

A BRIEF MANICHAEAN CATECHISM

1. *How did this Universe come into existence?*

It has always existed on the subtler planes: Two Realms, one of Light ruled by God, and one of Darkness ruled by the Evil Spirit. When Evil irrupted into the Light-Realm, the physical universe was designed for their gradual separation.

2. *What are the “Two Sources”?*

All existing things derive from one of these two: the infinite Light of spiritual Goodness, the bottomless Darkness of evil Matter, coexistent and totally opposed to one another.

3. *What is God?*

The infinite and ineffable beneficent King of the Light, manifesting Himself in vast cosmic Powers or Emanations to overthrow the aggression of evil Darkness on His spiritual Realm, and also immanent throughout the universe.

4. *Has the physical world any real existence?*

Certainly it is real, but it exists only until its purpose is achieved by the separation of the Light and Darkness. Compared with the Light-World's eternity, it is only a fleeting shadow dissipated by the dawn.

5. *Is it Good or Evil?*

It is a mixture of Good and Evil, Spirit and Matter, Light and Darkness. SO it will be dissolved when these eternal opposites are separated from each other, the Light having been cleansed of all contaminating shadows.

6. *Why was it created, and by whom?*

The Divine Mind, or “Living Spirit” fashioned it as a means of liberating Soul from Matter, the Light-Sparks of God from the enslaving Darkness – through the practice of the Twelve Virtues and the loving labours of the Luminaries or Saviours.

7. *What is Man?*

Man is a divine Spirit imprisoned in a body of flesh created by the demons to ensnare his divinity in their world of darkness.

8. *What is the Individual Soul?*

The Soul is a Spark of God's Light, a part of His very Being, separated off from Him to be absorbed into the darkness of Matter and gradually to refine and purify as much of it as possible. Divine in source and end, its powers are limited while held captive in the body.

9. *What brought the body into existence?*

Charmed by the spiritual beauty of the Light, the demons of the Darkness tried to capture it from themselves; so they made the body, to draw the Soul's attention away from God, its full perfection, to the lower pleasures of the flesh.

10. What is Sin?

Sin is the Soul's disloyal turning from God to Matter, accepting the sensual delights in place of spiritual ecstasy. Certain acts which tend to this have been listed as sins – such as violence, sex-lust, and possessiveness.

11. How did Sin come into existence?

Intoxicated by the Light of God, the Evil Spirit rebelled against Him and sought it for himself. The egoistic act of pride was the fountain-head of all Sin.

12. Is Matter eternal?

Yes, it has existed before time, and will survive time itself. But it is only now that it is in revolt; it will at last be vanquished by the Spirit, bound for ever in the Abyss, its Powers totally destroyed.

13. What are the “Three Moments”?

The Past, wherein Evil and Good were wholly separate from each other; the Present, wherein the former's aggression has caused a mingling and confusion of the two; the Future, wherein they shall again be separated – the Light in eternal peace and bliss, the Darkness in the ruin of perpetual captivity.

14. Why did God create the Individual Soul?

To cooperate with Him in freeing all Light, or Spirit from its slavery to Matter, herself the first, by warring ceaselessly with the spiritual weapons on Evil everywhere, and by helping to refine and uplift all beings – human, animal, plant and even mineral – through the intimacy with the holiness of Saints [Elect/Monks]. This, then, is our duty on earth.

15. How was the Soul imprisoned in the flesh?

Sent forth by God to enter and subdue rebellious Matter from within, the Soul is caught and swallowed up by the evil powers of its Darkness and forgets its real nature and its mission. Thus it becomes a miserable and helpless slave.

16. How can it become free?

By uprooting the desires those evil powers personify, and by gradually refining and spiritualising itself from all that is gross, material, it will at last be freed.

17. Can it do this unaided?

Possibly, but in fact the Soul is helped every stage by God's grace and the assistance of His Saints.

18. How does God help it to be free?

Manifesting as Intuition in the Soul, as the light of Conscience and of Grace, He works from within, eliminating the vices and dark desires, and planting the fragrant flowers of every virtue in the heart.

19. What disciplines should the Soul follow?

The mortifying of the flesh by chastity and prayer and fasting, the observance of total harmlessness, and a life of humility and loving kindness, within purity of thought and diet.

20. How does the Evil Spirit gain control of a man?

When his mind is off its guard, evil thoughts and desires enter in through some weak point in his nature, opened by some sense-impression; then they encroach step by step until the whole has been corrupted.

21. How does the Divine Mind free him from that control?

Entering the heart through the spoken word of God's Messenger, it replaces all downward with upward tendencies, all vices with the opposite virtues, until the whole nature henceforward is a pure throne for the Christ to reign upon over his life.

22. Has Man the power to choose aright?

His power is limited only by the effects of his own past choices, which set up a habit only the utmost effort can break. This effort is made possibly by the awakening call of God's Messenger – Mani, Jesus, or another.

23. Is there such a thing as “Fate”?

Fate or Destiny results from the Individual Soul's past choices of action, and it binds until those actions have been undone by other actions. It is therefore, ultimately under our own control.

24. What causes the instability of moods?

The Soul is sometimes nearer to Spirit, at times to Matter, according to the prevailing planetary aspects in its horoscope, and to the purity or coarseness of the foods it allows the body to consume.

