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# A Robber in Paradise: Luke 23:43 in Manichaean and Anti-Manichaean Exegesis

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## Introduction

The gospel episode of Jesus' crucifixion is well attested in Manichaean texts and has received much scholarly attention. Scholars usually dedicate their attention to evaluating whether Manichaeans defended a docetic view of Jesus' death (whether he truly died or he only appeared to do so), and to studying Manichaean exegetical methods more generally.<sup>1</sup> Research has shown that Manichaeans had, indeed, a very sophisticated reading of the New Testament, and developed precise exegetical tools that allowed them to determine whether each single verse was authentic or not, and thus whether it was to be kept or rejected. The crucifixion narrative was accepted as authentic gospel material, while other parts, such as the birth and infancy of Jesus, were deemed spurious and were therefore dismissed. The narration of the crucifixion was accepted in the way it is transmitted by the Gospel of Luke, be it in the form of a separate gospel or in its inclusion in the *Diatessaron* (the harmonization of the four gospels also used by Manichaeans). The Manichaean narrative contains “the plot against Jesus, the arrest, the trial, the death and the resurrection stories.”<sup>2</sup> These episodes correspond to the segment going from Luke 22:1 to 24:53, according to Michel Tardieu's reconstruction based on Middle Persian and Coptic sources.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, as is well known, Jesus' crucifixion plays an essential role in the Manichaean doctrine and in the celebration of its founder Mani, since it served as a model for

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<sup>1</sup> See Tardieu 1987; see also Viciano 2006; on the Manichaean use of the Gospels, see Pedersen, Falkenberg, Larsen, Leurini 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Tardieu 1987: 141. On the Manichaean perspective on Jesus' trial, see Tardieu 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Tardieu 1987: 141. The same scenes are mentioned in *Keph.* I, 12.21-13.11. For an interpretation of this passage as reflecting the order of the gospel events transmitted by the *Diatessaron*, see Gulácsi 2021.

the depiction of Mani's own final days, as the terminology employed in the Coptic *Psalms* and in the *Homilies* suggests.<sup>4</sup>

One particular verse belonging to this biblical scene, quoted and cherished by the Manichaeans, has not received much attention so far: it is Luke 23:43, containing Jesus' promise to the good robber, "*Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.*" This verse is interesting because it was accepted by the Manichaeans as authentic (they used it and referred to it, as we will see), but it was probably rejected by Marcion, whose biblical canon the Manichaeans knew and partially shared. Indeed, both Marcion and Mani rejected the Old Testament and kept the "Gospel and the Apostle (Paul)"; they both rejected the infancy narrative in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>5</sup> Yet it seems that Marcion also disregarded this very verse: according to Epiphanius of Salamis, "[Marcion] excised 'Today you will be with me in Paradise,'" which made Epiphanius to bitterly remark about the Marcionites that "You have taken away from yourselves the entry into Paradise, for you will not enter, neither will you allow those with you" (*Panarion* 42.11.17).<sup>6</sup>

It is thus relevant to examine how this verse has been interpreted by the Manichaeans and integrated in their doctrinal system, with which meanings and values it has been invested in Manichaean sources, and also whether it represented a *locus* for the confrontation between Manichaeans and "orthodox" Christians in late antiquity, as is the case of other biblical verses, such as the famous Matt 7:18 about the good and the bad tree.<sup>7</sup> To this end, in this contribution I retrace the history of the exegesis of Luke 23:43 in Manichaean and anti-Manichaean sources, mainly from the Mediterranean area, up to the sixth century. Curiously enough, while the robbers are mentioned several times in the various texts, the promise of Jesus to the good thief as contained in Luke 23:43 is somewhat rare.

In what follows, I will first provide an overview of the relevant sources where this verse appears; then, I will focus on the only text, to the best of my knowledge, that discusses in detail this biblical passage in an anti-Manichaean perspective, namely John Chrysostom's *Sermon on Genesis 7* (end of the fourth century); I will compare it with a later source, Severus

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<sup>4</sup> See Gardner 2015.

<sup>5</sup> On the relationship between the Marcionite New Testament and the Manichaean New Testament, see Tardieu 1987, 142-144. On the practice of antithesis as an exegetical tool shared by Marcion and Mani, see van den Berg 2010 and the recent contribution, Tardieu 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Holl 1922, 153; and Williams 2009, 310. See also Roth 2015, 339 and 434. Mark Bilby advanced reasons to doubt the veracity of Epiphanius' statement, since he is the only author to claim Marcion's rejection of this verse. See Bilby 2012 (this dissertation was published by Université de Strasbourg in 2013, *non uidi*). See also Lieu 2015, 198, who highlights that Epiphanius could refer to the entire episode of the penitent thief and not to Jesus' promise alone.

<sup>7</sup> For the use of this verse in Manichaean and anti-Manichaean texts, see Coyle 2009, 65-88. See also Pedersen et al. 2020.

of Antioch's *Cathedral Homily 22* (beginning of the sixth century), which, as I will argue, draws on Chrysostom's sermon; finally, based on the previous analyses, I will provide some concluding remarks on the Manichaean exegesis of this verse and on its role in the debates with Christian theologians.

## 1. Manichaean and Anti-Manichaean Interpretations of Luke 23:43

### *Manichaean Interpretations*

According to the reference tool *The New Testament in the Manichaean Tradition*, this verse appears in Western and Eastern Manichaean literature, both as quote and allusion, only six times.<sup>8</sup> Three occurrences belong to the fourth-century Coptic *Psalm-book: Psalm to Jesus 242* (*PsBk II*, p. 49, lines 23-25),<sup>9</sup> *Psalm to Jesus 271* (*PsBk II*, p. 90, lines 29-32),<sup>10</sup> and one of the *Psalms of Heracleides* (*PsBk II*, p. 195, line 22).<sup>11</sup> All three, including the latter, are devoted to Jesus as the savior who can remit sins. The three other occurrences are found in Iranian sources: the first one, M390/V/1-3, is a hymn on Jesus' passion, also known as "The Great Parthian Crucifixion Hymn";<sup>12</sup> the other two occurrences appear in M5779 (V/3-5 and R/20-26), which presents an outline of the Bema liturgy and contains instructions on the hymns to be sung during the Bema festival.<sup>13</sup>

All these texts are hymns used in ritual settings, and are devoted either to Jesus or to Mani, both of them regarded as saviors and remitters of sins.<sup>14</sup> One main interpretation of Luke 23:43 emerges from this context: the good robber is the example of the good believer, the faithful one who repented. As such, he becomes the model for Manichaean believers, who

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<sup>8</sup> Pedersen et al. 2020, 264-265.

<sup>9</sup> "A robber was saved upon the cross because he did but / Acknowledge you; you forgot all the sins that he / Had committed, you remembered all his good."

<sup>10</sup> "I stepped in with your cross, / I hung to the right of you, because I received the / Blessing: henceforth take me with you to the Paradise of the holy Gods."

<sup>11</sup> This Psalm is *4He6* in Siegfried Richter's edition (Richter 1998). This is a long hymn devoted to Jesus, who describes how he found his disciples, the way his persecutors killed him, and how he raised up victorious and sat at the right hand of his father. The allusion to the good thief is meant for Jesus' disciples, who endured many trials and suffering like him and were finally crowned for their faith: "They were made to go up on the fire, he made them cool with his dew. / They were hanged to the cross, he took them to Paradise."

<sup>12</sup> For the edition and translation of this hymn, reconstructed from several manuscripts of the Berlin Turfan collection, see Morano 1998, 131-145: "He [Jesus] showed salvation, and opened the door to / The pupils that like him / Are crucified (...)" (ll. 77-79, at. 136).

