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## Gnostic Origins of Alfred Rosenberg's Thought

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It has been said that the Christian opponent of Judaism has but two alternatives: to de-judaize Christ or to deny Him. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, following many theologians of middle Europe in the 19th Century, attempted to prove that Jesus was an Aryan living in an isolated area of Gallilee, and separated racially from the rest of the peoples of the region. The author of *Foundations of the 19th Century* attempted to show that an isolated group of Nordics had been cut off from the mainstream of the nation, and that Christ was descended from such people. Field Marshal Ludendorff and others merely denied the relevance of Jesus, and were anti-Christian as well as anti-Hebrew. These two traditions accepted in common the idea that the Bible, Old and New Testaments alike, was literal history.

A third possibility underlies Rosenberg's thought. The origins are rooted in pre-Christian ideas and practices commonly known in the West as gnosticism. Like many other generic terms, gnosticism is used by many to cover a wide variety of philosophical-theological ideas. Because of the success of the Western church, including its more recent Protestant forms, the systems which were vanquished in the long struggle for religious supremacy in Christendom are thought of in a totally negative context. Such names as Marcionite, gnostic, Manichaeism, and Bogomilite, are perjorative. Most of what was known about them was either secretly guarded or was learned from reading the refutations of opponents or the accounts of one or another Inquisition, including the interrogations (most often of unlearned members under torture) of those who were accused of heresy.

In the 20th Century there have been two major developments which have changed what we know about the various "heresies." One is the discovery of major documents and treatises either by leading gnostics or by their closest disciples and followers. The other development is the interest shown by leaders of the Third Reich in these movements, and the subsequent study of the ideology in terms of such thought. Among the major works to appear reinterpreting the National Socialist movement in such terms are Pauwels and Bergiers' *The Morning of the Magician* (in French, and translated into many languages), Ravenscroft's *The Spear of Destiny* and *The Cup of Destiny* and Angebert's *The Occult and the Third Reich*.

Most of the authors who have rediscovered the gnostics and their influence on the Third Reich have assumed that the leaders kept the bases of knowledge secret, usually in the SS shrines and rituals, and that this special knowledge was never intended for mass distribution. Only the few specially selected SS types could be entrusted with the age-old secrets. Even in the pre-Third Reich State, Rosenberg had distributed

his essay on the origins of Nazi ideology (actually written before the NSDAP was formed). His *Myth of the 20th Century* discussed one particularly gnostic sect, the Cathars (Holy or Purified Ones), in great detail, but stopped short of offering a simplified version of the Cathar religion/philosophy as the new religion (or reinstated religion) of Germany.

It is my contention here that Alfred Rosenberg's *Myth of the 20th Century* is quintessentially a gnostic work which attempted to set the stage for subsequent works which would have taken Germany back in time to a stage in which a simplified, anti-Jewish religion was the common practice in the West among the common peoples. It was designed not as a final statement on the New Nordic Religion, but was to serve as a trial balloon, a precursor of what was to come. In the early 1920s Rosenberg was not prepared to offer a final statement of this philosophy. The research necessary to the full creation had not yet been completed. It was a promise of things to come. It was a quest which may, in his terms, be likened unto King Arthur's setting the Knights of the Round Table on the quest for the Holy Grail.

## The Grail Legend

Every German schoolboy knew the great folk tale of the Grail by heart. Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* was one of the greatest works of literature in the German (or any other) language. On the surface it is a familiar tale of a pure knight's search for perfect love and redemption. It had been popularized in the late 19th Century by the composer Richard Wagner, in operatic form. Few pieces of heroic literature had more impact on the nation-conscious Germans than *Parzival*.

Wagner's opera opens with the aged Knight, Gurnemanz, recalling the legend of the Grail. Titirel had been fighting the pagans without success when, suddenly, he was visited by a band of angels. They gave unto him keeping the Holy Grail, which Christ drank from at the Last Supper; and the Spear of Longinus, the lance used by the Roman centurion to pierce the side of Jesus as he lay in agony upon the cross. Titirel had built a great stronghold at Monsalvat to house these treasures, and had gathered around him those knights who were pure in heart wherewith to guard these great talismans of heavenly power. These knights rode forth to fight injustice and tyranny throughout the world.

Klingsor was an applicant, but he could not vanquish lust and passion from his heart, and so was rejected for membership. He then built a great garden of evil in which, through enticements of the flesh provided by a variety of beautiful women, he lured the pure ones from their stronghold, and enslaved them in his evil service. Amfortas was sent forth by Titirel to carry the sacred lance into the evil place and end its temptations. Klingsor sent the lovely Kundry to tempt Amfortas. She seduced him and delivered the sacred spear to Klingsor. The evil sorcerer wounded Amfortas with it, and although Amfortas escaped, his wound would not heal. Amfortas believed that he was condemned for his sin of the flesh.

tin Innocent Fool, Parsifal, appears on the scene, seeking his identity and destiny. After a brief scene in which the Holy Grail is unveiled, he goes to Klingsor's castle. Kundry is sent to seduce him, but, suddenly, Parsifal has a vision and is transfixed. He is told that should he fall to Kundry's seduction there can be no healing of Amfortas' wound and no salvation for him or the Grail Knights. He rejects Kundry and leaves. Klingsor attempts to kill him with the spear, but it hovers over the youth's head. The sensual

paradise collapses and Klingsor vanishes.

