

MORE ON CHRISTIAN DUALISM

Dr. Kersey Antia, Mar 20, 2020

Janet Hamilton and Bernard Hamilton provide more information on this subject in *Christian Dualist Heresies in The Byzantine World* (Manchester University Press, Manchester) and I am quoting it succinctly here as it adds to our knowledge of this subject.

Constantine of Mananalis, who was born in the reign of Constans II (641-68) was the founder of Christian dualism as he held that the material universe was not the creation of the Good God but of an autonomous evil principle, an idea that prevailed in the Orthodox world of Byzantium for the next 800 years. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it spread to western Europe, where its adherents were known as Cathars.

But Byzantine theologians misconceived all Christian dualists as Manichaeans in disguise, and so persuasive to this day they are often referred to as neo-Manichaeans, which is quite misleading, for while the Manichaeans were dualist, they were not Christian.

The authors describe these absolute dualists as Paulicians and their leader Paul who went back to Armenia in the early eighth century to refound his sect.

On the other hand, the Bogomils emerged in Bulgaria under the leadership of Pop Bogomil who exhorted his followers to live like Orthodox monks, the main difference being the Orthodox monks gave up things that were good and God-given in their nature in imitation of Christ's self-denial, whereas the Bogomils gave them up because they believed them to be inherently evil and therefore not compatible with the true Christian life. The Bogomil's moderate dualism might have been initially influenced by the Paulicians who were quite active in Bulgaria in his time, "nevertheless (it) had a close resemblance to the beliefs of the Zurvanite Zoroastrians with which some Bulgarians seem to have been familiar before his day." (p. 31). During the early eleventh century "Bogomilism was able to grow virtually unchecked and by the early eleventh century it had spread into the Greek-speaking lands of Byzantium." (p. 31).

On the surface Bogomilism may appear to share many similarities with Paulicianism, but they differed greatly in their view of spiritual reality. The Bogomils believed in one God, whose sons were Christ and the devil, the devil being the maker of the phenomenal world. "This view of God", explains the authors, "did not derive from the Paulicians or the authors emphasize that the Bogomils' view of God was neither Paulician

or Manichean, but “its nearest parallel in Near Eastern thought was in Zurvanism, a form of Zoroastrianism which had been strong in the Sasanian Empire” and which regarded Zurvan as God and as the father of both Ohrmazd, the God of Light as well of Ahreman, the God of Darkness. This belief was prevalent in Bulgaria before the rise of Bogomilism at a time when the Bulgars lived on the Russian steppes and might have come in contact with different Iranian tribes there (which I have detailed elsewhere and which reminds me of how Paulicianism must have flourished in Armenia with all the Zoroastrian/Zurvanite ideas surrounding them.)

The close links maintained by the Cathars of Italy with the Balkan Bogomils indicate the spread of Bogomilism in the late twelfth century. The authors provide extensive evidence for it at length as well as for how various attempts later on to prosecute them did not materialise for a great while because of frequent palace revolutions, external attacks, revolts in the Balkans, etc. But the Bogomils and the Cathars ultimately disappeared from the region after making a move to migrate to Bosnia for their safe survival. Pope John XXII complained to Prince Stephen of Bosnia in 1325 about “a great crowd of heretics” migrating to Bosnia, which may be quite true since no Cathar precinct has been reported in the western Europe since 1325. The survival and subsequent history of Bogomilism in Bosnia are not attempted by the authors mainly for considerations of space. But the Council of Tunovo in circa 1350 “condemned the Bogomils for teaching cosmological dualism between the Good God of Heaven and the evil creator of this world.” (p. 54). The last evidence for the persistence of Bogomilism in Bulgaria is dated 1370 as they did not survive there after the Ottoman Turks conquered Bulgaria in 1393, though they survived in the Byzantine Empire right up to the eve of its conquest by the Ottomans as is known from The Treatise Against Heretics of Archbishop Symeon of Thessalonica (1416-29).

These little known facts I have noted here, though very succinctly, to highlight the far-reaching influence of Zoroastrian thought even in Europe, alas extinguished by the same force that ended the Zoroastrian rule in Persia.

This is not the first time western scholars have turned critical about Zarathushtra. As Professor Daniel Sheffield of Princeton University narrates well in the *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute*, Volume No. 75, 2010, Reverend John Wilson who sought to convert Parsi youth to Christianity was at the vanguard of such a movement in the nineteenth century. He called the alleged divine mission of Zoroaster as “insignificant, unsatisfactory and absurd” since all the sacred texts that chronicle his life were written long after he lived, etc. His Parsi critics pointed out that the same could be said of the Bible and Christianity as

declared then by the renaissance writers like Voltaire, but that did not seem to phase Wilson at all. I find the opinion of the Avestan scholar, Friedrich Spiegel quite pertinent here: “Although we have extracted no clues about the historical Zarathustra, we at least know how the followers of his teachings view him, and this is not unimportant.” What can possibly be better evidence of their religious practices, beliefs and texts faithfully preserved over millennia and which may well be among the oldest in human history.

The later part of the nineteenth century as well as the early to mid-twentieth century saw scholars that re-established the place of Zarathushtra and his teachings and like Mary Boyce even tried to show them as the origin or source of the Judeo-Christian tradition. But lately some scholars, albeit genuinely propelled by their erudite studies have begun to raise various issues as already noted. I find Gherardo Gnoli's response to them in his “Zoroaster's Time and Homeland”, Naples, 1980, quite appropriate.” We must react against the tendency, fairly common nowadays (even Mrs. Boyce is not entirely immune from it), which aims at leveling Zoroaster in a context – often arbitrarily reconstructed, what is more – that ends up by obscuring all the traits of his personality and the originality of his work. Zoroaster did not invent anything not even the name of his god and the reformation that has hitherto borne his name is no other than the result of a slow process of development of a traditional religion, and even the earlier rites and cults remained essentially unchanged and so on... Now, I am convinced that Zoroaster was, on the contrary, a unique case!”

However, it would be good to have one of our own to study these issues and guide us in the matter as how long we can defend upon having the good luck to have others to intervene on our behalf!

Dan Shapira provides another parallel in use in the two traditions in his doctoral dissertation submitted to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1998, p. xxxi): The terms “translation” and “exegesis do not fully render what the Zand really is. It was Schaefer 1930, 76, who identified the Zand as the Middle Persian Targum to the Avestan “text”, and Gignoux 1986a, 56, defined Zand as exegesis like that of the Judaeo-Christian world; indeed, the Jewish Targum is the best parallel to the Zoroastrian Zand. The most important common notion about both Jewish Targumim and Zoroastrian Zands is that both were originally supposed to be, on the one hand, strictly oral and literal, and, on the other, they were fluid, non-fixed, open to re-working.)