<sup>13</sup> The text was edited in Henning 1936, 45-46 (marked as T II D 123): "When you go, Lord (= Mani), save us also from the mortal existence. [...] And after the meal these three hymns take place: *Commander of fair name, God, Lord Mar Mani, you go, raise me also up to Paradise*" (ll. 3-5 and 44-48).

<sup>14</sup> On the multilayered figure of Jesus in Manichaeism, see Franzmann 2003.

identify with him when asking for the forgiveness of their sins. The quotation of the relevant stanzas of the first source will exemplify this interpretation:

I confessed you indeed because of this hour, I endured  
the mockery of all men; for I heard that he who shall deny  
you – you forgot him in his afflictions.

Lo, my faith stands fast with me; lo, my almsgivings that  
I performed in your name: lo, my prayers and my zeal  
Demand that I should receive grace upon me.

A robber was saved upon the cross because he did but  
Acknowledge you; you forgot all the sins that he  
Had committed, you remembered all his good.

All worldly Matter that surrounds me – burn it today,  
I beseech you. Cleanse me from all the sins, for  
I too have hung on your hope.

(*Psalm to Jesus 242, PsBk II, 49, 23-25*)

#### *Fourth-Century Christian Interpretations*

Turning now to contemporary, fourth-century texts emanating from “orthodox” Christians, apart from the prominence of the figure of Mani, which is naturally missing, we observe that they promote a very similar interpretation of Luke 23:43.<sup>15</sup> Ephrem of Nisibis (*ca* 306-373), for example, who fiercely and extensively condemned the Manichaeans both through poetry and prose, basically agrees with his adversaries insofar as this gospel verse is concerned. For Ephrem too Luke 23:43 signifies the great mercy of Jesus, and the good thief is regarded as the ideal of faith, repentance, and recompense. This interpretation is developed, for instance, in his *Commentary on the Diatessaron* XX, 22-26.<sup>16</sup> In other works, the thief becomes an example for Ephrem himself, who prays for the forgiveness of his sins and for access to Paradise in the robber’s footsteps (“Remember me as well, together with the robber, / So that I could enter in your kingdom in his shadow”, *Cruc.* 6, 20).<sup>17</sup> In his hymns, we find only one explicit polemical context in which Ephrem refers to this verse. It is not against the Manichaeans, but rather against the Arians, who, in his view, impudently seek to investigate

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<sup>15</sup> A study on this verse in early Christian literature up to the fifth century is provided by Bilby 2012. See also *The American and British Committees of the International Greek New Testament Project. Vol. 2: The Gospel according to Luke 13-24* 1987, 223-224, which include numerous Greek, Latin, and Syriac patristic references related to this verse.

<sup>16</sup> See Leloir 1966, 359-362.

<sup>17</sup> For analysis of Luke 23:43 in Ephrem’s works, see Bilby 2012, 122-124.

God's mystery. In the *Hymn on Faith* 84, 1-2, for instance, Ephrem recalls the example of the thief as of the one who, unlike the Arians, rightly believed and was rewarded:

1. The thief possessed faith –  
That faith which possessed him – and it raised him up and placed him  
In Paradise. He saw in the cross  
The Tree of Life. That faith was a fruit.  
And he took the place of Adam as an eater.

2. The fool who has faith  
Alongside all kinds of questions, irritates that faith,  
In the same way that poking the eye with a finger  
Blinds the eye. Worse than this is  
The one who investigates faith.<sup>18</sup>

Nowhere in his writings does Ephrem use this verse in a context of explicit accusation against the Manichaeans; this is rather unlike his clear attempts at singling out other biblical passages in his anti-Manichaean texts, in which he criticizes the Manichaeans' "wrong" exegesis.<sup>19</sup> A quick review of the other Christian writers who usually reject the Manichaean interpretation of the Bible, surprisingly did not give any result either: Luke 23:43 is not significantly mentioned or discussed in the anti-Manichaean works of Serapion of Thmuis, Titus of Bostra, Epiphanius of Salamis or Augustine, for example.<sup>20</sup> The only exception I could find is John Chrysostom, *Sermon on Genesis 7* (CPG 4410),<sup>21</sup> where a specific and extensive interpretation of Luke 23:43 is explicitly attributed to the Manichaeans and then refuted.<sup>22</sup> It is this sermon that I will discuss next.

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<sup>18</sup> Translation by Wickes 2015: 387. We notice here the establishment of a link between Adam, the one who was cast out of Paradise because of his sin, and the good thief, the one who, thanks to his repentance, entered Paradise. This connection is traditional in early Christian literature, and used in several other occurrences in Ephrem's writings: see Bilby 2012: 282-291. For an analysis of Luke 23:43 in Ephrem's polemics against the Arians, including the *Hymn on Faith* quoted here, see Bilby 2012: 143-145.

<sup>19</sup> As the above-mentioned Matt 7:18 on the good and bad trees.

<sup>20</sup> My survey included the following fourth- through sixth-century authors and works from North Africa, Italy, Constantinople, Antioch, Syria, Mesopotamia and Palestine: *Acta Archelai*, Serapion of Thmuis, Ephrem of Nisibis, Cyril of Jerusalem, Didymus of Alexandria, Titus of Bostra, Epiphanius of Salamis, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Augustine of Hippo, Severian of Gabala, John the Grammarian, and the Abjuration formulas. In these texts, Luke 23:43 is sometimes mentioned, but not in a relevant way. For example, in Augustine's *Contra Faustum* XIV, 1, Faustus alludes to this verse in his demonstration of existing discrepancies between the Old and the New Testaments (in particular, between Deut. 21:23, which curses everyone hanging on a pole, and Luke 23); Epiphanius, *Panarion* 66.62 alludes to this verse in his anti-Manichaean chapter, but to demonstrate that evil is not ontological: the thief, among other biblical examples, changed and repented of his criminal acts.

<sup>21</sup> CPG = *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, edited by Maurice Geerard [and J. Noret], 5 vols. Turnhout: Brepols, 1974-1987, 1998, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> John Chrysostom's anti-Manichaean polemics remain very understudied and there is not much scholarship devoted to this aspect of Chrysostom's preaching. For a very recent overview of his anti-Manichaean topics, with relevant literature, see de Wet 2021, 225-252. See also Mara, 2008, 195-199; de Wet 2011: 92-114, esp. 94-99; and de Wet 2014: 18-41, esp. 30-36, for the analysis of the anti-Manichaean rhetoric in three of Chrysostom's texts on Paul's epistles, namely *Homily 11 on Philippians*, *Homily 38 on 1 Corinthians*, and

## 2. John Chrysostom, *Sermon on Genesis 7*

The *Sermon on Genesis 7* belongs to the short series of sermons on Genesis that John Chrysostom delivered as a priest in Antioch, before being ordained as bishop of Constantinople. Specifically, this sermon was pronounced during Lent of the year 386 AD.<sup>23</sup> After speaking of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:9), Chrysostom comments on Luke 23:43. He first establishes a link between Adam and the good thief, like Ephrem before him; he mentions the episode of repentance on the cross and praises the thief's faith and Jesus' mercy, by evoking the promise of Paradise.<sup>24</sup> Then, suddenly, he pauses to highlight that this promise was wrongly interpreted by the Manichaeans. He argues that the Manichaeans used this verse to deny the resurrection of bodies.<sup>25</sup> He reports this Manichaean claim in two parts, each one followed by a double refutation, mainly supported by quotes from the Epistles of Paul. The structure of this part of the sermon devoted to Luke 23:43 in an anti-Manichaean perspective can be outlined in the following way:

**Manichaean claim 1:** the thief has received the reward, the resurrection of the bodies does not exist

- Refutation 1: body and soul are inseparable (2 Cor 5:10, 1 Cor 15:53)
- Refutation 2: Paradise vs. Kingdom of Heaven (1 Cor 2:9)

**Manichaean claim 2:** Paradise = Kingdom of Heaven

- Refutation 1: Jesus speaks of the future (Jn 3:18, Jn 5:24)
- Refutation 2: Nobody has been resurrected yet (Heb 11:13, Heb 11:40)

Despite its length, it is worth quoting in full the first part of the claim, since it is unique in Manichaean and anti-Manichaean literature:

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*Commentary on Galatians 1.* Indeed, Chrysostom's attacks against the Manichaeans are spread in his large corpus of writings, especially in his exegetical homilies on Paul's epistles and the Gospels. In order to gather a substantial list of Chrysostom's anti-Manichaean passages, it is necessary to combine the references discussed in the afore-mentioned articles with the information provided in Rambault 2013, 28, n. 4, and Alpi 2004: 233-243, esp. 237, n. 27.

