorded were done to men and women and cities and nations by the angels and the demons they begot, attributed these things to the god himself (*Apol.* 2.4(5).2-5).

When God created the cosmos, he appointed angels to preside over all things beneath the firmament (meteorological phenomena, humans, crops, and animals). Angels transgressed this appointed order to have sex with human women, siring daemons.³¹ These angels and their sons (evil daemons) went on to enslave the human race by three different methods: magic, fear, and sacrificial offerings.³² Justin explains that evil angels and daemons are dependent upon these things, themselves enslaved by the passions that are typically associated with the appetitive portion of the soul—i.e., base desires such hunger, thirst, and sex. According to this view, we can

³⁰ For an essential overview of Justin's reformulation of the watchers account, see Reed, "Trickery of Fallen Angels."

³¹ Important to note: Justin's reformulation of Enochic tradition does not reference the giants; it only speaks of "evil angels" and their daemoniac sons.

³² That the evil spirits "enslaved" humankind to lead them astray finds close parallel with the demonological ideas attested in *Jubilees*: "In the third week of this Jubilee (1583-89 AM), impure demons began to lead the children of Noah astray, to gain power over them and destroy them" (10.1-17).

suppose that evil spirits—because they benefit from sacrificial offerings, magical practices, and the fear they instill within humans they cause misery and discord among humanity to ensure the continued practice of these activities.

The general scheme of this etiology aligns well with *BW*: the evil spirits in *2 Apology* sowing strife and conflict upon the earth are similar to the spirits of the giants in *BW* who “lead astray, make violence, make desolate, and attack and wrestle and hurl upon the earth and cause illnesses” (*I En.* 15.10). Both accounts contain references to lustful angels siring evil spirits, but *Apologies* uniquely suggests that after the evil angels surrendered to their desire for earthly pleasure, they sought to enslave humanity through magic and sacrifices with their daemonic progeny.

Further, Justin’s etiology of evil spirits disparages the great poets and mythmakers, who, he claims, have inaccurately recorded the actions and characteristics of God in their popular works, which echoes Philo’s argument in *On the Giants*.³³ There is an inherent danger in blindly following what has been written by the poets and mythmakers, as they have inadvertently written about evil demons, assuming them to be gods. The evil demons, Justin suggests, are themselves responsible for this spread of misinformation to the poets and the masses.

But those who hand down the myths invented by the poets (μυθοποιηθέντα τῶν ποιητῶν) supply no demonstration at all for the youths who learn them by heart. These things we demonstrate to have been said by the working of the evil demons (ἐνέργειαν τῶν φαύλων δαιμόνων) for the deception and misdirection (ἀπάτη καὶ ἀπαγωγῇ) of the human race (*Apol.* 1.54.1).

³³ I argue elsewhere that Philo’s *On the Giants* functions as a philosophical myth modeled after the Myth of Er. I suggest that Philo used popular mythological traditions about the earth-born giants and Titans to construct his rational argument in *On the Giants*. Jewish demonological ideas attested in works like the *BW* and *Jubilees*, I suggest, were among the among the mythological traditions Philo worked with to write the treatise.

Evil spirits desire “to lead human beings away from the God who made them and from his first-begotten Christ” (*Apol.* 1.58.3). According to Justin, certain types of people are more susceptible to these daemonic plots.

And those who are not able to lift themselves up from the earth (καὶ τοὺς μὲν τῆς γῆς μὴ ἐπαίρεσθαι δυναμένους), they have fixed (προσήλωσαν) and do fix (προσηλοῦσι) upon earthly (γῆνις) and manufactured things (χειροποιήτοις), and those who strain for the contemplation of divine things they beat back insidiously, and unless these have a temperate understanding and a pure and passionless life, they cast them into impiety (εἰς ἀσέβειαν ἐμβάλλουσιν) (*Apol.* 1.58.3).