After many years Parsifal returns from his wanderings throughout the world. He finds that Kundry has taken the robes of a penitent and that Gurnemanz has become a hermit. It is Good Friday. He is told that Titirel has died and that Amfortas still lies wounded and unable to consecrate Holy Communion. Parsifal goes to Monsalvat, touches Amfortas' wound with the sacred spear and revives the knight. The spear and the Grail are replaced in the sanctuary.

The Grail legend is interpreted in two ways. Generally, it is viewed as a story of Christian love and the redemption of mankind. The second is the mythical interpretation. The Grail is said to contain a coded message known only to a few, and understood by a tiny number. It is this interpretation which is accepted by Ravenscroft in *The Cup of Destiny* (1981) and Angebert in *The Occult and the Third Reich* (1974).

Lucifer was a Prince of Heaven before his sin prompted God to cast him to Hell. On the descent to the Underworld his crown fell to earth, and from it a huge emerald. This was used by men of antiquity to fashion a drinking cup to be used in occult rituals. Here we find the most ancient relic accepted by both Christians and gnostics. The cup was ringed with the usual special signs, symbols, runes and the like, all depicting the ascent of man through various stages to a final state of blessedness. The Grail had become the sacred vessel of Initiate Knowledge. It contained on its exterior the great trove of primordial knowledge and tradition which linked the past to the future. That primordial knowledge can bring man back into the natural and only true condition for him, the primordial state of consciousness.

Within Germany many regarded the Grail as the lost, secret book of the Aryan race. It had been entrusted to them since eons past, and was lost and recovered on occasion. What precisely it contained was unknown, and since it was written in symbols, the interpretation given these runes may have differed from age to age. It was the one great treasure of all Aryans, at all times. From age to age it had been the uniting factor, the one artifact that provided a rationale for the existence of the race.

The recent movie *Excalibur* has given a similar highly secularized interpretation of the Grail myth. The Grail is presented as being a sort of intermediary between ruler and ruled, a magic transmitter that guarantees that the king and the land are one, and that each will serve the other in a wholly natural relationship. Yet it is the spiritual dimension of the Grail that allows for this mythical union.

The Grail predated Christianity. This is an absolute whose acceptance is necessary for understanding the importance of it as an artifact to the NSDAP and its leaders, notably the SS. In Alfred Rosenberg's *Myth of the 20th Century* the Grail may be viewed as the cause of German objection to some aspects of Christianity, notably to Roman Catholicism. It may be viewed as having provided direction to the German people, or at least a significant portion of it, when the people were confronted by orthodox Western church teachings which were alien to them.

While the authors of the recent studies, notably Angebert and Ravenscroft, and to a lesser degree Pauwels and Bergier, have noted the importance of the Cathars of the 11th through the 14th centuries, they have not gone far enough in their research. It is true, as we shall see below, that the "Pure Ones" did preserve, for a

time, the Grail and other related artifacts, but they were relative latecomers, both doctrinally and in terms of interest in and preservation of the Grail.

## The Marcionite Heresy

We must return to the 2nd century A.D., to Marcion of Sinope in Pontus, to see the development of the whole body of literature surrounding the Grail. The greater portion of what stood in contradistinction to both Western Catholicism and the later Orthodox schism from that Church, can be seen at least germinally in Marcion. He, like many, had struggled with the great problem of evil. The Church had not as of that time decided its own explanation of evil in the world. The question was far from settled when Marcion was writing.

The Marcionites believed that evil was a truly real force, not merely the privation of some good. One may, for simplification, regard that evil power as the Devil, Satan, or the Lord of the Flies. He is a power to be reckoned with. The world was the source of sin and corruption, and was to be avoided. It had been created just as the Old Testament had said, but not by God. There was a lesser being, or beings, much like the classic Greek "world artificers." Sometimes known as a Demiurge, that creator had a spark of divinity, for he was a son of God, an emanation from the Most High. Man naturally longs for his true home, but that is unknown to him. He is trapped in a world of corruption and ruination: in matter, the material world, which is not God's creation.

To Marcion, the Old Testament was lie because it was the story of a false god, a deceiver: Jehovah. It and most, if not all, of its various characters were a deceit, and must be rejected. The Jews he considered to be the people of Jehovah, that is, a race dedicated to the false god. He agreed with the Jews on one point: their messiah had not yet come. Jesus Christ was not their redeemer; he had come to liberate men from the false religion of Jehovah. In his anti-cosmic dualism, Marcion put the unknown God in opposition to the inferior creator-god, Jehovah. The salvation of mankind meant, in a word, liberation from Jehovah.

The contrast between the two worlds and their respective gods is very great. Jehovah is presented by Marcion as a warrior-avenger, interested in perpetuating a world of retribution. The gentle Jesus is the agent of the unknown (alien) God, and he is merciful and filled with love. One cannot know the unknown (alien) God directly, and though he may have been suspected by men, he was not revealed to exist until Jesus came into the world. Jehovah was at home in the material world because it was his mirror image, made in his (not the alien-God's) image and likeness. The true God could not exist in this world, for he is pure spirit and is in direct opposition to the conflict and disorder which is inherent in matter.