<sup>23</sup> Edition and French translation in Brottier 1998: 300-345. English translation in Hill 2004, 107-133.

<sup>24</sup> The *Sermon* is analyzed by Bilby 2012, 154-155, for the novel interpretation of the bandit's vision of Jesus' divinity as "the eyes of faith." Bilby points out the similarities of this sermon with two other homilies, entitled *On the Cross and the Bandit* (CPG 4338-4339). Nevertheless, these two homilies do not contain a parallel section to the anti-Manichaean development present in the *Sermon on Genesis 7*.

<sup>25</sup> De Wet 2021, 239-241, mentions this sermon and discusses Chrysostom's double reaction against the Manichaean denial of physical resurrection.

Just as the fellow had regard for divinity, so God had regard for the brigand's heart, saying, *Today you will be with me in Paradise*. At this point pay attention: an issue arises that is not a chance one, namely the Manichaeans, stupid and rabid dogs, presenting an appearance of mildness, but having on the inside the savage fury of dogs, wolves in sheep's clothing. Lest you look to appearances, however, examine instead the wild beast hidden within. These people, then, seize upon this passage to claim: "Christ said, *Amen, amen, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise*, so reward of good things has already been made, and resurrection is unnecessary. If the brigand," says (the Manichaean), "was awarded good things that very day whereas his body has not yet risen even today, there will be no resurrection of the body in future." Surely you have not given thought to what was said, or require that it be said a second time? "*Amen, amen, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise*. The brigand, then," says (the Manichaean), "did not enter Paradise with his body: How could he, when his body was not buried, and had not turned to dust, and there is no mention anywhere that Christ raised him up? If he welcomed the brigand, and the latter enjoyed the good things without his body, clearly there is no resurrection of the body; for if there were resurrection of the body, he would not have said: *You will be with me in paradise today*, but 'at the moment of fulfillment, when there is a resurrection of bodies.' But if he has already welcomed the brigand, and his body stayed outside and decayed, clearly there is no resurrection of bodies." This is what they (say).<sup>26</sup>

According to Chrysostom's report, the Manichaeans would have read Luke 23:43 as evidence for denying the resurrection of the bodies: they would have understood the promise of Paradise as applying to the day of death and would have further interpreted this as proof for the resurrection of the soul alone, based on the fact that the robber's body was buried that very day and could not have risen.

To this reading, Chrysostom first opposes the anthropological doctrine that considers body and soul as inseparable, which is traditional in Christian thought. In support, he quotes Paul's words in 2 Cor 5:10 (*We must appear before the court of Christ so that everyone may obtain the price of what he has done during his bodily life, either for good or for evil*) and 1 Cor 15:53 (*This mortal being must clothe immortality, and this corruptible being must clothe*

<sup>26</sup> *Serm. Gen. 7.4* (SC 433), 332, l. 305 – 334, l. 333: ὡςπερ οὗτος εἶδεν εἰς τὴν θεότητα, οὕτως ὁ Θεὸς εἶδεν εἰς τὴν καρδίαν τοῦ ληστοῦ, καὶ φησὶ· *Σήμερον μετ' ἐμοῦ ἔσῃ ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ*. Ἐνταῦθα προσέχετε· ζήτημα γὰρ οὐ τὸ τυχόν ἐπιφύεται. Καὶ γὰρ οἱ Μανιχαῖοι, οἱ κύνες, οἱ ἔννεοι καὶ λυττῶντες, τὸ σχῆμα μὲν ἐπιδείκνυνται ἐπιεικείας, τὴν χαλεπὴν δὲ ἔνδον ἔχουσι τῶν κυνῶν μανίαν, καὶ κατακρύπτουσι τῇ δορᾷ τοῦ προβάτου τὸν λύκον. Ἀλλὰ μὴ τὸ φαινόμενον ἴδῃς, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἔνδον κεκρυμμένον θηρίον ἐξέτασον. Οὗτοι τοίνυν ἐπιλαβόμενοι τοῦ χωρίου τούτου φασίν· Εἶπεν ὁ Χριστὸς· Ἀμὴν, ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, σήμερον μετ' ἐμοῦ ἔσῃ ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ· οὐκοῦν ἀντίδοσις ἤδη γέγονε τῶν ἀγαθῶν, καὶ περιττὴ ἡ ἀνάστασις. Εἰ γὰρ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἀπέλαβεν ὁ ληστής τὰ ἀγαθὰ, τὸ δὲ σῶμα αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἀνέστη οὐδέπω καὶ τήμερον, οὐκ ἔσται σωμάτων λοιπὸν ἀνάστασις. Ἄρα ἐνοήσατε τὸ λεχθὲν, σωμάτων λοιπὸν ἀνάστασις. Ἄρα ἐνοήσατε τὸ λεχθὲν, ἡ δευτέρον αὐτὸ πάλιν εἰπεῖν ἀνάγκη; Ἀμὴν, ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, σήμερον μετ' ἐμοῦ ἔσῃ ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ. Εἰσηλθεν οὖν, φησὶν, εἰς τὸν παράδεισον ὁ ληστής οὐ μετὰ τοῦ σώματος· πῶς γὰρ, ὅποτε οὐκ ἐτάφη τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, οὐδὲ διελύθη καὶ κόνις ἐγένετο; καὶ οὐδαμοῦ εἴρηται, ὅτι ἀνέστησεν ὁ Χριστὸς αὐτόν. Εἰ δὲ εἰσήγαγε τὸν ληστήν, καὶ χωρὶς τοῦ σώματος ἀπέλαυσε τῶν ἀγαθῶν, εὐδὴλον ὅτι σῶματος οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνάστασις. Εἰ γὰρ ἦν σῶματος ἀνάστασις, οὐκ ἂν εἶπε· *Σήμερον μετ' ἐμοῦ ἔσῃ ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ, ἀλλ'*, ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς συντελείας, ὅταν σωμάτων ἀνάστασις ᾖ. Εἰ δὲ ἤδη εἰσήγαγε τὸν ληστήν, τὸ δὲ σῶμα αὐτοῦ φθαρὲν ἔμεινεν ἔξω, εὐδὴλον ὅτι σωμάτων ἀνάστασις οὐκ ἔστι. Ταῦτα ἐκεῖνοι·

Trans. Hill 2004: 125-126, slightly modified.

