

Satan and Māra: Christian and Buddhist Symbols of Evil*

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The nature and meaning of what the early Christians and Buddhists experienced and defined as "evil" constitutes an important aspect of their religious experience. As counter to what they experienced as ultimately good and true, the experience of evil offers an alternate perspective from which to view and better to understand the meaning of the Christian "salvation in Christ" or the Buddhist "realization of the Dharma" as taught by the Buddha. Recent studies in the symbolism of evil,¹ and more specifically, an analysis of the symbols of Satan and Māra,² have not only demonstrated the intrinsic merit of such considerations but have also revealed the need for further scholarship in this area.²

This study of the early Christian and Buddhist symbols of evil, Satan and Māra, is based on an examination of selected literature that falls within the formative period of each tradition (ca. 100 B.C.—ca. 350 A.D.). In this early period the canonical literature of Christians and Theravādin Buddhists as well as important *sutras* of Mahāyāna Buddhists were written. Given the great diversity and amount of literature that falls within this period, a selection of texts was made based on the following criteria: (1) the text must have material relevant to the topic, (2) the texts selected should be representative of earlier and later literature and should reflect different types of writings, and (3) the texts should provide a suitable basis of comparison with the other religious tradition.³

Analysis of the texts proceeded as follows. Passages which described the activities of the chief figures of evil were grouped according to characteristic verbs and verb phrases of which Satan or Māra (or established related names) were the grammatical or contextual subjects. Passages which described the nature and power of Satan and

*A fuller treatment of this topic appears in the author's book by the same title (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975).

1. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. by E. Buchanan, New York: Harper and Row 1967; James Kallas, *The Satanward View: A Study in Pauline Theology*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968.
2. T. O. Ling, *The Significance of Satan*, London: SPCK, 1960, and *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962.
3. The selected Christian literature includes the New Testament, the Apostolic Fathers, and several of the early Greek Fathers. Specific texts considered are: *New Testament; Epistles of Ignatius; Epistle of Polycarp to the Phillippians; The Martyrdom of Polycarp; Epistle of Barnabas; Visions, Mandates, Similitudes of the Shepherd of Hermas; Justin Martyr's First and Second Apologies*, and the *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew; Irenaeus' Against Heresies; Origen's De Principiis and Against Celsus*. Texts selected from the Buddhist literature include portions of the Pali Canon, and Sarvāstivādin, Mahāsaṅghika, and Yogācārin Sanskrit literature. Specific texts considered are: the Pali *Nikāyas; Mahāvastu, Lalita Vistara; Aśvaghōṣa's Buddha Carita; Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā, Saddharma Puṇḍarika; Nāgārjuna's Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra; Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośa; Asaṅga's Srāvakabhūmi.*

Māra were grouped according to titles and phrases which were characteristic throughout the selected literature in both traditions. In this manner a general portrait of the activities, nature and power of Satan and Māra was derived.

Interpreting these mythological portraits as expressions of real dimensions of the early Christian and Buddhist experience of evil, these stories of the activities, nature and power of Satan and Māra can be understood as a means of identifying the various kinds of experiences each tradition considered evil as well as serving as symbolic expressions of the general character of those experiences.⁴ The meaning and etymological background of the terms Satan, Māra, and Evil One (Gr. *ponēros*; Skt. *pāpimā*), furthermore, are found to be explications of concepts central to each tradition's understanding of evil.⁵ The following interpretive comparison of the dominant motifs in Christian and Buddhist mythology deals with basic similarities and differences between their respective accounts of experiences of evil as well as their understanding of the nature of "evil" (*ponēros*; *pāpa*).

A. Kinds of Experiences of Evil

A comparative analysis of the texts discloses that similarities between early Christian and Buddhist experiences of evil are found on the level of general characteristics; however, specific aspects of their respective accounts of such experiences show important differences. On the general level, both the early Christians and Buddhists had similar experiences of "evil" when they were urged or felt inclined toward actions which were not in accord with what they regarded as ultimately good and true.

For example, in the New Testament gospels Satan tempted Jesus to work miracles, to fly from the roof of the temple, or to seek to be the "prince of the world," all of which were actions appropriate to popular messianic expectations but not to Jesus' own understanding of his mission.⁶ Satan is referred to by St. Paul as "the tempter" who entices men from their faith.⁷ Among the Greek Fathers Origen also views Satan's temptations as a means of putting the followers of Jesus to the test.⁸

4. When I use the expression "experience of evil" I mean to include interpretive elements as well as the experience *per se*. The term "mythology" is to be understood as connoting stories about "the actions of gods or of beings conceived as divine or possessed of divine attributes" (*mythos*); cf. Webster's *New International Dictionary*, 2nd. ed., 1958. This basic usage is to be distinguished from the term "mythical" (*mythikos*) which connotes "arbitrarily invented . . . imaginary stories."
5. It is to be understood that we are dealing with these concepts within the context of the respective mythologies of each tradition. This point is especially important when considering the Buddhist term *pāpa*. We shall not be discussing the general sense of the term *pāpa* ("evil") as it is used in Buddhist ethics for example, but only as it is given meaning by the Māra mythology.
6. Mk. 1: 13; Mt. 4: 3-10; Lk. 4: 3-12.
7. I Thess. 3:5; I. Cor. 7:5; cf. also: *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho a Jew*, trans. M. Dods and G. Reith in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* [hereafter ANCL], Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1867-1895, p. 112; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, trans. A. Roberts and W. H. Rambaut, ANCL, II, 112; Origen, *De Principiis*, trans. F. Crombie, ANCL, I, 224. For the Greek text of the writings of the Greek Fathers cf. J. P. Migne's *Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Graeca*, Paris, 1857-1887, VI, VII, XI. The Loeb Classical Library Series on *The Apostolic Fathers* provides on alternate pages the Greek and the English translation by K. Lake.
8. *De Principiis*, I, 224.

Likewise, the Buddhist Pali texts record episodes in which Māra urges Gotama to become a universal king and establish a great empire of peace⁹—certainly an acceptable social goal, but not the goal of one on the direct Path to freedom (*nirvāṇa*) and Enlightenment (*bodhi*). The Sanskrit literature also relates how Māra encourages man's inclinations toward worldly and "religious" values which lead away from the Path of the Buddha. The *Mahāvastu*, e.g., quotes Māra as saying to the Buddha (a query applicable to the followers of the Buddha as well): "What wilt thou gain by this striving? Go and live at home..... (and) when thou diest thou wilt rejoice in heaven and wilt beget great merit."¹⁰

The specific manner in which this type of conflict with traditional religious and social values was described, however, differs between the two traditions. The Christian characteristically spoke of being tempted (*peirazō*) by Satan, whereas the Buddhist referred to man's "inclinations" toward values and desires of this world (*kāmesu namati*) promoted by Māra. The term "temptation" (*peirazō*) means, principally, "being put to the test," meeting an external challenge. When used in connection with Satan, "temptation" also connotes "enticement to sin."¹¹ The Christian experienced a "testing" of his total orientation to life, an enticement away from his faith. The Buddhist term "inclination" (*namati*), on the other hand, as it is developed in the literature, emphasizes one's own inclinations—essentially misdirected natural instincts on the part of man—which remove him from the Buddhist perspective and lead him into the pursuit of alien values.¹²

