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Andrea Annese

## ***Manichaeus Redivivus: The Use of Ancient Heresiological Categories in Pre-Tridentine Anti-Protestant Catholic Controversy\****

“We are not new Pelagians, but it is Luther who is an ancient heretic, a stupid Stoic and a posthumous [son of] Mani [*Non ergo sumus novi Pelagiani, sed haereticus est antiquus stupidus Stoicus et Manichaei posthumus Lutherus*]” (Eck: 1979, 324), that is, Mani (*Manichaeus*) *redivivus*. Thus writes Johannes Eck in his *Enchiridion* (1525), the most popular pre-Tridentine Catholic manual of controversy, in the chapter *De libero arbitrio* (added in the 1527 edition).<sup>1</sup>

In Catholic anti-Protestant polemics, the attempt to construct ‘genealogies of error’ has often been a central strategy (cf. Motta: 2017, 727–728; Miccoli: 1983; 1985; Backus/Büttgen/Pouderon: 2012). The ‘heretical’ doctrines of Luther and his followers were traced back to Hus, to Wycliffe, and even further, to figures from the first centuries of Christianity. These early ‘opponents’ of the Church were often reduced, in the controversialist frame, to little more than ‘masks,’ mere names or symbols of heresy.<sup>2</sup> One of the most significant associations is that between Luther (and, more generally, Protestant doctrines) and Mani, founder of the syncretic dualistic religion that bore his name. From the third century onward, Manichaeism spread widely in the territories of the Roman Empire and Central Asia, surviving in China until the Middle Ages, if not the early modern period (cf. Lieu: 1992; 1999; Gnoli: 2003, esp. LXIII). Indeed, the legislation of the now Christianized Empire in the fourth century persecuted the Manichaeans, making them a primary target of the ‘orthodox’ party.<sup>3</sup> Yet despite this, toward the end of that century, there were important Manichaean groups in the western territories, including Roman Africa, where the young Augustine of Hippo was a Manichaean *auditor* for some years. Later, Augustine would become one of the leading critics of Manichaeism (which he seems to regard as a *Christian* heresy or schismatic current, a view that would have great influence for over a millennium), as well as one of the main sources (together with John Chrysostom and Epiphanius) of knowledge about Manichaeism transmitted to the Latin Middle Ages and to early modern theologians and philosophers.<sup>4</sup> For early sixteenth-century Catholic controversialists, Protestantism echoes Manichaeism in its questioning of free will, appearing as a determinist doctrine that would deprive individuals of moral responsibility. Protestant authors reacted to this identification, accusing Catholics of neo-Pelagianism (as we saw in Eck’s text quoted above; cf. e.g. Prosperi: 2000, 79.153), while also occasionally wielding the charge of Manichaeism polemically against other Protestant groups (so, for example, Melanchthon against radical Lutherans, as we will

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning Eck’s *Enchiridion*, see Fraenkel: 1979, 7\*–59\*; Iserloh: 1985, 54–55.

<sup>2</sup> One significant case is that of early modern interpretations of Simon Magus; see Pouderon: 2012; 2019; Presezzi: 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Think especially of Theodosius’ legislation. However, as early as 302 CE the non-Christian emperor Diocletian promulgated an edict against the Manichaeans.

<sup>4</sup> On Augustine’s engagement with Manichaeism, see BeDuhn: 2010; 2013; van Oort: 2020, to which I refer the reader for further bibliography.

see), or even against Catholics themselves, although not concerning free will (Bullinger: 1526, c. C2r, on marriage and dietary norms).

It hardly needs emphasizing that these are stereotypical representations, conditioned by polemics. They fail to account for the complexity of either early modern theological positions or authentic Manichaean soteriology, which included exhortations to act righteously, references to individual responsibility toward sin, and the choice between good and evil (cf. e.g. Pedersen: 2004, 171–176, esp. 173; 2021; Magris 1997, 407–411; 2001; 2020, 178n.192n). But the image of Manichaeism known to the controversialists, and deployed in their writings, was nurtured by statements such as that of John Chrysostom, who in commenting on John 6:44<sup>5</sup> (in a passage that Erasmus would later evoke against Luther) writes that the Manichaeans misinterpreted the verse to mean that “nothing is in our own power”; according to Chrysostom, however, the text is not intended to nullify free will, but to emphasize that we are in great need of (divine) help.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Jerome summarizes the Manichaean doctrine as a denial of free will.<sup>7</sup> Above all, the sixteenth-century texts contain countless references to Augustine,<sup>8</sup> of whom it will suffice here to evoke a few occurrences of the criticism levelled at the Manichaeans of nullifying free will, by identifying the origin of sin in a foreign and evil nature inherent in human beings – which would absolve them of moral responsibility. Thus, in his *Contra Fortunatum* (ca. 392 CE), he writes:

God is not the progenitor of evil things, neither has He made any evil nature. [...] [E]vils have their being by the voluntary sin of the soul, to which God gave free will [*mala esse voluntario peccato animae, cui dedit deus liberum arbitrium*]. Which free will if God had not given, there could be no just penal judgment, nor merit of righteous conduct, nor divine instruction to repent of sins, nor the forgiveness of sins itself (*Fort.* 20 [CSEL 25/1, 97–98; trans. NPNF 4, 119]).<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, it was precisely the growing controversies between Catholics and Protestants that provided the impetus for the emergence of historical studies on Manichaeism, from their beginnings in the last third of the sixteenth century to more sound research in the early seventeenth century.<sup>10</sup> However, the pre-Tridentine phase – a period in which ‘Manichaean’

<sup>5</sup> “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me” (NRSVue).

<sup>6</sup> Τοῦτο ἐπιτηδῶσι Μανιχαῖοι λέγοντες, ὅτι οὐδὲν ἐφ’ ἡμῖν κεῖται· ὅπερ μάλιστα βεβαιῶ κυρίου ὄντας τῆς γνώμης. [...] Ὁ καὶ αὐτὸ οὐ τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἀναρῆι, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ἐμφαίνει ἡμᾶς βοηθείας δεομένους (*Hom. Jo.* 46,1 [PG 59, 257–258]). On Chrysostom’s view of Manichaeism, see de Wet: 2021.

<sup>7</sup> “Breviter que calumniatoribus respondemus [...] manichaeorum esse sententiae hominum damnare naturam et liberum auferre arbitrium et adiutorium Dei tollere” (*Pelag., prol.* 2 [CCSL 80]; cf. 3,5).

<sup>8</sup> As early as 1506, an edition of Augustine’s complete works was available (the *editio princeps* by Amerbach), followed in 1528–1529 by the critical edition published by Erasmus (who also edited Jerome, 1516, and Chrysostom, 1530).

<sup>9</sup> A similar argument appears in Augustine’s *De haeresibus* (428–429 CE): the Manichaeans “peccatorum originem non libero arbitrio voluntatis, sed substantiae tribuunt gentis adversae, quam dogmatizant esse hominibus mixtam” (*Haer.* 46,19 [CCSL 46]); see also *Conf.* 5,10,18. On the other hand, in *Fel.* 2,5, quoting a text from Mani, Augustine accuses him of contradicting himself and acknowledging that there is free will, ascribing sin to human will (see also *Nat. bon.* 42). For a comprehensive reconstruction of Augustine’s doctrine of grace and free will in its development, see Lettieri: 2001.

