ASPECTS OF ANTI-MANICHAEAN POLEMICS IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND UNDER EARLY ISLAM

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Mani established his religion on very broad syncretistic grounds, in the hope that it could conquer the whole oikoumenē, East and West, by integrating the religious traditions of all peoples—except those of the Jews. Although Manichaeism as an organized religion survived for more than a thousand years, and its geographical realm extended from North Africa to Southeast China, this ambition never came close to being realized, and the Manichaeans remained, more often than not, small and persecuted communities. Yet, in a somewhat paradoxical way, Mani did achieve his ecumenical goal. For more than half a millennium, from its birth in the third century throughout late antiquity and beyond, his religion was deplored and rejected with the utmost violence by rulers and thinkers belonging to all shades of the spiritual and religious spectrum. In this sense, Manichaeism, an insane system, a "mania," appeared as the outsider par excellence. It thus offered a clear reference point, a convenient negative.

1 For the best overview of Manichaeism in its roots and development East and West, see now S. N. C. Lieu, Manichaeism in the Late Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey (Manchester: Mancheste University Press, 1983). Cf. the review by G. G. Stroumsa, Classical Review 37 (1987): 95–97. Parts of this paper were read at the Symposium on Late Antiquity and Islam held at the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London, 26–28 June 1986. We wish to thank the conveners of the Symposium, Professor Avod Cassuto and Dr. John Matthews, as well as Dr. Samuel Lieu, who chaired our session and raised interesting points in the discussion. We are also grateful to Professors Shinzo Fujii and Shaul Shaked for their helpful comments on an earlier version.

2 So called by Greek Christian hagiographers using a word play on the founder's name. It appears already in the earliest polemics in Greek; see, e.g., Titus of Bostra Contra Manichaeos 1.1 (ed. P. de Lagarde: Berlin: Herta, 1839) 1; and Epiphanius Pan. 66.1 (ed. C. Riggio: Rome: Pontificio Istituto Altoro Latino, 1907) 4; and see n. 46 and apud n. 47 below. In order not to overburden a complex argument, we have tried to keep instances and norms to a minimum, often ignoring norm parallel to those cited. Our documentation thus seeks to be representative rather than exhaustive.
Manichean devotion to their scriptures, and despite the fact that the Zoroastrians were considered ahī al-bilāb, Manicheans were never granted this status. Muslim theologians did not have to worry about overt Manichean claims to represent true Islam. Nevertheless, they dreaded the Manichean skill to infiltrate secretly into the Muslim community in order to lure the simple people and to corrupt Islam from within, for instance by falsifying prophetic traditions.

Unlike Christian and Muslim theologians, Jewish thinkers had no political commonwealth to protect from the Manicheans. Moreover, Manichean dualism does not seem to have represented a direct threat from inside the Jewish community. The only lively debate with a dualist may be that with the heretic Shi'it al-Balbhi (eighth century), whose system was apparently closer to that of Manichaeism than to that of Mani.2 Otherwise, the argumentation in Jewish writings remains on an abstract theological level, and closely resembles that found in Muslim hadith. Its main interest for us lies in that it supplements our evidence on the development of anti-Manichean argumentation.

Although very little is known about the historical evolution of the Manichean religion, there is no reason to assume that in a world that underwent drastic transformations, the Religion of Light alone remained unchanged. There were wider periods and also reappearances. In particular, the first Islamic centuries seem to have witnessed a strong Manichean renaissance.8 One possible way to explain the paucity of Manichean material is through the study of

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3 On this perception of the Manichean danger in the Roman Empire, see Lüne, Manichaeism, 99–105.


5 The description of Manichaeans as a Christian heresy (mainly with doctrinal features), see, for example, the prologue of the "Seven Chapters" attributed to Zacharias of Myriotes, in S. N. L.van Susteren, Le Manichéisme et les sciences humaines (Leiden: Brill, 1967). For the "De villis" hex., see, ibid., chap. 1, §166 and 190 n. 1; cf. also Masi is called the "ravens of the Devil," which implies a Syriac word-play on his name. See also Ephesians Fan. 162 (12–14, Riggs).

6 The Byzantine writers, "Manichaeans sank to a state of opprobrium, despite various kinds of heretical beliefs, were not even loosely connected to Manichaeism. Cf. 196 (82–84). Together with the preference of scholars for descriptions of Manichaeism mythology over argumentative polemics, this fact has often discouraged scholarly interest in Manichean Byzantine-Mesopotamian litera-
anti-Manichean arguments, which, while repeating the standard arguments against Manichaeism, may reveal patterns of evolution.