*immortality*), in order to highlight that body and soul endured together the suffering of the earthly life and will together receive the reward of resurrection. Then, he establishes a difference between Paradise as mentioned by Jesus in Luke 23:43 and the kingdom of heaven, where the resurrection of the bodies will take place. By quoting 1 Cor 2:9 (“Do you not hear what Paul says about those good things: *What the eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered the human heart?* Now Paradise, Adam’s eye has seen it, his ear has heard it, and man’s heart has received it”),<sup>27</sup> Chrysostom reminds his audience that God did not proclaim the kingdom of Paradise, but the kingdom of heaven, and illustrates this conception with further biblical examples.<sup>28</sup> He infers from these scriptural proofs that the robber is in Paradise, not in heaven, and that he has not been resurrected yet (“So, if he [Jesus] promised the kingdom of heaven and welcomed the brigand into Paradise, he had not yet repaid him the good things [i.e. the reward of resurrection]”).<sup>29</sup> The distinction between the physical reality of Paradise, experienced by Adam, and the heavenly reality of the kingdom, that nobody knows yet, relies on a literal interpretation of scriptures, which is characteristic of the Antiochene exegesis promoted by Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia.<sup>30</sup> John Chrysostom favors this kind of biblical interpretation against the Alexandrian, allegorical tradition.<sup>31</sup> This interpretation has led to the notion that there is an intermediate place where the souls of the deceased await the last judgment before reuniting with the bodies; and this place is Paradise.<sup>32</sup>

At this juncture, Chrysostom reports an objection purportedly coming from the Manichaeans which is directly related to his latter argument. This objection constitutes the second part of the Manichaean claim. The polemicist frames it in a fictitious dialogue between himself and a Manichaean interlocutor:

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<sup>27</sup> *Serm. Gen. 7.5* (SC 433), 336, ll. 352-356: Οὐκ ἀκούεις τοῦ Παύλου περὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ ἐκεῖνα τί φησιν; Ἄ ὀφθαλμὸς οὐκ εἶδε, καὶ οὐς οὐκ ἤκουσε, καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἀνέβη· τὸν δὲ παράδεισον καὶ ὀφθαλμὸς εἶδε τοῦ Ἀδάμ, καὶ οὐς παράδεισον καὶ ὀφθαλμὸς εἶδε τοῦ Ἀδάμ, καὶ οὐς ἤκουσε, καὶ καρδία ἀνθρώπου ἐδέξατο· Trans. Hill 2004: 128, slightly modified.

<sup>28</sup> He evokes Matt 4:17, Gen 3:18, He 6:4-8, Gen 2, John 3:5. In late antique Christian theological thinking, the identity or the distinction between Paradise and kingdom of heaven were subject to debate. For the general contours of these notions and their relationship, see Delumeau 1992: 1:45-46; Filoramo and Ramelli 2014: 3:65-68; Bockmuehl 2010: 192-209.

<sup>29</sup> *Serm. Gen. 7.5* (SC 433), 338, ll. 385-387: Εἰ τοίνυν βασιλείαν οὐρανῶν ἐπηγγείλατο, εἰς παράδεισον δὲ εἰσήγαγε τὸν ληστήν, οὐδέπω ἀπέδωκεν αὐτῷ τὰ ἀγαθὰ. Trans. Hill 2004: 130.

<sup>30</sup> Like the Antiochenes, John Chrysostom defends the belief in the physical existence of Paradise on earth, against other theologians, such as Origen, who understand Paradise as a spiritual entity: see Bockmuehl 2010: 205 and 208.

<sup>31</sup> See de Wet 2021: 240.

<sup>32</sup> On the late antique Christian notion of various heavens, among which is Paradise or Eden, see Filoramo and Ramelli 2014: 3:66, who also mention Syriac sources such as Ephrem.

In response to this they make another claim: “The Paradise he [Jesus] means here is not paradise; instead, he used the term paradise for the kingdom of heaven. Since he was speaking to a brigand, you see, a person who had heard nothing of elevated doctrines, was not aware of inspired writing, and instead had spent his whole life in isolation, committing murders, casting not even a glance at a church or participating in sacred reading, unaware of what the kingdom of heaven is, he put it this way, *Today you will be with me in Paradise*, suggesting by the better-known and more familiar term “paradise” the kingdom of heaven – this it was of which Christ was talking to him.” – “I follow.” – “Therefore,” says (the Manichaean), “he entered the kingdom of heaven.” – “What is the proof for that?” – “From his saying: *Today, you will be with me in Paradise*.”<sup>33</sup>

In other words, the Manichaeans would have taken Jesus’ promise of Paradise as the promise of the kingdom of heaven and would have explained Jesus’ ambiguous expression as a conscious choice intended to adapt his message to the abilities of understanding of the illiterate thief. Accordingly, the good robber is truly in heaven and he has been resurrected with his soul alone.

This interpretation attributed to the Manichaeans reflects their known hermeneutical practice in two respects. First, the appeal to a social explanation is in line with Manichaean exegetical principles. As Michel Tardieu points out by referring to the reading of Matt 5:17 provided by Faustus (Augustine, *Contra Faustum* XIX, 1-3), the Manichaeans valued the sociological and the narrative contexts of a New Testament passage to clarify its ambiguous or obscure meaning.<sup>34</sup>

Second, the idea of an immediate redemption upon death, which is the implicit consequence of the proposed interpretation, is consistent with the Manichaean doctrine of the afterlife and of the end of times, namely with both individual and cosmic eschatology, as found mostly in Greek, Coptic, Iranian, and Arabic documents. According to it, after death, the saints’ souls ascend to the Realm of Light, also called New Paradise of Light in the apocalyptic age, namely the place where all the particles of light will be gathered after the last judgment and the destruction of Matter. The New Paradise will finally merge with the original luminous Kingdom of the Father of Greatness. In other words, in the Manichaean understanding, the terms Paradise and the kingdom of heaven do not cover different realities,

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<sup>33</sup> *Serm. Gen. 7.5* (SC 433), 340, ll. 388-402: Ἄλλ’ ἕτερόν τι πρὸς τοῦτο λέγουσι. Τὸν παράδεισον, φασίν, ἐνταῦθα, οὐ τὸν παράδεισον εἶπεν, ἀλλὰ τῷ τοῦ παραδείσου ὀνόματι τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν ὠνόμασεν. Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ πρὸς ληστὴν διελέγετο, ἄνθρωπον οὐδὲν ἀκηκόετα τῶν ὑψηλῶν δογμάτων, οὐδὲ εἰδότα περὶ προφητείας, ἀλλὰ πάντα τὸν χρόνον ἐν ἐρημίαις διατρίψαντα, καὶ φόνους ἐργασάμενον, καὶ μηδὲ παρακύψαντά ποτε εἰς ἐκκλησίαν, μήτε μετασχόντα θείας ἀκροάσεως, μὴ εἰδότα τί ποτέ ἐστι βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, τοῦτο ἔλεγε· Σήμερον μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἔσῃ ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ· Τῷ γνωριμωτέρῳ καὶ συνηθεστέρῳ ὀνόματι τοῦ παραδείσου τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν δηλοῖ, καὶ περὶ ἐκείνης αὐτῷ διαλέγεται ὁ Χριστός. Δέχομαι. Οὐκοῦν, φησίν, εἰσηλθε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν. Πόθεν δῆλον; Ἐξ ὧν εἶπε, Σήμερον μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἔσῃ ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ. Trans. Hill 2004: 130, slightly modified.