In these first examples, it is notable that evil, for both the founders of these traditions and their followers, is integrally related to what each considers Holy and True.¹³ As faithful followers of Jesus, Christians view as evil that which is disruptive of their desire to realize a full life in Christ. Jesus himself regarded any form of enticement away from his messianic goal as the work of Satan.¹⁴ Those who follow the

9. *The Book of Kindred Sayings*, trans. Mrs. Rhys Davids and F. L. Woodward. Pali Text Society [hereafter PTS], London: Luzac and Co., 1950, I, 146; *Samyutta-Nikāya*, PTS ed., I, 116.
10. *Mahāvastu*, trans. J. J. Jones, *Sacred Books of the Buddhists* [hereafter SBB] London Luzac and Co., II, 224-225; III, 418; cf. also: *The Buddha Carita of Asvaghosha*, trans. E. B. Cowell, *Sacred Books of the East* [hereafter SBE], London: Oxford University Press, 1927, XIII, 138; XV, 163; *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā (The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Slokas)*, trans. E. Conze, Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1958 XVII, 123.
11. W. Arndt and F. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed., 1952, "peirazō," p. 646.
12. The verb *namati* (bend down, or incline) as it appears in the *Samyutta-Nikāya*, I, 116 (cf. above, n.9), is in the optative mood, third person singular (*nameyya*). In such a case the verb form has neither a causative nor passive implication, and in this context refers to man's inclination to sense desires rather than man's being "enticed" to sense desires by some external cause. As far as can be ascertained from the texts selected for this study there is no Pali or Sanskrit term used in conjunction with Māra's activities which is equivalent in meaning to the Greek verb *peirazō* (putting to the test by enticement to sin).
13. The terms "Holy" and "True" refer respectively to the Christian theological and Buddhist philosophical orientations, although both terms are regarded as correlates in each religious tradition.
14. Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men" (Mk. 8 : 33; Mt. 16 : 23) when Peter rebuked Jesus for saying that the Son of man must suffer many things. Peter was putting Jesus' messianic understanding to the test and consequently was doing the work of Satan.

Path of the Buddha and seek to attain perfect wisdom (*prajñā*) and freedom (*nirvāṇa*), likewise regard whatever inclines one away from this purpose as "evil." In both traditions, evil is essentially a disruptive break in the bond between man and what he considers sacred.¹⁵ However, having once stated this, we must also keep in mind that the difference between "temptation," a term for which there is no exact equivalent in the selected Buddhist literature,¹⁶ and "inclination," is suggestive of differences in the two estimates of evil.¹⁷

Another kind of experience of evil broadly similar in both traditions concerns problems internal to the religious community. When the religious doctrine or teaching was misrepresented or the unity of the church or sangha challenged, such events constituted evil. The Apostolic and Greek Fathers especially warned against what the New Testament refers to as the spirit of error which seeks to take away the Word that has been sown in men's hearts so that weeds may grow in its place.¹⁸ St. Ignatius of Antioch admonishes the Ephesians: may "no plant of the devil be found in you." He criticizes the Docetists who are inspired by the Devil, and condemns the Judaizers as instruments of the Devil.¹⁹ Irenaeus states even more specifically: "Let those persons.... who blaspheme the Creator, either by openly expressed words, such as the disciple of Marcion, or by the perversion of the sense (of Scripture), as those of Valentinus and all the Gnostics falsely so called, be recognized as agents of Satan."²⁰

The Buddhist Māra sought to "blur the vision" and "darken the understanding" of the followers of the Path by various means. The Sanskrit *Perfection of Wisdom* literature, e.g., defines as activities of Māra the disruption of proper relations between teachers and pupils, the promotion of "bad opinions" such as maintaining "being"

15. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 5, defines evil as the "crisis" in "the bond between man and what he considers sacred." I have chosen to use the more general term "disruptive" rather than "crisis" in that the former is applicable to the Buddhist as well as Christian experience.
16. Cf. above, n. 12.
17. Of less importance, but of descriptive interest, are the different types of conflict that occurred between early Christians and their contemporaries and early Buddhists and their Indian contemporaries. Christians were subject to the "terrible torments" (*deinas kolaseis*) of martyrdom, such as struggling with wild beasts or having limbs mangled, all of which were seen as instigated by Satan. (Cf. *Ignatius to the Romans*, trans. K. Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers* [hereafter AF], Loeb Classical Library, ed. E. Capps, et al., New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1925, I, 223). The Buddhists, however, were subject to verbal rather than bodily abuse. Brahmins and householders, believed by the Buddhists to be possessed by Māra, "replied, abused, vexed and annoyed" (*akkosanti paribhāsanti rosentī vihesenti*) them, taunting them about their pretended purities or scornfully claiming that greater merit than they had respect for traditional views. (Cf. *The Middle Length Sayings*, trans. I. B. Horner, PTS, London: Luzac and Co., 1954, I, 397-398; *Majjhīma-Nikāya*, PTS ed., I, 334). Despite these differences, the intended effect was similar, namely, to bring about a denial of faith in Christ or to disrupt efforts to follow the Path of the Buddha.
18. I Jn. 4 : 6; Mk. 4 : 15; Mt. 13 : 19, 25.
19. *Ignatius to the Ephesians*, AF, I, 185, 191, 193; *Ignatius to the Philadelphians*, AF, I, 245; *Ignatius to the Magnesians*, AF, I, 197; *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians*, AF, I, 293.
20. *Against Heresies*, II, 127; cf. also I, 72. Caution against being deceived is prevalent throughout the early tradition: Mt. 24 : 4, 5, 11, 24; Mk. 13 : 5ff.; Jn. 7 : 12; I Jn. 2 : 26; 3 : 7; Rev. 2 : 20, 13 : 14; 19 : 20, 20 : 3, 8, 10; *Dialogue*, 96, *First Apology*, 56; *De Principiis*, I, 241; *Against Heresies*, II, 127. The term "Devil," which comes from the Greek word *diabolos* used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew *sātan*, means the "slanderer" and "deceiver." Cf. Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 181.

where there is only emptiness, as well as false understandings of the very teaching of "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*).²¹ The Pali literature narrates how Māra attempts to undermine the disciples, confidence in the Buddha and seeks to make the Buddha perplexed by challenging the authenticity of his Enlightenment.²²

The early Christians characteristically speak of this type of experience as being "deceived by lies" (*planaō, pseudos*), whereas early Buddhists talk of being "confused and perplexed" (*vicakkhukamma, vicakṣukarma*). Again this difference is related, in the final analysis, to different understandings of the Holy and True. The early Christians experienced the Holy in their relation to an historical personage, Jesus, whose life and events could be narrated and their religious significance defined. The error and delusion of false doctrine resulted from the failure of heretical teachings to articulate properly the true religious significance of the Christ event in history. Hence heretics were "deceived by lies." Buddhist language didn't become "doctrinal" in the Christian sense, basically because of the Buddhist attitude that language was fundamentally soteriological in function and meaning. Buddhist language is always most correctly understood to be simply a means toward achieving the ineffable truth; conceptual constructs can in no way "contain" the truth itself.²³ The Buddhist experienced a "blurring" of his vision of the Path and found misunderstandings between teachers and pupils "confusing and perplexing," hence evil, but did not consider them "lies" which misrepresented an historical, definitive truth.