As a fully fledged Neoplatonic system of thought, Manichaeism represented the last significant outreach of mythological thought in the world of antiquity. It remains a moot point whether Mani himself actually believed in the boresque mythology and the highly developed numerology that he propounded. In any case, since Mani was the Last Prophet, and had brought the final revelation to mankind, there was no place left for interpretation or exegesis of his message. Hence Manicheans were asked to believe his apocastic sayings and mythical doctrines au pied de la lettre. This point was clearly seen by polemicists. The sixth-century neo-Platonic philosopher Simplicius remarked: "They do not think it right to understand any of the things they say allegorically... as one of their sages informed me." In the various intellectual and spiritual traditions of late antiquity myths were not seen to be taken at their face value, and were never to be understood apart from the exegetical level that alone could reveal their deeper, spiritual meaning. Therefore Simplicius reflects an attitude very common among late antique thinkers, Christian and pagan alike, when he denies the Manichean "stories" the very name of a myth. They fabricate certain marvels which are not worthy of being called myths. They do not, however, use them as myths, nor do they think that they have any other meaning, but believe that all the things which they say are true.

The Manicheans' universal understanding of their myths enables two Muslim theologians to remark, some four centuries after Simplicius, that the very exposition of Manichean myths is its best refutation. This remark, voiced by both al-Marrādī (d. 945-946) and 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025/8) reflects the assurance of these two well-informed and usually trustworthy authors that there was no second level on which Manicheans understood their myths. If the Muslim critics had been aware of such an exegesis, they would surely not have neglected to refute it. Yes, like so many others before them, they sneer at the myth but hardly argue with it.

In the various traditions, therefore, the bulk of anti-Manichean polemics is directed not so much against the myths themselves as against the theological principles underlying them. For it was the Manichean fascination with science, which has been called a "simulacrum of reason," that attracted intellectuals like Augustine. This scientific and rational pretense of Manicheism offered the real challenge to the monotheistic religions.

From its very beginning Manicheism succeeded in bringing about a more or less common front of pagan philosophers and Christian theologians and in turning them into "objective allies," as it were, all united in their radical rejection of the main tenets of the new religion. Of course, the arguments of the various polemicists differ in their accent, their rhetoric, and their originality. Nevertheless, the picture of Manicheism that emerges from the various texts is rather clear and consistent.

Also consistent is the polemicists' insistence on what one may call the "philosophical keen" of late antiquity, to which the theological foundations of Manicheism were abhorrent. This philosophical keen is reflected in the almost constant appeal—by Christians as well as by pagans—to the "common principles of thought," the koine enourisc (a concept borrowed from Stoic philosophy) and to "rational arguments" (logikai methodikai). Similarly, Moslem and Jewish writers repeatedly insist on the innate, intuitive axioms of thought (al-nuṣūß) and on rational, logical argumentation (aqrāb al-qiyās). This fact illustrates what was said above, that it was at the theological, rather than at the mythological level, that the discussion usually took place. There are grounds to believe that this preference for rational debate was introduced by the Manicheans themselves. The extremely precise and ordered mythology developed by G. Vajda's appreciation of al-Marrādī's account as "de moindre importance" is probably too harsh, as Vajda's own interests in the text would demonstrate." (Le stéphanie de al-Marrādī sur la doctrine des manichéens, des dényans et des marcionites, in 'Annuario orientale' XIX (1933) pp. 127-141.)
For the Manicheans matter is evil, and as one of the two principles it is the opposite of God. Christian theologians and pagan philosophers alike discard, first of all, the very idea of two principles (archai) for all beings. This idea, they say, contradicts common sense, since there should be a common—and hence third—single root to these two archai. Moreover, the two opposite principles could not mix without the presence of a third arché, which would act as an intermediary. Following an argument proposed already by Proclus in his treatise On the Origins of Evil (where the Manicheans are not even mentioned), Simplicius adds that matter cannot be a principle.

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32 See, e.g., Augustine Conf. 3.7; 5.10, and particularly De utilitate credendi, 1.2, pass text is quoted by Villey, Contre la doctrine, 199, who cautionss (rightly, in my estimation) that methodological argument should not have been very different in Egypt and conclusion. “Il est vrai de dire que les manichéens devaient faire de la raison un usage soutenu par eux, pour nier les idées de leurs adversaires et surtout, d’agir de main de foi, de ce qui est hors de leurs incognitables de leur estime.”
33 The third one is, or, Serm. 85—according to the classification of R. Durand, in Leons et Grand, Sermonee (SC 2001) 16.184—85. “In qua ferae existent, dies demonstrata, dicat immortalis.”
34 For two early writers, see the instances quoted in Stromma, “Alexander of Lycopolis and Titus of Borsa.”