<sup>10</sup> The Lutheran theologian Cyriacus Spangenberg is considered to be the first author to write a ‘history’ of Manichaeism (though still within a heresiological frame), with his *Historia Manichaeorum* (1578); see Ries: 1988; van Oort: 2022. Ries also mentioned the *Magdeburg Centuries* (vol. III, 1559) and the polemical work *De vitis, sectis, et dogmatibus omnium haereticorum* (1569) by the Catholic Gabriel du Préau. However, the first real “Manichaeologist” (van Oort’s words) can be considered to be Isaac de Beausobre (eighteenth century). Interestingly, the modern sources cited by du

functioned as a polemical epithet, used sometimes with reference to Patristic sources, but without a historical-critical approach – remains relatively underexplored.<sup>11</sup>

In this paper, I therefore intend to focus on the early decades of the controversy, specifically the first instances in Catholic anti-Protestant treatises where heresiological categories and motifs inherited from late antique Christianity were employed. In particular, the present investigation will map the most interesting occurrences of the polemical use of the figure of Mani and Manichaeism, because such use touches the doctrinal heart of the controversy: the matters of free will, grace, and the human capacity to cooperate (or not) in one’s salvation.<sup>12</sup> Of course, there are other important issues in the debate, especially ecclesiological ones: the authority of the pontiff and the Roman Church is questioned, according to Catholic theologians, by Protestant ‘heretics,’ who in this ‘rebellion’ recall earlier (even ancient) examples. In the polemical literature, one can find various references to Arius, Marcion or other ‘heresiarchs,’ although these are often less developed than references to the Manichaeans. The Manichaean thread proves to be of particular relevance, and it is therefore this thread that the present research intends to follow, interrogating not only prominent works such as those of Erasmus and Eck, but also other writings, especially from the Italian *milieu*.<sup>13</sup>

## 1. Johannes Eck: An Enduring Anti-Manichaeism

Let us begin with Johannes Eck (1486–1543; see Iserloh: 1985; Bärsch/Maier: 2014). The sentence from his *Enchiridion* cited above appears in the conclusion of the chapter *De libero arbitrio*, where Eck, after reviewing numerous arguments, summarizes his own position. Neither the Church Fathers nor the Scholastics, he writes, are Pelagians: they do not deny original sin, nor do they say one can save oneself by purely natural means; rather, they consistently affirm the necessity of grace, which must precede the activity of free will. By good works, one can merit the grace of the Holy Spirit, as happened even to the centurion Cornelius whose alms were pleasing to God (Acts 10, particularly vv. 4.31.45). Therefore, “Non ergo sumus novi Pelagiani, sed haereticus est antiquus stupidus Stoicus et Manichaei posthumus Lutherus, cum Carolostadio, Urbano et Billicano” (Eck: 1979, 324).

The reference to Mani’s doctrine immediately proves central: it opens and closes the chapter *De libero arbitrio*, which is included in the *Enchiridion* beginning with the 1527 edition. The chapter opens with the following words: “Haeretici hic resuscitarunt olim extinctam haeresim Manichaei” (Eck: 1979, 313). First, Eck continues, they denied that free will is able to actively do good, believing that good works should be ascribed only to God. Then Luther, “insanus factus,” denied free will altogether, claiming that everything happens by absolute necessity, as Empedocles, the Stoics, and

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Préau to argue the equivalence between Manichaeans and Lutherans (i.e. Lindanus, Staphylus, Hosius) do not predate the Tridentine and post-Tridentine period.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, the essays on the ‘heresiological argument’ collected in Backus/Büttgen/Pouderon: 2012 make just a few references to Manichaeism, and do not elaborate further on this topic; moreover, most of them relate to post-Tridentine texts (see e.g. Petitmengin: 2012, 189.191), as it is the case with Lauchert: 1912. Van Oort: 2020, 3 briefly refers to Erasmus. Adam: 1962, 33 refers to a 1520 writing against Luther by Jacobus Latomus (quoted through Luther, WA 8, 95, but see Latomus: 1550, 4r = *Contra articulos quosdam Martini Lutheri a Theologis Lovaniensibus damnatos*) and to Erasmus. See also Stroumsa: 2010, 113–123; van Oort: 1991, 200–201.

<sup>12</sup> For a recent overview of the history of the debate concerning justification, see Gerace: 2017.

<sup>13</sup> This choice is motivated in particular by the scope of the research project (centered on the Renaissance papacy) under whose aegis this paper has been written (cf. above).

others who fell into error previously said.<sup>14</sup> The charge of absolute determinism against Luther is a *topos* of Catholic controversy; it is not the purpose of this essay to assess the accuracy of this claim regarding the original Lutheran doctrine, but rather to identify conceptual nodes and historical and textual connections. Thus, we sense that Eck associates Luther with the Manichaean doctrine by interpreting both as expressing an unappealable determinism: just as Manichaean dualism posits that good and evil derive from two opposing, coeternal principles, so for Luther it would be impossible for man to escape evil determinism and do good without the gift of grace. Walter L. Moore, who devoted a detailed study to the doctrine of predestination and justification in Eck's early writings, highlighting Eck's explicit desire to distance himself from both Manichaeism and Pelagianism, has summarized the Eckian definition of "Manichaeism" as "the denial of a positive role to man in his own salvation" (1967, 145; cf. Workman: 1984, 207).

Thus, while Eck's defense of free will against 'Manichaeism' in the *Enchiridion* echoes passages from Erasmus and John Fisher (to which I will return below), it should also be pointed out that Eck's anti-Manichaeism is not merely the repetition of a rhetorical *topos*, nor is it necessarily derivative, for it emerges clearly in some of his earliest writings, predating not only Fisher's and Erasmus' anti-Lutheran works, but even Luther's *Ninety-five Theses*. In his 1514 *Chrysopassus praedestinationis* (see Greving: 1906), Eck was already inveighing against the "Manichaean error,"<sup>15</sup> which he referred to on some occasions. In two such instances (I,9; III,55),<sup>16</sup> Mani's name appears along with that of the fourth-century monk Jovinianus, another personage who a few years later would become a polemical mask projected onto Protestants, starting with Luther,<sup>17</sup> but also – at the opposite end – a kind of *ante litteram* reformer or forerunner of Protestantism, this time read in a positive light, as Harnack will do at the end of the nineteenth century by making Jovinianus (somewhat like Marcion) a genuine heir of Paul and his defense of the value of faith and grace against justification by works (Hunter: 2007, 8–9). As early as 1514, in *Chrys.* III,55 Eck plainly states that "satis notum est Manichaeum et Iovinianum in haereses incidisse, quod libertatem arbitrii nostri nimis extenuabant" (Eck: 1514, c. H3r), immediately after having quoted Sirach 15:14-17 as a clear example of what the 'orthodox' Christian well knows about the choices made possible by free will.<sup>18</sup>

In sum, the young Eck was already equipped with a solid theological arsenal, nurtured primarily by Augustine,<sup>19</sup> and the rhetorical *topoi* that would enable him, in the more mature *Enchiridion*, to deploy in an anti-Protestant sense his polemic against the devaluation of free will that he saw paradigmatically embodied by Manichaeism. It is perhaps surprising that Eck's anti-

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<sup>14</sup> "Primo quidem negarunt liberum arbitrium se habere active ad bonum opus, 'quia illud totum et totaliter fieret a Deo.' Dein Luther, insanus factus, negavit omnino liberum arbitrium, 'quia omnia de necessitate absoluta eveniunt' [cf. Luther, *Assertio omnium articulorum*, Art. 36, WA 7, 146], quod olim stupidi Stoici, Empedocles, Critolaus, Diodorus, et alii errantes dixerunt" (Eck: 1979, 313).

<sup>15</sup> "Manichei error" is one of the items listed in the *Index* at the end of the *Chrysopassus*, though only *Chrys.* I,9 is mentioned at that point.

<sup>16</sup> On these two passages, see Greving: 1906, 148n. Another reference to Mani is in V,88.

<sup>17</sup> In his *De votis monasticis* (1522), Luther complains that some of his opponents regard him as a new Jovinian (cf. Hunter: 2007, 6–7).

<sup>18</sup> "It was he who created humans in the beginning, and he left them in the power of their own inclinations [but in the Latin Vulgate quoted by Eck: *consilium*]. If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your choice. He has placed before you fire and water; stretch out your hand for whichever you choose. Before each person are life and death, and whichever one chooses will be given" (NRSVue).

<sup>19</sup> On the influence of Augustinian and pseudo-Augustinian writings on Eck, see esp. Moore: 1979; 1982. For a list of Augustine's texts quoted in *Chrys.*, and the editions known to Eck, see Greving: 1906, 30–31.