Still another kind of experience of evil relates to illness and natural calamities. Rarely are disease and infirmity directly linked with the primary symbols of evil in either tradition. Satan is seldom cited as the cause of illness and on only one occasion in the selected texts is Māra the direct cause of illness.²⁴ However, there is an indirect association of Satan and Māra with illness and natural disasters, an association which is stronger among early Christians than among Buddhists. The problems of cold, hunger, thirst, and heat are occasionally cited by the Buddhists as the external armies of Māra,²⁵ and inconveniences (*ādinava*) such as distress, pain and uneasiness are termed the "fetters of Māra."²⁶ The early Christians speak more prevalently of demonic possession as the cause of certain kinds of illness, and understand this possession to be an extension of Satan's effort (as the ruler of demons) to seduce men from God.

21. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, XXX, 202ff.; XXVII, 125; XI, 87; III, 29-30; *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, ed. R. Mitra, Calcutta; Asiatic Society, 1888, XXX, 483; XXVI, 331; XI, 240; III, 78. Cf. also *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu*, trans. L. de la Vallée Poussin, Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1923-1926, IX, 249; *Mahāvastu*, III, 417; *Le Mahāvastu* (Texte Sanscrit), ed. E. Sonart, III, 416.

22. *Kindred Sayings*, I, 137-139; *Samyutta-Nikāya*, I, 110-111.

23. For a discussion of this point see Frederick J. Streng, "The Problem of Symbolic Structures in Religious Apprehension," *History of Religions*, 1964, IV (1) : 126-153.

24. Lk. 13 : 16 refers to a woman bound with an infirmity for eighteen years by Satan; other passages are not as explicit: Acts 10 : 38; I Cor. 5 : 5; II Cor. 12 : 7; I Tim. 1 : 20. The overall tendency in the selected literature is to regard possession as a demonic function and not an activity of Satan. *The Middle Length Sayings*, I, 395, relates that Māra entered the Venerable Moggallāna's stomach and caused severe discomfort.

25. For example, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna* (*Mahāprajñāpāra mitāśāstra*), trans. É. Lamotte, Louvain: Bureaux du Muséon, 1944, 1949, II, 906.

26. *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*, I, 346.

Physical infirmities are attributed to "spirits of infirmity" and "unclean demons," and Jesus' healing is described as a driving out of demons.²⁷

The fact that illness and natural disorders are sometimes regarded in both traditions as evil, though peripherally so, may be due simply to the negative effect illness has upon one's energies and actions which hinder him from pursuing the religious life. The early Christian was more likely to experience illness and natural calamities as disruptive evil than was the Buddhist, however, because of the difference in basic attitudes toward the nature of man's present existence in relation to the Holy and True. From the perspective of the Enlightened Buddhist, life is essentially *dukkha* (suffering and ill); hence illness and disease are manifestations of a basic condition which one must radically break through (*nirvāṇa*). To realize the truth of suffering (*dukkha*) is a step on the Path to Enlightenment rather than an obstruction to it. The early Christian's evaluation of this life, on the other hand, is that it is fundamentally good, or at least originally so, as it is the creation of the one true God. Any perversion of this initial condition, such as illness and disease, is unnatural and hence some account has to be given of it, while the Buddhist has no need to give a similar account. He is prepared to take it as a "given," while the Christian is not.

Mental attitudes and emotional states ranging from slothfulness and lustful pleasures to anger and irreligious sentiments are also broadly associated with the experience of evil by followers of both traditions. The *Shepherd of Hermas*, for example, says: "when ill temper or bitterness come upon you..... [or] the desire of many deeds and the luxury of much eating and drinking..... and desire of women, and covetousness and haughtiness, and pride..... know that the angel of wickedness [Satan] is with you."²⁸ Origen in turn refers to those "wicked suggestions" that deprave a sentient and intelligent soul with thoughts of various kinds persuading it to evil, the example par excellence being the suggestion of the devil to Judas that resulted in his betrayal of Jesus.²⁹

Likewise the Buddhists frequently refer to Māra as the fisherman who uses fleshbaited hooks of "gains, favours, flattery," and binds all by lust, anger, or desire.³⁰ The Pali literature quotes Māra's command to his host who are surrounding the Lord and the Great Brahmā: "Come on! And seize and bind me these, let all be bound by lust!"³¹ "Womanhood" and "anger's loathsome form which lurks in the heart" are also understood as Māra's snares.³² Sanskrit works frequently refer to persons being "beset by Māra," such as those who are unpractised, plant no wholesome roots, or keep bad friends.³³

27. Mt. 7 : 22; 9 : 34; 10 : 8; Mk. 1 : 34, 39; Lk. 9 : 49; 11 : 14ff.; 18ff.; 13 : 32; *Shepherd of Hermas, Mandates*, AF, II, 87-89; Origen, *Against Celsus*, ANCL, II, 517. Satan is frequently called the "ruler of demons" in the gospels: Mt. 9 : 34; 12 : 24; Mk. 3 : 22; Lk. 11 : 15.

28. *Shepherd of Hermas, Mandates*, II, 97-99.

29. *De Principiis*, I, 241-242; cf. also: *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, AF, II, 317.

30. *Kindred Sayings*, II, 153, 154; *Dialogues of the Buddha*, SBB, II, 293.

31. *Dialogues of the Buddha*, II, 293; *Dīgha-Nikāya*, PTS ed., II, 262.

32. *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, trans. F. L. Woodward and E. M. Hare, PTS, London: Luzac & Co., 1966, II, 61; III, 56; *Anguttara-Nikāya*, PTS ed., II, 52; Ii, 68; cf. also: *Kindred Sayings*, II, 153-154; *Samyutta-Nikāya*, II, 226-227.

33. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, VII, 60; VIII, 62; *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, VII, 184; VIII, 186; cf. also: XVII, 128, XXI, 153-154; *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*, II, 844.

The Christian usually speaks of these experiences as "hindrances" and "obstructions" (*egkoptō*) to the realization of a true life in Christ. The Buddhist, similarly, refers to such experiences as "obstacles" (*āvaraṇa*) or "interruptions" (*antarāya*) brought about by Māra so as to swerve a person from the Path, as when thoughts about the teaching or meditational practices are disturbed by internal desires or external nuisances.³⁴ The Christian, however also speaks of his being "instigated" (*hypoballō*) by Satan into ill-temper or similar attitudes.³⁵ That is, in early Christian literature there is an expressed sense of experiencing an emotion, such as lustful pleasure, as an obstacle to a truer life, yet being incited or urged into such a course of action by a power adverse to one's well-being.³⁶ The Buddhist, on the other hand, though he experiences interruptive, unwholesome attitudes as obstacles to the pursuit of the Path, views them not so much as predicaments into which one is urged, but rather as manifestations of what one is already bound to (*baddhatū*) just by the fact of existing. The intoxicating powers of lust, anger and intemperance are described by the Buddhist as "snakes" (*pāsa*) and "fetters" (*saṃyojana*) which bind him to *samsaric* existence and deny him access to the freedom of Enlightenment.