37 Contro Manichaeo 1.23 (de Logos, 14).
38 Antiochais 15 (Demetriou, 5).39
39 Contro Manichaeo 15 (Brokkenhuyse, 13—14; Villey, 17).
40 Ibid., 6—9 (Brokkenhuyse, 9—13; Villey, 14—15).
One should add that Christians and Manichaenacs accused each other in late anti-
quity of propounding an anthropomorphic perception of God.51

Movement and mitts imply another series of internal contradictions. Accord-
ing to the last of the Greek church fathers, John of Damascus (who died in the
Palestinian monastery of Mar Saba around 750), the moving of a part of God into
another locus corresponds to God's indivisibility and introduces change in the
eternal.52 Similarly, two sixth-century theologians, John of Caesarea and Paul
the Persian, attack in various ways the Manichaean doctrine of God. John
insists that if a part of God moves into another realm (that of evil), this creates a
division in the deity as does the Manichaean participation of souls in God's sub-
stance.53 Paul notes the moral blemish of a God who sends his "sons" or
"members" as ransom into the kingdom of evil.54 On his side, Zacharias
reminds that this conception contradicts God's transcendence, which should
imply a certain distance from creatures.55

Finally, for Christian theologians—but not for Platonic philosophers—the
Manichaean conception of eternal matter denies the possibility of the creation of
the world ex nihilo by God rather than from God's own substance. Manichaean
hylozoism had to be rejected in order to affirm matter's subordination to God.
The Christian here-insists that matter, if subordinated to God, cannot be
identified with evil, since everything coming from God must be good.56 If
Genesis were evil, its opposite, corruption (pôthôria), would be—a manifi-
ently false conclusion. Furthermore, the conception of matter as evil and blind contradicts
Manichaean mythology. A blind matter could not see the divine light. On the
other hand, if matter could see God, that would imply a close relation, a sort of

51 See, e.g., Augustine Conf. 3.7 for the Manichaean anti-Christian argument and Augustine C.
City, Fund. 23.25 for the Christian counter arguments. These texts are discussed in
Sarah Stroumsa, "The Incomparability of God: Content and Implications of Origen's "Ponēria,"
52 Contra Manichaeos 3, in B. Koller, Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskus (4. Patristische
53 John the Grammarian Disputatio cum Manichaeis 15–16, 13, in M. Richard and M. Ashdowne,
54 Disputatio cum Platonio Manichaeis 40 (PG 88, 541–641). Paul also notes that if divine sub-
stance is indivisible, the soul cannot originate (v 7, ibid., col. 536). On Paul and the
Persian's dialogue with Platonism, see L. Manet, "11–7. It should be pointed out that the
years around 527 (when Manichaeans) together with those in the last decade of the
Manichaean's life, the Church father St. John of Damascus, who was a
supporter of the Manichaean,
seems to have witnessed a sort of "restoration of Manichaean by Byzantium, reflected by
Simplicius as well as by the writings of Plato, Zacharias, and John. Cf. Badian, "Wider die
212, where St. John ("hypotes in factum in Dominus es rerum ab IV° ad VII™ saec."
Cramer: faute d'auteur d'authenticité incontestée, 1965 ed., 349–350) is a work that should
be read with care. See also John, 212, "hypothes in factum in Dominus es rerum ab
V° ad VII™ saec."
55 Anti-Macarian (11南通poutopologia, 7).
56 See, e.g., John of Damascus C. Monach. 76 (Koller, 392); cf. ibid., 31, 70 (Koller, 359, 398).
57 This point has been demonstrated by Sh. Bākhtī, "The Nabonidus Temple and its Relation
to Technology," in 5000 33 (1979) 181–107. For the Zoroastrian (and Manichaean) poetics, see
the Standard Varham of Manzana Erguel, in the editors of P. J. de Manio,
L'architecture et la construction au VI™ siècle (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1943) chap.
58 See, e.g., Al-Maqqari, Usūr al-Muqaddamas, chap. 2, fol. 15–22; chap. 8, fol. 36; Mīrzu'll-
Tawālid, 313–14.
59 See, e.g., "Abād al-Jabbāl, Muḥājir, 6113 (on the authority of al-Wardī), and the discussion in
Māgidī, 22–24 (sup. 253: 0 have, the technical term for mirror); Mīrzu'll-Tawālid, 157–21.

kinship (raiganeia) between the two—something which both common sense
and Manichaean doctrine itself cannot admit. This argument is based on the rule
that only similar essences can know one another. It

should be emphasized that the attack carried from various quarters against the
identification of matter with evil is not a rejection of materialism per se, but
specifically of Manichaenacs, Concerning matter, a basic difference between
Zoroastrians and Manichaenacs must be noted here. The Zoroastrians did not
partake in the Manichaenacs' inability to conceive of spiritual entities. While the
two realms of matter (gēlīt) and spirit (mēnē) coexist according to Mazdaean
thought, creation, an act of Ahura Mazda (the good God) is only in the world of
mēnē, while Ahura Mazda's existence remains in the world of gēlīt.57