Manichaeism is less pronounced at the Leipzig Debate (1519);<sup>20</sup> however, during this debate, Eck invited his interlocutors, particularly Karlstadt, to consult precisely his *Chrysopassus* (cf. Moore: 1979, 252). The symbolic importance of this work – hardly known to the Wittenberg Reformers before the dispute – would become evident shortly thereafter: on December 10, 1520, Luther and his followers publicly set Eck’s *Chrysopassus* on fire, along with the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* and other ‘papistical’ texts (WA 7, 184–186; WA Br 2, 234). Moreover, just a few weeks after the Leipzig Debate, Eck maintained that Karlstadt, with his opinions about free will, was in danger of reviving Manichaeism (“quoniam alioquin Manicheus rediisset Vuittembergam,” *Expurgatio adversus criminationes F. Martini Lutter*, dated September 2, 1519; text in Fabisch/Iserloh: 1991, 297).<sup>21</sup>

Returning to Eck’s *Enchiridion*, and before delving into Fisher’s and Erasmus’ influence on Eck’s argumentations concerning free will, it is worth mentioning two additional examples of the polemical juxtaposition of Lutherans and Manichaeans, this time regarding other doctrinal matters. The first one appears in the chapter *De conciliis* (ch. II), crucial in the structure of the *Enchiridion* since its first edition, though later revised. In a passage packed with ancient and modern controversial *topoi*, Eck defends the established authority of Councils and Fathers against “haereticos nuper natos, et apostatas” (1979, 38). One cannot appeal to Scripture alone without the authority of the Church, Eck continues, because heretics reject parts of it at will – just as Luther rejected the *Epistle of James*, and just as ancient heretics once rejected the four gospels, and Manichaeans the Old Testament (*ibid.*; cf. Augustine, *Faust.* 13,1-2; 32,14).

The second example also derives from a key chapter of the *Enchiridion*, namely *Non disputandum cum haereticis*. Resuming an argument that had been prevalent since late antiquity, Eck asserts that it is useless and harmful to dispute with heretics, who are obstinate, devious, and – in the Lutheran case – prefer to dispute not in the presence of learned theologians but uncultured laypersons. Notably, this chapter opens with yet another association between Lutheranism and Manichaeism (as well as numerous other “heresies”):

Quamvis de Luthero et Lutheranis non sit dubium, quin sint haeretici damnati, et pro talibus habendi – quia ipsi revocant haereses saepe damnatas: Arrii, Manichaei, Ioviniani, Aerii, Vigilantii, Euticetis, Felicis, Albigensium, Waldensium, Ioannis Wicleff, Ioannis Huss, et aliorum haeticorum – ideo contra eos non est disputandum (Eck: 1979, 280).

There is no doubt, Eck writes, that Luther and the Lutherans are heretics, since they recall heresies that have been condemned many times. In doing so, he constructs a quasi-genealogical catalogue of heretical movements, stretching from Arius and Mani to Wycliffe and Hus, passing through the Waldensians and Albigensians, among others.

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<sup>20</sup> Moore (1967) and Workman (1984) identify the difference between Eck’s *Chrysopassus* and sermons, on the one hand, and Eck’s statements at Leipzig, on the other: “Eck appears to be presenting in the sermons a more openly anti-Manichean or semi-Pelagian position than at Leipzig” (Workman: 1984, 208). However, one can also notice some ambiguity in Eck’s arguments: “His attempts to obscure both extremes of Pelagianism and Manicheism (by emphasizing grace at one time and man’s efforts at another) were related to his recognition that Augustine exaggerated in a polemical context” (*ibid.*, 255; cf. Greving: 1906, 91 and Eck, *Chrys.* III,93).

<sup>21</sup> That same year, Luther complained that Eck, in commenting on a pamphlet by the Franciscans of Jüterbog (*Articuli per fratres minores [...] contra Lutheranos*), had described Luther as Manichaean, Hussite, and Wycliffite (Letter to Spalatin, August 10, 1519, in Fabisch/Iserloh: 1991, 281). Eck, in his *Expurgatio*, rejected this accusation (*ibid.*, 309–310).

In the passage quoted above, Eck does not delve into the theological knots behind his comparison of Lutheranism with the aforementioned “heresies,” leaving them implicit – though they can be easily guessed. One of them certainly was free will. Therefore, returning to the corresponding chapter of the *Enchiridion*, it is worthwhile to examine some of its sources. Eck was familiar with the *Assertionis Lutheranae Confutatio* (1523) of cardinal John Fisher (1469–1535), bishop of Rochester, a friend of Erasmus who praises him in the *Hyperaspistes* (e.g. LB X, 1479F–1480A; cf. Chantraine: 1981; McConica: 1986; Porter: 1989; Scheck: 2013). Fisher also drew parallels between Luther and Manichaeism; in Article XXXVI, devoted precisely to the defense of free will, Fisher disputes the charge of Pelagianism (“Nihil enim nobis commercii est cum Pelagianis”) and argues that Luther, having been “seduced by the error of the Manichaeans,” believes that free will had been so corrupted by original sin that human beings “cannot help but sin” (Fisher: 1597, 700; see also 661 and 707, which I will return to later).

## 2. Erasmus: Defense of Free Will and Subtle Rhetorical Strategies

At this point, it is appropriate to turn to the writings of Erasmus, starting with *De libero arbitrio* (1524), which appears to have been a source for the homonymous chapter in Eck’s *Enchiridion*. Focusing specifically on references to Manichaeism, we find that in Erasmus’ work – which inaugurated Erasmus’ direct confrontation with Luther on divine grace and human will – the doctrine of Mani is mentioned only briefly, yet this reference carries significant weight. To fully grasp the argument, one must look a few pages earlier, where Erasmus juxtaposes Luther with Wycliffe by stating that the German Reformer took up the claim that “whatever we do happens not by free will but by absolute necessity” (LB IX, 1217E / trans. CWE 76, 12; cf. Luther, *Assertio*, Art. 36, WA 7, 146).<sup>22</sup> Later, Erasmus lists a number of patristic and medieval theologians who defended free will, beginning with Origen. He then comments, “From the apostles’ times to this day, there has not been a single writer who has completely denied the power of free will, excepting only Manichaeus and John Wyclif” (LB IX, 1218E / CWE 76, 15). But Mani’s doctrine, Erasmus adds, might be more conducive to “true religion [*pietas*]” than Wycliffe’s, for Mani “refers good and evil deeds to two natures in man,<sup>23</sup> yet in such a way that our good deeds are owed to God as our creator” (*ibid.*, 1219F / 16). Moreover, Mani “leaves us grounds for imploring the creator’s aid against the powers of darkness,” whereas Wycliffe, by referring everything to absolute necessity, leaves no room “to our prayers or our endeavours” (*ibid.*). In *De libero arbitrio*, therefore, Erasmus does not explicitly liken Luther to Mani; he does so implicitly, insofar as Luther is compared to Wycliffe and the latter to Mani. In any case, Erasmus presents Wycliffite (and, by extension, Lutheran) determinism as even more extreme than the Manichaean doctrine.

In the *Hyperaspistes*, however, the situation changes. As is well known, Erasmus adopts a much harsher and more radical tone in this work compared to the zetetic and fairly ‘irenical’ approach of *De libero arbitrio*, to which Luther had reacted vigorously with his *De servo arbitrio* (1525), thus triggering this counterattack. In both parts of the *Hyperaspistes* (part I, published February 1526; II, September 1527), he explicitly parallels Lutheran doctrine with Manichaean doctrine. In Book I,

<sup>22</sup> A similar statement is in Erasmus’ Ep. 1342 (February 1, 1523), Allen V, 225, ll. 933–935.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. LB IX, 1243E / CWE 76, 78: “Manichaeus, as we said, dreamed up the notion of two natures in man, one which could not avoid sinning and one which could not avoid doing good.” See also Fisher 1597: 707; Augustine, *Haer.* 46,19.

Erasmus himself states that in *De libero arbitrio*, he had already placed Luther alongside Mani, Hus, and Wycliffe (LB X, 1314F / CWE 76, 250). This allusion is clearly to the passage discussed above, where Erasmus left a slight margin of ambiguity, but here the juxtaposition is explicit. However, it is in Book II that Erasmus fully unfolds the implications of the parallel. One of the most interesting occurrences relates to the exegesis of John 6:44 (“No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me”); Erasmus maintains that “Here Luther gives the same interpretation as the Manichaeans, as Chrysostom indicates” (LB X, 1510F / CWE 77, 695; cf. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Jo.* 46,1 [PG 59, 257–258], quoted above, fn. 6), namely that “mankind can do nothing at all on its own” (“Hic Lutherus idem interpretatur quod interpretabantur Manichaei [...]: ex his enim Evangelii verbis docebant hominem ex sese nihil omino posse”). With biting irony, Erasmus asks whether Mani understood the *Gospel of John* better than “the orthodox Fathers.” According to Erasmus, John’s intended meaning is that “no one believes in the divinity of the Son unless it is revealed to him by the Father, for it is beyond human capacity.” Moreover, the gift of grace does not compel, but invites free will: this is how the verb ‘to draw’ should be understood (a similar interpretation was delivered by Erasmus in *De libero arbitrio*, LB IX, 1238C–D).

