

The Manichaeian Perfection

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Manichaeism penetrated into Europe in two waves, separated by an interval of a few centuries. The first wave spread between the third and the seventh centuries over the whole of the Mediterranean world extending from the Middle East and Asia Minor to North Africa, Spain, Southern France and Italy. The second wave was that of a revived Manichaeism, known usually as Bogomilism which became known as a historical fact for the first time in the mid-tenth century in Bulgaria. Its followers were called Bogomils, which in the Slavic language means literally “dear to God”. In Western and Middle Europe they were known by the names Cathars, Albigenses, Waldenses and as well as the most common names Bulgari or “Bulgars”, mentioned by Rudolf Steiner:

“Thus in later centuries, and indeed for a very long time in Europe, those in whom this mood of soul was most strongly developed were called ‘Bulgars.’ ‘Bulgars’ — for the people of Western and Middle Europe in the later Christian centuries of the first half of the Middle Ages — Bulgars were human beings who were most strongly touched by this opposition of the good and evil cosmic spiritual powers.” GA 237, 5

This Bogomil Manichaeism was a Christian esoteric viewpoint which first spread eastwards over much of the Byzantine Empire during the 10- 11th centuries and then during the 12th and early 13th centuries it spread westwards mainly through southern Europe – from the Black Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, and also to Belgium (Flanders) and parts of southern Germany.

According to historical data both the eastern Bogomil and the western Cathar Mystery schools consisted of three degrees, the highest of which was the one of the “*perfects*” (“*perfecti*”), followed by the “*believers*” (“*credentes*”) and finally by the “*listeners*” (“*auditors*”). The former were the Initiates in the Mysteries who functioned as priests. The others were the disciples or the candidates for initiation, whose act of reception into the number of “*credentes*” or “*believers*” was recorded by the Byzantine monk and theologian Euthymius Zigabenos¹ in his *Panoplia Dogmaticae*:

“They say that our baptism has to do with John because we baptize with water, while their baptism has to do with Christ, for they think they baptize with the Spirit. For this reason, if someone goes to them, they baptize him again. First they set out time for confession, purification and fervent prayer. Then, placing the Gospel on his head, they read “In the beginning was the Word”, invoke the Holy Spirit and sing “Our Father”. After such baptism, they assign time for more detailed training, a more abstentious life and more genuine prayers, and they demand proof that he was able to observe all this and that he struggled zealously.”

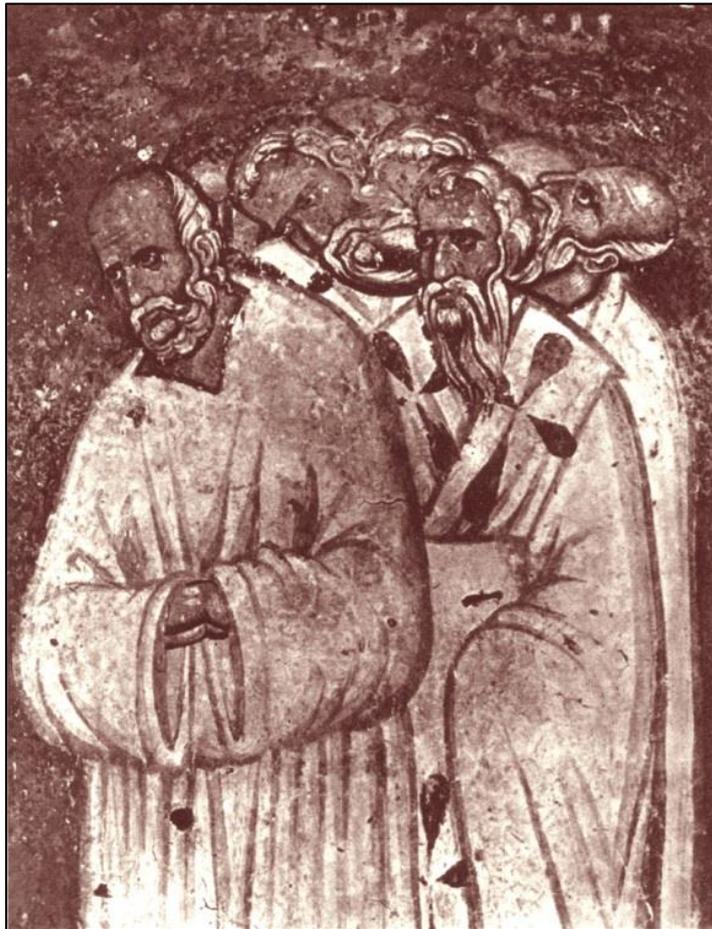


Fig. 1 Serbian Bogomil priests, 12th century fresco from Serbia

The “perfect” Manicheans were those who had submitted to the initiation-rite, called the *consolamentum*. This was a sort of spiritual baptism, also called “imposition of Hands” and “Baptism of the Holy Spirit”. It was performed by two “perfects” at least! Euthymius Zigabenos described this in short in his *Panoplia Dogmaticae*:

“Both men and women have to bear witness to this and then he is taken to their disreputable initiation into the sacraments: they make the wretch turn to the east, place again the Gospel on his sinful head, the men and the women who are present there touch him with their sacrilegious hands and sing wicked prayers of initiation.”