On most points, the outline given here of Christian polemics against Mani-
chaean materialism would fit also the polemics written against it in Arabic, by
both Muslims and Jews. They too attempted to preserve God's indivisibility and
God's immutability, and, like the Christians before them, they strove to
establish creation ex nihilo, and fought against the Manichaean as part of their
fight against the Aššāb al-Yahud, those who believe in polymordial matter.58
Nevertheless, although no totally new element comes into the discussion, there
seems to be a shift in weight, and certain issues become focal, which had been
only superficially dealt with in Ptolemaic literature. These arguments are usually
incorporated in Kalidā texts into the section devoted to God's unity (bāīt al-
našīb). Al-Mārūfī and 'Abd al-Jabbāl draw their description of Manichaean
ism from earlier sources such as the ninth-century heresiographers Abd ʻĪsā al-
Wardī and al-Nuṣairī and al-Isāwī. But when they turn to the refutation of Manichaean
their arguments and terminology reflect contemporary kalidā. Hence, the
defense of God's indivisibility and immutability is often formulated in terms
borrowed from Islamic atomism.59

But even beyond atomistic circles and concerns, Arabic writings against
Manichaean materialism reflect the growing importance of what we might call
"philosophy. Like Simplicius, the tenth-century Jewish theologian Sa'il-
ayfūmī points out that darkness is not a principle (asp) opposed to light, but is
only the absence (cadum) of light. In another context he explains that bodies (ajadum) have no opposite: only accidents (arid, i.e., sambodhis) have opposites. But in Arabic heresiography, unlike in Patristic polemics, this anti-Manichaeism argument grows into a Manichaeism contention, and the Manichaens are depicted as those who deny the existence of accidents. They also deny the existence of potentiality: there are only bodies or essences, which may sometimes assume forms (like colors) or hide within them (like the fire within the piece of wood, for example—the famous tamar). The Manichaean rejection of spiritual entities also receives a slightly different turn, and becomes a purely epistemological issue. In polemical writings in Arabic the Manichaens are repeatedly said to deny whatever they “have not seen.” They are explicitly said to accept only the evidence of the senses, to the point that the ninth-century Jewish theologian Dávid al-Maqqarrí refers to the Manichaens as Manurí al-fašr, a curious appellation that apparently means “those who have a mania of sense perception.” Al-Maqqarrí, who is, as we so far know, the first Jewish theologian to write in Arabic, studied with Christians in Nisibis, and there is every reason to believe that he got his information about the Manichaens there, as well as the originally Greek pan on Mani’s name.41

41 Kühn al-andárī wa-fiqāḥ (ed. J. Quiti, Jerusalem/New York/Sex. 1970) chap. 1.3, p. 56.12–14. Other missalium, for whom absence was a real entity, do not usually use this argument. See above n. 26 above.

42 Anáštis, 4.3, pp. 155.20–156.9.

43 See ‘Abd al-lābbah, Maynūr. 11.6–19; 21–22; 62.13.


45 See, e.g., al-Maqqarí, Anáštis 138.14 (in Mani, 1977), al-Muháddir, al-Nuṣairi (ed. al-Abbi-dí al-Muhammád Iibern, Cairo, 1949) 4, 449; ‘Abd al-lābbah, al-Maqqarrí, in ‘Abd al-lābbah, al-Maqqarrí, Maynūr (ed. F. Kraus, Cairo, 1934) 323–325 (in Mani, 172). It can be said that these are analogous to ‘Abd al-lābbah, al-Maqqarrí, Mani, 105:2 (in the description of Manichaean claims are probably a veiled reference to the same stance. Manichaean kavi verses this argument against the Manichaens: see, e.g., al-Quhtán b. Ibrahim, al-ndárī, 1b. el-Muqaffir, (ed. M. Qadiyy, Rome, 1972) 4, 10; 3, 10–11, 13, 39. This potential shift is a reaction not only to the general Manichaean perception of the senses; it is also (as suggested by Monnot, “Musulon und das Manichaeism,” MEDES 11 (1972) 49), but specifically to the Manichaean insistence on the immediacy of the senses, the ‘fašr’. The overproduction of this epistemological principle for the rejection of credos ex manibus is clearly seen in al-Maqqarí, Tamkhlīn 27:20–28:3.

46 ‘Abd al-Muqaffir, chap. 14, fol. 58.

47 See n. 2 above.
anthropology. As Titus of Bystra says at the very beginning of his treatise, it is the first doctrine of the Catholic Church that God is the source of all (notions) for human thought (adikia), which is the only real evil, and hence cannot be imputed to God.22 Quite opposite to this true conception of God stands the Manichean one: a God who in his ekonomy (mixes contrasts), adds Titus, will also be responsible for evil.23

As this reference to Titus shows, the direct linkage between theology and anthropomorphism and ethics (that is, the problem of free will) in Patristic thought is clearly established from the early stages of anti-Manichean patristics. The problem of free will (autotonia) had already been discussed at length in Patristic theology before the fourth century, precisely in an antidualistic context. Against Valentinians and other Gnostics the early Church Fathers up to Origen had already defended both God’s goodness and human free will.24