A few pages later, while discussing the status of free will after original sin, Erasmus states that the Pelagians denied the existence of original sin and were justly condemned; but “those who place such enormous emphasis on original sin come close to the far more dangerous error of Manichaeus, and they give an opportunity to the flagrantly vicious to excuse their sins and blame them on nature” (LB X, 1513E / CWE 77, 700–701). A little further on, a similar argument is reiterated while commenting on Rom 7:20 (“if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me”); “if you apply that to nature” (that is, to an evil nature inherent in human beings), Erasmus writes, “the language will smack of the Manichaeans’ opinion, and nothing could be more detestable than that” (*ibid.*, 1515B / 703). Erasmus opposes the Lutheran idea that human nature is irrevocably vitiated, to the point that even righteous people sin in their works, however good they may be, arguing that “this overemphasis on original sin [...] agree[s] with the teachings of the Manichaeans [*ista peccati originalis exaggeratio [...] ad Manichaeorum accedens dogmata*]” (1515C / 704). Indeed, Erasmus continues, Luther has gone even further than Mani: whereas Mani teaches that only a single part of the human being is irreparably vitiated, namely the flesh, Luther “makes the whole person vitiated, so that not even the Spirit performs a good work in him” (1515D / 704; cf. Fisher 1597: 707).

Toward the conclusion of *Hyperaspistes II*, Erasmus again states that the Lutheran doctrine of *servum arbitrium* is, in his view, close to the Manichaean doctrine as an expression of absolute determinism. But, he continues, “the more judicious philosophers” have always opposed the idea of “fate” or “necessity” (*ananke*), and even more so Christians (1521D / 716).<sup>24</sup> The Pelagian Julian of Eclanum had charged Augustine with Manichaeism, precisely because Augustine insisted on the burden of original sin and the role of grace; but Augustine vigorously rejected this charge as false, in his *Contra duas epistolas Pelagianorum* (I,2,4–I,4-8 [CSEL 60]). “I do not see how Luther can do so,” Erasmus continues, since he posits that the *whole* person is vitiated, “overemphasizes original sin” and “denies that man is in any way capable of accepting or rejecting grace, but is simply acted

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<sup>24</sup> In the subsequent lines, he thus describes Manichaean doctrine as a form of necessitarianism: “No other feature of Manichaeism was more execrable than its devising of two principles: it made one part of man irrevocably evil, the other part necessarily good, and thus introduced a double necessity into the one person” (1521D / 716).

upon by God as a saw is acted upon by a carpenter” (1521E / 716–717).<sup>25</sup> By detaching Luther from Augustine and instead aligning him with Mani – indeed, positioning Luther as an even more impious successor to Mani – Erasmus adopts a more explicit rhetorical strategy (see also 1523B; 1535A), which comes close to some of Eck’s and Fisher’s arguments.

To summarize, in *Hyperaspistes*, Erasmus locates Luther’s ‘Manichaeism’ in his excessive emphasis on original sin; his denial of the human capacity to cooperate in salvation, accept grace, act righteously; and his belief that humankind is absolutely determined (to evil).

At this juncture, it is worth considering an important distinction: while Eck explicitly states in his *Enchiridion* that Luther and his followers, as well as the Manichaeans, are heretics, Erasmus appears much more cautious in using the latter category. It may not be surprising, before the controversy with Luther ignited, to find statements such as the one in the *Spongia* (1523), where Erasmus – responding to a critique by Hutten – writes that he never used the words ‘heretic’ or ‘heresy’ in regard to Luther or Lutheranism (ASD IX/1, 172 / CWE 78, 99). Yet even in 1534, after a very vehement attack by Luther, Erasmus reaffirms, “I never call Luther’s teaching heresy anywhere in my writings [*nusquam in scriptis meis appello Luteri doctrinam haeresim*]” (*Purgatio adversus epistolam non sobriam Martini Lutheri*, ASD IX/1, 444 / CWE 78, 414).<sup>26</sup> One possible explanation lies in the Erasmian concept of what falls under the fundamental articles of faith and what does not, and how he classified differences of opinion on free will in this sense. Was the doctrine of free will a test case for one’s orthodoxy, or an issue that did not touch the substance of the *philosophia Christi*?<sup>27</sup> Rather than attempting to resolve this question here, I instead propose a complementary line of inquiry: Is it possible that Erasmus, in recalling ancient heresiological categories and juxtaposing them with Lutheran theological principles, intended to suggest obliquely the ‘heretical’ nature of the latter? If so, we would encounter one of the many examples of Erasmus’ elusive and refined rhetorical ability, able to speak on multiple levels and to multiple audiences with the same statement. While he refrains from openly calling Luther a ‘heretic,’ he likens him to Hus, to Wycliffe, to Mani, mentioning that the doctrines of these men had been condemned by the Church,<sup>28</sup> and adds that Luther had often gone even further than them – this might have been persuasive to Catholic (and possibly curial) readers.

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<sup>25</sup> “Caeterum qui id possit Lutherus non video, qui totum hominem etiam juxta praecipuas illius partes facit carnem, et in hac regnantem Satanam, etiam post infusum Spiritum, qui sic attollit crimen originis, et naturam hominis vitiatam, qui negat ullo pacto in homine situm esse, ut vel recipiat gratiam, vel amittat, sed tantum agi a Deo, quemadmodum a fabro agitur serra.”

<sup>26</sup> It should be noted, however, that the Erasmian notion of “heresy” develops over several years, not without changes, ambiguities, and contradictions, as Barral-Baron (2012) shows. For example, in a letter to Nicolas Coppin dated September 6, 1525 (Ep. 1608, Allen VI, 163), Erasmus writes, “Est mihi bellum irreconciliabile cum universis Lutheranis [...]. Haereses et schismata non possum amare.” In considering his statement of 1534, should we conclude that “haereses” does not refer here to Lutherans in general, but only to the implications culminated in the Peasants’ Revolt, which Erasmus alludes to in the same letter?

<sup>27</sup> For the thesis that Erasmus did not consider the question of free will among the ‘essentials’ of faith (*de articulis fidei*), see Thompson: 1950, esp. 39–40.45; Remer: 1996, 54–59; the “General Introduction” by James D. Tracy in CWE 78, esp. XI; and Annese: 2023; cf. e.g. *De libero arbitrio*, LB IX, 1216E–1217A, and *Spongia*, ASD IX/1, 190, as well as one comment by Luther in his *De servo arbitrio*, WA 18, 604, ll. 22–23.

<sup>28</sup> Among the several instances in Erasmus’ writings, one of the most interesting is at the same time one of the most ambivalent: in addressing Luther in *Hyperaspistes I*, Erasmus writes that Mani, Hus, and Wycliffe have been excommunicated by the Church, and continues: “as for the judgments of God, they are unknown to us” (“Statuimus te ad dextram, cum Manichaeo, Joanne Husso et Wiclevo, ques omnes percussit Ecclesiae fulmen. Dei iudicia nobis sunt incognita,” LB X, 1314F–1315A / CWE 76, 250).

Erasmus' careful choice of words makes these implications elusive. Indeed, it can be noted that, in the places we have cited where he places Luther alongside Mani – even in the *Hyperaspistes* – Erasmus hardly uses the term 'heresy' to qualify Manichaeism itself. Manichaean necessitarianism is referred to as "dangerous," perhaps execrable, but not heretical. But other places in the Erasmian *opera* help to connect the pieces. While Manichaean views are often referred to as "foolish" rather than heretical (see e.g. *Explanatio Symboli* [1533], CWE 70, 294), at least two passages surface where Erasmus speaks explicitly of heresy. In *De sarcienda Ecclesiae concordia* (1533), Erasmus lists a number of "heretics [*haeretici*]" of whom the practice of excellent virtues is reported, although this did not bear them good fruit, since they "did not place their young in the nest of the church" (ASD V/3, 282 / CWE 65, 70–71). Among them, Erasmus includes the Manichaeans, renowned for their "extreme abstinence and austerity of life." A similar argument also appears in the *Epistola ad fratres Inferioris Germaniae* (1530, in response to Bucer), where the term "heretics" is again employed (ASD IX/1, 336 / CWE 78, 276). More importantly, in another passage of the same work, Erasmus refers to "Evangelicals" who had caused "disturbances" in Switzerland and who claimed to possess "the Spirit." They believed that they were being unjustly persecuted; denouncing this idea, Erasmus writes: "What heretics ever vaunted that they were condemned deservedly? Did not the Montanists, the Arians, and the Manichees complain of being wrongfully condemned?" (*ibid.*, 386 / 330).

