

Did the Prophet Mani Reject the Old and New Testaments?

[Extracted from a lecture presented in Beijing in August 2012, by Char Yar, D.D., M.A., Ph.D., University for Historical and Cultural Research]

Some scholars have claimed that the Prophet Mani and Manichaeans have traditionally rejected the Old and New Testament, even claiming anti-Semitism as part of the religious belief system of Manichaeism. This is based on the interpretation of what little manuscripts academics have access to today and upon what previous scholars and religious authors have said. This is especially noticeable when scholars attempt to quote Augustine, who became an apostate of the Manichaean religion. Augustine left the religion for the Catholic church and is responsible for possibly thousands of deaths of Manichaeans by the Catholic church.

In this brief section of the lecture, I would like to compare a few quotes from Manichaean texts with those of the Judeo-Christian Bible called the Old and New Testament.

“Send down the springtide of the great Law to fertilise the ground of my Soul and let the flowers and fruits of my Soul flourish! Teach me the way of Life, and I shall come to thee rejoicing...”
(*Gospel of the Prophet Mani*)

“Teach me, Lord (Yahweh), the way of your decrees (Laws), that I may follow it to the end. Give me understanding, so that I may keep your Law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.” (Psalm 119:33-35, *New International Version - NIV*)

“Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life.” (Psalm 143:8, *NIV*)

“Manichaean books are full of echoes and memories from the great Hebrew Prophets and Psalmists.” (Introductory pages of the *Gospel of the Prophet Mani*)

“The Manichaean Psalmist knew and loved the Hebrew Psalms” (Duncan Greenlees, translator of Manichaean manuscripts for his volume the *Gospel of the Prophet Mani*; page 174)

God, Supreme Father of the Light, Zurvan... “He is the Father of the Greatness, the Glorious One who is adored, for whose greatness there is no measure, who is the First Aloneborn, the First Eternal, who was before everything which has been and which shall be, the Root of all the Lights.”
(*Gospel of the Prophet Mani*)

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” (James 1:17, *NIV*)

The Prophet Mani made use of the Gospel of Thomas. In this work, the Apostle Thomas from the New Testament, basis a parable on Psalm 118:22:

“He said, A good man had a vineyard. He leased it to some tenant farmers so that he would receive its profit from them. He sent his servant so that the farmers would give him the profits of the

vineyard. They seized his servant, they beat him and almost killed him. The servant went back; he told his master. His master said, perhaps they did not recognize him. He sent another servant. The tenants beat this one as well. Then the master sent his son. He said, perhaps they will respect my son. The tenants seized him, they killed him, since they knew he was the heir of the vineyard. He who has ears let him hear. Jesus said, Show me the stone which the builders have rejected. It is the cornerstone." (Gospel of Thomas 65, 66; compare to Mark 12:1-12)

The Gospel of Thomas, verse 1, says... "Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings shall not taste death."

Compare the verse in the Gospel of Thomas to Isaiah 25:18...

"He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken." (NIV)

"He (mankind) shall reign over the totality" (Gospel of Thomas 2). Compare to Genesis 1:26... "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'" (NIV)

These are only a very few examples of how the teachings and writings of the Prophet Mani and later Manichaeans of ancient times can easily be compared and cross referenced to passages in the Old and New Testaments. It would require an entire book to list all the possible references to the Bible. There is no doubt then, when viewing the writings attributed to Mar Mani with an open mind, he was quite familiar with and used the Jewish and Christian scriptures.

Unfortunately, many people would prefer to remain blissful in their ignorance than being open to the very notion of remotely being wrong about their interpretations of Manichaean writings.

"I have known the Cross of Light that gives life to the universe, I have believed in it that it is my beloved Soul which nourishes everyone, whereat the blind are offended, because they are ignorant of it." (*Gospel of the Prophet Mani* 71:4)

"The souls of the deniers and blasphemers shall weep when the Last Statue comes down therein" (*ibid*, 87:1)

References

Gospel of the Prophet Mani, translated by Duncan Greenlees
<http://astore.amazon.com/wcre05-20/detail/1585095028>

New International Version of the Bible
<http://astore.amazon.com/wcre05-20/detail/0310912369>

Gospel of Thomas
<http://astore.amazon.com/wcre05-20/detail/1463600402>