Again it is the difference in basic attitudes toward the nature of man's present existence as evaluated from the perspective of the Holy and True that explains this difference between early Christians and Buddhists. The Christian considers this present existence as inherently good (cf. the Doctrine of Creation). Actions and attitudes which obstruct or hinder one from the realization of that good are not an integral part of the nature of existence and therefore are accounted for in terms of an external instigating power opposed to the proper course of life. The Buddhist, however, judges ordinary existence as an inherently imperfect mode of being (cf. the Noble Truth of *dukkha*). Actions and attitudes which interrupt one's progress toward Enlightenment are therefore examples of the internal character of *samsaric* existence itself, further manifestations of the very bondage from which he seeks to free himself. For this reason the Buddhist regards unwholesome states of intemperance, etc., as more serious experiences of evil than does the Christian. Anger, lust, etc., are instances of a more pervasive evil: the desire that intoxicates the human condition and so perpetuates an existence full of suffering. These unwholesome states are not merely external obstructions to an inherently good life. They are symptomatic of an inherently imperfect mode of existence which is the very antithesis of what the Buddhist considers Holy and True.

All of the above kinds of experiences were associated with the activities of a Satan or Māra. The function of these symbolic references to the activities of the two mythological figures was thus to identify the varied kinds of experiences regarded as evil as well as to emphasize their common character as being disruptive of efforts to relate to or attain the Holy and True as perceived by each tradition. The two

34. *Śrāvakabhūmi of Asaṅga*, trans. Alex Wayman, "Studies in Yama and Māra," *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 1959, III: 112-113.

35. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, II, 335; *De Principiis*, I, 241-242.

36. "Instigate" means "to incite, to urge on," in contrast to "possess" which means "to enter into" (*eiserchomai*). "Instigate" is also to be distinguished from "tempt;" the latter means "to put to the test through enticement," the former means "to spur into action by inciting."

mythological episodes which are most illustrative of this disruptive characteristic are Satan's temptation of Jesus and Māra's attack on Gotama. These two episodes are frequently referred to throughout the early literature of each tradition and epitomize what each tradition understood to be the fundamental nature of evil, namely, a power opposing and disruptive of what each considered the truest expression of the ultimate—the person of Christ and the insight wisdom attained and taught by the Buddha.

B. Character of Experiences of Evil

The mythological descriptions of the nature and power of Satan and Māra suggest further that the existential character of these varied kinds of experiences of evil is also symbolically portrayed in these two mythologies. Descriptions of the nature and power of Satan and Māra articulate symbolically the general nature and power of the experiences of evil themselves. A comparison of the Buddhist and Christian mythologies discloses a basic similarity as well as difference between them. What might be termed a numinal sense of *mysterium* and *tremendum*, an overplus of meaning eluding conceptual apprehension, is similarly conveyed in both mythologies. First this similarity will be discussed before moving to a consideration of the difference.

The *tremendum* aspect of the experience is mythologically expressed in the great power and influence Satan and Māra have over man and the world. Satan is the ruler of demons and the ruler of this world (*kosmos*),³⁷ which includes the "world rulers" (*kosmokrates*) of this darkness,³⁸ the "elemental spirits of the universe" (*stoicheia tou kosmou*)³⁹ and the world as mankind—the sum of the totality of human possibilities and relationships.⁴⁰ The extent and authority (*exousia*) of Satan's reign is vast, hence he is appropriately called the "god of this age" whose power (*dynamis*) inspires all evil "rule, authority, and power" in the heavenly places as well as on earth, from the beginning of this present evil age (*aiōn*) to its end.⁴¹

The Buddhist Māra, likewise, holds man in his power (*balam*) and commands a fearful host of demons. Māra is the lord of the world of desire (*kāmaloka*) which is comprised of six classes of *devas* as well as "the world below with its recluses and

37. Jn. 12 : 31; Mt. 9 : 34; *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, II, 399; *De Principiis*, I, 52.

38. Eph. 6 : 12. The term "world rulers" occurs only in this passage in the New Testament and probably refers to angelic world rulers who according to Jewish belief controlled various departments of the universe and were conceived as subordinate to one great prince of evil; cf. Francis X. Gokey, *The Terminology for the Devil and Evil Spirits in the Apostolic Fathers*, Washington, D. C. : The Catholic University of America Press, 1961, p. 52.

39. Gal. 4 : 3, 9. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951-1955, I, 173, says that the "elemental spirits of the universe" are "conceived to be in essence star-spirits" who "govern the elapse and division of time." Cf. also G. H. C. Macgregor, "Principalities and Powers: The Cosmic Background of Paul's Thought," *New Testament Studies*, 1954, I : 17-28.

40. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, I, 255. Cf. also, T. O. Ling, *The Significance of Satan*, London: SPCK, 1960, p. 32.

41. Eph. 2 : 2; 1 : 21; II Cor. 4 : 4; *Ignatius to the Ephesians*, I, 187; *Dialogue*, 258. The Greek Fathers especially make explicit the association between Satan and the serpent who appeared at the beginning of time and the anti-Christ who will dominate the end-days of time Cf. *De Principiis*, I, 222; *Against Heresies*, II, 123.

brahmins, its princes and peoples....."⁴² His realm, as death's realm (*maccudheyya*), however, extends beyond the *Kāmaloka* to the *Rūpa* and *Arūpa* worlds.⁴³ The whole substrata of rebirth and death, in other words, are within Māra's domain. The Pali texts say of Māra's army that they can hunt and seek "in every sphere of life;"⁴⁴ simply to "drift along life's stream" is to be subject to Māra.⁴⁵ And not only is the entire "triple world.... assailed by Māra, the Evil One,"⁴⁶ but a succession of *devas* filling the Māra position continues this domain throughout the cyclic process of *samsara*.⁴⁷ Thus the Buddha has said: "I consider no power, brethren, so hard to subdue as the power of Māra" (*Māra bālaṃ*).⁴⁸

These aspects of the Satan and Māra mythologies express the feeling of encountering a power that precedes, outlives and extends far beyond the reach of an individual's life; a despotic and infectious power of such magnitude that an acute sense of impotence or even captivity to this power is experienced. This is a sense of *tremendum*.⁴⁹

A numinal sense of *mysterium* is conveyed in the portraits of the nature and abode of Satan and Māra. Satan is called the "prince of the power of the air," the ruler of "spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."⁵⁰ This reference by St. Paul to "heavenly places" suggests that he shared the common Jewish opinion of the lower atmosphere being the dwelling place of fallen angels.⁵¹ Irenaeus also refers to the Devil as "one among those angels who are placed over the spirit of the air."⁵² In addition to this heavenly abode, Satan is also conceived as a "spiritual" reality which is unlike man's form and mode of existence. Unlike man, Satan cannot