As a result of the consolamentum it was believed that the Holy Spirit had settled in the Manichaean initiate or Perfect! This reminds of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, promised by Christ and fulfilled in Manes – the founder of Manichaeism.

None of the ancient authors or the modern scholars, however, can explain what exactly the “perfect”, “believer” and “listener” degrees mean. Rudolf Steiner gave some indications in the following excerpt from a lecture about Goethe’s fairytale:

*„However, there are methods to purify thinking so far that we no longer think personally but let the thoughts think in us, as we let mathematical thoughts think in us. If we have purified the thoughts from the influence of the personal, we speak of the purification or **catharsis** as this was called in the old Eleusinian mysteries. The human being has to purify his thinking that gives him the possibility to grasp the things with objective thoughts.*

*As this is possible, so it is also possible to blank out all that is personal from the feeling, so that then also that which stimulates the feeling no longer has to do with the person, with sympathy and antipathy, but appeals to the being of the thing itself, insofar as it cannot speak to the mere imaginative power. The experiences in our soul can also be purified from the personal – like with thinking, so that the feeling provides that same objectivity or as the thinking or the powers of imagination can provide. One calls this purification or development of the feeling **“enlightenment”** in all esoteric schools.*

*Any human being who is able of development and does not strive for it arbitrarily must take care that he is stimulated only by that which is contained in the being of the thing. If he has come so far that the thing wakes no sympathy or antipathy in him, then it lies in the being of the thing that the thinking and acting of the human being run in this or that direction, and this is a statement of the innermost being of the thing. One called this development of the will esoterically the **“perfection”**. (...)*

*What the human being attains by the purification of thinking makes him recognise the spiritual behind everything. The sensuous becomes a symbol of the spiritual. He penetrates deeper to grasp what is inaccessible to thinking. Then he reaches a level on which he is no longer looking at the things with the help of images, but is led to the thing itself, where the being of the things and that which one cannot describe becomes attainable. What one cannot describe, what one has to imagine in another way Goethe just calls the **“indescribable”***

whereby one has to advance to the secrets of the will. If the human being has covered the triple way through thinking, feeling and willing, he unites with that which is called in the chorus mysticus the “eternally female,” that which has gone through its development as a human soul which is represented as the beautiful lily.” GA 57, 24.10.1908.

This text makes it clear that the “perfection” degree was that of the Initiates in the Manichaeic mystery schools. It has always existed, also in the mystery schools of ancient times, and it refers to the ultimate, completed or in other words the “perfect” stage in their development. "Perfection" was in fact nothing but a technical term just as “catharsis” and “enlightenment” or “illumination”. It signifies the perfection or completion of the process of purification of the human will, which transformed it into the finest instrument for acquiring supersensible knowledge. One could call it “*thinking of the will or of the limbs*” like the “*thinking of the heart*” which Rudolf Steiner spoke often. This is the “indescribable” mentioned above of and of which Goethe wrote at the culmination of his “Faust”:

All that is transitory is only a symbol;

What seems unachievable here is seen done;

What's indescribable here becomes fact;

The eternally-female shows us the way.

On the modern mystery path of inner development, which is the task of Anthroposophy, the “cathar” stage would correspond to the stage of Imagination. It is described by Rudolf Steiner in his book “How to Attain Knowledge of the Higher Worlds” along with Inspiration and Intuition, which in certain ways correspond to the Manichaeic stages “belief” and “perfection”. At the level of Inspiration one hears the uttering of spiritual beings, having previously seeing them through Imagination. Finally, the complete union with them comes through Intuition, which is the stage of the Manichaeic perfection or what Goethe termed the “indescribable”.



Fig. 2 Serbian Orthodox (left) and Bogomil (right) priests, 12th century fresco from Serbia

Besides, so to speak, the general anthroposophical path, which is intended for all people and does not require the presence of a Teacher, at the end of his life Rudolf Steiner founded the School of Spiritual Science of the Anthroposophical Society as a further development of his earlier Esoteric School. Though Steiner intended to develop three “classes” of this school, only the first was developed in his lifetime and continues today. It could be associated with the stage of Imagination or “catharism”. Correspondingly, the other two classes should have led to Inspiration and Intuition or according to the Manichaeian terminology, to the stages of the “believer” and the “perfect”. They are a task still to be achieved in the future!

1. *Euthymios Zigabenos (died after 1118) was a monk and a court theologian under the patronage of Byzantine Emperor Alexios (1048 – 1118). He wrote Panoplia Dogmatica or “Full Armour of Belief”.*
2. *Western Balkan monuments, called Stechak.*