<sup>34</sup> Tardieu 1987 : 135-136 (exegetical rule n° 13).

but rather the same entity, since the end, both individual and cosmic, is conceived of as a return to the beginning.<sup>35</sup>

Chrysostom considers the Manichaean solution of equating Paradise and the kingdom of heaven as “forcing” the biblical text (βιαιοτέρα ἢ λύσις αὐτή).<sup>36</sup> We should recall here that the same equation was popular in the thoughts of some Christian writers, such as Basil of Caesarea, who used the two terms interchangeably.<sup>37</sup> We may understand Chrysostom’s allegation of distortion, then, less against the Manichaeans themselves than against an allegorical, or in any case a non-literal interpretation of the biblical verse. In his *Homilies* 38.3 and 39 on 1 Cor, Chrysostom also refutes the Manichaean denial of the bodily resurrection, which is based, according to him, on an allegorical interpretation of 1 Cor 15: the Manichaeans would have taken the Pauline term “death” as meaning “being in sin”, and “resurrection” as being freed from sin.<sup>38</sup>

In our *Sermon*, John Chrysostom replies to this second Manichaean claim in a twofold way, as he did to the previous claim. First, he quotes John 3:18 (*The one who does not believe in the Son has already been condemned*) and John 5:24 (*The one who believes in the Son has transferred from death to life*) to show that Jesus tends to speak of the future as an already existing reality: Christ speaks of the events “as though things have occurred that have not yet occurred, so he spoke also to the brigand.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, in his perspective, the thief entered Paradise just in words, not in experience yet. Then, Chrysostom argues that nobody has been resurrected yet (“no one has laid hold of the reward of goods things”) and cites Heb 11:13 (*It was in faith that they all died without having obtained the object of the promises, but they saw it and greeted it from afar*) and Heb 11:40 (*God foresaw a better fate for us, and*

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<sup>35</sup> For an excellent presentation of Manichaean eschatology and relevant bibliography, see Werner Sundermann 1998/2012. The Coptic *Psalm of the Wanderers* 12 expresses this doctrine in poetical terms: upon death, the soul exults saying “Open to me thy Paradise (...) O holy ones, rejoice with me, for I have returned to my beginning again.” (*PsBk* II, 154,22-155,15, ed. and tr. Allberry 1938).

<sup>36</sup> *Serm. Gen. 7.5* (SC 433), 340, l. 403.

<sup>37</sup> Filoramo and Ramelli 2014: 3:66.

<sup>38</sup> See de Wet 2011: 97-98, and de Wet 2021: 239. It is worth noting, however, that in other cases Chrysostom seems obliged to refute the Manichaean literal exegesis and to promote an allegorical interpretation to counter Manichaean theses. See, for example, the Manichaean reading of Gal 1:4 (*God who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father*) reported in Chrysostom’s *Commentary on Gal. 1*. Here, the Manichaeans are said to take “the present evil age” literally, to mean “evil world,” which would support their notion of cosmology; whereas Chrysostom interprets αἰών in a temporal sense and as metaphorically meaning “evil actions and a depraved moral principle.” See de Wet 2014: 31-33.

<sup>39</sup> *Serm. Gen. 7.5* (SC 433), 342, ll. 414-416: ὡς γεγενημένων δὴ πραγμάτων οὕτω γεγενημένων διαλέγεται· οὕτω καὶ πρὸς τὸν ληστήν ἔλεγε. Trans. Hill 2004: 131. Chrysostom further alludes to Gen 2:17 and interprets God’s death sentence to Adam in the same way, namely that Adam did not die after his transgression. On this interpretive technique, characteristic of Chrysostom’s exegesis but which goes back as far as Justin Martyr, see Moss 2013: 227-250, at 238, fn. 41.

*they were not to reach perfection without us*). After that, he concludes the sermon by recommending his audience to remember his words, which are useful for their education.<sup>40</sup>

How should we take John Chrysostom's testimony, given that, to the best of my knowledge, he would be the only author, in the panorama of Manichaeism and anti-Manichaean literature, to report such a Manichaean exegesis of Luke 23:43? It is possible that he invented this Manichaean biblical reading, by extrapolating it from the Manichaean rejection of the physical resurrection, which is anchored in turn on the anthropological and eschatological Manichaean doctrine, namely the opposition between body and soul, the redemption of light and the destruction of matter at the end of times. Well informed about Manichaean dogmas, Chrysostom may have linked the Manichaean doctrine on resurrection to the Lukan verse. The opinion he attributes to the Manichaeans is, indeed, fundamentally authentic, as several direct sources demonstrate, including a Sogdian fragment from Turfan (M 140), which speaks of "five resurrections," all concerning the liberation of light. Interestingly with regard to our discussion, this text also contains polemics against those who defend the final resurrection in the flesh (including Elchasaites, other Christians, and Zoroastrians): "And if the resurrection of the fleshly bodies would occur, just like the heretics say, then a *Mazan*-like demon more disgusting than this could not be found."<sup>41</sup> Thus, in Chrysostom's sermon, if the *opinion* he attributes to the Manichaeans is correct, its direct *relation* to Luke 23:43 may be due to the intervention of Chrysostom himself. One may suggest that this link is prompted by the aforementioned intra-Christian, longstanding discussion over the realities of Paradise and the kingdom of heaven: John Chrysostom may have aimed at dismissing the view which defended the identity of the two realities based on Luke 23:43, among other biblical passages, by attributing it to an external enemy universally condemned, Manichaeism. In other words, he would have used the Manichaeans and their notions to target Christian adversaries and ultimately affirm his ideas in an intra-Christian debate revolving around the interpretation of Luke 23:43 and the concept of Paradise. According to this scenario, the Manichaeans would not have appropriated this verse for supporting their doctrine against the corporeal resurrection.

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<sup>40</sup> Hill 2004: 132-133 (slightly modified): "Hold fast to this and remember it; much has been said, and my longing is that you have a better education. Holding fast to it with precision, then, let us also prepare ourselves for what is yet to be said and all together, let us praise glory to God, to whom be the glory and the power, now and forever, and for ever and ever. Amen."

<sup>41</sup> Text, translation, and commentary in Sundermann 1996: 187-194 (quote at 191).

As likely as this scenario may be, given how frequently late antique Christian theologians used Manichaeism as a label of abuse to designate other opponents and deal with other controversies,<sup>42</sup> nevertheless there are reasons to doubt it and to consider, by contrast, the authenticity of Chrysostom's attribution of this exegesis to the Manichaeans. First, what he reports of the Manichaean interpretation is articulated and not condensed in a stereotypical formula, as is oftentimes the case when the polemicists appeal to Manichaeans for condemning a Christological doctrine as docetic or for attacking groups as dualistic. Second, this interpretation is based on the exegetical criterion of the social explanation that is attested in other sources relevant for Manichaeism, namely Augustine's *Contra Faustum*; as such, Chrysostom's interpretation looks, then, very plausible. Third, the interpretation is conceptually coherent with other opinions Chrysostom attributes to Manichaeans in other homilies as interpretations of other biblical passages, in particular of Paul's epistles.<sup>43</sup> It is well known that Paul was considered a reference figure by Mani and his followers; it is an equally known fact that Manichaeans relied on his writings also by interpreting his words in accordance with their own teachings.<sup>44</sup> In other words, we are not in the presence of a brief, clichéd, and isolated instance that would look spurious. Furthermore, John Chrysostom attests to a wider pool of biblical passages that were taken by the Manichaeans in support of their beliefs, as much as other Christian polemicists do, *in primis* Titus of Bostra and Augustine.

This is why we should try to explain the uniqueness of Chrysostom's attestation in another way. For example, it may be possible that Chrysostom accounts for a local exegesis: the exegesis of the Manichaean community in Antioch, where Manichaean presence is documented since at least the beginning of the fourth century.<sup>45</sup> It is with this Antiochene context in mind that I turn to another well-known anti-Manichaean polemicist, active in Antioch in the early sixth century, namely the Miaphysite patriarch Severus (r. 512-518). And yet, it is not in his famous *Cathedral Homily 123*, explicitly targeted against the Manichaeans and which is a mine of citations from direct Manichaean sources, that I could find something relevant to the topic under discussion, but rather in the *Cathedral Homily 22* (CPG 7035), that

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<sup>42</sup> The cases are numerous. For an example recently discussed in scholarship, see Pedersen 2021: 324-350.

<sup>43</sup> See the bibliography mentioned above, fn. 21.

<sup>44</sup> See Viciano 2006: 663 for some examples and relevant literature.