42. *Kindred Sayings*, I, 167; *Dialogues of the Buddha*, II, 12. Cf. also, L. de la Vallée Poussin, "Cosmogony and Cosmology (Buddhist)," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* [hereafter ERE], 1955, IV : 129-138.
43. *Middle Length Sayings*, I, 277, 279; *Kindred Sayings*, I, 135-136; *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka* (*The Lotus of the True Law*), trans. H. Kern, SBE, London: Oxford University Press, 1909, XIII, 275. Buddhaghosa, in his commentary (*Papañcasūdanī Majjhimanikāyatthakatha of Buddhaghosacarīya*, London: Oxford University Press, 1928, II, 266) applies the term *tebhūmaka* to both Māra's realm and Death's realm; the term "refers to the three stages of being, the *kāma*, *rūpa*, *arūpa* existences." Cf. T. W. Rhys Davids, *Pali-English Dictionary*, PTS, London: Luzac & Co., 1959, p. 306.
44. *Kindred Sayings*, I, 141.
45. *Woven Cadences of Early Buddhists*, trans. E. M. Hare, SBB, London: Oxford University Press, 1947, V, 764.
46. *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka*, XII, 275.
47. Among former Māras, Dūsī Māra is sometimes mentioned. Cf. *Middle Length Sayings*, I, 396.
48. *Dialogues of the Buddha*, III, 76.
49. The Pali expresses this sense of *tremendum* vividly in the phrase describing Māra's desire to make the Exalted One "feel dread and horror and creeping of the flesh" (*bhayaṃ chambhitattam lomahaṃsam*). Cf. *Kindred Sayings*, I, 129, 130, 160-164; *Samyutta-Nikāya*, I, 104, 128-131. Likewise, the mythological descriptions of Māra's attack upon the bodhisattva (Cf. 'The Māra Suttas,' *Kindred Sayings*, I, 128-159) and the apocalyptic vision of the fearful host of demons in the Book of Revelation (Cf. Rev. 9 : 7-11) give expression to this dimension of experiences of evil.
50. Eph. 2:2; 6 : 12; cf. also *Against Heresies*, II, 821; *De Principiis*, I, 151.
51. Cf. above, n. 38, 39; below n. 70.
52. *Against Heresies*, II, 121. Irenaeus also associates "spiritual wickedness" with "the angels who transgressed and became apostates." Cf. *Against Heresies*, I, 42.

be perceived by the physical senses,⁵³ and he is capable of deeds which are beyond man's capabilities, e.g., possession.⁵⁴

These qualitative differences between man and the chief figure of evil are also characteristic of Māra the Evil One. Māra is a *deva* (god) of the highest class of *devas* in the *Kāmaloka*; he is the chief of the *Paranirmitavaśavartin devas* who occupy the highest heavens in the world of desire.⁵⁵ His abode is far above Mt. Meru, the center of the Buddhist universe.⁵⁶ As a *deva*, Māra has a mind-made body which, unlike that of a human being is not "born of a father and mother," and is superior to the human form which is nothing but ".....a heap of boiled rice and sour milk,subject to rubbing, massaging, sleep, dissolution, disintegration and destruction."⁵⁷ In contrast, Māra's body is self-luminous, long-lived, does not cast a shadow, and like Satan, is capable of deeds far beyond the powers of man.⁵⁸

In other words, there is a dimension to experiences of evil that lends itself to mythological descriptions of realms qualitatively different from man, numinal dimensions beyond the horizon of the usual, the intelligible and the familiar—a sense of *mysterium*. The Satan and Māra mythologies are thus symbolic expressions of the general character of early Christian and Buddhist experiences of evil. So that when St. Paul, for example, speaks of Satan as hindering him from visiting the church at Thessalonica,⁵⁹ or when he was kept from being too elated in his work because of the harrassments and hindrances placed in his way by Satan,⁶⁰ the reference to Satan is a means of articulating in-depth realities of that experience. In these particular hindrances Paul experienced not simply disappointment and frustration. There was also a real sense of his own impotence in the face of a radically unintelligible and profane power which was hostile to him and his efforts to visit fellow Christians. The Satan mythology gave expression to these aspects of an experience distinguishable from more ordinary occasions of failure or dissatisfaction.

Similarly, when *bhikkhunī* Somā experienced an interruption while attempting to enter concentrated thought, she spoke of it as an activity of Māra.⁶¹ The reference to Māra, likewise, distinguishes the character of that experience from other simple annoyances. On this particular occasion *bhikkhunī* Somā experienced not only an interruption but also a sense of bondage to an infectious inclination and inexplicable power which constantly sought to cripple her efforts to realise Enlightenment.

53. Although it is only by interpretive implication, Satan's association with "evil spirits" (*ponerōn pneuma*) suggests that he too "has not flesh and bones" (Lk. 24 : 39); cf. also *Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans*, AF, I, 225; *De Principiis*, I, 6.

54. Cf. Lk. 22 : 3, e.g., where Satan entered (*eisēlthen*) into Judas.

55. Cf. e.g., *Kindred Sayings*, I, 167; *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*, I, 340, 608.

56. Cf. *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*, I, 449; L. de la Vallée Poussin, "Cosmogony and Cosmology (Buddhist)," ERE, 1955, IV : 129-138.

57. *Mahāvastu*, II, 253, 260-261.

58. Cf. e.g., the description of the lowest class of *devas* over which Māra rules in the *Mahāvastu*, I, 25-26; II, 253, 360.

59. I Thess, 2 : 18.

60. II Cor. 12 : 7.

61. *Kindred Sayings*, I, 161-162; also I, 149.

That the chief symbol of evil in the two traditions both give expression to the numinous dimension of the experiences of evil may provide a partial explanation for the remarkable similarity in the relation of both Satan and Māra to the activity of "possession." The writers of early texts in both traditions viewed major crimes or acts detrimental to Jesus or Gotama as deeds resulting from "possession" by Satan or Māra. Early Christians understood Judas' betrayal of Jesus as the result of being possessed (*eisēchomai*) by Satan,⁶² and early Buddhists viewed Ānanda's failure to encourage the Buddha to stay on in this life as due to "possession" (*pariyuṭṭhita*) by Māra.⁶³

Perhaps what these references to Māra and Satanic possession expressed for the early writers was that in these acts detrimental to the Christ and the Buddha, the numinous realities basic to all experiences of evil were most vividly present. Such explicit opposition and blindness as was manifest in these direct encounters with the Christ and the Buddha did not appear to be solely attributable to human volition. By ascribing these events as due to the possession of Satan and Māra, the early writers pinpointed in terms of their own experiences of evil the reality of that power which was the disrupting source of opposition to all efforts to relate to or realize the Holy and True.⁶⁴

As encompassing and infectious as was this numinous dimension of the experiences of evil, however, it was felt to be derivative and lacking in ultimacy. That is, it was not thought to be as primordial as the experience of the Holy and True wherein ultimately reality and power resided. This is reflected in the mythological portrayals of the limitations and defeat of the chief figures of evil. Satan's status is that of a creature, a fallen angel, who has been decisively defeated by the power and authority of Christ⁶⁵ and whose future destruction (*katargein*) is certain.⁶⁶ Similarly, Māra, though a *deva*, is himself subject to death and liable to change and sorrow.⁶⁷ Māra is defeated by the *bodhisattva* and his future demise is also certain, for Māra will reap the result of his *karma* as do all beings in *samsara*.⁶⁸

Next let us look at the basic difference in the experience of evil in the two traditions, as conveyed by their respective mythologies. Whereas a dominant characteristic

62. Lk. 22 : 3; John 13 : 27.

63. *Kindred Sayings*, V, 231 *Samyutta-Nikāya*, V, 259; *Dialogues of the Buddha*, II, 111; *Dīgha-Nikāya*, II, 104. Cf. also "anvāvisati" *Middle Length Sayings*, I, 389; *Majjhima Nikāya* I, 326-327.