Christian theology was thus well equipped to deal with the Manichaeans challenge at the theological level. It would seem that even more than with the problems related to materialism, the major place accorded to the defense of free will in Christian theology, particularly in Byzantium, owes much to this challenge.25 It is also in this context that the accusations of the Pelagian thinker Julian of Eclanum against Augustine should be seen. According to Julian, Augustine’s insistence on grace as a major element in salvation and his correlating lack of emphasis on the role of free will, reflect the fact that the bishop of Hippo never quite succeeded in freeing himself from his Manichaean past.26

In their argument against Manichaeism materialist the Christian polemicist insisted that evil was not to be identified with matter, and that it did not even have an identity of its own, but rather it should be defined as the lack of good.27 In the context of their theology, they sharpened this conception and developed the Christian doctrine of evil.

22 Caesara Montesquieu, L. 13 de Leggieri, 1, 3.
23 Ibid., 129 de Leggieri. 18 = 24 in numera in PG 13.
24 For an overview, see D. Neils, “Freileihheit,” RAC 8, 289–306.
27 See, e.g., John of Damascus, C. Monch. 14 (Knox, 194) and parallels quoted there. Cf. also nn. 26 and 41 above.

Good and evil, says Zacharias, are not in God, but in human beings, adding that good is a habit (bête), whereas evil is the absence of this habit.28 In the proper sense, evil is imperity or sin; one can speak of the “objective” evils in the world only in the figurative sense. One can thus speak of a polysemous good and evil that in the proper sense are opposed to each other only as qualities in human beings.29 Since the world created by God is good, there is no place in it for evil. In many cases, noes, Ephrem, what appears prima fave as evil turns out to have a curative function.30 The medical metaphor is also used in a slightly different sense by John of Damascus. God is not more guilty of Satan’s fall than a doctor can be held responsible for his patient’s sickness.31 The devil is indeed as free as human beings, and it is out of his own free will that he acts in evil ways. John of Damascus is brought to insist that since God can create only good order, we are responsible even for death, which was produced by human beings, not by God. He adds that, on the other hand, God gives only being, while we alone have the power of making good being.32 In short, for the Christian theologians evil is found in subjective experience rather than in the objective order of nature.

The opposition of the Church Fathers to Manichean anthropology and to its implications is not less radical. Manichean dualism is not limited to the ontological or cosmological level. The great divide crosses also human beings themselves: while our souls may be of divine provenance and of divine nature, our bodies, being material, belong in toto to the other power. Such a conception is anathema to the Christian theologians. Anthropological dualism would prevent any integrated concept of the person. Although this concept will find its final expression with Boehmerius, it was already well established in Patristic thought in the fourth century (in great part owing to the Gnostic challenge of the second and third centuries).33 Therefore, the Christian theologians emphatically reject the two aspects of Manichean anthropology. The body, as part of the human being who is created in the image of God, cannot be altogether evil. On the other hand, as John of Caesarea says, God would indeed be responsible for evil if the soul were part of God.34 But since human beings are free, the source of evil is to be found in the
soul and in its own free choice (Paul the Persian). Zacharias says that the soul is the cause of evil and of unlawful acts; hence, it cannot be said that we sin involuntarily. Incidentally, the discovery of the soul as the root of sin, and the Voluntary and evil in the proper sense is, according to Titus of Bostra, another proof for the nothingness of the soul.47

In the Father's eyes, a free God and a free human being are correlatives: one entails the other, just as the Manichean conception that makes of human beings slaves of the evil power is also bound to deprive God of his free will. If human beings are thus able to act freely, this means that they possess a natural knowledge of good and evil.48 This natural knowledge is, in the field of ethics, the equivalent of the logos, essential in epistemology. Here again, both pagan and Christian thinkers seem to agree on most points in their radical rejection of the ethical implications of Manichaean doctrines.

Already Alexander of Lycopolis was shocked by the Manichaean limitation of the path of salvation, pointing out the social aspects of the closed Manichaean community. Moreover, he ridiculed Manichaeism as asceticism as meaningless.49 Simplicius goes further: According to him Manichaean doctrine negates the very possibility of ethical life, since Manichaean ethics is the human’s virtue and ethical behavior by negating the freedom of choice given to man by God and nature.50 He adds that, if there were such a thing as the evil principle, there would be so evil in the world.51 Such wording echoes Plotinus's passionate argument against the Gnostics, where he insists on their lack of ethical teaching.52

Although Christian theologians seem to have put a stronger emphasis on theology and anthropology, they were by no means insensitive to the ethical side of the polemics. Thus, for instance, notes at the start of his opus, that the false conception of compulsion held by the Manicheans entails a lack of belief in effort (energesis and virtue (arête) in human behavior.53

In reaction to Manichaean eschatology, the Church Fathers consistently defended the legitimacy of marriage.54 Sufficient it here to mention John of Damascus, who insists that natural law itself legitimizes child-bearing.55

Christians offered exegesis on texts which the Manichaens understood literally. In their denigration of the flesh, for instance, Manicheans were able to quote Paul, whereas the Christians had to understand the Paulinian concept of flesh in a figurative sense, as the spiritual principle of evil.56 The Christians claimed that sin is neither natural nor necessary: human beings, not God, are responsible for it, through the free will of their souls. Indeed, late antique thinkers were not so wrong as we are in upholding the notion of evil. Nevertheless, they offered a cogent conception of free will, which linked in a rather rigorous way theodicy, anthropology, and ethics. This conception is established upon a vision of human beings as free in theory but sinners in practice.