25. What is the reward of righteousness?

The purifying of the Individual Soul from all defilement, and its victorious entry upon eternal life in the blissful Land of Light with God and all the Angels and happy Souls.

26. What happens to the wicked?

Those who deliberately prefer Evil to Good make the freeing of the Soul from Matter impossible for themselves. Then they take birth after wretched birth in Matter, till they become so grossly material that there can be no escape. And that is Hell.

27. So Manichaeism teaches Reincarnation?

Yes, as a Hell, or as a purgatorial suffering involved in being attached to the fleshly body and its delights. Love of the body necessarily causes its reproduction age after age.

28. How do Rebirths come to an end?

When the Soul turns from the bodily desires to a full yearning after the Spirit, from worldly pleasures to devotion for God, His Messengers and His Church, it can no longer be born on a material plane, nor can it even wish to be.

29. What is Death?

Death is the temporary or final release of the Spirit from its material prison. When the Light-Spark is purified, death is its entry on eternal bliss and glory in God's Realm of Light.

30. What happens to the Soul at death?

The good, pure, righteous Soul is adorned by the Angels in its robes, crowns and garlands of light, and led into the Light-Kingdom; ordinary Souls are driven back on the paths to rebirth in the physical world; evil Souls are dragged by the demons into their hells of darkness, fire and misery.

31. How does God check the victory of Evil?

He Himself comes forth in some Divine Emanation to war upon and overthrow the Evil, or He sends a Messenger of the Light to encourage and strengthen men in resisting it.

32. Can true Knowledge be given by another?

The Saint or Messenger of God comes to enlighten men with the Teaching and the Ethics, the "Wisdom" and the "Righteousness", which lead to freedom. But only those in whom he Intuition, or "Light-Mind", is awake will welcome or benefit from his Message.

33. What, then, is the Teacher's part?

To awaken the Soul to its own latent divinity, to guide it on the purifying path, to carry it through the liberating door of death into the endless glory of the Spirit.

34. What are the Qualifications for this Path?

The knowledge that one is the Soul and not the Body, a firm resolve to live only for the spiritual aim, devotion to God and His Church which keeps that resolve a living power in the life, loving humility and gentleness to all, and persevering effort for self-purification.

35. Is it necessary to renounce the world?

Yes, for its attractions must be overcome and ultimately its standards and ways of living be abandoned; no, in the sense that it is here and in the world that the Church, and each component Soul, must labour for God's plan of liberation until its purity has set it free for ever.

36. Is there only one code of life for all Manichaeans?

The ordinary moral and religious law is binding on all alike, but the “Elect” [the Monks or Hermits], who resolve on swift treading of the Path, have voluntarily embraced themselves a code of higher standards.

37. How does man find God?

Roused by God's Messenger from the drunken sleep of fleshly ignorance, he realises his identity with Spirit and his temporary bondage to the body; then he resolves to be free and patiently works at his own liberation – refining his thoughts and practising all spiritual virtues till he is pure enough to see God in the hour of death.

38. Where then is God?

As eternal King of the spiritual Light-Realm, he dwells transcendent over all that is; as manifest in the Powers of the Light, He wars for its total liberation from the aggressing Darkness; as immanent in every atom of Matter everywhere, He awaits that liberation which He alone can bring about.

39. Has He any real Temple?

He is immanent in everything and manifested there to the seeing eye; therefore God's Temple is the universe and every particle within it, sacramentally, but more especially is it the heart of the Saint who longs for Him.

40. What are the Gods and Angels?

They are Emanations or Expressions of the nature of the One God, the King of Light and Father of all, come forth from Him to bring about His final victory over Evil.

41. What is our relationship with them?

They aid our struggle to escape the darkness of Matter, and we must not fail to reverence, love and worship them as our Champions, Protectors, Friends.

42. Who are the “Messengers of Light”?

Saints and Prophets sent by God from age to age to teach men the truths of life and how they can attain to Him in whom alone all happiness is found.

43. What is the Church?

It is the organised assembly of the faithful Souls called by God and His Messenger to choose the Light, and to labour for its freedom everywhere from the Darkness. It is a wonderful Unity in Him, based on Love and Wisdom fully shared.

44. What happens when the Soul is wholly freed?

The physical worlds created for its freeing cease to exist, the Light becomes supreme, while the Darkness and all Evil, together with those who choose to merge therein, are forever subdued or sunk into oblivion.

45. What is the Final Goal of all life?

The freeing of the Soul from all defilement, so that it shines with God's pure glory and can live eternally in the bliss of His realised Presence and a sort of mystical unity with Him.

46. Is this a Dualist Religion?

Most certainly it is, in the fullest possible sense, for Good and Evil, Spirit and Matter, Light and Darkness are eternally independent and opposite Forces, between which every Individual Soul must choose.

47. Can you sum up this Religion in a few words?

It is the teaching of God's Prophets which awakens the Soul to a knowledge of its spiritual nature, so that it strives under its guidance to purify and free itself from the defilements of material darkness and ignorance.

A Brief Manichaeian Catechism, composed by Duncan Greenless, 1956.

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Personal Notes

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