Evil demons set their sights on those full of passions and overly attached to earthly things: characteristics exemplified by the evil angels and their sons. Justin demonizes the desire for manufactured (literally “made by hand”) and earthly things, which are mere imitations of God and the heavenly Forms, suggesting such tendencies indicate a high-level of susceptibility to daemonic influence. Justin characterizes evil demons as threats to “earthly” people, which resonates with Philo’s argument in *Gig*, which suggests that earthly people are threats to humanity because they act in ways similar to evil spirits. In this way, Justin expands his definition of “earthly” behavior to encompass the worship and manufacturing of idols.

While we cannot definitely assert that Justin used the Philonic corpus to write *Apologies* and *Dialogue with Trypho*, it is clear that these two authors share an interest in certain modes of scriptural interpretation that stress the heuristic value of Platonism. We should approach Justin’s denigration of the poets and the dangers of their mythological depictions of the gods as a rhetorical feature of his efforts to present the scriptures and practices of Christianity as inherently philosophical.

Daemonic Conspiracies and Mimicries

Justin's overarching point about daemons in *Apologies*—that they have corrupted and spread imitations of the prophetic spirit's messages—begs two questions: why are these imitations so dangerous and what makes them daemonic? I want to stress a couple points on this. First, the false ideas about the gods relayed by evil spirits have led to cultic sacrifices being commonplace. Animal sacrifices, incense, and libations feed evil spirits which, in turn, allow evil daemons to continue to cause wars, destruction, and terror upon the earth. As we will see in chapters five and six, these daemonological views attested in Justin's writings become standard among later Christian authors. Themselves "enslaved by passions and desires," Justin explains, evil spirits *need* sacrifices. Across the *Apologies*, Justin engages the idea that evil daemons feed on sacrifices to demonstrate 1) the falsity of pagan religion, and 2) the truth of Christianity, whose God does not require sacrifices.

Any religious community that has offered these sorts of sacrifices (Jews, Greeks, and Romans) are thus rendered complicit in the worship of evil daemons. Justin understands the Jews, in particular, to be responsible for their part in these acts of daemonic worship. In *Dialogue with Trypho*, he explains: "Therefore, God, adapting his laws to that weak people, ordered you to offer sacrifices to his name, in order to save you from idolatry." Even to this, Justin laments, the Jews could not commit as they knowingly began to offer their own "children as sacrifices to daemons" (*Dia.* 19.6).³⁴ The Sabbath, too, was "imposed" upon the Jews to provide them the much-needed reminder to worship God. In this way, because the Jews are inherently disobedient,³⁵ God provided them the Torah to keep them in line. Christians, recognizing the truth of Christianity, necessitate no such measures. As Reed notes, where the Jews have

³⁴ See also *Dia.* 46.6, 73.6, 153.1.

³⁵ Reed, "Trickery of Fallen Angels," 168-71. Similar ideas animate the Epistle of Barnabas' framework.

knowingly disobeyed God, the pagan gentiles, while still complicit, are ignorant of their participation in daemonic worship, having been manipulated by them.³⁶

Second, the misinformation spread by the evil spirits, which resulted in the emergence of other religious practices, makes it difficult for Christians to highlight the true value of their religion to potential converts. Put another way, through processes of daemonic *mimesis*, which render the prophetic spirit's messages as imitated half-truths, other religious traditions share just enough in common with Christianity that people might not feel the need to denounce their traditional religious practices. This manufactured sense of "sameness,"³⁷ which could be understood positively in terms of globalism or diversity, is actually a feature of the conspiratorial efforts of evil daemons, who desire to keep the masses from benefiting from the rationality one can achieve through Christianity. Converting to Christianity does not only help the individual, but the Christian collective, which, according to Justin, has been tirelessly fighting against the daemons. As more people convert to Christianity, learning the truth about this cosmic conspiracy, the power of the evil spirits will subside, lessening the amount of persecution that Christians face.

