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MĀNĪ AND SHĀPŪR

A Universal Faith for a Universal Kingdom

The rise of the Sassanian Empire brought with it the renaissance of several major aspects of Iranian national life. Sassanian kings considered themselves to be the descendants of the Achaemenians; and Ardashir and his son and successor, Shapur, endeavoured to link Iran's past to its present by bridging over the period of five and a half centuries of foreign rule and feudal disintegration.

In the early decades of the Sassanian rule a new spirit made itself felt all over the country, and "nationalism", as Roman-Ghirshman, remarks "Was now stressed in every aspect of life."¹ This new spirit was manifest in government, administration, arts, and especially in religious movements and in foreign policy.

The aim of the political activities of the great Achaemenian kings was to bring the world - East and West - under one unified rule. In Aeschylus' famous drama, *The Persians* (lines 180-190), Atossa dreams of Greece and Persia as "two sisters in a house", who, because of "some kind of quarrel, twixt the twain", are estranged, and Xerxes tries to reconcile and reunite them; but the one in "Dorian garb" is not subdued, and breaks away. According to Herodotus (I. 209), Cyrus, in his expedition against the Messagets, saw in a dream one night that the Young Darius had a pair of wings on his shoulders, shadowing Asia with one wing and Europe with the other. ²

1. R. Chirshman, *Iran*, Pelican books 1954, p.347.

2. It was this policy of fusion that later on was followed by Alexander and his successors, Seleucus and Ptolemy I.

For Shapur, who had taken the works and policies of Cyrus and Darius as his models, it was natural to think of building a "world-empire". The world situation at his time was exceptionally favourable to his ambitions. The Kushan kingdom in the East had lost its solidarity and the Roman Empire was, in the words of Franz Cumont, "torn by factions, thrown upon the mercy of manifestoes, and ruined economically and morally".¹ Shapur's actual conquest of the Kushan territories, and his conspicuous victories over Gordian, Philip and Valerian make it evident that his aspirations were not empty dreams. He had a "world-empire" in view, and his political and military achievements in this direction were remarkable. But, at the same time, he was made restless by a double-edged problem.

Shapur's kingdom was, in a sense, already a world-empire, consisting of Iranians and non-Iranians, and including almost all religious communities-Buddhists and Hindus in the east, Christians, Jews and gnostics in the west, and all Iranian cults and creeds in between. Shapur had realized that his kingdom could hardly be more than a shaky political unit, and was aware that an empire with a plurality of independent, competitive and contending religious traditions and ideologies had very little chance of being firmly unified. This was one edge of the problem. The other edge was the fact that the old Mazdeism in its various forms had lost its vigour and was in the impending danger of being wiped out by the expanding forces of Buddhism and Christianity.

Shapur belonged to a family that could not remain indifferent to religious matters. His forefathers were guardians of the temple of Anahita at Istaxr, and the family's association with this ancient cult continued under the reign of Shapur. His inscription of Ka' ba-ye Zardusht represents him as a zealous worshipper of Ahura Mazda,² and the number of religious institutions that he established in various parts of the country points to the deep

1. F. Cumoudd, *oriental religions in Roman Paganism*, New York, 1956, p. 141. See also M. Sprengling, *Third Century Iran, Saper and Kartir*, Univ. of Chicago, 1953, pp. 2-3; Ghirshman, *op.cit.*, pp. 346-7.

2. Cf. Sprengling, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-20.

- concern he had for the old national tradition. It is obvious that Shapur could not think of an Iranian kingdom with a non-Iranian spiritual content.

Here a reasonable question presents itself: How could Shapur, for all his "national" awareness and religious feelings, have friendly and favourable attitude towards Mani, the stern heretic who had come to him with a new religion, and claimed to be the messenger of God-?

To explain the situation it is important to note that the religion of Mani was, from the earliest stages of its history, regarded as an Iranian creed not only in the land of its origin but also in the Roman world. In fact, neither Shapur nor Kartir, the high-priest of his court, thought that Mani's religion was foreign or nonIranian.

Shapur gave Mani full freedom and support to preach his religion all over the country and make converts even within the royal family; while he would never allow Buddhist or Christian missionaries to carry on such proselytizing activities in his kingdom.

At the beginning of *Kephalaia* Mani speaks of his relations with the king, and says that when Shapur was enthroned.

I appeared before the king Shapur, who received me with much honour. He allowed me to travel in his kingdom, and to preach the word of life.