64. Likewise, the torments of martyrdom and the woman bound with an infirmity for eighteen years were seen as the work of Satan rather than the work of demons because of the obvious and extreme nature of the disruptive power being manifested.

65. In the gospels the strongest expressions of the triumph of Jesus over the Devil have to do with exorcisms, e.g., Mt. 8 : 16. The Apostolic and early Greek Fathers express the same confidence in Jesus' power; cf., e.g., *Ignatius to the Trallians*, AF, I, 217.

66. I Cor. 15 : 26; cf. also Mt. 25 : 41; Rom. 16 : 20; *Epistle of Barnabas*, AF, I, 395; *Against Heresies*, II, 127-128. For a discussion of the term *katargein* see, Hans-Reudi Weber, "Christ's Victory over Satanic Power," *Study Encounter*, 1966, II (3) : 164.

67. Like everything else in *samsara*, *devas* are transient and subject to death and rebirth.

68. *Kindred Sayings*, I, 155; *Le Lalita Vistara*, trans. P. E. Foucaux, *Annales du Musée Guimet*, 1902-1908, XXI, 257.

of the Christian mythology could be referred to as a sense of *horrendum*,⁶⁹ the Buddhist experience may more accurately be characterized by *fascinans*. This difference is conveyed by the way in which the two mythologies characterize the chief figures and their realms. Satan's abode is in the lower atmosphere, the "dark" regions where the clouds gather and where sin, error and death reign.⁷⁰ Satan is a fallen angel, who, according to some texts, transgressed and became an apostate, hence was cast out of heaven down to earth.⁷¹ Though he is chief of the fallen angels and prince of this world, what is emphasized is the lowliness of his hierarchical status in contrast to what he had been previously. Thus Satan's domain and power are identified with the "powers of darkness" that reign over this present evil age.⁷²

Māra, on the other hand, is described as reigning with great power, majesty, influence and splendour.⁷³ His abode is formed from seven jewels due to previous good merits,⁷⁴ is "covered with a canopy of jewels and crowded by throngs of Apsarases," and stands in the midst of the mansions of the highest class of devas.⁷⁵ Rather than being linked with the *asura-host*, with whom there is the association of a fall from former glory, Māra is associated with the *devas* who are "virtuous, mighty, long-lived, beautiful, and enjoying great well-being."⁷⁶

The dissimilarities are apparent. The metaphorical colouring conveyed by the terms which describe Satan and his realm, as well as the fallen status of Satan himself, suggest that in the final analysis the character of the early Christian experience of evil was "dark" and negative. It was a confrontation with an opposing power which perverts what is initially good and is hostile to man's welfare, namely, a sense of *horrendum*.⁷⁷ Although there is initially a sense of *fascinans* in the Christian experience

69. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John Harvey, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958, pp. 106-107, n. 2, suggests that in regard to Satan the *mysterium tremendum* might be intensified to *mysterium horrendum*. In the experience of evil there "is a horror that is in some sort numinous, and we might designate the object of it as negatively numinous."

70. Eph. 6 : 12; *Against Heresies*, II, 121; *De Principiis*, I, 144. St. Augustine says: "There are . . . some spiritual beings of wickedness in the heavens, not where the stars twinkle and the holy angels inhabit; but in the shadowy dwelling place of this lower atmosphere where the clouds gather together." Cf. Sermon 222, *Migne Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, Paris; 1857-1887, XXXVIII, 1090; translation by Gokey, *Terminology*, 52.

71. For the most part, the New Testament writers make no theoretical assertions as to the origin of Satan. However, a number of passages by choice of words and phraseology seem to reflect the idea of Satan as a fallen angel. Cf., II Peter 2 : 4; Jude 6; Rev. 12 : 9. Justin is explicit about a fall, *Second Apology*, 75; Irenaeus only hints at a theory, *Against Heresies*, I, 42; cf. also *Against Celsus*, II, 385.

72. Eph. 6 : 12.

73. *Kindred Sayings*, I, 167; *Gradual Sayings*, IV, 164-165; *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*, I, 340, 608; *Śrāvakabhūmi*, 112-113.

74. *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*, I, 449.

75. *Mahāvastu*, II, 327. "Apsarases" are a class of female divinities.

76. *Ibid.*, I, 26-28.

77. We are here comparing the characteristic motifs of each tradition's portrayal of its chief figure of evil. It should be noted, however, that on occasion Satan can appear as an angel of light (Lucifer: II Cor. 11 : 14) and Māra is sometimes called *Kanha* (*Kṛṣṇa*), the "Dark One" (e.g., *Dialogues of the Buddha*, II, 293; *Lalita Vistara*, XXI, 258-259) and on one occasion is associated with "smokiness" and "murkiness" (*Kindred Sayings* I, 152).

of temptation, such an experience ultimately carries a sense of *horrendum* because of the realization that its tendency is toward a violation of the inherent well-being of man. Since man's present existence is inherently good, evil is experienced as that which is externally adverse to such a condition. The term Satan itself means "adversary."⁷⁸ As an adversary Satan is the source of "evil" (*ponēros*; *ho ponēros*—the Evil One), a term which means in the physical sense, "sick, painful, spoiled," or in "poor condition," and in the ethical sense, "base, vicious, degenerate."⁷⁹ In other words, evil, for the Christian, means essentially a degenerating, spoiling opposition to what is inherently or originally a good and desirable condition of human existence. Evil is a condition of personal desolation or ruin brought about by what is experienced as an actively opposing power hostile to a good and full life. Satan's powers of death and destruction, "the loss of all that gives worth to existence," epitomize evil.⁸⁰

The early Buddhist mythology, on the other hand, though it reflects a sense of meeting an equally pervasive and despotic power which makes what is not really desirable seem desirable, characterizes that power not as essentially dark and negative but rather as splendid and attractive. Māra has the majesty and splendour of a *deva* who is long-lived and often associated with *kāma*, the expression of love and enjoyment of life in this world.⁸¹ Māra is not the hostile power which brings ruin and end to life; rather he promotes life in *samsara* and those pleasures that lead to its continuance. The early Buddhist experience of *pāpa* ("evil"), in the context of the Māra mythology, is basically one of being attracted to the pleasures and ideals of this world. Although there is initially a sense of adversity in conflicts the Buddhist had with contemporary religionists (e.g., the reviling abuse of Brahmins),⁸² finally even this kind of experience of *pāpa* betrays a sense of *fascinans* because the effect is perceived to be adherence to traditional religious practices which the Buddhist judged as merely another facet of the enticing realm of *samsara*. Because man's present existence is inherently imperfect, experiences of *pāpa* are characterized by the inherent, seemingly attractive conditions of *samsaric* existence. The Māra mythology shows that the experience of "evil" in early Buddhism is more adequately characterized by the mood of *fascinans*, than by that of *horrendum*.

The attraction which the Buddhist feels toward *samsara* is understood as the result of desire conceived in ignorance as to the true nature of phenomenal existence. To emphasize the true character of *samsaric* existence as fundamentally undesirable, another type of usage of the Māra symbol came into being in the Buddhist tradition.

78. "Satan" is a Hebrew name derived from the root *sātan* which means "to oppose" or "to act as an adversary." Cf. *Greek-English Lexicon*, "satan," p. 752.