The Marcionites rejected any and all things which tied one to the material world, or which seemed to tie one there, or which seemed to suggest physical redemption or conversion of material things. Thus they rejected baptism, except as a manifestation of their disdain for the material world. Holy Communion was a great contradiction, for it had as its primary content the transfixion of material things into the realm of the spirit and of the unknown God. All earthly pleasures were to be avoided as distractions which tie one to the temporal world. Sexual contact was another more serious tie to the visible world. Procreation of children meant that more sparks of the spirit were to be entrapped in the world of tears and deceit.

Because he is pure goodness and mercy, the unknown God adopted mankind, or at least that portion which was his own and to whom he could come, and who would accept and love him. God gave us grace quite freely to aid in our salvation, not because we as lowly beings could not merit it, but because he loved us although he did not know us. This is the doctrine of "pure grace," a quintessential part of Marcionite theology. That, in a sense, is the whole of the religion. God so loved the world that, although unknown to him, he chose to bring men to live with him so that he and men could come to know one another in a world far removed from the corruption of the present one.

Morality was not regarded as conformity to some law of Nature; nature was physical, and thus corrupt. God was not in the world. Natural laws were the embodiment of the demi-urge, Satan, not the Unknown God. One ought to avoid contact with nature in all its visible forms, for it leads one away from the true God.

While it is faith, not knowledge, that leads us toward God, we must have access to and know the special knowledge that much of what passes as religion is false. We must know, in Marcion's schema, that the Unknown God is God, and that the creator of the world is only an eon, an evil emanation from God. Christ the Son of God came to bring us to know that which we cannot know directly, in and of ourselves. That we are trapped in matter without hope of redemption unless we know the correct faith is a matter of special, or gnostic, revelation. That God invites us strangers into his home without any knowledge of us, or we of him, is a canon of faith which can be known only through this special knowledge.

Marcion dropped elements of the New Testament that he did not like. What remained were expurgated portions of the Gospels (notably Luke), some of Paul's letters, and bits of the Acts of the Apostles. It is noteworthy that the Western church had not, as of this time, codified the New Testament. Marcion was more restrictive than most of the priests of the time in his choice of acceptable materials for the services. He rejected the Old Testament entirely, although one deviation of the time, possibly not Marcionite, devolved into snake worship, based on the Old Testament tale of the snake tempting Eve. Presumably, the snake was a good symbol for it was set in contradistinction to the ones Marcion had made evil characters. The snake was believed to be bringing certain knowledge of Satan, the creator of Adam and Eve.

In censoring the New Testament, Marcion excised those references made to an early childhood of Christ. Since Jesus was the messenger of the Most High, the Unknown God, he could not have been immersed in matter. Without having to materialize, Jesus had appeared to men to have a body and then only at Capernaum. He came to save those who would reject Judaism and Jehovah. What his precious blood purchased, in a metaphorical sense, was the freedom from the false god, Jehovah. He offered a baptism which would reject the world and all its material evils. One was to be "married" only to Christ so that child-bearing was avoided and man could escape the material world. While the material world would continue to exist, Christ had come to destroy, as an idea, the world of Jehovah.

## **The Manichaeian Heresy**

Few religious deviations in the Western church had greater impact or longer-lasting effect than

Manichaeism. Founded by Mani in Mesopotamia about 242 A.D., it was a major rival to orthodox Christianity. Mani was martyred by the Western Church in 276 A.D. Among the early adherents was the great apologist for the Catholic Church, St. Augustine, who practiced its tenets from about 373 to 382. His *City of God* has strong Manichaean tendencies in its absolute dichotomy between good and evil, and between the city of man (visible world) and the City of God (realm of the spirit).

Mani reflected the gnostic background of the area and the times. The origin of evil lay in the nature of matter itself. Its multiplicity is radically opposed to the spirituality of God. Matter is an evil which can never be redeemed; it is eternally evil. The soul is divine, or like unto the divine, for it is immaterial and simple. Man's body is but a prison in which the soul is entrapped. Redemption is found only in death.

The Demiurge, or lesser creator, created the visible world out of particles which belonged to the powers of darkness. These powers are opposed to God and the whole realm of the spirit. They are forever entrapped in the world of matter. They entice man to use his sexual powers to continually procreate so that bits of the spirit are trapped in the bodies of men. Otherwise the bodies would be lifeless, hollow shells, and there would be no one for the powers of darkness to control.

The dichotomy is called anti-cosmic dualism. It underlies all of the major works of gnosticism, but especially Manichaeism. Sin is concomitant with life itself in the material world. Only the spark of life, the human spirit, is fit for godly action or thoughts, and for redemption. Necessarily this dualism concluded that whatever is merely finite (hence limited in time) is evil; whatever is eternal is good, and the spirit of man is a spark of the eternal fire of God.

Manichaeism had a rigid ethic. Mankind was forbidden to kill animals or otherwise to shed blood. Sex was condemned for reasons noted above. One was to reject Satan, the world, all material things, and all happiness based on the enjoyment of material goods. The elect or perfects travelled begging for food. They ignored secular laws which were in any way antithetical to their religion, and openly sought martyrdom for their beliefs. A significant portion of the community was devoted to prayer and fasting, and was dependent on the lodging and hospitality of the common believers.