<sup>45</sup> For example, the elect Julia, who debates with Porphyry, the bishop of Gaza, as reported by Mark the Deacon in his *Life of Porphyry*, comes from Antioch. See Scopello 2005: 237-291. See *idem*, 246-248 for a presentation of the historical evidence concerning the Manichaean presence in Antioch.

Severus delivered in Antioch on April 5, 513 and where, moreover, the Manichaeans are not overtly mentioned.<sup>46</sup>

### 3. Severus of Antioch, *Cathedral Homily 22*

The homily focuses on Matt 27:46 (*My God My God, why have you forsaken me?*) and explicitly situates itself within the Christological debates of the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>47</sup> Severus opens his sermon by denouncing his major target, those who defend a “dualistic view of the natures of Christ,” namely the followers of the Council of Chalcedon and of Nestorius’ doctrine. Accordingly, the sermon is a lengthy demonstration that Matt 27:46 does not contradict Miaphysite Christology, promoted by Severus, but rather offers evidence in support of the condemnation of Dyophysite doctrine. It is in this framework that Severus evokes Luke 23:43, as a further biblical proof for his argument.<sup>48</sup> This citation occasions a discussion of its various interpretations; this discussion appears in the final part of the sermon as an excursus.<sup>49</sup> For composing this excursus, I argue that Severus drew on John Chrysostom’s *Sermon on Genesis 7*, without acknowledging it, and that, consequently, the polemics against the Dyophysites is suspended for a moment to refute the Manichaeans, who remain unmentioned.

The excursus is composed of a series of explanations of Luke 23:43, each one introduced by a standardized formula, “Some say,” “Others say,” where every party involved is left anonymous. Here is an outline of the structure of the excursus:

“For some say”: “How can we say that the thief entered Paradise” given Heb 11:39-40?

“Some say (to this)”: restrictive interpretation of Heb 11:39-40, the thief did enter Paradise

“But others say”: Jesus speaks of the future (John 3:18 and 5:24)

“Others also force this verse”: punctuation in the verse, “today” does not refer to the resurrection

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<sup>46</sup> This might be one of the reasons why this homily has passed unnoticed in Manichaean studies. I will try to demonstrate below that it concerns the Manichaeans in some respects. It is thanks to the list of patristic texts dealing with the good robber provided by Van Esbroeck that this homily caught my attention: Esbroeck 1983: 328-329.

<sup>47</sup> Edition of the Syriac text (in the translation by Jacob of Edessa) and French translation: Brière & Graffin 1975: 88-113. The part of the homily devoted to Luke 23:43 is also preserved in Greek, not in its original version, but in a *catena*: see Cramer 1844: 168-171. This text is reproduced in the *Patrologia Orientalis* edition, at p. 106-112. An analysis of the structure of *Homily 22*, and the exegesis Severus displays there, is offered in Roux 2002: 190-201.

<sup>48</sup> More precisely, Luke 23:43 appears in the homily as the second component of the Dyophysite/Miaphysite discussion. The homily has been defined as a diptych by Roux 2002: 192, for Matt 27:46 and Luke 23:43 convey two opposite views on Christ, the former his human weakness, the latter his divine power. This opposition would have supported the Dyophysites and their emphasis on the double nature of Christ. Thus, Severus sets off to refute the Dyophysite doctrine by addressing the evangelical verses one at the time.

<sup>49</sup> *Hom. 22* (PO 37), 106, l. 5 – 112, l. 10 (Syr.), 107, l. 4 – 113, l. 9 (French trans.).

“But the true exegesis is this”: Paradise vs. Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 3:2 and 6:10)

“But maybe someone will say”: Paradise = Kingdom of Heaven

Refutation: Paradise vs. Kingdom of Heaven (1 Cor 2:9) and nobody has been resurrected yet (Heb 11:40)

Modern scholars have highlighted that Severus’ presentation of these various opinions represents the originality and the historical importance of this sermon.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, they have pointed out that here Severus draws on the exegetical techniques he uses to interpret Jesus’ words or *dicta*, rather than narrative episodes or *facta*. Contrary to the latter, in the exegesis of *dicta* Severus is inclined to present and admit as legitimate a multiplicity of opinions, if they do not contradict the *regula fidei*.<sup>51</sup> A close examination of the text allows to refine this assessment and to understand that the excursus is articulated in two movements: 1) Severus first reports one specific position, which is subsequently refuted by four opinions; only the last one of them reflects Severus’ own response; 2) Severus reports an objection to his response, then refutes this too. The structure can thus be improved in this way:

Position to condemn 1: “How can we say that the thief entered Paradise” given Heb 11:39-40?

Refutation 1: restrictive interpretation of Heb 11:39-40, the thief did enter Paradise

Refutation 2: Jesus speaks of the future (John 3:18 and 5:24)

Refutation 3: punctuation in the verse, “today” does not refer to the resurrection

Refutation 4 (Severus): Paradise vs. Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 3:2 and 6:10)

Position to condemn 2: Paradise = Kingdom of Heaven

Refutation (Severus): Paradise vs. Kingdom of Heaven (1 Cor 2:9) and nobody had been resurrected yet (Heb 11:40)

Is it possible to be more precise and to identify to whom the various positions and refutations belong?

The first position to condemn questions the very fact that the thief could enter Paradise. According to it, Luke 23:43 stands in contradiction to Paul’s words in Heb 11:39-40: Jesus’ promise of Paradise would oppose Paul’s statement, uttered years after the crucifixion, that the righteous ones, the witnesses of faith, would not be rewarded with the

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<sup>50</sup> See Van Esbroeck 1983: 333: “Sévère d’Antioche est intéressant tant par sa date que parce qu’il passe en revue les opinions diverses.”

<sup>51</sup> On this, see Roux 2002: 127-128 (for Severus’ exegesis of *dicta*) and 198-199 (for the application of this exegesis to this excursus). For other examples of Severus’s acceptance of multiple biblical interpretations, see Moss 2016b: 785-808, esp. 805-807.









This objection coincides with the one attributed, at greater length, to the Manichaeans by John Chrysostom (what we labelled above the “Manichaean claim 2”, i.e. that Jesus used Paradise as a more common synonym of the kingdom of heaven to be understood by the thief). And Severus’ reply is identical to the second one that Chrysostom employed to refute the first Manichaean claim: he too quotes Paul (1 Cor 2:9) to demonstrate that the kingdom of heaven and Paradise are two different things. The dependence on Chrysostom goes beyond the borrowing of the same claims and the same scriptural proofs: Severus cites Chrysostom’s very words, without acknowledging it, when he prolongs the Pauline citation with the following comment: “On the contrary, Paradise, even Adam’s eye saw it, even his ear heard it.” The Greek text of Severus is almost identical to Chrysostom’s: Τὸν δὲ παράδεισον καὶ ὀφθαλμὸς εἶδε τοῦ Ἀδάμ, καὶ οὗς ἤκουσε (Chrysostom);<sup>65</sup> Τὸν δὲ παράδεισον καὶ ὀφθαλμὸς εἶδε τοῦ Ἀδάμ, καὶ οὗς ἤκουεν (Severus).<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, Severus concludes, just as Chrysostom did, by quoting Heb 11:40 and stating that the thief has not yet been resurrected. He thus shows that Jesus’ promise of Paradise is not in contradiction with Paul’s words; on the contrary, Paradise as per Luke 23:43 designates a resting place for the souls, before they are rewarded with the admission into the kingdom of heaven.

The following table offers an overview of the abovementioned correspondences between Chrysostom’s and Severus’ texts:

<b>John Chrysostom, <i>Sermon on Genesis 7</i></b>	<b>Severus of Antioch, <i>Homily 22</i></b>
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<sup>65</sup> *Serm. Gen. 7.5* (SC 433), 336, ll. 355-356.

