

Augustine, *Confessions*: Manichaeism vs. Christianity

Manichaeism

The religion of followers of the Iranian prophet **Mani** (c. 216-276). They claimed to be Christians (*Confessions* III.vi.10; page 40, cf. footnote), but in fact rejected nearly all the core teachings of Christianity.

Manichaeism includes Gnostic elements (Greek *gnostikos*, “of knowledge”). **Gnosticism** refers to a variety of sects which were popular rivals to Christianity from the late 1st century to the 3rd century AD. Generally speaking, Gnostics:

- (1) emphasize salvation through knowledge of secret teachings,
- (2) often believe in dualism, conflict between supreme good and evil beings (*see below*),
- (3) aggressively distinguish between body and spirit (*see below*),
- (4) have different sacred scriptures: they delete, revise, or replace parts of the Christian Bible (*see below*), and
- (5) have complex cosmologies (*see below*).

Dualism: While he is a Manichee, Augustine believes in **dualism**, a conflict between light/good and darkness/evil, entities which are similar in substance and status (for example, the good entity did not create the evil entity). His idea of God is this light/good entity; God and the evil opposed to God are supposedly both infinite masses, alive and composed of some physical substance. This leads Augustine to think of God as a literally glowing physical object (*Confessions* IV.ii.3, IV.xv.24, IV.xvi.31, V.x.20, VII.ii.3; pages 53-54, 67, 70, 85, 112-113).

While he is a Manichee, Augustine believes his soul is part of the good entity (God), but can be corrupted by the evil entity, so that his sins are not his own fault but the fault of the evil entity (*Confessions* IV.xv.68, IV.xvi.31, V.x.18, VII.ii.3; pages 68, 70, 84, 113).

Christianity

The faith of followers of Jesus **Christ** (first use of this name for his followers, Acts 11:26). Jesus’s title, Christ (Greek *Khristos*, “anointed”) is a translation of the title Messiah (Hebrew *Moshiach*, “anointed”) and refers to someone anointed with oil, a ceremony marking kings and priests.

Christian teaching has always been open rather than secret, in publicly available scriptures and creeds. The command and practice is always to share the teachings that lead to salvation, and in fact to share all teachings, especially the best and most important ones (e.g., Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Galatians 6:6, Deuteronomy 6:1-9).

Christianity teaches that God made everything (Genesis 1:1, John 1:1-3, Nicene Creed), and is thus more powerful than any evil being, including Satan, who will be ultimately defeated (1 John 4:4, Revelation 12:9, Genesis 3:15, Romans 16:20, Hebrew 2:14, Colossians 2:14-15, Jude 1:6, 2 Peter 2:4, Luke 10:17-19, Revelation 20:10).

Christianity teaches that people are responsible for their own sins, but that Jesus Christ died for the sins of humanity so that those who repent and believe in him will be forgiven and saved from their sins and from the penalty for their sins (1 Corinthians 15:3, 1 Corinthians 15:17, Romans 10:9-10, Matthew 26:28, Luke 24:46-47, Acts 2:38, Acts 10:43, Colossians 1:13-14, Hebrews 9:22-26, Matthew 1:21).

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Manichaeism

Body and spirit: While he is a Manichee, Augustine is contemptuous of the body as inferior to the spirit. He mistakenly believes that Christians think God the Father has a human-like body, and rejects this idea. He also rejects the idea of Christ's incarnation in a human body, a real and central Christian doctrine, because at this time he believes having a body would necessarily defile Christ. At that time, Augustine thus does not believe Christ was crucified to make the forgiveness of sins possible (*Confessions* III.vii.12, V.ix.16, V.x.20; pages 43, 82, 86).

The Manichees use terms which Christians use for the members of the Trinity, but they use the terms very differently because of their different beliefs, denying the humanity of Christ and saying the Paraclete (Holy Spirit) is the other self of the prophet Mani (*Confessions* III.vi.10, V.v.8, V.x.20; pages 40 [cf. footnote], 76, 86).

Scriptures: The Manichees attack the Bible, criticizing the Old Testament and claiming the text of the New Testament has been tampered with (*Confessions* III.vii.43, III.vii.14, V.xi.21; pages 43, 45, 86).

Cosmology: The Manichees' teachings about the sun and moon were incompatible with verifiable facts: for example, Manichees taught that eclipses were caused by the sun or moon veiling their eyes (*Confessions* V.iii.6; page 75, cf. footnote).

Christianity

Christianity stresses the value of the human body, which was part of God's good creation (Genesis 1:27,31; 2:7,22). Jesus Christ, God the Son, is **incarnate** as a man with a body (John 1:1,14), and died in his body for the sins of humanity (1 Peter 3:18). According to the Apostle Paul, the **resurrection of the body**—both Christ's resurrection and the resurrection promised to Christ's followers—is one of the most important Christian teachings (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, 15:16-22, cf. Nicene Creed).

Christianity affirms the **Trinity** (Latin *Trinitas*, "tripleness, group of three") of three persons—Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit—united as one God. Christ's followers are to be baptized in the name of all three distinct persons (Matthew 28:19, John 14:9-10,16-17; cf. Nicene Creed), and the **divinity of Christ**—Christ's identity as God while being distinct from God the Father—is particularly stressed in the New Testament (Philippians 2:6, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8, John 1:1-18, John 5:18, John 10:30).

Christians believe that the Bible (Greek *ta biblia*, "the books") or Scripture (Latin *scriptura/scripturae*, Greek *graphé/graphai*, "writing/writings") is inspired by God to teach them and guide their actions (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Early Christians referred not only to the Old Testament but to New Testament books as "Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16), although the list of New Testament books recognized by the church was made official later. (In fact, Augustine played an important role in standardizing the list.)

Christianity teaches that the universe is God's creation and therefore shows his power and character (Genesis 1:1, Psalm 19:1, Romans 1:19-20), but says very little about the organization of the universe.