I spent several years with him, following him to Persia, the land of the Parthians, and as far as Adiabene and frontiers of the Roman Empire.

And these words are confirmed by the remarks of later writers and historians such as Alexander of Lycopolis,¹ Ibn al-Nadim² and al-Biruni.³

In Kartir's inscription of Ka'ba-ye Zardusht the Manichaeans are called "Zandiks" - an appellation which they carried with

1. *Contra Manichaeum*, 4. 20.

2. *al-Fihrist* (in Ahmad Afshār Shirāzi, *Māni was Din-i ū*, Tehran, 1335, p. 150).

3. *Āthār al-Bāqiya*, (*Ibid*, 204). See also p. 5 *infra*.

them over to the times after the Muslim conquest. The term, in Zaehner's words, "was coined to denote all those who based their teaching on the Zand or "commentary" of the Avesta rather than on the Avesta itself".¹ Therefore they must have been regarded as a Mazdean group or sect who had their own interpretations of the Avesta. As a matter of fact the dualistic structure of Manichaeism, on which the whole system is based, and many of its myths, concepts and doctrines - especially when they are clothed in Middle Persian languages - give clear indications of their essentially Iranian character; and some of the greatest names and figures of Mazdean scriptures, such as Zurvan, Ohrmazd, Ahriman, Mithra, Vahman, Spandarmadh, Nairyosangh and several others appear most prominently, and with comparable roles, in Manichaean writings. It is also important! to note that Mani showed profound reverence for Zarathushtra, and claimed to have received the same revelation that had come to this great predecessor of him. His mission, he said, was to fulfil and universalize the same wisdom that had previously, been preached to certain groups of people in some parts of the world.

To examine the problem of the Manichaean propaganda in its Iranian environment, it should also be remembered that in the third century A.D. a Zoroastrian orthodoxy, with a set of clear-cut dogmas, a fixed canon and a commonly accepted school of interpretation, had not yet come into existence. Doctrinal conflicts between the Manichaean church and the Mazdean priesthood could not have existed before the latter had begun to organise itself, and, in order to defend its precarious position against the Manichaean propaganda and the Christian missionary activities, had been forced to formulate and define its doctrines, dogmas and injunctions. The seeds of the formation of a well-defined Mazdean orthodoxy were latent in the national awareness of the early Sassanians. The process began to manifest itself in the militant measures taken by the high-priest Kartir under Bahram I and II, and as we may infer from a well-known passage of the *Dinkart* (ed. Madam, 412-15), it was still in progress during the reign of

1. R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, London, 1961, p. 176.

Khusrow I in the sixth century. It was, however, under Shapur II that Athurpat Mahraspandan gave the movement a clear and decisive direction. In fact, as it appears from a passage in the third book of the *Dinkart*¹, the earliest refutation of Manichaeism from Zoroastrian standpoint that comes down to us is based on Athurpat's understanding of the Mazdean religion, and it is from his point of view that the religion is defended against the Manichaeism propaganda.

In the light of the above considerations it becomes clear that when Mani began to preach his religion in the cities of Iran, it was not regarded by the people as something heathenish or outlandish, nor did Shapur see anything in it that might be at serious variance with his own religious or national feelings. It is almost certain that the tragic end of Mani's life at the instance of Bahram I was caused by political suspicions rather than by religious discrepancies, though, obviously - and quite naturally - certain court priests were responsible for and instrumental in contriving it.

Outside Iran, within the Roman territories, similarly, Manichaeism was considered as an Iranian sect. Emperor Diocletian in the year 297 issued an edict against the Manichees, addressed to the African proconsul Julianus, in which he refers to these heretics and their doctrines as being Persian and coming from Persia. In the words of Geo Widengren, the edict said.

He (the Emperor) had become aware... that of late the Manichees had like a fresh and sudden plague coming from the hostile Persians broken in upon the Roman Lands and committed many crimes.

They were exciting peaceful communities and there was reason to fear that by reason of their beastly habits and crazy Persian customs they were liable to try and contaminate as with a baleful poison people of a more innocent nature, the quiet Roman folk and indeed the whole world. Therefore he prescribed measures of the strictest sort: the tracts and their authors together with the

1. Translated by A.V.W. Jackson, in *Researches in Manichaeism*, Columbia Univ., New York, 1932, pp. 203-8.

ringleaders were to be burned, their followers to loose their lives and their property confiscated by the State. Persons holding a position in society who had adhered to this disgraceful sect or succumbed to the Persian doctrine were condemned to compulsory labour in the mines and confiscation of property. 1

Commenting on the above evidence, Widengren continues, Diocletian's attitude to Manichaeism, in the light of his politico-military antagonism to Sassanian Iran on account of his wars with Sassanid Narses and his belief that he was dealing here with an Iranian 'sect', is intelligible.