<sup>66</sup> *Hom. 22* (PO 37), 108-109 (in apparatus). The borrowing of Chrysostom’s own words would suggest that Severus worked directly with Chrysostom’s text rather than with a repertoire of arguments and scriptural proofs on the topic in question that would have also been used by Chrysostom.

<p><b>Manichaean claim 1:</b> the thief has received the reward, the resurrection of the bodies does not exist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Refutation 1:</u> body and soul are inseparable (2 Cor 5:10, 1 Cor 15:53)</li> <li>- <u>Refutation 2:</u> Paradise vs. Kingdom of Heaven (1 Cor 2:9)</li> </ul> <p><b>Manichaean claim 2:</b> Paradise = Kingdom of Heaven</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Refutation 1:</u> Jesus speaks of the future (Jn 3:18, 5:24)</li> <li>- <u>Refutation 2:</u> Nobody has resurrected yet (Heb 11:13, Heb 11:40)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Manichaean claim 1:</b> <u>For some people say:</u> How can we say that the thief entered Paradise given Heb 11:39-40?</p> <p><u>Some say (to this):</u> restrictive interpretation of Heb 11:39-40, the thief did enter Paradise</p> <p><u>But others say:</u> Jesus speaks of the future (Jn 3:18, 5:24)</p> <p><u>Others also force this verse:</u> I am telling you today, that...</p> <p><u>But the true exegesis is this:</u> Paradise vs. Kingdom of Heaven (1 Cor 2:9)</p> <p><b>Manichaean claim 2:</b> <u>But maybe someone will say:</u> Paradise = Kingdom of Heaven</p> <p>Refutation: Nobody had resurrected yet (Heb 11:40)</p>
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We observe that all the topics present in John Chrysostom's *Sermon* have been reused by Severus, except for the demonstration that body and soul are inseparable (Chrysostom's refutation 1 to the Manichaean claim 1). Severus' relationship to Chrysostom is not univocal: one of Chrysostom's refutations (refutation 1 of Manichaean claim 2) is reported by Severus as the second reply to the main question, and he does not endorse it, whereas two other refutations by Chrysostom (refutations 2 to the Manichaean claims 1 and 2) are accepted and adopted by Severus as his own. In addition, Severus did not reiterate the order of Chrysostom's reasoning, but used it organically in a new composition, where he inserted other opinions, not present in his major source. This situation may be a sign of the evolution of the exegesis of Luke 23:43 over time.

The availability of Chrysostom's writings to Patriarch Severus can easily be explained by the geographical context of the see of Antioch and its rich patriarchal library.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Severus' frequent use of Chrysostom is attested in other works of his: Chrysostom, together with Cyril of Alexandria, is probably the most quoted church father in Severus.<sup>68</sup> The fact that Severus does not mention Chrysostom by name as his source should not surprise us. It is the

<sup>67</sup> Thus, Severus would have become acquainted with the patriarchal library and the local traditions of Antioch in a rather short period of time, since he was appointed patriarch in November of 512, namely only five months before delivering his *Homily 22*, in April of 513.

<sup>68</sup> See Allen 2016: 1-13; and Voicu 2014: 633-643.

habit of late antique theologians to refer to previous authors without explicit attribution. Rather, the contrary is the exception: whenever Severus acknowledges his sources, it is in a context of demonstration where he needs to stress the authority of the proofs which would support his claim. Indeed, in *Homily 22*, the excursus on Luke 23:43, while being inscribed in the context of a demonstration against the Dyophysites, is not in itself polemical. Rather, as recalled above, this excursus is characterized by the exegetical method applied to *dicta*, which admits the legitimacy of multiple opinions. Contrary to the excursus, in the parts of the homily that precede it, which address the Dyophysites, Severus does quote by name several patristic authorities, such as Cyril of Alexandria, upon which he bases his refutation, as well as his adversaries, such as Nestorius and Pope Leo. The excursus belongs to another realm, to exegesis, rather than to theology, where there is room for diversity and the appeal to named supporters and opponents is less relevant.<sup>69</sup>

Coming back to my initial hypothesis, these similarities may thus point to an Antiochian context, and the interpretation of Luke 23:43 in support of the denial of the bodily resurrection could be the position of the Manichaean community in Antioch. Yet, one element remains problematic: why does Severus leave anonymous this interpretation and does not attribute it to the Manichaeans, since, as we have just showed, he knew and used John Chrysostom's sermon which explicitly refutes the Manichaeans and their exegesis of this verse? For such an anti-Manichaean opponent like Severus, it would have been a great opportunity to denounce the Manichaeans on this front as well. To explain why he left their opinion anonymous, several possibilities, whether socio-historical, textual or content-related, come to mind: 1) given that the main target of the homily are the Nestorians, Severus strategically chose not to mention by name other adversaries, in order to keep the attention of his audience focused on what mattered the most for him in that specific occasion; 2) there was no need for an explicit attribution, since the simple mention of "some say" followed by a claim which questions the traditional dogmas of the Church would have sufficed to make the audience understand that the Manichaeans were intended;<sup>70</sup> 3) the claim is outdated and by Severus' time, in the sixth century, Manichaeans did not defend this interpretation anymore; 4) Severus knew or discovered that John Chrysostom misattributed this opinion to the Manichaeans, and he did not want to repeat a mistake, but kept the opinion as one among

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<sup>69</sup> See Moss 2016b: 804-807.

<sup>70</sup> The Manichaeans were indeed mentioned and condemned in a previous intervention by Severus to the same audience: *Homily 21*, delivered two days before our *Homily 22*, namely on April 3, 513. See Alpi 2004.

numerous exegeses of the verse;<sup>71</sup> 5) due to accidents in the textual transmission, Chrysostom's sermon reached Severus deprived of the mention of the Manichaeans. The first option seems to be the most likely, when we compare this homily to the other contexts in which Severus attacks the Manichaeans: the *Cathedral Homily* 123 is entirely devoted to them, and even when Severus accuses other adversaries of being Manichaeans, thus using the term as a polemical label, he never does so against the Dyophysites, but rather against the followers of Eutychius and of Julian of Halicarnassus.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, he leverages that label for doctrines that, according to his creed, diminish or deny Christ's humanity. A polemical association of Nestorians and Manichaeans would thus have not been fruitful for him, just distracting.

At any rate, as highlighted above, the denial of the resurrection of the bodies attributed to the Manichaeans by John Chrysostom corresponds to an authentic Manichaean doctrine, attested by multiple sources. The association of this doctrine with Luke 23:43 may provide new lenses through which we can look back at the other polemical sources and detect an *implicit* anti-Manichaean polemic in some of them, and consequently an *indirect* allusion to the Manichaean interpretation of Luke 23:43 in support of the denial of the bodily resurrection.

#### 4. Implicit anti-Manichaean polemic

This implicit anti-Manichaean dimension could underlie Ephrem's treatment of Luke 23:43. In his *Hymn on Paradise* 8, this verse prompts a whole reasoning about the resurrection, where the emphasis is put on the unity of body and soul:

I behold a dwelling there  
and a tabernacle of light,  
a voice proclaiming  
"Blessed is the Thief  
who has freely received  
the keys to Paradise."  
I imagined that he was already there,  
but then I considered  
how the soul cannot  
have perception of Paradise

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<sup>71</sup> This possibility is not farfetched, given that philological and bibliographical research characterizes Severus' use of previous writings: see Grant 1960: 13-24, for Severus' attention to the textual problems in Ignatius of Antioch's and Irenaeus of Lyon's writings, as well as his avoidance of forgeries for compiling his dossiers of patristic authorities; and Moss 2016a: 206, fn. 35, for Severus' search in the corpus of 3000 letters of Isidore of Pelusium, for argumentative purposes.