Many of the Christian concepts and arguments mentioned above were taken over by Muslim and Jewish theologians, who stated categorically that the attribution of evil to God seems from ignorance of the meaning of evil and from a subjective, egocentric view of the world.57 Also common is the attack, from various angles, on the Manichaean mistaken conception of the person, which does not recognize the integrity of the living entity.58 Concerning free will, however, there are some differences between Christianism and Islam—differences that bear upon the status of human will and action. As is well known, predestinarian views were predominant in early Islam. This is clear from both the Qur'an and claims of Muslim orthodoxy. Moreover, an outside observer such as John of Damascus confirms this predestinarian tendency in the earliest period of Islam.59 It stands to reason that within early Islam, both held the opposite view. Indeed, political insurgents against the Unmayyads professed a doctrine of free will, in defiance of the predestinarian


48 Paul the Persian Disquisitiones, Diaphoræ III (PG 88. 547 – 49).


view held by the rulers. Hence, the issue of free will and predestination was present within Islam itself from its early stages. However, we are concerned here with the theological expression of this issue. In this context, a full understanding of the texts cannot ignore the impact of the Manichean challenge. Arabic texts repeatedly refer to the Manichean presence during the formative period of Islam. The scope of this article does not allow us to go further into this historical question, but we see no compelling reason not to accept the accounts of Arab historians that on the issue of free will (as in the topics dealt with above) as solid evidence. Moreover, the formulation of the problem of free will in Muslim theological literature seems to confirm this evidence.

It should be noted here that in discussing ethics, Arabic-writing theologians often refer to dualism in general rather than to Manichaeism. In many cases, however, it appears that dualism took court meant first and foremost Manichaeism. "Abd al-Jabbar, for example, (who dedicates most of his anti-dualist polemics to Manichaeism), opens his refutation of the Manichaean view of evil by saying that this is actually a repetition of the refutation of dualism (shakabwiyah)—this last word referring clearly to his previous discussion of Manichaeism (cf. Maghil 33:5; Momont, Penseur, 251).

Due to the problematic status of free will in Islamic thought, it seems that Manichaean attacks on God's equity found here at first, easy prey. But it was not long before Muslim thinkers started to fight back, and this reaction had a major impact on the development of Islamic theology.15 [Whit b. 'Aḅbar (early eighth century), the founder of the first established school of Islamic theology, the Mu'tazila, is said to have composed a thousand questions against the Manichaeans, and this fact can illustrate the speed and urgency with which Muslims reacted to Manichaeism. As the Šayk-Gamūnisī Vičār, a Zoroastrian polemical work of the ninth (7) century shows, Mu'tazilite argumentation on free will did not impress dualist theologians, for whom there remained inherent contradictions in monotheism itself on the question of the human freedom. The importance of the concept of theology and free will in this fight is best illustrated by a relatively rare source, the Qur'ān's Yūsuf al-Bashir (eleventh century), who often follows the Muslim 'Abd al-Jabbar. According to Yūsuf al-Bashir, the polemics with the dualists has nothing to do with the unity of God (waṣūs), but rather it belongs entirely to the realm of theology (bab al-qal'ad). To our knowledge, this is the only place where this view is formulated in such a drastic way, but Yūsuf al-Bashir is certainly not alone in putting the stress in this domain.

A ninth-century Muslim heresiarch, Ibn al-Rawandī, who was a student of the Manichean Abū Ṭālīb al-Warrag, wrote a book propounding dualism (fiqh al-qal'ad, fi al-ḥifṣanayn). This book was entitled "The Futility of Divine Wisdom" (Walā al-Ḥikmah), a title which expresses well Manichaean rejection of both this evil world and its creator. An Arabic work from the same period, which is attributed to the Muslim theologian al-Jāhiz but clearly betrays a Christian origin, takes up the Manichean challenge and endeavors to prove precisely that Divine wisdom and economy is manifest in every aspect of this world, including what seems to us to be evil.16 And according to both al-Mārufī and al-Baghdaḍī, a major doctrine of the Mu'tazila, that God's deed is always the optimum (al-aṣlāk) originated in the Mu'tazila's attempt to refute the dualism.17