Strictly speaking, the Manichaeans were not Christians. They did accept Christ as having been a divine being, or, at least, a being who was guided by the Holy Spirit. But so too did they accept all of the major religious leaders: Buddha, Lao-tzu and others. They did reject the idea of incarnation that is the cornerstone of Christianity. Jesus only appeared to be a man. He was not hung on one cross; he was, at all times, omnipresent. Some of the critics of Manichaeism accused the cult of pantheism. It is true that the Manichaeans had no special use for many of the Christian beliefs. They rejected Holy Communion on the ground that it was worthless because of the omnipresence of Jesus. They rejected the relics, such as the cross, partly because the artifacts were material and partly because they had no more relevance than any other physical item, since God was everywhere.

The term Manichaeism has come to represent any and all varieties of dualism in which matter and spirit are necessarily and essentially opposed. The movement died out probably for two reasons. It was too anti-social in its rejection of sex and its exclusiveness. It went too far in rejecting war, violence and bloodshed

in an age that was far too tempted to war in both conquest and defense. But the term and many of the ideas lingered on, the vital spark carried by others.

Agapius (c. 450 A.D.) attempted a fusion of Manichaeism and true Christianity. He continued the belief in an Evil One, a self-subsistent force that is both eternal and opposed to God. He urged rejection of the whole of the Old Testament on the grounds that it was filled with lies and deceit. He, too, condemned earthly pleasures, sex included. Yet he believed in the doctrine of the Trinity, the Incarnation, baptism for the remission of sins, the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Final judgment, and the resurrection of the material and glorified body. His fusion, while intriguing, had only its role as a link in the time chain to commend it.

The Paulicans are quite another matter, for they served as a link between Manichaeism and the Gathers, from about 668 A.D. when the cult was organized, until after 1200. In 869, Peter of Sicily wrote a blistering attack on the Paulicans in his *Historia Manichaeorum*.

The origins of Paulicanism are obscure. The teachings are traced by some authorities to Paul and John of Samosata. The name may have been derived from that Paul, or it may refer to the sect's devotion to ten letters of St. Paul (Saul). Others have traced it to an attempt to belittle the movement as the "petty disciples of Paul."

Publicly, the Paulicans rejected Manichaeism, but privately they adopted the gnostic dualism and many other of its teachings. They rejected the Old Testament as a work of deception. They stated that it had been written by a race of thieves and deceivers, and was inspired by the worship of the false god, a demiurge, Jehovah. They hated the Jews on a second ground, as Christ judges and condemners. They stopped short of condemning them as Christ killers because they viewed the Crucifixion as an illusion. They viewed Peter as a typical Jew who, under pressure and in danger, had betrayed Christ and denied him.

They attacked the traditional church on several grounds. They viewed clerical garb as the costume of Satan. They despised the emphasis placed on Christ's Passion and Crucifixion as these were either illusions or deliberate lies. Christ had no physical body made of the corrupt matter of this world. His "body" was an illusion offered to men as a convenient point of reference. Communion was an offering of material things, water or wine and bread, and thus could not be holy. The true Eucharist, they taught, was in Christ's words and thoughts.

On the surface they appeared to be orthodox Christians, for they made a distinction between things done on the surface without meaning and those done privately with special meaning. The Bible, even the hated Old Testament, was accepted for esoteric use, while the initiates used esoteric rites in private. They believed that faith was the great guiding factor in attaining salvation (hence their love for Paul). But they also believed that there were certain hidden meanings and revealed words that the initiates must know in order to escape the material world. These they held in secret, in their clandestine services.

In one area they did differ from Manichaeism. They were willing to fight and die. Much of their success

came in opposing the armies of the Byzantine and, later, the Bulgarian empires. They spread the word with the sword as well as with the Bible. Perhaps their impact on history is greater because of their fighting prowess than because of their ideas. While they did not usually force conversion, the mere sight of their powerful armies in the field must have had a significant impact on the local population. Their power peaked under Tychicus, c. 801-835 A.D., although remnants remained active until at least 1200.

Paulican and Manichaean ideas were fused in an otherwise quite original movement which appeared in Bulgaria about 950 A.D. Our only true point of reference is a notation that they were first studied while Tsar Peter reigned in Bulgaria. Peter died in 969. The Bogomili were a group of initiates possessed of secret writings and ideas, whose name indicates "God have mercy" or "Mercy of God" or "Beloved of God."

Their highly original position in theology begins with the gnostic dualism of matter as evil and spirit as good. In the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) they found an allegory. Christ is the good son who remained with the father and the devil is the son who goes off to do evil. The devil (Satanel as the Bogomili called him) was the son of God and the brother of Christ. One later tale which tells us of the Bogomili is as follows. The devil made the body of Adam. He tried to animate it with a spark of the eternal (soul) which he had stolen from God, but the soul would not remain in place. The soul continually exited through the anus. Eventually the devil was able to dam it up and the soul was sufficient to animate the body. The devil made the body from water and earth.