<sup>72</sup> See Alpi 2004: 234-235.

without its mate, the body,  
its instrument and lyre.  
(*Hymn on Paradise* 8, 2)

Ephrem's position is that, since the body of the robber could not go to Paradise, the resurrection has not taken place yet, and the robber is not inside Paradise, but outside of it, on the surrounding wall, waiting for the last judgment and the reunion with his body. This stanza has been interpreted as a reaction against Bardaisan and his rejection of the bodily resurrection.<sup>73</sup> I argue that it could also be targeted at the Manichaean doctrine, especially given the context suggested by John Chrysostom's sermon, namely the connection with the promise to the good robber.

## 5. Manichaean Interpretations of Luke 23:43 to Deny the Resurrection of the Bodies

Finally, if, with this same connection in mind (i.e. Jesus' promise to the good thief and bodily resurrection), we look back at the Manichaean sources alluding to Luke 23:43 quoted at the beginning of this paper, we observe that the reference to this verse is accompanied by a rejection of the body and the material world. For example, the *Psalm to Jesus* 242 cited above seems to imply such a theological assumption:<sup>74</sup>

A robber was saved upon the cross because he did but  
Acknowledge you; you forgot all the sins that he  
Had committed, you remembered all his good.

All worldly Matter that surrounds me – burn it today,  
I beseech you. Cleanse me from all the sins, for  
I too have hung on your hope.

Here, the interpretation of the thief as the model of the believer who is saved and forgiven, is accompanied by the notion of the destruction of matter and, consequently, by an implicit apology for the resurrection of the soul. Yet, the relevant Manichaean sources, as we said above, are all liturgical; John Chrysostom, on the contrary, attests to an exegetical practice.

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<sup>73</sup> See De Francesco 2006, 228, fn. 5.

<sup>74</sup> This is also the case of the other *Psalm to Jesus*, *Psalm to Jesus* 271 (my emphasis): "Jesus, king of the holy, take me... / O Christ, whom I have loved, belonging unto you, *I fell into the snares / of the body of death. The trappers that set traps for me brought me / beneath their nets [...] / I broke their snares, I burst their nets by the faith of your Truth [...] / I heard the power of your living cry, I followed / You, I put down the nets of Error, I took the / Nets from the man in unto life, I let the dead / Bury the dead, I stepped in with your cross, / I hung to the right of you, because I received the / Blessing: henceforth take me with you to the Paradise of the holy Gods.*" (*PsBk* II, p. 89-90).

The two Manichaean contexts for the use of Luke 23:43 are, thus, different. I suggest overcoming this apparent incompatibility by claiming that the exegesis lies behind the liturgical expression, or, otherwise stated, that ritual hymns, like those where the allusions to Luke 23:43 are found, are theologically based on doctrinal conceptions matured in exegetical contexts. Therefore, even if we do not have Manichaean sources openly displaying an exegesis of Luke 23:43, the preserved liturgical documents presuppose such an exegesis.

Furthermore, John Chrysostom speaks of the Manichaean interpretation in a sermon which is situated in a specific temporal and liturgical setting: as recalled above, Chrysostom pronounced this homily during Lent 386, in the fasting period preceding Easter, which, that year, was celebrated on April 5<sup>th</sup>.<sup>75</sup> Thus, John Chrysostom delivered his homily sometime in March, namely the time in the year where the Manichaeans would celebrate their annual Bema festival. This ceremony is preceded by a month of fasting.<sup>76</sup> In opening his condemnation of the Manichaean reading of Luke 23:43, John Chrysostom mentions a concrete detail that would allude to such a fasting:

An issue arises that is not a chance one, namely the Manichaeans, stupid and rabid dogs, presenting an appearance of mildness, but having on the inside the savage fury of dogs, wolves in sheep's clothing. Lest you look to appearances, however, examine instead the wild beast hidden within. These people, then, seize upon this passage to claim...

Apart from recurring to well-known heresiological *topoi*, such as the madness and the deceitful disguise of the adversaries,<sup>77</sup> Chrysostom highlights the “appearance of mildness” (τὸ σχῆμα ἐπιεικείας) of the Manichaeans: albeit Chrysostom uses it in the traditional way, namely for polemically opposing the inner fury of his enemies and their outward virtuous aspect, this expression may hint to the conduct of Manichaean believers, ruled by ascetical practices that provoke physical emaciation. Given the time in the year where Chrysostom delivers his sermon, they could refer more precisely to the Manichaean long fast in the month leading to the Bema feast-day. Following this reasoning, we may further deduce from Chrysostom that during that month of fasting, in preparation for the Bema festival, or during one of the Bema rituals, the Manichaeans were reading passages containing a reference to Luke 23:43. In other words, we may deduce that the *Psalms to Jesus* in particular, usually considered “psalms on the ascension of the soul to the Land of Light” at the moment of death,

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<sup>75</sup> Grumel 1958, table at 267.

<sup>76</sup> For a detailed presentation of the Manichaean Bema festival, see Sundermann 1989.

<sup>77</sup> For the stereotypical portrait of the Manichaeans, and of heretics in general, in Chrysostom's works, see Brottier 1998, 165, fn. 6 and 8. The deceitful appearance of the Manichaeans is stressed in several anti-Manichaean authors, such as Titus of Bostra, *Against the Manichaeans* 4.43 and Augustin, *De moribus* 2.20.74.

namely funerary psalms,<sup>78</sup> were also performed during the confession of sins preceding the ritual meal of the Bema, where it was believed that either Mani or Jesus himself would sit on the throne to judge mankind, in a simulation of the last judgment taking place at the end of time.

## Conclusion

From the survey of the Manichaean interpretations of Luke 23:43, which promote the figure of the thief as model of the righteous believer, it emerges that John Chrysostom's *Sermon on Genesis 7* stands out for uniquely reporting a Manichaean reading of the verse as a proof denying the resurrection of the bodies. The Manichaean exegesis that Chrysostom quotes is articulated, and touches also upon the question of the nature of Paradise and its identity – or lack thereof – with the kingdom of heaven, a topic of debate since the early Christian centuries. Rather than being used only in a rhetorical way by the Golden Mouth to settle this intra-Christian debate evidently still current in his times, the interpretation he ascribed to the Manichaeans seems authentic for several reasons. In particular, the sociological explanation constitutes a strong argument in this respect, since it resonates with Manichaean exegetical methods attested elsewhere.

The comparison with a later, yet geographically close source, namely Severus of Antioch's *Homily 22*, reveals that the sixth-century Patriarch knew and used Chrysostom's work, although without explicitly mentioning it. Severus' silence about the Manichaean paternity of the position he condemned is surprising, but can be explained on internal grounds, namely on the content of the *Homily*, preoccupied with the Christological controversy and targeted against the Dyophysites. Thus, Severus' quote of the position that Chrysostom attributes to the Manichaeans as a thesis to be rejected further suggests that Luke 23:43 was taken by Manichaeans in support of the resurrection of the soul alone and of the identity of Paradise and the kingdom of heaven.

In turn, the double attestation of John Chrysostom and Severus offers a clue to the possibility that Luke 23:43 was used in this way by the Manichaeans not only in Antioch, but more broadly in the Syro-Mesopotamian area. In other words, based on their attestation, it is worth reexamining the cases where the exegesis of Luke 23:43 is present, both in Manichaean and anti-Manichaean sources. The Coptic versions of the Manichaean *Psalms* in Egypt would

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<sup>78</sup> See Dubois 2017: 68-75.

reflect this interpretation, where the praise of the thief is joined to an invocation of the final destruction of matter; Ephrem the Syrian could be reacting to it in his eulogy to the union of body and soul at the time of resurrection. It would be necessary to reconsider from this perspective, offered by John Chrysostom and Severus of Antioch, all the other sources from that area to see if there are implicit and indirect traces of this Manichaean interpretation.

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