The last of Erasmus' texts to consider is *Concio de immensa misericordia Dei* (August 1524), a work closely related to *De libero arbitrio* (which was released a month later). Here Erasmus never explicitly mentions Luther, and his anti-Lutheran theological arguments often unfold in a subtle way (cf. Lettieri: 2017a; 2017b). In one passage Erasmus refers to Manichaean (and perhaps, implicitly, Marcionite) dualist doctrine:

Every single book of the old covenant proclaims, hymns, and insists upon the mercy of God. And what becomes of those, more delirious than heretical, who make two Gods out of the One: one in the Old Testament, who was merely just and not also good; and another in the New, who was merely good, and not equally just? [...] What of the insane Manichees [but: *ubi vaesanus Manichaeus*], who taught that the one who addressed us so lovingly through the prophets, and who made Moses' law, was not the true God, but one of the noxious demons? (ASD V/7, 74 / CWE 70, 117; see also *Explanatio Symboli*, ASD V/1, 227f and 234; *De sarcienda Ecclesiae concordia*, ASD V/3, 271; cf. Augustine, *Haer.* 46,15)

Michael J. Heath, in his introduction to the text, noted that Erasmus' insistence on non-selective mercy could be a veiled critique of Luther. Heath also highlights the strategic importance of this reference to Manichaeism, since elsewhere Erasmus made the juxtaposition explicit – partly in the almost coeval *De libero arbitrio*, but especially, we may add, in the *Hyperaspistes*.<sup>29</sup> This lends further support to the hypothesis that Erasmus often uses the Manichaean argument as an implicit anti-Lutheran 'weapon.'

<sup>29</sup> See Heath's "Introductory Note," CWE 70, 73: "It may be that Erasmus' insistence in *De immensa Dei misericordia* on the mercy of the God of Israel is also a covert reproach to Luther. Although in this sermon Erasmus explicitly condemns only the ancient heretics, the Manichees, for making the God of the Old Testament capricious and ultimately evil, Erasmus had revealed elsewhere his suspicion that Luther's view was similar." In the relevant footnote, Heath mentions *De libero arbitrio* LB IX, 1242F, probably alluding to the following passage: "I can see no consistency in those who exaggerate God's mercy in good men in such a way as to make him seem almost cruel towards others." But see also 1243E–F, concerning the "ancient authors" who "posit two Gods: one of the Old Testament [...] and one of the New Testament" (immediately below, Erasmus also mentions Mani and his "notion of two natures in man").

Some of the arguments of Erasmus' *De libero arbitrio* and *Hyperaspistes*, as well as Eck's *Enchiridion*, find an antecedent (and probable source) in Fisher's aforementioned *Confutatio* (1523) (cf. Chantraine: 1981, 461–466). In a crucial passage, responding to Luther's claim that the pope Leo X appeared to him to be "worse than Pelagius" because he placed God's grace in the power of human effort, whereas Pelagius denied that it was necessary (*Assertio*, WA 7, 148), Fisher (1597, 707) writes: "Whatever it seemed to you, you certainly seem to me worse than Mani [*Quicquid is tibi visus fuerit, tu mihi profecto videris Manichaeo deterior*]." For Mani, Fisher continues, did not want to make a good God the author of evil, and established two principles of all things, one good and one evil, the former the source of good, the latter of evil. Luther, on the other hand, is not shy about blaming God for our sins ("Tu vero nihil vereris Deum optimum maximum peccatorum nostrorum auctorem asserere"), which is blasphemy. Fisher adds: "Et ubi Manichaeus duas in homine facit naturas, alteram bonam, alteram malam: et eam quae bona est, affirmat non posse malefacere, et quae mala est, non posse non peccare. Tu naturam liberi arbitrii cum prudentia carnis eandem facis, et illam asseris reluctari spiritui Dei semper, etiam in Sanctissimis viris" (*ibid.*). As Fisher summarizes, Luther portrays human nature as radically flawed: the flesh is opposed to the Spirit, and free will alone can do nothing. This places humankind in the power of "absolute necessity," thus making Luther a Manichaean, or rather, something even worse – something more "pestilential" ("Haec si Manichaeum non expriment, aut quiddam omni Manichaeo pestilentius, ego certe nihil intelligo," *ibid.*, 707–708).

### 3. The Italian Controversialists before the Council of Trent

Is it possible to find parallels, or traces of reception, of these arguments among Italian theologians who wrote against Luther and the Lutherans? Friedrich Lauchert's now-classic study, *Die italienischen literarischen gegner Luthers* (1912), registers very few occurrences of the concept of 'Manichaeism' in Italian controversialist texts, all of them after the beginning of the Council of Trent (thus falling outside the chronological scope of this study).<sup>30</sup> A closer examination, however, reveals further references.

One of the first Italian authors (and one of the first in general)<sup>31</sup> to liken Luther to Mani is the Dominican Ambrogio Catarino (Lancellotto Politi, 1484–1553), a renowned controversialist of his time (though his intellectual contributions extended beyond polemics).<sup>32</sup> As early as 1520, when he was officially appointed by the papal Curia to write against Luther, Catarino accuses Luther of Manichaean tendencies in his *Apologia pro veritate catholicae fidei* – one of the sources of Eck's

<sup>30</sup> Lauchert: 1912, *ad indicem*. On the reception of Luther in Italy, see also Perrone: 1983 and Catto: 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Silvestro Mazzolini (Prierias), in his *Replica ad Martinum Lutherum* (1518), juxtaposes Luther with Mani, Faustus, and Donatus, but this is a vague reference without a definite theological topic (text: Fabisch/Iserloh: 1988, 118).

<sup>32</sup> "Politi was, rather, very far from the monolithic and simplistic personage passed down to us until now. Next to the facile polemicist capable of violent anti-Lutheran invectives there was the eclectic theologian [...] adversary of the scholasticism [...]. Side by side with the zealous executor of the repressive goals of the intransigent wing of the Roman Curia and the newborn Congregation of the Holy Office was the [...] protagonist of a para-inquisitorial activity whose best weapon was voluntary conviction and conversion of an adversary. [...] The reconstruction of his erratic relations with the Spirituali in the first half of the 1540s allows us to better appreciate the extraordinary fluidity of positions in the matter of justification in the years preceding the Tridentine decree [...]. Moreover, the role he played as pontifical theologian and as bishop in the first phase of the council provides us with the image of another Counter-Reformation, different from that which triumphed at Trent and in the post-Tridentine decades" (Caravale: 2017, 210–211). On Politi, see also Lauchert: 1912, 30–133; Preston: 2003.