Justin's writings play an important part in the reception of Enochic traditions. Writing at the turn of the second century, Justin pulls on Enochic tradition freely. He stresses the dangers of the material world and its idols, using the fallen angel myth and the evil spirit etiology of Enochic tradition in ways consistent with Philo of Alexandria. Though Philo argues against the existence of evil spirits in *Gig*, like Justin, he frames traditions about the fallen angels in terms of "earthly" danger. For Philo, the "earth-born"

³⁶ Reed notes that Justin "sees the Jewish condition as marred by a long history of deliberate disobedience to God's commandments; just as Eve 'brought forth disobedience' by succumbing to the Serpent (*Dial* 100), so Jews now turn away from God and towards the demons through their own free will," "Trickery of Fallen Angels," 168.

³⁷ I use Reed's language of "sameness" here, "Trickery of Fallen Angels," 164.

are those too attached to the pleasures of the body. Justin's writings attest this core idea, but evil spirits are essential to how he expresses the threat of earthly people: too attached to the material world and the pleasure it offers, Justin contends, earthly people are highly susceptible to daemonic influence, which makes them the target of daemonic attacks. When daemons set their sights on earthly people, they trick and tempt them to offer sacrifices so that they can feed upon them.

Material Arguments against Idolatry

Taken together, Justin employs Enochic tradition to stress the materiality of idol worship. When we place these ideas into conversation with contemporary philosophical debates about matter and its relationship with evil, it helps us to more fully understand the weight behind these Christian adaptations of Enochic tradition within their anti-idolatry polemics.

Plutarch understood God to be "eternal, unchanging, non-composite, [and] uncontaminated by Matter."³⁸ In the *Life of Romulus*, for example, he explains: "But the soul, which is contaminated with body, and surfeited with body, like a damp and heavy exhalation, is slow to release itself and slow to rise towards its source" (28.8).³⁹ In his *On the Special Laws*, Philo expresses that God did not take part in the creation of all things because of his happy and blessed nature, which prohibited him from touching the "limitless chaotic matter (ὄλης)" (*Spec.* 1.329).⁴⁰ Moderatus of Gades (first century C.E.), a Neopythagorean interested in reformulating Plato's philosophy, writes that "matter is evil, insofar as it is in retreat from the good."⁴¹ And, to

³⁸ Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 199.

³⁹ Plutarch, *Lives, Volume I: Theseus and Romulus. Lycurgus and Numa. Solon and Publicola*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, LCL 46 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914).

⁴⁰ Philo, *On the Decalogue. On the Special Laws, Books 1-3*, trans. F.H. Colson, LCL 320 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937).

⁴¹ Preserved secondarily in Simplicius's *On Aristotle's Physics* 230.34-231.24. For text and translation, see Simplicius, *On Aristotle's Physics*, ed. H. Diels, CAG Vols. 9 and 10 (Berlin: 1882, 1895).

return to Celsus' point about the spread of evil that opened this chapter, "evils do not come from God: they are associated with matter and reside among humans" (*C.Cels.* 4.65).

Thus, Christians like Justin employed philosophical debates about matter and evil to argue against idolatry. Indeed, as portions of *BW*, *Similitudes*, and *the Epistle of Enoch* circulated, the illicit instruction motif became associated with idolatry. However, it is specifically within the writings of philosophically trained Christians that we begin to see arguments against the production and worship of idols because of their materiality. For Christians familiar with Platonic debates about matter's relationship with evil, Enochic tradition's major themes were readily translatable. The *BW*'s emphasis upon the boundaries between heaven and earth lent itself to platonically informed interpreters like Justin adapting aspects of Enochic tradition to demonstrate the danger of being too attached to earthly experiences and things. Second-century Christians played upon the heaven/earth and spirit/flesh dualisms inherent to the *BW* to express that the material world—a place full of flesh, passions, and manmade monuments and idols dedicated to false gods—is rife with evil.