79. *Greek-English Lexicon*, "ponēros," pp. 697-698.

80. J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-literary Sources*, London: 1914-1929, "olethros," p. 445. Satan has the power of death and destruction: cf. Hebrews 2 : 14; I Cor. 5 : 5; *Shepherd of Hermas, Similitudes*, II, 173; *De Principiis*, I, 268.

81. *Dhammapada*, trans. S. Radhakrishnan, London: Oxford University Press, 1954, pp. 74-75; *Buddha Carita*, XIII, 137-139; *Kāma*, the god of sensual love and worldly enjoyment in the Vedic tradition, when used in the Buddhist tradition as a synonym for Māra, clearly rests on Buddhist views in which death and world desire are coordinates. Cf. Ernst Windisch, *Māra und Buddha*, Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1895, p. 187.

82. Cf. above, n. 17.

In addition to its symbolical use as the title of a cosmological *deva*, *māra* came to be used as a concept associated with representative aspects of the whole of *samsara*. The root meaning of the term *māra* is "death" (*mārayati*: that which kills).⁸³ Death in the Buddhist context refers not simply to the termination of an individual life, but also to continual death after rebirth. With this conceptual meaning, *māra* became identified with three terms, *skandha*, *kleśa*, *marāṇa*, the first two of which point to aspects of *samsara*, and the third of which the Buddhist considers a general characteristic of the whole of *samsara*. *Skandhas* are the personality aggregates epitomizing the conditions of existence. The *skandhamāra* identified all phenomenal existence with death (*māra*). The term *kleśa* refers to the *karmic* defilements of man's ignorant desire for the world. The *kleśa-māra* identified all *karmic* defilements with death (*māra*) as they are causative factors in the continuation of the death-birth cycle. To express more fully the meaning of the term *māra*, as it is here being used, a third use of *māra* was formulated, viz., the *marāṇamāra* (or *mṛtyumāra*). *Marāṇa*, meaning "death itself," is both the essential meaning of the concept *māra* and the essential character of all conditions and defilements of *samsara*. The whole of *samsara* is characterized by *marāṇamāra*.⁸⁴

By using the title *Māra*, referring to the *Māra deva*, the Buddhist acknowledges that *samsaric* existence has a mysteriously attractive, binding power. At the same time, by identifying representative aspects of *samsara* with the concept *māra* meaning "death," the Buddhist emphasized the basic undesirability of ordinary, impermanent existence. It is the latter usage that stresses the essential meaning of the Buddhist understanding of *pāpa* ("evil"). This Sanskrit-Pali term has been linked with the Greek word *pema*, which means "misery, calamity"⁸⁵ as well as with *talaiporos* which means "suffering, distressed, miserable (a hard life)."⁸⁶ Etymologically the term *pāpah* has been traced to the sense of inferior social classes often opposed to the superior.⁸⁷ The basic meaning of the term *pāpa*, therefore, most probably is: that which is essentially miserable, full of suffering, and inferior. All conditions of *samsara* which are subject to or cause death (*skandhamāra*, *kleśamāra*, *marāṇamāra*) are of

83. Etymologically the term *māra* is related to the Pali *maccu* and the Sanskrit *mṛtyu*, which mean "death." More specifically, whereas *maccu* (Skt. *mṛtyu*) indicates "death itself" *Māra* is the *nomen actoris* to the causative *mārayati*; *Māra* therefore means the one who kills or causes death. Cf Windisch, 1895, pp. 185-186.

84. References to a plurality of *Māras* are frequent in both Pali and Sanskrit literature. Passages specifically dealing with the four *Māras* (*skandhamāra*, *kleśamāra*, *marāṇamāra*, and the *Māra deva* [*devaputamāra*]) can be found, e.g., in the following: *Mahāprajñā-pāramitāsāstra*, I, 339-340; *Sāvākabhūmi*, 112-113. That the numerical reference is "four" is not of significant importance in itself. References in both the Pali and Sanskrit traditions range from one, three, four to five *māras*, the fifth being *abhisamkḥāramāra* which is simply a broader definition of the *kleśamāra*, and has to do with the accumulation or construction of karma. For a more detailed discussion, cf. my article, "Symbols of Evil in Buddhism," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 1971, XXXI (1) : 63-75.

85. M. Mayrhofer, *A Concise Etymological Sanskrit Dictionary*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1962, p. 255.

86. T. W. Rhys Davids, *Pali-English Dictionary*, p. 453. According to Windisch p. 192, the term *pāpmā* in older Sanskrit literature signifies "not only the morally bad, but more objectively, misfortune, sorrow and pain....."

87. Wilhelm Rau, *Staat und Gesellschaft im Alten Indien*. Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1957, pp. 32ff., 61. I am indebted to Dr. Mahinda Palihawadana for these references to Rau and Mayrhofer.

the nature of *pāpa*, i.e., constitute an inferior, lowly, essentially miserable form of existence. The attractive life which the *Māra deva* (*Māra pāpimā*) extols is judged by the Buddhist as inferior and fundamentally full of suffering (*pāpa*) because it is impermanent and can be equated with death (*māra*) in all its aspects.

C. The Meaning of *pāpa* in Relation to *ponēros* and "Evil"

We have seen that the fundamental difference in meaning between the Christian *ponēros* and the Buddhist *pāpa* is closely related to their respective doctrines of creation and *dukkha*, which in turn are determined by each tradition's understanding of the Holy and True. The Christian seeks to affirm the basic goodness of ordinary existence through a full life in Christ. His understanding of *ponēros* is essentially that of a mysterious power hostile to and destructive of the intrinsic worth of life. The characteristic experiences of *ponēros* are: being tested, tormented, deceived, instigated into acts of degeneracy, and falling ill or becoming diseased, each of which is a spoiling of the basic worth of existence. Evil (*ponēros*) is an undesirable, often aggressively negative and morally degenerate violation of the human condition. The Buddhist, on the other hand, judges the human condition itself as a "violation" of absolute freedom (*nirvāṇa*), and therefore seeks to break through the ordinary conditions of human existence which are identifiable with suffering and death. His understanding of *pāpa* is conceived in a strikingly different way from that of the Christian *ponēros*: *pāpa* has to do with that mysterious, attractive, binding power inherent in ordinary existence itself. Characteristically, the experiences of *pāpa* are: being naturally inclined toward sense desires, bound to the snares and fetters of *samsaric* existence, and continually interrupted and confused in efforts to release oneself from a state of being which is imperfect, impermanent and full of suffering.

The connotations of the English term "evil" are applicable to the meaning of *pāpa* only if the context is made clear, and careful consideration is given to specific usages. The term "evil," in English, readily reveals its Christian heritage, for it connotes not only that which is undesirable (lowly, miserable, worthless), but also that which is "not morally good" (wicked, sinful) as well as what is "offensive, wrathful, harmful, injurious, and malignant."⁸⁸ The moralistic and strong malignant connotations of the term are not applicable to *pāpa* when the latter is associated with the ordinary conditions of *samsara*. The impermanent (*marāṇamāra*), non-substantial (*skandhamāra*) conditions of *samsara* are not intrinsically harmful nor are all human actions, as such, morally bad, hence they are not "evil" in these two senses. On the contrary, the Buddhist would maintain that *samsara* constitutes those conditions which enable one to attain Enlightenment. It is only in and through *samsara* that *nirvāṇa* can be realized. What is important is one's attitude toward *samsara*. Adherence to the attractions of *samsara* promotes the continuity of *samsara* with its attendant suffering; adherence to the Path of the Buddha which leads one in and through *samsara* results in freedom and salvation.