*Enchiridion*. In this text, Catarino accuses Luther of denying human “good nature” and cursing God by making him the author of evil. Does Luther want to be “Manichaean,” Catarino rhetorically asks? This is the risk he runs if he advocates such “horrendous blasphemy.”<sup>33</sup> The context of these statements is a discussion of the relationship between philosophy and theology and the use of Aristotle in Scholasticism, but Catarino’s true focus is the question of theological anthropology, particularly the inclination of human nature and thus, by extension, the problem of free will. It is noteworthy that Politi’s official appointment was suggested to pope Leo X by Girolamo Aleandro (1480–1542), who had known Politi in Florence, when Aleandro was in the service of cardinal Giulio de’ Medici (Caravale: 2017, 18). On July 1520, Aleandro was chosen by Leo X as papal nuncio to promulgate the bull *Exsurge Domine* in Germany, accompanied by Eck. Aleandro and Giulio de’ Medici soon exchanged copies of Catarino’s *Apologia*. Aleandro was responsible for drafting the Edict of Worms (May 1521), in which – unlike *Exsurge Domine* – Luther is associated with Mani and Wycliffe as an advocate of determinism against free will.<sup>34</sup>

Catarino briefly draws another similarity between Luther and Mani in the *Speculum haereticorum* (1540): Luther posits that “Poenitentia non est activa, sed passiva contritio,” but according to Politi this “Manichaei enim est dogma” (1540, c. E3v). Further references are found in the *Resolutione sommaria contra le conclusioni luterane*, published in 1544 along with two other polemical writings in the Italian vernacular (the best known being *Compendio d’errori et inganni luterani*, written against the *Beneficio di Cristo*). At the beginning of *Resolutione sommaria*, Catarino addresses the city of Naples, which he identifies as the main center for the spread of Protestant propaganda, including through vernacular writings such as the anonymous book *Sommario della Santa Scrittura* (1534 and subsequent editions), against which he directly polemicizes here.<sup>35</sup> In his preface, Politi warns against the danger of “heresy” and heretics, mentioning ancient examples and then drawing a parallel with his own times, namely with Protestantism, which he calls “this cancer, which has already spread in Germany” and beyond (1544, 3r). Among the ancient examples he cites, the “Manichaean sect [setta Manichea]” is mentioned as one of the most powerful (2v). Later on, Catarino makes the analogy explicit by dealing precisely with meritorious works and free will. In refuting a proposition extracted from the *Sommario* (“If I did any good, that belongs to God, not me, for God – namely, his grace – made that within me [se io ho fatto alcun bene, quello è d’Iddio, et non mio, perché Iddio ha operato quello in me, et non io, ma la sua gratia]”), Catarino calls it “false” and “impious” because it contradictorily denies that it is the individual who does “the good work.” But if this were true, humans would have no free will – except, perhaps, as an inclination toward evil, “as the Manichaeans said” (“se fusse questo vero ch’io non facesse alcuna buon’opera, dunque non haverei libero arbitrio, se non forse al male, come dicevano gli Manichei,” 9r). Why then, Catarino continues, would God command us to do good works? The Dominican theologian then defends, through Scriptural quotations, a ‘concordism’ in which human beings act together with divine grace.

<sup>33</sup> “Num igitur in hoc etiam Manichaeus esse vis, ac malarum rerum authorem Deum constituere in blasphemia plus satis horrenda?” (Catarino: 1956, 53). Politi’s *Apologia* was greatly appreciated by Leo X (Caravale: 2017, 21).

<sup>34</sup> This juxtaposition appears in the ‘original’ German text of the Edict (while not in the official printed version) as well as in the first Latin edition, see Fabisch/Iserloh: 1991, 518–519. Luther is charged with drawing from Mani and Wycliffe (“Liberum arbitrium prorsus nullum esse, sed omnia certa lege stare ex Manichaei quidem et Vigleffi penu depromit”), with reference to one passage in his *Assertio* (WA 7, 146) – but there, Luther mentions Wycliffe, not Mani. On the Luther–Mani parallel in the Edict, see also Reinhardt: 2016, 191.

<sup>35</sup> The *Sommario* was the Italian translation of the French version of a Dutch book printed anonymously in 1523, see Caravale: 2017, 123; Peyronel Rambaldi: 1997.

The parallel between Manichaeism and the Lutheran doctrine of justification does not seem to be drawn, by contrast, by another important Dominican theologian, Tommaso De Vio (Cardinal Cajetan, 1469–1534), at least not in his texts directly engaged in the controversy (such as *De fide et operibus* and others that were compiled in his *Opuscula omnia*). This fact is perhaps not surprising, considering De Vio’s approach to the anti-Lutheran polemic, which was quite different from Eck’s intransigent approach, but also (in style and language) from Catarino’s. Cajetan, open to the search for agreement and compromise, and avoiding polemic against personalities (cf. Stöve: 1991; Wicks: 1978, 2–3), appeared less interested in exploiting an argument that equated Lutheranism to Manichaeism – a movement irretrievably branded as heresy through numerous council pronouncements and late antique imperial decrees, and whose condemnation was common throughout Latin Christendom until the Middle Ages and into the early modern period, thanks in large part to the enduring influence of Augustine’s anti-Manichaean works.<sup>36</sup>

As might be expected, the anti-Protestant ‘Manichaean argument’ resurfaced in treatises expressly devoted to the question of free will, which began to spread especially starting in the mid-1520s, after the first controversy between Erasmus and Luther. Among the earliest was *De fato et libero arbitrio* (1526) by the Spaniard Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490–1573; see Pacheco: 1987; Lavenia: 2014), who lived for a long time in Italy. A protégé of the prince of Carpi Alberto Pio, whom he supported in his polemic against Erasmus, and courtier of pope Clement VII, Sepúlveda would later become Charles V’s official chronicler and chaplain. In the first book of *De fato et libero arbitrio*, we find the well-known argument that depicts Luther as a proponent of anthropological fatalism or necessitarianism, on a par with the Stoics as well as Mani and Wycliffe.<sup>37</sup> To them Sepúlveda opposes a large group of advocates of free will, including Chrysostom, Origen, but also Augustine. This passage, with the Luther–Mani–Wycliffe juxtaposition and the list of “doctors” who have defended free will, echoes Erasmus’ statements at the beginning of *De libero arbitrio* (and in the *Hyperaspistes*) – a text that Sepúlveda had well in mind, for he mentions it in the opening of his work, pointing out its merit in responding to Luther’s theses, but also criticizing its excessive caution and lack of a thorough *philosophical* examination of the issue (preferring, instead, to rely on Scripture), as Sepúlveda sets out to do (1526, c. A2v).

Slightly preceding Sepúlveda’s *De fato* is the *De libero animi motu* (January 1525) by Celio Calcagnini (1479–1541; see Lauchert: 1912, 311–315; Marchetti: 1973; Bacchelli: 2006; Felici: 2020), another work inspired by Erasmus’ *De libero arbitrio*, which it cites directly (cf. Sánchez: 2002). Calcagnini’s text (1544, 395–399) does not speak of Manichaeism, and his analysis of human freedom is conducted primarily by analyzing ancient philosophers. Nonetheless, Calcagnini’s case warrants attention for its unique intellectual position. He was an important intellectual and diplomat of the Ferrarese court, as well as a priest and a close collaborator of Cardinal Ippolito d’Este. While he was actively engaged in anti-Lutheran polemics, he was also receptive to the ideas of authors considered ‘heterodox’ – even Protestant ones. Above all, Calcagnini explicitly defended the practice of Nicodemism, that is, religious dissimulation. According to some scholars, Calcagnini is not to be regarded simply as an ‘Erasmian’ thinker who puts the ethical dimension of (Catholic) Christianity before the dogmatic one, but as a true dissimulator committed to concealing his sympathy for

<sup>36</sup> Obviously, Cajetan was well aware of Manichaean doctrine: in one *Oratio* on the origin of evil (1502), he mentions the “Manichaean error” concerning the two eternal principles (De Vio: 1582, vol. III, 274). See also O’Connor: 2017, 104: in his biblical commentaries, Cajetan mentions the Manichaeans twice.

<sup>37</sup> “[...] praeter Manicheum, Ioannem Viclevum haeticos, et his longe detestabiliorem Lutherum” (1526, c. D3r).

Protestant doctrines (Seidel Menchi: 1987, 86; cf. Ginzburg: 1970, 164; *contra* D’Ascia: 2010, 27), or even a rationalist inspired by Epicurean, Lucretian and Neoplatonic philosophy (Bacchelli: 2006, esp. 132–133; Felici: 2020, 137–138). His defense of the Roman Church supposedly had an essentially political and social reason: for Calcagnini, the ignorant common people are unable to understand certain doctrines, and therefore it is good that these should be kept silent, especially if they “concern neither piety nor the salvation of souls,” since their open discussion would risk fomenting sedition and thereby threaten the unity of the Church (Calcagnini: 1544, 195).