In a second version of the story the water flowed out of Adam's toe and formed a stream, which appeared to Adam as a snake. The snake tried to warn Adam of the deceit of Satanel, and was thus cursed by him. Eventually, God and his prodigal son reached an accord: each would rule a part of man. God was to govern what had been stolen from him, the spirit of man; the devil would govern the body.

To prevent the end of mankind, and thus end Satanel's control over man through his body, the devil must continue the human race. He could accomplish that only by continually entrapping the spirit in matter. He thus uses sex as the primary instrument of control. Without sex and procreation there would be no future subjects for Satanel's control. Thus, marriage was to be rejected by the true believer.

The esoteric portion of the Bogomile cult taught that messages were hidden in the gospels, acts of the apostles, and letters of Paul. One had to have a certain key to unlock the secrets. For reasons that are not clear, but perhaps out of fear of the Jews, the messages were presented in riddles, allegories and metaphors. The correct interpretation of the materials was vital to salvation.

The Bogomili rejected the cross-it was a symbol of evil. On it the Jews had really or symbolically crucified Christ. Even if one attempts to reconcile the dualism which precludes Christ from having a body with the hatred of the Jews as "Christ killers" one is left with the idea in Bogomilism that they condemned Christ and his teaching. The Cross may be symbolically interpreted as representing that condemnation and rejection.

The Bogomili made no distinction between priests and laity. It was a democratically-run organization

with no hierarchy until about 1200. They were more contemplative than the Paulicans, less given to action, and apparently non-violent. Had they been more active militarily their organizational structure may have been greater. They did not attempt to create a temporal regime.

The usual rejection of the sacraments marked Bogomilism. Marriage leads to continued creation of material bodies. Communion is an attempt to do the impossible: sanctify matter which is evil and cannot be blessed. Relics are rejected, and formal churches for the same reason.

The Phundagiagitae may be regarded as a form or application of Bogomilism and, to a degree, Paulicanism. It was probably founded by John Tzurillas in Bulgaria about 1050, and spread through Bulgaria and Byzantium. It was more willing than the Bogomili to pay lip service to those things of organized Orthodox Christianity. Its adherents were hard to discover during the many persecutions of non-Orthodox Christians in both Bulgaria and Byzantium.

The Phundagiagitae were accused of being devil worshipers, and of having a developed satanology. The accusation comes from a misreading of their interest in Satanel as a son of God and as the creator of this world. God created six heavens, and Satanel the remaining one. Satanel had tricked the other devils into rebelling against God; realizing that they had been tricked, these other fallen angels set about to create a race of helpers for mankind. This they did by fathering a race of giants by the daughters of men.

Moses had led the Jews astray, the Phundagiagitae argued, by worshiping only Satanel, and in offering men the law which was written by Satanel, not by God. Other men rebelled, urged on by the giants who had been instructed by their fathers. In retaliation, Satanel caused the Universal Deluge which killed all but Noah who had remained loyal to him. In this cult, very few of the Old Testament figures were worthy of other than eternal damnation.

Satanel had stolen the spark from God which became the spirit of man. This was represented metaphorically as the light of the sun set against the eternal darkness of Satanel's realm. The spirit of man cried out for redemption so God sent his son Jesus Christ to the rescue. After having saved men, or that portion to whom he came and who received him, Jesus returned to heaven. On the ascent he bound Satanel, and removed from him his godliness, after which the devil became Satan, the "el" having been appropriately dropped. (The "el" indicated "of God.") The teaching of Jesus was designed exclusively to liberate men from Satanel and his servants on earth, the Jews, followers of Moses and Noah.

## **The Pure Ones**

In the *Myth of the 20th Century* Alfred Rosenberg spends much time discussing the Cathars, also known as the Albigensians or Pure Ones. He clearly preferred their brand of Christianity to the Roman Catholic version. They were the carriers of the Manichaean tradition, as influenced by the Bogomili, Paulicans and others, into Central Europe, in the years prior to the Reformation. Had the Cathars been more militarily active and adept it is they, not Luther and Calvin, who might have won a place in history as the reformers of Christianity and the successful rebels against the Church. As it was, they were successfully contained by the Catholic Church and allied princes.

We find the Cathars emerging by about 1025 A.D., in Germany, Italy and France, also spreading to England and Flanders. Originally they were simply "the new Manichaeans," and were so labeled by those whom the Church sent to weed out the recurrent heresy. There are many legends about the founders of the Cathar heresy, but no single figure or small, identifiable group can be credited. Gerbert of Aurillac, Archbishop of Reims, for example, in 991 made a declaration of principles which were decidedly gnostic and Manichaean, but he cannot be said to have led or encouraged the spread of Cathar religion. In 1028 William V, Duke of Aquitaine, summoned a council of bishops to deal with the heresy, and there it was held that it had spread northward from Italy. Ademar of Chabannes believed that a woman and another peasant had carried the doctrine into France, perhaps from Italy. Modern scholarship suggests that a portion of it, at least, came from Bulgaria, Armenia, and/or the Byzantine Empire, with another portion coming out of the Moslem Empire, where there was an unusual tolerance for strange gnostic sects.