Nevertheless it is interesting that the Iranian character of Mani's system had been so clearly perceived on the Roman side. Manichaeism was indeed in the West always regarded as a religion belonging to the Persian people which was ever hostile to the Romans, *z adversaria nobis gens*, as Diocletian phrased it. Thus its Iranian origin alone sufficed to render the new religion a peril to imperial safety.

Diocletian's edict is, from our point of view, important not only because it points to the fact that in the Roman world Manichaeism was regarded as an Iranian 'sect', but also because it shows how far and wide, and how fast, the new religion had spread outside its native land, and how deep its impact was on the lives of the people it had won. It is interesting, moreover, to note that the first attacks on Manichaeism and its followers were on political, and not on religious grounds.

Shapur and Mani had much in common. They both were of Iranian blood (and this is a fact that should not be overlooked or underestimated), 2 both belonged to Iranian royal families, and

1. Geo Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism*, New York, 1965, pp. 118-9.

2. Throughout their history, this feeling has always been present with this people. Ghirshman writes, "The spirit of Persian people was imbued with love of country; this was remarked on by Herodotus who emphasised that no Persian ever prayed to his god for a personal benefit. But he prays for the welfare of the king and of the whole Persian people, among whom he is of necessity included. This patriotic ideal inspired and developed an antional conscience in the fulfilment of the imperial task that was a part of the nation's destiny". (*Iran*, pp. 154-5).

This patriotic sentiment and its manifestations continued to be a formative element in the social, political and cultural history of Iran. It showed itself in the

both had their roots in their common culture and shared a common heritage. They were motivated by the spirit of the time, and were fully conscious of their place and position in history.

Much can be read in the relationship between these two figures. While Shapur was preparing for his coronation, Mani was writing his famous *Shapurtan* in the language of the Sassanian dynasty. When, on the first of Nissan 243 Shapur was crowned in Ctesiphon, Mani, who had just returned from the eastern regions of the empire, proclaimed himself the Prophet of God.¹ On the same day he was granted an audience by the King. There he presented his *Shapurtan* to Shapur,² and Shapur honoured him and wrote letters to all magnates in the following terms: „Befriend and defend him, that none shall transgress or trespass against him”.³ Mani spent many years in the King's company, travelled in his retinue, and even, as Alexander of Lycopolis says, „fought at his side”.⁴

Mani and his royal patron were dreaming of a larger world which would include Iran and beyond Iran. Shapur had a „World Empire” in view, and Mani was thinking of a „World Religion” to give it spiritual unity.

Mani's religion has been called “eclectic” by many scholars. This is not the proper characterization. All great religions are

nation's ancient legends, religious writings (cf. Jackson, *Zoroastrian Studies*, p. 137), royal inscriptions, and, particularly after the Arab invasion, for several centuries, in almost every aspect of the people's life.

In this latter period, under the most painful conditions, it assumed numerous subtle forms, and working with all its intensity in the courts of the Caliphs and among the common people, on the battle-fields and in religious circles- succeeded not only to secure the nation's survival but also to subdue, tame and train the intruding forces. To study the history of a people regardless of their emotional life is misleading.

1. Cf. *Kephalaia*, pp. 15, 27-31; *al-Fihrist* (in Ahmad Afshar Shirazi, op. cit. p. 150).

2. *Āthār al-Bāqiya* (*ibid*, p. 204)

3. *Kephalaia*, pp. 16 f.

4. *Contra Manichaeum*, 4.20.

eclectic. What gives a specific quality to Manichaeism is its founder's conscious and deliberate effort to build up, during his own lifetime a religion of universal appeal to unify the different people within and without the Sassanian Empire. In Mani's own words, all previous creeds were consummated in the wisdom that he was preaching,

One established his religion in the west, and his religion did not spread to the East; another established his religion in the East and gained nothing in the West; this is the case with all those whose names are unknown in other cities. The hope that I preach will gain the West, it will also win the East, and it will be heard in all languages and be preached in all cities. My religion is in this respect superior to all the preceding religions, for all those were established in some places and in some towns only. My religion will spread throughout all towns, and its message will reach all countries (*Kephalaia*, cliv).

