

SIMILARITY BETWEEN ZOROASTRIAN AND CHRISTIAN DUALISM

Dr. Kersey Antia, Jan 16, 2020

Although Russell regards the later Sasanian dualism as “absolute dualism” (p. 107), later he explains that Ahriman is regarded therein as a non-being and adds: “The non-being of Ahriman is meant to indicate his non-Ohrmazdness, Ohrmazd being equated with absolute being” and Ahriman's being is contingent, not absolute. This ambiguity regarding the existence of evil indirectly influenced Christianity in which it became one of the classical questions of theology and still causes misunderstandings”. In a footnote, Russell refers to Antonio Moreno's book *Jung, Gods and Modern Man*, Notre Dame, 1970, in support of this view. Russell adds that Ohrmazd limits time in order to destroy Ahriman and “this limitation of time, and conception of time as meaningful, progressive and necessary for the eventual triumph of the God, appears again in the thought of the Christian fathers, especially Augustine, and becomes the basis of historical thought in the West”. (p. 108).

In the Zurvanaite dualism Ohrmazd and Ahriman are the two halves of Zurvan separated by the birth process, Ahriman being the first to see life and thereof claiming superiority over Ohrmazd, only to be flatly denied Him. Russell here sees the story of Jacob and Esau as they represent another set of doublets. “However”, adds Russell, “the difference between the Zoroastrian/Zervanite position and that of the other previous religions we have observed is again remarkable. The solution to this twinning in the nature of the One is not the eventual reconstitution of the divine (or psychic) whole, but rather the elimination of one of the two by cosmic battle (psychic repression), a solution very similar to that adopted by late Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Devil has become a totally alien force, not to be assimilated but to be destroyed. We are not to recognize the evil in ourselves and consciously suppress it; rather, we are to deny that it is in us, insist that it lies somewhere outside us, and therefore strive for the perfection that will come when we have driven off its assaults. Whatever the merits of this theodicy, its psychological difficulties are manifest,” (p. 111), which as a Magian and a life-long octogenarian psychologist I find unsubstantiated or at least in need of reliable validating data as the Zoroastrian experience and annals hardly suggest it.

However, Russell acknowledges that “in no way Ahriman is the God of matter” as in Manichaeism “or even, as in Christianity, “the lord of this world”. (p. 122).

The fall of Mashye and Mashyane, the ancestors of all mankind, as narrated in the *Bundahishn*, for lying that Ahriman and not Ohrmazd, created everything in the corporeal world as well as for sinning by offering an ox in sacrifice, and committing both these sins of their own free will when tempted by Ahriman and consequently falling from grace reminds Russell of the ambivalence in Christianity of Adam and Eve falling from grace but at the same time learning the ways of an imperfect corrupt world. They ultimately managed to survive and become ancestors of mankind. “But”, comments Russell, “the effects of the fall remain with us. Humankind lives in a world rendered imperfect by Ahriman and further corrupted by the defection of our first parents”. However, the sin of Mashye and Mashyane do not stop us from using our own free will and make the right choice in life, according to Zoroastrianism, a view also reflected in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

As in Christianity, lesser demons are also distinct from Satan in later Zoroastrianism. While I cannot agree with Russell on the status of women in Zoroastrianism which I have explained in an addendum in my book, *Argument for Acceptance in Zoroastrianism*, Create Space, 2015, his views on commonality between the Zoroastrian and Christian eschatology are commendable. Both share two forms of eschatology, one personal, at the death of a person and the other cosmic at the time of resurrection. He finds the concept of Chinwad Bridge very similar to the motif of the ladder to heaven in Christian mythology. In both eschatologies neither God or the judges or the spirit of darkness can send a person to hell but only his own evil deeds can. Those souls whose good deeds are equal to bad deeds go to Hamestagan, which Russell, like most scholars, compare to the Christian purgatory, another Zoroastrian concept that filtered into Christianity.

Russell believes that “many similarities in the Iranian and Judeo-Christian notions of the evil one, of hell and of resurrection probably indicate a high degree of cultural diffusion.” He finds Iranian influence “undeniable” on the Manual of Discipline and upon the Gnostics as their figure of Ialdabaoth bears a striking resemblance to Ahriman. However, the Zoroastrian influence on Judaism may also have paved the way for influencing Christian thought, as I have so often brought out in my writings. As stated earlier, devil and apocalypics play more of a role in Christianity than in later Judaism.