Their doctrines are learned by and large from Roman Catholic sources, mostly records kept of the inquisition of prisoners. No book similar to the (ancient Armenian?) *Key to Truth* had to date been discovered, translated and disseminated to explain the Cathar side of the controversy over their doctrines. Most modern scholarship begins with a stern warning that the records of the Inquisition, even if accurate, were gleaned from those under torture, and thus those questioned were prone to say what the torturer wished to hear. Also, the records were obtained from unlearned peasants whose ideas of theology contradict one another, and none may be accurate in their recountings of the theology. Last, we must note that the Cathar heresy existed clearly for more than two centuries and it had no central authority similar to the papacy to set doctrine universally.

The Cathars were clearly dualists in the classical Manichaean sense. The earliest references to them state that there was a new outbreak of the Church's old nemesis, Manichaeism. Intermittently thereafter the Cathars were called Manichaean. Authorities have not decided, based on the available testimony, whether the Cathar dualism was of traditionally opposed eternal gods, or whether it was of the monarchical type. There may have been shades of each heresy existing simultaneously. The monarchical dualism suggests that the power of evil is a being in all ways inferior to God, and that evil force will disappear when the material world ends. Traditional dualism, based in some part on the teachings of the Persian sage Zarathustra (Zoroaster) suggests that there are two equally eternal and powerful beings, one good and one evil.

The Cathars accepted the usual limited scriptural writings, and excluded the bulk of the Old Testament. Several books, to which the New Testament referred often, were retained, notably the Psalms. Jehovah of the Jews was dismissed as being either an incarnation or form of Satan, or as being merely a world artificer and not God. They gave esoteric interpretations to Scripture, including proscription of eating meat. The portions of the New Testament which did not suit their purposes were removed, usually with the justification that these had been added by the Jews to confuse or confound the faithful.

There was a significant distinction made between the Perfects and the laity within Catharism. The laity were those who were learning the true Christianity. They could marry, or continue to live in wedlock, if they wished. The initiates who had taken the final vows of the cult could not have sexual intercourse or

live in a family environment. The training period often lasted several years or even a decade or more. Many Cathars held off taking the vows until they were near death, so that they were not obliged to follow the much stricter moral code required of the Perfects.

The great sacrament of the Cathar religion was the *Consolementum*. It was held in the home of a Perfect or a sympathizer. It began with a communal confession of sins and failures called the *Servitium*. All those present, Perfects or followers, participated. A senior Perfect held aloft a copy of the excised Scripture. The transcriptions of what the ceremony consisted of have come down to us, and as reported contain nothing that is shocking to, or antithetical to, orthodox Christianity. The closest it came to heresy was the stress laid on the sins one could commit of a material type, notably the sins of the flesh.

The candidate's initiation into the final rite of the Perfects was reasonably simple. It was flavored with writings from the accepted Church fathers and the excised Scripture, but mostly consisted of the rejection of things which were offensive to the Cathars. One pledged not to eat meat, engage in worldly vanities, lie, cheat, swear, and the like. The Roman Catholic Church alleged that it was at this point that the rejection of all things Catholic took place. The catechumen was reminded that here, before God, he swore eternal allegiance to his religion. Doubtless, he was required to renounce the Sacraments, since these were tied to the material world, and several canons of faith.

The Cathars drank no wine, and they objected to Holy Communion on the ground that nothing material could be made holy or purified in the sight of God. This, as we have seen before, is standard in anti-cosmic and gnostic dualism. Confession was an open affair, and not made to the priesthood. The cross was most objectionable, on the traditional ground that it was the symbol of the passion, even though they generally believed that Christ had no body and only appeared to suffer. The fact that the Jews had sought to crucify and condemn Jesus was sufficient reason to hate the cross, even if Christ was not actually crucified.

Some Cathars appeared to be Adoptionists. Here, they believed that a man like any of us-but a non-Jew-had been born, out of the flesh of Mary, fathered probably by Joseph, but not born of a virgin, and not born of one eternally exempted from sin (Immaculate Conception). At the time of the baptism by John, when God spoke the words "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased," Jesus was transfixed or possessed by God. The "adoption" remained through the crucifixion, and possibly God removed himself from the man either at the Garden of Gethsemane or on the cross ("My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?"). Most among those accepting Adoptionism believed that the man, not the man-God, was crucified.

Probably the mainstream Cathars believed that God had not, and could not, become flesh, because flesh is material and thus corrupt. He only appeared to men to have a body, as a convenience to men to see him. That point of view had a secondary benefit: it precluded having to be concerned with whether Christ was a Jew. That was a problem of some considerable concern for a group which had fully rejected Judaism and the writings, prophets, thoughts, and laws of the Old Testament.

Traditional teachings on Heaven, Hell and Purgatory were unacceptable to the Cathars. Earth, as the

material world of the Devil and of corruption, was the Hell. Only those who renounced the flesh and Satan could be assumed into Heaven. The Consolamentum was the purgation of the evil and corruption from man. Thus, there was no need for a second place in which this cleansing could occur. Likewise, there was no need to pray for the dead. Some of the dead had made it to the Heaven above the corruption of the material world, and thus needed no help. Others continued to have their spirits entrapped in the world.