Ibn al-Rawandī's above mentioned book had an alternative title: "On defending God's injustice and on accusing him of injustice" (al Tadrīli wa'al Tajwîr). This title reveals the broader scope of the Manichean challenge. For the creation of the evil world earned God the accusations of cruelty and folly; the accusation of injustice, however, did not refer directly to God's creation, but more precisely to God's conduct with human beings. God orders them to do what they cannot do, and then punishes them for disobeying these absurd orders.18 This accusation led 'Abd al-Jabbar, for example, to formulate clearly his

15 Whit b. 'Aḅbar (early seventh century).
18 Kitāb al-ḥifṣanayn waṣūs al-Mu'tazila (ed. Muhammad Rāshid al-Ṭabrīshī; Baghdad, 1928), and see D. Z. Scaff, "A Common Source for Baha b. Yaqub and al-Chaukö," Magna Annomynous Book (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1938) 23–30. See also the following:
19 Nasr al-Dīn al-Ṭadhbīḥī, Tadhba, 159:10–11 (on al-Marrūsī, waṣūs al-Mu'tazila, 9th century); see also the following:
20 Kitāb al-ḥifṣanayn waṣūs al-Mu'tazila (ed. Muhammad Rāshid al-Ṭabrīshī; Baghdad, 1928), and see D. Z. Scaff, "A Common Source for Baha b. Yaqub and al-Chaukö," Magna Annomynous Book (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1938) 23–30. See also the following:
21 Nasr al-Dīn al-Ṭadhbīḥī, Tadhba, 159:10–11 (on al-Marrūsī, waṣūs al-Mu'tazila, 9th century); see also the following:
22 See Nyberg, ibid., Le Livre de la Trompette.
23 In this context the human being is compared to a chained slave who is asked to perform an impossible act (e.g., al-Maqūzī, 'Ultray laqījī, 12.1ff., 20), or to do something given as an order to fly like an eagle (Theodore Abū Qura, "Mystere yahwistique l'introduction à la bienveillance," Magna Annomynous Book).
objection to Manichaeism. Dualism is false, he says, because of the reality of God’s commands and prohibitions.81 A substantial part of the discussion of theodicy in many Me?harzite works, however, does not speak directly about Manicheans, but rather about the presuppositions, known as the Majbira. Their doctrine of predestination is said to be unmotable because it would mean that God created people for heaven and hell regardless of what their deeds might be, and because only those who act out of free choice can be called agents. Since the Majbira deny that free agents choose, human beings are not the real agents of their acts, and punishing them for their acts is unjust.82 Quite often, the skirmishes between the Majbira and the kucayna are presented in juridical and also in Jewish writings. Al-Muqammi, for instance, gives a well-rounded discussion of the flaws in the doctrine of the Majbira, without mentioning the dualists at all in this context.83 Nevertheless, the terminology he chooses is strikingly similar to the terminology known to us from Manichean jargon and from monotheistic anti-Manichean vocabulary. For al-Muqammi sets out to prove that God is wise and just (halak, ‘ulq), and not, as the determinant doctrine would imply, stupid and unjust (jabad, sa’iq, ‘alqam), whose acts are futile (‘abqar), oppressive, and tyrannical (zulm, jawr). And indeed, al-Murtadu tells us, using again the same terminology, that it is in antidualistic context that these terms were used and developed.84

Similarly, a standard argument in the polemics against the Majbira is that we must consider human beings the sole agents of their acts, because of the impossibility of ascribing one act to two agents.85 This is a major argument in anti-Manichean polemics, which is developed at length in those sections of the theological works that deal with the creation of man.86 In all likelihood, it is from this context that it was borrowed and passed into the argument about free will. And yet, the dualists are not usually mentioned when this argument is adduced in the context of free will.

Finally, a famous prophetic tradition (hadith) says that the Qadiriyya are the Zoroastrians of Islam (al-Qadariyya majba haiditi al-amma).87 Whether the

83 Iyadi, tawb, 12. and see G. Vajda, “La fondation de la creation humaine selon un manichéen de la IIe siécle,” Oriens 15 (1962) 61—85. See also ‘Abd al-Halab, Majbira 6:300.84, who reportedly compiles the Majbira to the Majbira. See Tawb, see n. 85 above.
85 E.g. ABDULLAH, M., 4:45. 156:31—156:8.
86 See n. 35 above.
87 Tawb, see n. 35 above.
89 See n. 30 above.
90 see n. 30 above.
92 see n. 33 above.
93 see n. 33 above.
94 see n. 33 above.
95 see n. 33 above.
96 see n. 33 above.
Probably more than Judaism and Islam, Christianity is inherently prone to dualistic challenges. But this very fact also provides the answer for Christianity’s rather impressive immunity to Manichaeism: in the second and third centuries, Christian thinkers had successfully developed theological tools in order to counter the Gnostic threat. These tools were ready for renewed use against Manichaeism, which challenged Christianity when it was becoming the leading religion in the Roman Empire. Manichaeism was seen to be pushed into a defensive position and into the underground. It is possible—although the sources are too scarce for one to be certain—that a resurgence of the Manichaean challenge occurred during the reign of Justinian I in the first half of the sixth century. Such a resurgence would explain the rigor of Justinian’s legal measures against the sect, and also the relative abundance of extant copies of Manichaean literature during this period.\(^\text{104}\) In any case, there was clearly no Manichaean danger in Byzantium after the sixth century, and in all probability the argumentation that reached John of Damascus and Theodore Abu Qurra had been transmitted to them in a rather abstract way, with no reference to an actual polemical context. Other Byzantine theological works from the sixth to the eighth century make only random allusions to Mani, his doctrines, and his followers.\(^\text{105}\)