Jackson is right in saying, "Mani endeavoured... to form a new religion... that should not be confined by national borders but be universally accepted. In terms of today, Mani's aspiration was to bring the world, Orient and Occident, into closer union through a combined faith, based on the creeds known in his day".¹

Manichaeism is eclectic, but in a deliberate and purposeful way, and for a preconceived aim. Mani was trying to assimilate Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Christian and Gnostic elements into the basic structure of his own religion, and thus, to make it a common ground on which peoples of different creeds might join together and come into one fold. In a very clear and simple language, and not without a touch of naivety, he describes his religion as the most comprehensive wisdom that has ever been revealed, and in which all previous revelations are completed.

The writings, wisdom, apocalypses, parables and psalms of all the previous religions, gathered from all parts, have come together in my religion, in the wisdom which I have revealed. As one river mixes with another and forms one great stream, so also the ancient books have been united to my writings and there has thus been formed one great wisdom, to which nought can be compared that has been preached to any previous generation (*Kephalaia*, cliv).

1. A.V.W. Jackson, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-8.

Mani's universal religion could very well complement the universal kingdom that Shapur was striving to build. It was not, however, the first time in the world history that a would-be universal sovereign was thinking of consolidating his kingdom by a universal faith. At the end of the fourth century B. C. Ptolemy I, the founder of the Macedonian dynasty in Egypt, acting on the advice of Manetho, the Egyptian priest, and Timotheus of Eleusis, established the new cult of Serapis in his Greco-Egyptian empire. Serapis, whose cult in its Greek form continued in the West for several centuries, was to be worshipped by the Egyptians as an Egyptian god and by the Greeks as a Greek deity, and thus, to provide the ground on which these two different peoples might be united. Manichaeism seems to have been a similar venture, but on a considerably larger scale and with a much greater ambition. The rivals it had to fight were not local mystery cults or ethico-philosophical schools of thought. From the outset it was attempting to replace the three greatest religions of the time, namely, Christianity in the West, Buddhism in the East, and the ancient Zoroastrianism in its own birth-place. Like Jesus who said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law of the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" Mani called Zoroaster, Buddha and Jesus his „brothers" 1 and claimed to be the last messenger 2 of the same God who had sent Zoroaster, the Buddha and Jesus Christ in earlier ages. In a passage that al- Biruni quotes from Mani's Shapurgan, it is said, 3

Wisdom and deeds (of righteousness) have always from time to time been brought to mankind by the messengers of God. So in one age they have been brought by the messenger called the Buddha to India, in another by Zoradusht to Persia, in another by Jesus to the West.

1. *Kephalaia*, cliv.

2. That Māni claimed to be "the seal of the prophets" has been reported to us by Muslim historians (see Ahmad Afshār Shirāzi, *op. cit.*, pp. 492, 510 and confirmed by Turfan and Coptic Manichaean, writings (see G. Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism*, p. 77; C.R.C. Alberry. *Y Mani'iaean Psalm Book*, vol. II, pt. 2, p. 16).

3. *Āfshār al-Bāghā*, in Ahmad Afshār Shirāzi, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

- Thereupon this revelation has come down, this prophecy in this last age, through me, Mani, the messenger of the God of Truth to Babylonia.

This universal attitude that Manichaeism had adopted showed itself in the attempts that its early missionaries made to conform and harmonize their religious views with the ideas of those whom they intended to attract. Because of the flexibility of its tenets, and since from the outset it had not confined itself to a particular language, Manichaeism could easily assume the outward appearance of other religions and adapt its terminology to the religious language of the locality into which it was introduced. In Iran the followers of Mani were, as it has already been remarked, recognised as "zandiks", because they were supposed to be adhering to the "Zand", or the commentary of the *Avesta*, and not to the precepts of the *Avesta* itself, or perhaps because they had their own interpretations of the sacred scripture. Among the Christians, similarly, they claimed that Mani was the Paraclete who was to come to complete and to fulfil Christ's mission. The way they argued with their Christian opponents may be illustrated by the dialogue that takes place between Faustus, the Manichaean Perfect, and St. Augustine, himself previously a Manichaean for nine Years. On being asked whether he believed the Gospel, Faustus answers in language which is in full accord with Christian, and also Buddhist, ethical ideals.

My obedience to its commands shows that I do.