None of the works consulted on Catharism have taken up the question of reincarnation, but it seems to be a logical consequence of the refigion. If a soul was not able to escape matter, would it not be forced to return to try again? Or was it that a soul which failed to rise from the material world in that single attempt of the lifetime spent here was eternally trapped in matter in some way? The sources we have are silent on this important point.

One might also ask if it was necessary for the Cathars to believe that all men had this spark of the Eternal God. This is not taken up in the extant sources either. One legend suggested that Satan invaded the celestial abode sufficiently well enough to capture one-third of the spirits and these he entrapped in earthly bodies. However, the legend does not state clearly that this number was sufficient to account for all mankind. This, precisely, is the major problem in the Cathar teachings: they spoke in myths, parables and legends, and not infrequently contradicted themselves.

Except in a highly symbolic sense, Mary had no role in the Cathar teachings. Some held that she was, as a virgin, a symbol for the Church in its most abstract form. One sidelight held that Mary was a vehicle through which an eon passed on its way to earth; and a variance allowed Christ to have passed through her, but through her ear, not through the usual birth route.

The Inquisition accused the Cathars of being pantheists. In a spiritual sense, something of God may be said to be present in an things. Conversely, nothing material could house God, as in the Cathar rejection of Holy Communion, because God was the antithesis of materialist diversity and multiplicity. The Cathars generally responded to questions about God's presence in Church or in Communion by saying that God was no more present there than anywhere else. Some Cathars evidently believed that God, being all-powerful, could enter matter, or take on the appearance of matter, at will, to deceive the Devil and rescue the Men of Light from their material prison. Thus, at any given time, God may be present in any apparently material thing, or appear to all, Satan included, as a material thing.

The list of figures inverted in their moral standing is both long and intriguing. Jehovah, as we have seen, was as the Jewish God both evil and a false god, a form of Satan (or Satan incarnate). Abraham and Moses were said to have been inspired by the Devil. John the Baptist was evil because he baptised in water (i.e., a material thing) instead of baptising in the spirit. The various characters who destroyed, or who had a hand in , destroying, others -- as in the robbery of the Caananites to obtain the "land of milk and honey" -- were condemned.

## **Rosenberg and Gnosticism**

The Cathars served as a highly convenient take-off point for Alfred Rosenberg's attack on both the Catholic Church and on Judaism. It is impossible to show his intellectual development, to say whether his disdain for these two powerful institutions flowed from a general dislike of them, or from his analysis of their doctrine or their history. However, there are many references throughout the *Myth of the 20th Century* to both groups as the corrupters of Christianity and of God's true message, and to these organizations as the persecutors of the Cathars.

One may assume that Rosenberg's constant favorable reference to the Cathars suggests that he believed they possessed the key to true Christianity. Rosenberg insisted throughout his writings and speeches that he was a Christian. He criticized the Roman Church on the usual grounds that one finds throughout post-Reformation Europe. But there was much more to it than that. The Reformation had not gone far enough. Luther and Calvin, and others, had started in the right direction, but had faltered.

One might compare the Protestants to the Waldenses who were the contemporaries of the Cathars. The Waldenses were in no way dogmatic and they spent very little time with questions of esoteric doctrine. They merely wanted to purify the Church, simplify the services, and end the corruption among the clergy. In short, they wanted to reform the Church to conform more to the "simple" Church they believed to have existed during the Acts of the Apostles. These, basically, were the aims and the results of Protestantism. In "simplifying" they wanted to reduce the number and complexity of the sacraments and the stronghold of central authority over matters of faith, morals, and bureaucracy. The doctrinal disputes were minimal, and for the most part no more comprehensible than the difference between Catholic Transubstantiation and Lutheran Consubstantiation. The doctrinal differences were of very little concern to most of the body of the faithful.

Thus, Luther paid great heed to the literal interpretation of the whole of the Bible, and rejected tendencies (latent Catharism?) to excise the Old Testament. The matter of a vernacular Bible was more important than any process of "purifying" the content. The Calvinists paid even greater attention to the Old Testament than did the Catholic Church. The Puritan form even attempted to reinstitute the Rule of judges and the Old Testament theocracy when they came to power in New England, and many of the True Levellers ("Diggers") attempted to do the same in England.

Luther had the greatest reverence for the literal word of Paul. The Cathars and other gnostics had made great use of Paul, but in a way so highly symbolic that a fair statement of the situation might be that they merely used Paul as a take-off point for their esoteric ideas. It is with Paul, especially a literal interpretation of Paul, that Rosenberg had his greatest problem with Christianity. Rosenberg saw in Paul a conclusive hypocrisy, in that Paul denied the Law, yet paid great attention to the development of the same Law. He had rejected the Mosaic Code under that name as too binding, but had attempted to codify a Law for Christians which, Rosenberg said, was merely the Mosaic Code under a new name.

To Rosenberg, Paul was the grand conspirator. Seeing that the new religion of Christ could not be defeated, that it threatened Judaism, the Jews sent Paul to transform it. Because the New Testament blamed the Jews for the death of Christ ("His blood be upon us ...") it would or at least could take on an anti-Jewish character. So the Jews decided, according to Rosenberg, to send one of their own, in effect

sacrificing him, to redirect Christianity. It was this simple: Christ had come unto his own, and his own received him not. The Jews were thus outcast. But by redirecting Christianity, Paul made it seem that the Jews were not outcasts.