Samsara, in other words, can be associated with *puñña* (good, virtue) as well as with *pāpa*. A more appropriate rendering of *pāpa* in the context of its association with the ordinary conditions of phenomenal existence may be the term "bad" rather

88. Cf. Webster's *Third New International Dictionary*, 1966.

than "evil." The English word "bad" in contemporary usage does not as readily carry the moralistic and strong malignant connotations as does the term "evil." Although one does talk of "bad conduct," for example, as morally wrong and possibly harmful (and in this usage the term becomes a synonym for evil), one can also talk of "bad weather" or of "bad food," the former meaning undesirable, troublesome weather, the latter referring to inferior, poor or rotten food. The meaning of "bad" in this type of usage approximates more accurately than does the term "evil" the meaning of *pāpa* when associated by the Buddhist with *samsaric* existence. *Samsaric* existence is *pāpa* (bad) because it is something which is undesirable, troublesome, i.e., ill (*dukkha*), and is inherently inferior to the state of Enlightenment.

The connotations of "evil" and "bad" as that which is morally wrong and injurious are applicable to the Buddhist use of *pāpa*, however, if the reference is to those *karma*-producing acts of defilement (*kleśamāra*) which ultimately are based on a desire and fascination for an inferior mode of existence. Not only overt conduct such as acts of violence toward others, but also intellectual and emotional attitudes such as anger, hypocrisy, desire, etc., constitute defilements which are harmful and injurious to efforts to follow the Path to emancipation. Thus *pāpa* can connote that which is harmful, offensive, and malignant as applied to man's own bad *karma*. *Kleśa* is not only "bad" ("ill, inferior and undesirable"), it is "evil" ("morally wrong, offensive and malignant", connotations which, as we have stated, are also involved in certain usages of the term "bad"). Because the English term "bad" embraces both connotative levels more readily than does the more forceful term "evil," it appears to be a more appropriate general rendering of the Buddhist meaning of *pāpa*.⁸⁹

A difficulty in interpretation arises when it is noted that the *devaputamāra* mythology suggests not only that *pāpa* is to be understood as a malignant power, but also as an opposing power *external* to man. The mythological portrayal of Māra's attack against the Buddha, for example, expresses strong negative connotations suggestive of an offensive, malignant external force of *pāpa*. This mythological suggestion of the reality of an external power beyond the harmful results of one's own *karma*-producing acts of defilement cannot be reconciled with a basic Buddhist premise: the efficacy of the law of *karma*. The Buddhist follows the Path in order to attain Enlightenment, and insofar as it is true that good actions bear good fruits, one can proceed with confidence in following the Path. However, the *karmic* principle which gives efficacy to the Path is jeopardized if one admits of real factors outside the freedom of man's self-determinations that determine his behaviour, i.e., if one admits to the reality of a radically *external* power that impinges upon man's will rather than being reducible to it.

The traditional Buddhist solution to this interpretive problem has been to limit the meaning of the *devaputamāra* reference through demythologization. This process

89. That the Buddhists use the same word where we might use different ones (evil and bad) is not to suggest that they were conscious of the different meanings when they used the terms. Rather it simply points out the inherent difficulty in attempting to understand experiences structured by one language system in terms of the categories of meaning of another language. The Buddhist use of *pāpa* suggests that they saw resemblances where we require distinctions in meaning. Often those resemblances evade us. For an interesting discussion concerning assumptions in translations which are often misleading see, A. W. H. Adkins, *From the Many to the One*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970, pp. 1-12.

can be noted throughout early Buddhist literature. Māra's external armies were named hunger, thirst, cold and heat,⁹⁰ his daughters "Craving," "Discontent," and "Passion."⁹¹ Likewise, the Māra *Pāpimā* figure has been traditionally viewed by informed Buddhists as the personification of the three doctrinal *māras* (*skandhamāra kleśamāra, maraṇamāra*). The Pali commentary tradition elaborates even further and refers to a fifth *māra*, the *abhisamkhāramāra*. *Abhisamkhāra* refers to the accumulation of *karma*, and as a *māra* is simply a broader doctrinal designation for *kleśamāra* which emphasizes that the source of injurious *pāpa* is not external, but internal to man.⁹² When *pāpa* is experienced, the source lies not in the disruptive external circumstances themselves, but in how man responds to them. Ultimately it is man's own intellectual, emotional, and volitional *karmic* response that constitutes the active, counter-productive and malignant power of *pāpa*. The problem of "evil" for the Buddhist is to bring about the cessation of man's own internal desires conceived in ignorance and thus break through the impermanence and suffering of *samsara*.

In contrast, the Satan symbol is not demythologized by the early Christian writers under study. Even the *Shepherd of Hermas*, who among the selected writers is the only one to consistently demythologize demons as personified vices, never speaks of the Devil or Satan in this manner. When speaking of these personified vices, *Hermas* always restricts his terms to *daimonion* and *pneuma*, and at no time calls them *diabolo*.⁹³ The reason for this is that the Satan figure, mythologically portrayed as an external agent of evil, expresses the Christian understanding of the ultimate source of *ponēros* as external to man. Although man contributes to the power of evil through his own sin, the early Christians understood the nature of *ponēros* to be ultimately an extrinsic power foreign and hostile to the rightful conditions of human existence. Furthermore, unlike the Buddhist who "depersonalized" man through dharmic analysis (analyzing all phenomena into its component parts and relations), the Christian's emphasis upon the personal character of man and God lent itself to a personified representation of evil. Consequently Satan was not demythologized. The existential "problem of evil" for the early Christian was one of conquering the power of *ponēros*. The theoretical "problem of evil" was one of reconciling the reality of *ponēros* with the Christian understanding of the nature of God and His creation.

This difference between the Christian affirmation and the Buddhist rejection of the externality of the source of "evil," as we have seen, is ultimately a derivative contrast stemming from their separate understandings of what constitutes the Holy and True. The Christian, who understands his present existence to be fundamentally purposeful as the creation of a Holy, transcendent God, also knows evil, in the final analysis, to be an adverse power alien and external to the original created order. The informed Buddhist, on the other hand, understands his present existence as fundamentally imperfect and inferior to the state of complete emancipation (*nirvāṇa*). This state, paradoxically, is a condition immanent in *samsara* itself. Thus, the Buddhist knows *pāpa* and *māra* as intrinsic to *samsara* itself. Each tradition's understanding of "evil" is consistently derived from its understanding of the ultimate good.

90. *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*, II, 906.

91. *Woven Cadences*, 835. Cf. also *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*, II, 880-881, n. 1; *Buddha Carita*, XV, 160; *Kindred Sayings*, I, 156.

92. Cf. above, n. 84. For a convenient listing of the references to Māra in the Pali commentary tradition see, G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, London: Luzac and Co., 1960, II, 611ff.

93. Cf. Gokey, *Terminology*, pp. 126-127.