This is not the occasion to investigate Calcagnini’s authentic beliefs, but it is worth reflecting on a reference to Manichaeism that the Ferrarese scholar makes in the well-known letter to his friend Fulvio Pellegrino Morato (who had joined the Reformation), dated July 23, 1538. In addition to addressing the theological issue of justification, the letter contains one of Calcagnini’s open endorsements of Nicodemism. At the beginning, Calcagnini refers to a book (perhaps the *Sommario della Santa Scrittura* [Bacchelli: 2006, 122], or Calvin’s *Institutio christianae religionis* [Felici: 2020, 141]; in any case, a Protestant text), in which he says he has found nothing that cannot be advocated (1544, 195). Later, Calcagnini sets out his views on the importance of grace, but also of free will and meritorious works. The key point here is that Calcagnini, in commenting on “that book,” reports that some people suspect that its author comes close to the “Manichaean heresy,” but the same might be said of the Pauline Epistles, in the hands of an inattentive reader, just as the *Epistle of James* might be perceived as pro-Pelagian (*ibid.*; cf. Bacchelli: 2006, 134).<sup>38</sup> This passage is significant not only for its implicit recognition of the Pauline inspiration of the Protestant doctrine of grace, but also its intent to eschew the logical association between Manichaeism and Reformed predestinarianism that Eck and others, including Erasmus (admired by Calcagnini), had outlined. Protestant doctrine, Calcagnini is saying, is no more Manichaean than Paul’s is,<sup>39</sup> therefore it is perfectly biblical. Does this mean his statements in defense of human freedom and works were therefore purely extrinsic, tactical, and that Calcagnini was, in fact, a pro- or crypto-Protestant? The question is perhaps destined to remain open. However, another issue arises: If, as Bacchelli’s analysis (2006, 132.135 and *passim*) suggests,<sup>40</sup> Calcagnini retained a certain – thinly veiled – determinist inclination (or at least a residue of youthful determinism) even into his maturity, this might help to explain why he does not deploy the usual anti-Protestant reference to Manichaeism and indeed appears to downplay the very critique of the latter.

The year before Calcagnini’s letter to Morato, the Dominican Vincenzo Giaccari (or Zaccari; *ca.* 1490–1540?; see Lauchert: 1912, 411–423; Cavazza: 1983, 75; Von Wille: 2000) published in Venice his *Opuscula adversus Lutheranam impietatem* (1537), which included a *Libellus de libero arbitrio, gratia, praescientia, et praedestinatione* (49r–92v), dedicated to the Duke of Ferrara Ercole II and solicited from Giaccari by Celio Calcagnini himself. In this text, Giaccari challenges the

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<sup>38</sup> “Puto fuisse, ac in posterum etiam fore, qui autorem illius libelli suspectum habeant, quasi in Manichaei haeresim plus nimio propensum: sed eadem suspicio tanget Apostolum gentium Paulum, si in temerarium et imprudentem lectorem inciderit. Sicut et Iacobus frater domini immodice favere Pelagianis existimabitur, nisi eum nactus sit, qui atra et candida possit internoscere. Siquidem recte inquit Paulus, a fide omnia pendere, et nihil nostris viribus, sed gratiae dei omnia esse tribuenda.”

<sup>39</sup> Already Augustine, having been accused by the Pelagians of reviving Stoic fatalism, replied that the same charge should then have been made against Paul (*C. du. ep. Pelag.* 2,5,10, on Rom 9:15–16; cf. Lettieri: 2001, 404).

<sup>40</sup> According to Bacchelli (2006, 133), Calcagnini’s juvenile poem *Secta Coelii* proves to be “fiercely anti-Christian” and determinist, while the letter to Morato of some twenty-five years later shows a Calcagnini “somehow re-Christianized,” but aware of the difficulty of defending with rational arguments the force of free will, which is opposed by cosmic, environmental, or emotional forces (cf. *ibid.*, 135).

Lutheran doctrine of *servum arbitrium*, arguing that it places the origin of evil and the cause of all human action in God, thus depriving humanity of moral responsibility. Against Luther’s theological anthropology, which considered the human will to be intrinsically inclined to evil without the assistance of divine grace, Giaccari defends the capacity of human free will to choose the good (Von Wille: 2000). The treatise contains two references to Manichaeism, the most significant appearing in the context of an exegesis of Rom 9 (in particular, Rom 9:16, “it depends not on human will or exertion but on God who shows mercy [*non volentis neque currentis sed miserentis Dei*]”) and passages from Augustine, where Giaccari reiterates the accusation that Lutherans revive “the ancient error of the Manichaeans,” in removing free will. According to his critique, the Lutheran view presents the human will as merely ‘moved’ by God, without real freedom (1537, 58v).<sup>41</sup>

Around the same time, Cardinal Gasparo Contarini (1483–1542; see Fragnito: 1983; Gleason: 1993; Burzelli: 2022a) also wrote a *De libero arbitrio*, as a letter (in the vernacular) to Vittoria Colonna dated November 13, 1536. This is one of several writings that Contarini devoted to the themes of free will, justification, and predestination (cf. Sgarbi: 2020; Burzelli: 2022b). For the purposes of this discussion, it will suffice to note that Contarini never draws an explicit parallel between Lutheran and Manichaean doctrines, although from his very first text on those topics, the *Confutatio articulorum seu quaestionum Lutheranorum* (1530), he polemicizes against the idea that God can be considered the author of evil in human beings (“Quis etenim sanae mentis diceret Deum esse auctorem malorum nostrorum operum?” [Contarini: 1923, 7]). Contarini’s letter *De libero arbitrio* does not actually mention Luther or Protestantism at all; he explains that it is intended to set out the author’s thoughts on the issue of free will, “so debated nowadays [tanto al dì d’hoggi volgata et disputata]” (Contarini: 2023, 121), by examining it first (and foremost) through the lens of philosophers and then from that of “Catholic doctrine” (*ibid.*). In the epistles *De praedestinatione* (to Lattanzio Tolomei, late 1537/early 1538, in the vernacular) and *De iustificatione* (1541), on the other hand, “Lutherans” are mentioned, but there are no explicit references to Manichaeism (unlike the numerous mentions of Pelagius). However, he critiques a rigid understanding of predestination (both letters are now included in Contarini: 2023). The same can be said of the letter *De poenitentia* to Reginald Pole of July 1542 (in the vernacular; text in Contarini: 2023), where Contarini – echoing Erasmian motifs – states that it is necessary to avoid both Scylla and Charybdis (cf. Contarini: 2023, 228), that is, both a Pelagian-esque doctrine (justification can occur by the power of one’s own works alone) and Lutheran doctrines, of which, however, the cardinal also points out some points with which he agrees.<sup>42</sup>

One can explain the absence of the polemical conflation of Manichaeans and Lutherans in Contarini’s writings by his political and diplomatic approach, as well as his own ‘compromise’ doctrine on justification (his theory of ‘double justification’ was to procure him several criticisms). As an exponent of a reformist, Erasmian Catholicism, distant from the more intransigent Catholicism that would be developed in the post-Tridentine dogmatic strictures, committed to the search for concord at the Regensburg colloquia of 1541 (see Burzelli: 2023, CXCI–CCV), Contarini probably had no interest in identifying Lutheranism as a dualist ‘heresy’ (see also the preceding discussion of

<sup>41</sup> “Ex hoc loco [Rom 9:16], qui liberum hominis arbitrium auferre conantes, veterem Manicheorum suscitantes errorem, maximam assumunt rationem dicendi, quo suum defendant errorem: dum putant hanc voluntatis praeparationem ad quandam vim pertinere divinae virtutis, per quam hominis voluntas, necessario quodam impulsu ad volendum, quod Deus iusserit, impellatur absque libero motu voluntatis eiusdem.”

<sup>42</sup> This should not be interpreted as evidence of a pro-Lutheran attitude; see Burzelli: 2023, CCVI–CCXI for a balanced treatment of Contarini’s dialectic between accepting some Lutheran points while refuting others.

De Vio).<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Contarini was probably aware that Melanchthon had already begun to counter such Catholic arguments, himself criticizing the deterministic Manichaean doctrine that he juxtaposed with that of the more radical factions of Lutherans.<sup>44</sup> In contrast to the 1521 edition of the *Loci communes*, Melanchthon's later revisions would move further and further away from a potentially deterministic view, eventually departing also from Luther (cf. Iserloh/Glazik/Jedin: 1980, 345, quoting a letter of 1559 in CR 9, 766; Quatralo: 2023).