I should rather ask you if you believe it, since you give no proof of your belief. I have left my father, brother, wife and children and all else that the gospel requires; and you ask me if I believe the gospel. Perhaps you do not know what is called the gospel. The gospel is nothing else than the teaching and the precept of Christ. I have parted with all gold and silver. I have left off carrying money in my purse; content with food obtained from day to day; without anxiety for the morrow and without care as to how I shall be fed or: wherewithal I shall be clothed; and you ask if I believe the gospel? You see in me the blessings of the gospel; and yet you ask if I believe the gospel. You see me poor, meek, a peacemaker, pure in heart, mourning, hungering, thirsting, bearing persecutions

and hatred for righteousness sake; and do you doubt if I believe in the gospel. 1

Mani had travelled far and wide, and was fully aware of the diversity of cultures, traditions and languages of the people inside and outside of the Sassanian kingdom. Therefore when he was designing the outlines of his religion he tried his best to give it the potential of being adaptable to various conditions, and to make it flexible not only in moral teachings and in exposition of tenets, but also in language and expression. This explains why the Eastern and the Western Manichaean writings are so much different in tone, imagery, terminology and personal names. Schaefer observes that "the undeniable difference between the Eastern and Western literary Manichaean tradition was due to Mani's having translated his religious system into both Iranian and Christian categories... When propagating his ideas, Mani found it necessary to translate them not only into the languages of Iran and the West, but also to 'co-translate' the religious terms and conceptions into their corresponding indigenous terms and notions". 2

In the psalm ccxxv of the Coptic Manichaean Psalm Book 3 there is a passage which contains an interesting point. According to the translation of the Coptic text, when Mani was taken to King Bahram,

He (the king) said to him
wrathfully in a mighty voice; ,who bade thee do these things or
(‘e) who art thou?
Thou doest deeds that harm(?) all men.’
The glorious Mind (nous) answered and said to him straightly
,Know, O King, that God hath... thee (?), thou being a man,
to the law (nomos) of life ... the perfect commandments (entole)
of Christ. My doctrines...
... to thee.’

1. *Contra Faustum*, Book V, ch. I, quoted in Francis Legge, *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity*, New York, 1964 (reprint), ch. xiii, p. 317.

2. Quoted in G. Widengren, *op. cit.* p. 11.

3. C.R.C. Alberry, *A Manichaean Psalm Book*, Stuttgart, 1939, vol. II, part 2, pp. 15-16.

It is very difficult to believe that the phrase "... the perfect commandments of Christ. My doctrines..." was verbally pronounced by Mani in such a crucial moment. Certainly he had enough sense and foresight not to propagate "the perfect commandments of Christ" at the court and in the presence of a Mazdean king who was, apparently, under the influence of the priestly class. Concerning this scene and the conversation between Mani and the king, there are other passages in the Eastern and Western texts (Turfan Fragments, Muller's edition, 3; and *Manichäische Homilien*, Polotsky's edition, 45-49, 93), and nothing similar to the above phrase occurs in them.

In the West, Mani and his followers expressed their views in the language used by the Gnostics and the Christians and tried to adapt their own religious tenets to the religious terms and beliefs of the latter groups. In producing outward conformity with Gnosticism and Christianity their achievement has been so great that in later Manichaeism was regarded in the West as a Christian heresy; and even today there are still scholars who treat it as a Gnostic sect or try to trace its essential elements to Christian origins. But in this respect Manichaeism was a success and an inevitable failure at the same time. It endeavoured to appear to the Christians as the fulfilment of Christianity, to the Mazdeans as the perfected form of Mazdeism, and, perhaps, to the Buddhists as the consummation of the Buddha's teachings; but, soon after its appearance, Christians began to deal with it as a Christian heresy, and Mazdeans considered its followers as those who had their own interpretation of the Mazdean scripture, and the Buddhists, we may presume, might have a similar attitude towards it. It is interesting, however, that the Roman emperor, Diocletian, who was neither a Christian, nor a Mazdean, nor a Buddhist, called it the sect of the Persians.

Mani's religion, whatever its outward appearance might be, was a dualistic system of the Iranian type, and had Iranian origin and character. In fact, its dualistic structure, and its doctrines of the "Two Roots" "Three Times", are evidently Zurvanite; and these are the fundamental elements on which the whole system is based. Widengren says,

Whilst the Christian and Buddhist elements of the religion show themselves to be "trimmings" which can be singled out without difficulty and with no harm to the system, the same action cannot be undertaken in respect of the Iranian elements, because they are indeed constituent parts. With their removal practically nothing is left of the framework of Mani's ideas...

