Manichaeism identifies itself as the religion of the Two Natures and the Three Times.\(^1\) The idea of the Two Natures, namely Good/Light versus Evil/Darkness, forms the foundation upon which everything else in the religion builds.\(^2\) Their descriptions can be found in a variety of Manichaean texts spread throughout the Roman world, Central Asia and China. The reasoning behind the belief of the Two Natures is that the good God could not have created evil and therefore evil must have its own root or cause which must be outside the realm of the good. Although the reasoning behind this was for a good cause, i.e. to protect God from the idea that he created evil, and Mani and other Manichaens could turn to the New Testament to back up their belief, the mainstream church saw otherwise. For them, there was only one God and thus one nature.

This chapter will examine the scriptural evidence used by the Manichaeans for the existence of the Two Natures. It will show that the *Acta Archelai*, although fictional, accurately portrays the way that

\(^1\) See Decret 1970, especially chapter 3; Lieu 1992, 10–32; and J. C. Reeves, “Manichaean Citations from the Prose Refutations of Ephrem,” in Mirecki/BeDuhn 1997, 266. For Manichaean primary sources on this subject, see *Keph* 55.16–57.32; and Felix in Augustine’s *C. Fel*. 2.1 “Ista enim epistula Fundamenti est, quod et sanctitas tua bene scit, quod et ego dixi, quia ipsa continet initium, medium et finem” (Latin is taken from Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Vienna, 1865–, vol. 25,2/828.23–26, hereafter CSEL).

\(^2\) Why there are Two Natures in the first place is something that the Manichaens felt was beyond human reasoning. Secundinus, in *ep. Sec.* (CSEL 25,2/899.11–15) tells Augustine to stop making the two natures one “desine duas naturas facere unam, quia adpropinquat domini iudicium. Uae, qui accipient, qui, quod dulce est, in amaritudinem transferunt!” He also tells Augustine (CSEL 25,2/899.16–900.5) that it cannot be explained why there are two natures, since “divine reason surpasses the hearts of men.” Augustine answers this in *C. Sec.* 26 (CSEL 25,2/946.21). Secundinus echoes Mani, in *Keph* 67.15–21.
the Manichaeans based the Two Natures on the scripture, especially in the use of the Gospel of Matthew and its abundant references to the Two Trees (the Good and the Evil) and their fruit. Evidence from other Manichaean texts and characterizations of Manichaeans in Augustine’s writings shows similar usage of Mt. and Jn. It will also show that Archelaus’ response is the same as found in other Christian anti-heretical texts where the two natures are argued against: evil is the result of man’s free will and it cannot exist as a separate entity.

The Acta Archelai (AA) contains a great deal of information about the Manichaean religion, whether or not the debates between Mani and Archelaus actually took place. In it there are three main sections that purportedly come from the Manichaeans: a letter from Mani to Marcellus (AA 5), the Manichaean Turbo’s account (AA 7), and the rest of Mani’s statements (starting at AA 15). In the letter that Turbo carries from Mani to Marcellus, Mani begins his main argument to Marcellus with a plea for Marcellus’ salvation and subsequently begins to attack the view that there is only one principle from which everything (including evil) stems. Although Marcellus sent his reply to Mani, Turbo (who for some unknown reason abandons his faith in Mani, AA 6.3) gives a version of the Manichaean cosmogonical story that begins with the well known eternal separation of good from evil at the beginning. Mani then arrives and picks up where his letter left off: the salvation of Marcellus’ soul. He wastes no time in attacking the one-principle theory as explained by Archelaus. Mani thought that if he could convert Marcellus to his brand of Christianity, then he “would be able to seize the entire province.” At his defeat Mani left and soon after preached his idea of two unbegotten beings (52.2).

Throughout the AA, much like other texts that were written against heretics, Mani is disparaged a number of times. Archelaus remarks that he should be called a parasite rather than the Paraclete (AA25.3) and claims that he is a vessel of the anti-Christ (40.2), a barbarian priest

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3 For a discussion of this subject, see Chapter One of this volume, and Lieu 1994, 132–152.
4 See Gardner, Chapter Three of this volume; also Lieu in Verme, 40 n13.
5 AA 4.2. There is no doubt that in this text, Mani saw his religion as a Christian religion. This was undoubtedly the case for the other Manichaeans in the Roman Empire. See J. van Oort, 2001, 164.
6 For example, see Tertullian’s description of Marcion in his Adu. Marc. 1.1 (among others).