Had it not been for Paul, Rosenberg argued, Christianity would have been as the "heretics" like the Bogomili, Manichaeans, Paulicans, or Cathars. It would have rejected the Old Testament, removed the Jews and their Jehovah, and founded an anti-Jewish religion.

We are unusually hard-pressed to discover precisely how much of the gnostic anti-cosmic dualistic theology Rosenberg had mastered. We do not know precisely what books he read or discovered. Neither do we know precisely what the "Occult Bureau" of the SS had found.

After the fall of the last Cathar stronghold, in October 1244 A.D. at Montsegur, a few of the group made it through the Roman Catholic lines and carried off the treasures. Among these was reputed to be a Holy Grail, and on it the initiate knowledge the Cathar gnosticism required for salvation. This is the great theme of both Ravenscroft's books, and of Angebert's *The Occult and the Third Reich*. Otto Rahn's *Crusade Against the Grail*, published during the pre-war years, suggests that the location of the greatest of the Cathar treasures was known. Possibly, too, the SS had located long lost books of Cathar theology, or books showing the esoteric Cathar interpretation of the New Testament books they accepted. Also, the SS may have located the Cathar commentaries on books long used by Manichaean sects, including apocryphal books like The Books of Enoch, the Book of Adam and Eve, The Gospel of Thomas, or The Childhood of Jesus.

Ravenscroft believed that the spear of Longinus had long before been located, in Vienna, at the treasure-house of the hereditary Austrian kings. The spear, as he calls it in his book title: *The Spear of Destiny*, was to Ravenscroft a talisman of power in and of itself. He suggested, but did not clearly state, that it may be much more.

We may be puzzled, as an aside, by the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. In a sense, it suggests that a small group knew that the National Socialists were hunting for certain symbols, such as the Holy Grail and the Spear of Longinus. In another sense, why was the Ark of the Covenant chosen in that movie? Nothing I have read about Rosenberg or the gnostics suggests that the Ark was remotely of interest.

Other than the miscellaneous writings we have suggested here, and the Grail, of what did the Cathar treasure consist? More to the point in this section of the essay, of what did Rosenberg believe it would consist? And what of that lot did Rosenberg study and consider? Presumably, Ravenscroft and Angebert, in researching their books, spent much time in considering answers to these questions. Both agree that Hitler and the National Socialists possessed the Spear. Neither author is evidently willing to commit to the Nazis' possession any other specific object or writing. One might even ask if, indeed, the Cathars had a treasure, and, if they did, if any of it has survived.

I strongly suspect that somewhere there exists, or did exist at the end of the war, a substantial amount of very important research on the whole of the Cathar movement and the presumed great treasure taken from

Montsegur. It would have been gathered for the express purpose of being made into the basis of the Nordic Christianity that preoccupied both Rosenberg and Hitler.

Angebart's *The Occult and the Third Reich* suggests that a substantial portion of what the SS gathered on religion was put into use by the SS under Heinrich Himmler and that a special stronghold had been provided Himmler for the express purpose of indoctrinating his select SS leaders in the new cult. Pauwels and Bergier, whose work is most noteworthy for its wild statements given with absolutely no documentation, say in the *Morning of the Magician* that a whole black ritual devoted to Satan worship was offered selected SS officers. The Black Order was to be devoted to black magic, demonology and all sorts of evil things. Ravenscroft believed that Hitler was a black magician and a master of many of the occult sciences.

One might point out that similar charges had been brought against the Cathars. They had offered a whole new interpretation of Christianity and had suffered burning at the stake and other painful martyrdoms. Until the documents which still may exist are released, we can only say that it is within the context of Rosenberg's published works that he studied what was available on the Cathars, and perhaps other medieval Manichaeans (in a very broad definition of Manichaeism), and that the ideas as he understood them were to be the basis for a reconstituted Christianity.

It is noteworthy that the Roman Catholic Church acted swiftly, and for the first time in many centuries attacked a specific work, Rosenberg's *Myth of the 20th Century*, in an encyclical entitled *Mit Brennender Sorge*. The issuance of an encyclical in the vernacular (German here) was itself more than slightly irregular and noteworthy. The Roman Catholic Church has also taken the position of exonerating the Jews for especial guilt in the death of Christ, placing the blame more universally on all men. That action has taken place since the *Myth of the 20th Century* was written and, to some considerable degree, the encyclical may be viewed as a reaction to Rosenberg and the National Socialist position.

Surely, nothing fitted in better with the prevailing thinking of the Third Reich than the Manichaean position on the Jews and the Old Testament. That it was quite possible to be anti-Jewish and a good Christian at the same time was a cornerstone of the Nordic approach to Christian doctrine. It was also important that the medieval Manichaeans could allow that there was a race of cosmic men who were corrupt and materialistic and ruled by a false, materialistic god that stood in opposition to a race of pure men, steeped in rejection of the material world and deeply immersed in the realm of the spark of the Creator. The statement of the medieval Manichaeans on the race and the anti-race sounds like a passage plucked from the Nazi Primer.

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