



MANI'S RELIGION OF LIGHT: ITS DARKER SIDES AND CONSEQUENCES

Investigating whether the religious philosophy of Mani (216-274 AD) still possesses any power and influence today would be a rewarding undertaking for a contemporary historian. The followers of Mani called themselves Manicheans. Theirs was a worldview dominated by two forces, the "good children of light" and the "evil world of darkness."

The influence of Manichaeism on philosophical thinking up to the Middle Ages is amply documented. But this dualistic doctrine has also influenced historical developments well into our time in an unfortunate way. The tendency to see things in terms of black and white has certainly contributed to the emergence of numerous conflicts. But this way of thinking is not only limited to the Manicheans, as history shows. There is the fanaticism of the Crusaders, who fought under the sign of the cross. There are many examples of witch hunting. There is the still-glorified myth of St. George, which is tied to the idea that "good" can be demonstrated only by fighting "evil." And finally, there is the persecution of the Jews. This was brought on in part by Hitler's misinterpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy—the "Herrenmoral" and the disdainful division of "supermen" and "subhumans."

These dualisms, those of light and darkness, friend and foe, good and evil, should have been overcome during the Age of Enlightenment, or at least after the collapse of National Socialism. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The dangerous bacillus of dualistic thinking has not only lodged in the heads of radical parties, but worse it has taken hold of the imagination of some of the mighty of this world.

Obviously, today we don't speak any more of the Manichean Light Elves and Dark Elves. Today, things are different. There are us versus the rogue states, and the free world versus the alliance of evil. But whether the dualistic mode of thinking can be traced to the Manichaeic creed alone, or whether its origin is an intrinsically human one, the questions still need to be asked.