PART TWO

STUDIES IN MANICHAEISM:
ORIGINS & MYTH; DOCTRINES & CULT;
DIFFUSION & ART
CHAPTER TWELVE

THE MANICHAEAN COSMOGONICAL MYTH AS A ‘RE-WRITTEN BIBLE’

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Considering the studies on Manichaean doctrine and the complicated myth of Mani one can clearly discern two main lines: a Zoroastrian one and a Gnostic-Christian one. In the past years, more and more attention has been paid to the Gnostic roots of Manichaeism.

The Gnostic-Christian constituent of the Manichaean cosmogony should be connected with the fact that Mani grew up and was educated in a Jewish-Christian community of βαπτισταί in Mesopotamia. We therefore might suppose that the cosmogony of the Bible had become one of the principal sources for Mani’s cosmogonical teaching.

Much research has been done in the field of Bible interpretation and Biblical parallels found in Gnostic texts. At first sight the complicated and fantastic Gnostic mythology differs cardinally from the Old Testament Creation story. But the Gnostic myths show many parallels with the legends that were developed in the early Christian tradition on the basis of the Genesis story. In turn, these Christian legends show striking parallels with Jewish exegeses of the Bible.

The attitude of the Gnostics toward the Old Testament is not as radically antagonistic as it might look. A more precise analysis shows that

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3 The recent literature on this topic see in: J. van Oort, ‘Biblical Interpretation in the Patristic Era, a “Handbook of Patristic Exegesis” and Some Other Recent Books and Related Projects’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 60 (2006), 80–103.