Puesh is probably right in saying that the Indian, Iranian, Christian - and we may add, Mesopotamian - elements were for the most part not influences integral to the system from the start but later, more supplementary, extrinsic features, the result of a deliberate effort on the part of its founder.

This can be more confidently asserted by keeping in mind that the whole system is Iranian, specifically Zervanite, in concept. The idea of the "redeemed Redeemer", as dominant in Manichaeism as in all gnosticism, is Iranian, the idea that the Redeemer is himself the sum of all the souls to be redeemed, a notion bound up with the thought of identity between the higher human ego and this heavenly Redeemer. In Manichaeism this sequence of thinking is echoed in that complex of ideas which revolves around the figure called "the Great Vahman" a complex whose consanguinity with the Indian Atman-Brahman speculation vouches for the Indo-Iranian origin of these ideas (*op. cit.*, pp. 72-3 and 138).

All the similarities that exist between Manichaeism and Gnostic thought should not be explained as borrowings from the one into the other. Recent investigations of Hans Jonas, J. Doresse and G. Widengren have brought to light a good deal of evidence regarding the dependence of early schools of Gnosticism on ancient Iranian religious thought. Concerning the affinities of Manichaeism with Gnostic tenets, Hans Jonas remarks,

Originating a century later (than the Valentinian system) it yet represents... in its theoretical substance a more archaic level of gnostic thought.. Orthodox Zoroastrianism furnished the original model, and already at least a century before Mani the Iranian model had been adopted for gnostic purpose.,¹

There may be in Manichaeism, as Mary Boyce writes² imagery some "echoes", imagery and "doctrine" borrowed from the New Testaments; but it must be remembered that the fundamental framework of the Manichaean system, and its

1 . *The Gnostic Religion*, Boston, 1963, pp. 206 and 214.

2 . *Inão-Iranica Journal*, vol. vii, 1963, NR. 1.

concepts of God, man, and the universe, are radically different from those of Christianity. A God of Light, who is Light itself, cannot be the same God who came out of the darkness, created the light, and saw, for the first time, that „the light was good” (Genesis, I, 4). The following passage from Theodore Bar Khoni's *Scholia* elucidates the difference,

And he (Mani) says, that He (Jesus) raised him (Adam) up and made him taste of the Tree of Life. And then Adam looked and wept; and he raised his voice mightily, like a lion that roars and ravens; he loosened (his bosom) and smote (his breast) and said „Woe, Woe! to the fashioner of my body and to the binder of my soul and to the rebels who have enslaved me. 1

Here it is Jesus who gives Adam the taste of the Fruit of the Tree- an interesting exchange of roles between Jesus and the Tempter.² Adam's cursing his creator is no less interesting. The creator here, who is Ahriman himself, plays the role of God in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions. Neither Boyce nor Burkitt, who tries to relate Manichaeism to the Christian religion, seem to have realised the fundamental difference between the two frameworks and the two settings. In such a case no borrowing from one system can have any significant place in the other, nor can it be much more than a name, an image or the surface-form of a myth. Widengren is right in saying that in Manichaeism Jesus could just as well have had another name.³

Mani's career, we may state once more, was a conscious and carefully planned endeavour to create a universal religion, organised, canonised, and institutionalised by him in his own life-time, and the aim he had in view is best understood in its relation to Shapur's aspirations for creating a universal kingdom.

This peculiarity of the Manichaean movement, which makes it distinct from all previous religions, and the purposeful and deliberate nature of its form and content, have been observed by

1. Translated in Jackson, *Researches in Manichaeism*, Columbia Univ. Press, New York, 1932, pp. 253-4.

2. Hence al-Nadim in *al-Fihrist* (Ahmad Afshār Shirāzi *op. cit.*, 159):

3. *op. cit.*, p. 158.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith in their historical context. To conclude, I quote a relevant passage from his book, *The Meaning and End of Religion*:

The traditions of the Jews, the Christians, the Zarathushtrians, the Buddhists, had originated from a content and were developing gradually a form. Mani discerned the form, appropriated it, and set about to fill such a form with new content.

Others had spoken what eventually became or was becoming scriptures. Mani began with the concept "scripture", and wrote books to fill this role. He is perhaps the first person in human history ever to have consciously played the role of a world prophet. To others, or to their later memories, so many followers were attracted that organisations formed, Mani set up an administrative organisation, to systemise a religious community.

He was the first person in human history ever to do this and to know what he was doing. 1

1 . *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Mentor Books, 1964, p. 88.