The lack of a serious Manichaean threat to Byzantine Christianity does not mean the absence of any Manichaean influence on Byzantine theology. When the late Jean Gouillard writes that Byzantine refutations of Manichaeism are “a laborious task — a challenge of doctrine that inspired the enmity of the enmity,” he is probably wrong.\(^\text{106}\) Christian theologians focused precisely on those major implications of Manichaean doctrine that threatened the monotheistic conception of God and of the human person. Theology and ethics seem never more cogently developed in Patristic and early Byzantine works than in the context of anti-Manichaean polemics, whereas in other polemical contexts the main emphasis was on problems of chronology and trinitarianism. The very reappearance of anti-Manichaean polemical works by Christian, Jewish, and Muslim theologians in the early Islamic period testifies, along with the accounts of Muslim historians, to a Manichaean resurgence under the

\(^{104}\) See n. 34 above.

\(^{105}\) See, e.g., from the sixth century Lamentatio Dei against De baretia (3.2: PC 86.1, 1213); Theodore of Ratisbon in Thesaurus De miraculis (6.9, 1485 C–D). From the seventh century we have George the Hagiographer, Chapters to Ephesians concerning Heresies, ed. M. Richard, Syedrae Excerpta Byzantinae Spoudaia 25 (1955) 331, who mentions the Gospels of Pothos and of Thomas, and Anastasius Sinaita, Vener Dei, passim. Cf. also, for reasons at Regensburg–Lotharingia University, 1941; see index; cf. particularly XLI.3.34 (p. 298)—which seems to imply direct contact with a Manichaean.

To summarize the results of our inquiry, it appears that Manichaean presence and doctrine constituted a significant challenge to both early Byzantine and early Muslim theology, although this challenge was of a slightly different nature in both cases. Moreover, it appears that the emphasis of this challenge was on ethical rather than purely theological issues. Anthropological concepts of the Manicheans—and hence their approach to the problem of free will—seem to have been felt by both Christian and Muslim theologians as more immediately threatening than their theological dualism and its "materialist" sequel.

Mansi established his religion on very broad syncretistic grounds, in the hope that it could conquer the whole Columbia, East and West, by integrating the religious affections of all peoples—except those of the Jews. Although Manichaeism as an organized religion survived for more than a thousand years, and its geographical realm extended from North Africa to Southeast China, this ambition never came close to being realized, and the Manicheans remained, more often than not, small and persecuted communities. Yet, in a somewhat paradoxical way, it did achieve its ecclesiastical goal. For more than half a millennium, from its birth in the third century throughout late antiquity and beyond, its religion was despised and rejected with the utmost violence by rulers and thinkers belonging to all shades of the spiritual and religious spectrum. In this sense, Manichaeism, as an insane system, a "mania," appeared as the outsider par excellence. It thus offered a clear reference point, a convenient negative

1 For the best overview of Manichaeism at its most and developments East and West, see now S. C. Lane, Manichaeism in the Late Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey (Oxford: Manichean University Press, 1985). Cf. the reviews by O. G. Stratman, Classical Philology 88 (1987) 95-97. Parts of this paper were read at the Symposium on Late Antiquity and Early Islam at the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London, 26-28 June 1996. We wish to thank the convenors of the Symposium, Professor Averil Cameron and Dr. John Matthews, as well as Prof. Samuel Lane, who chaired our session and raised interesting points in the discussion, and also grateful to Professor Shihato Hoss and Shahzad Khan for their helpful comments on an earlier version.

2 So called by Greek Christian heresiographers using a word play on the founder's name. It was already in the earliest polemics in Coptic; see, e.g., Tract on the Cross of Manichaei 1.1, p. de Lagarde, Berlin, Hans, 1839); and Epistulae Pan. 66.1 (ed. C. Rügg: Roman-Hellenistic Inscriptions Zentral-Latinistica, 1987).2. and see n. 46 and supra n. 47 below. In order not to reproduce a complex argument, we have relied on instances and notes to a minimum, often being terse to those cited. One documentation thus seeks to be representative rather than comprehensive.