A similar argument could be made for the Erasmian and 'semi-Pelagian' (see Douglas: 1959, 85.88) Jacopo Sadoletto (1477–1547; see also Grendler: 2008, 263–270; Lucioli: 2017; Lettieri: 2017a; Battista: 2020), apostolic secretary under Leo X and Clement VII, elevated to cardinal by Paul III in 1536 and a member of the *Consilium de emendanda ecclesia* along with Contarini. Sadoletto's attitude toward Protestants was, in general, one of dialogue and search for reconciliation, devoid of polemical exaggerations. Perhaps this is why an explicit characterization of Lutheranism as a new Manichaeism does not emerge in his works. Certainly, Sadoletto did not appreciate the doctrine of the 'bondage of the will' and its deterministic implications; in his commentary on the Pauline Epistle to the Romans (*In Pauli Epistolam ad Romanos Commentariorum libri tres*, 1535), Sadoletto criticizes the "recent heretics" who dared to write about *servum arbitrium* instead of free will.<sup>45</sup> After all, he esteemed Melanchthon (and his approach) more than Luther, as evidenced by his letter to Johannes Sturm in July 1539, where Sadoletto lavishes words of praise on Sturm, Melanchthon and Bucero, describing them as "most learned men" and contrasting them from Luther, who is wont to "rage fiercely and clamorously" against his opponents.<sup>46</sup>

Returning to the Catholic authors who instead exploit the juxtaposition of Luther and Mani in a polemical key, we can mention a few examples from writings of the 1530s not expressly focused on the topic of free will. One finds some (mostly vague) references in *Pro religione christiana adversus Luteranos* (1530) by Augustine (Guido) Steuco (1497/1498–1548; see Lavenia: 2019), best known for his *De perenni philosophia* (1540). The Augustinian theologian asserts that Luther's "dogmas" are not difficult to refute: the Lutheran theses, in his view, were not only blatantly ungodly but also puerile in exposition, to the point that "the monstrosities of the Manichaeans and Ophites turned out to be almost more credible [*ut manichaeorum ophianorumque monstra essent pene credibilia*]" (1530, 10r). This scathing judgment aligns with Steuco's far from conciliatory controversial style.

The Franciscan Giovanni Pili of Fano (1469–1539; see Von Wille: 2001; Cavazza: 1983, esp. 69–74) is among the first to write an anti-Lutheran treatise in the vernacular; his *Opera utilissima vulgare contra le pernitiosissime heresie Lutherane per li simplici* (also known as *Opera utilissima*

<sup>43</sup> Like De Vio, Contarini knows and criticizes the Manichaean doctrine about the origin of evil; see, e.g., Contarini: 1571, 559 (from his *Conciliorum summa*).

<sup>44</sup> "Non probo deliramenta Manichaeorum, qui prorsus nullam voluntati actionem tribuebant, ne quidem adiuvente Spiritu sancto; quasi nihil interesset inter statuam et voluntatem" (*Loci communes* [ed. 1535], CR 21, col. 377). See also the 1559 edition (*Loci praecipui theologici*): "Si tantum expectanda esset illa infusio qualitatum sine ulla nostra actione, sicut Enthusiastae et Manichaei finxerunt, nihil opus esset ministerio Evangelico, nulla etiam lucta in animis esset. Sed instituit Deus ministerium, ut vox accipiatur, ut promissionem mens cogitet et amplectatur, et dum repugnamus diffidentiae, Spiritus sanctus simul in nobis sit efficax" (CR 21, col. 659).

<sup>45</sup> "Quae etiam, his recentibus haereticis occasionem praebuit, ut de servo iam, non amplius de libero arbitrio auderent conscribere" (Sadoletto: 1737–1738, vol. 4, 209).

<sup>46</sup> Sadoletto: 1760–1764, vol. 3, 104–108, esp. 105–106: "Quapropter tibi nil simulans dico, quod palam etiam cum facultas datur soleo et commemorare et loqui, me tibi et Melanchthoni et Bucero hominibus doctissimis, plane benevolum et ex animo fautorem esse. [...] At ego arbitrabar, hoc unius Lutheri proprium esse irruere in omnes homines videlicet cum impetu et clamore, a vobis autem homini nus liberalius eruditus, longe id abesse."

*volgare chiamata incendio di zizanie Lutherane*), dated 1532, contains a cursory reference to Manichaeism in connection with Luther. Giovanni states that one should not dispute with “heretics” but flee them “as a pernicious plague [come pernitiosissima peste]” (f. 11r). Luther, he argues, admits no human judge, relying solely on the authority of Scripture, which he interprets in his own way. Immediately following this, Giovanni adds that Luther and the other “heretics” “revive many heresies” of the past, already condemned by the Church: a list follows that includes Arius, Mani (“Manicheo”), Jovinianus and others, up to Hus (11r-v). In the pages devoted to free will, Giovanni does not exploit the Manichaean argument. However, it is quite plausible that he was implicitly alluding to it in mentioning Mani among the “heretics” whose thought Luther was reintroducing, an argument that Eck in his *Enchiridion* had by then made widely known, precisely by referring to the denial of free will. Giovanni’s text proves to be heavily indebted to Eck, Fisher, and Catarino (cf. Caravale: 2017, 70).

In 1538, the Ferrarese Carmelite Giovanni Maria Verrati (1490–1563; see Lauchert: 1912, 423–439) published the first edition of his *Disputationes adversus Lutheranos*, where he collects a series of treatises on the main topics of controversy. In this edition, there are some references to Manichaeism, but they do not concern the Manichaeans’ opinions about free will; Verrati – echoing a passage from Eck’s *Enchiridion* (cf. *supra*) – writes that Luther rejects the *Epistle of James*, as “the heretics” once rejected the four gospels, and Manichaeans rejected the Old Testament (139v–140r). The second edition of 1544, however, includes an *Apologia* (s.d.; cc. 244r–266r) dedicated to the Duke of Ferrara Ercole II d’Este. Here the references to Manichaean doctrines are more numerous (based, as expected, on Augustine’s writings), and Manichaeans are explicitly paralleled with Lutherans for their denial of free will. In another passage reminiscent of Eck’s *Enchiridion*, Verrati first accuses the Lutherans of reviving “the heresy of the Manichaeans,” then describes them as even worse than the latter, likening them to the “stupid Stoics” for their denial of free will and submission of human beings to absolute necessity.<sup>47</sup>

Raffaele da Como (Raphael Comensis/Novocomensis, Raffaele Venosta, d. 1543; see Lauchert: 1912, 452–455), a canon regular, is best known for his *Malleus haereticorum* (1543) and his polemic against Bernardino Ochino. He also published a tractate entitled *De praedestinatione, gratia, et libero arbitrio* (1543), where one finds (at 66v) the juxtaposition of Luther, Wycliffe, and Mani as opponents of free will, an argument already delivered by Erasmus.

With the writings of Raffaele da Como and the second edition of Verrati’s *Disputationes* (coeval with Catarino’s *Resolutione sommaria*, analyzed above) we are now on the eve of the Council of Trent and, more broadly, already at the beginning of the phase of increasing confessionalization and repression, as evidenced also by the establishment of the Roman Inquisition in 1542. The experience of the Regensburg Colloquies of 1541 had by then demonstrated the impossibility of genuine reconciliation between Catholic and Protestant fronts, and the intransigent Catholic party increased its force. In the mid-1540s, a new phase emerged, including on the level of controversialist tractates, which is beyond the scope of this research.

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<sup>47</sup> “Praeterea recentiores haeretici, ac eorum fautores suscitant olim extinctam Manichaeorum haeresim, qui negarunt liberum arbitrium se habere active ad bonum opus, cum dicunt praedestinationem necessitare liberum arbitrium, quinimmo ipsum omnino negant, cum omnia necessitate absoluta evenire fatentur, ideo, ut stupidi Stoici, Lutherani, peiores sunt Manichaeis” (1544, 249v; cf. 259r–v and 265v). In later works, Verrati would again juxtapose Lutheran and Manichaean doctrines; cf. e.g. Lauchert: 1912, 438.

#### 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, a review of the texts analyzed reveals that the accusation against Luther and the Lutherans of reviving ‘Manichaeism’ – which Catholic controversialists understood as a synonym for determinism, nullification of free will, and the attribution to God of the human inclination toward evil – emerges early, in a polemical key, from Luther’s official break with Rome. The parallel was proposed in 1520 by Catarino, following earlier suggestions by Mazzolini and Eck. In 1523, John Fisher elaborated on it by focusing precisely on the question of free will; Eck and Erasmus would further develop this theme between 1524 and 1527. It is probably these latter authors, great protagonists of the theological debates of the time, who reflect most deeply on that parallelism. Both profound experts on Augustine and other patristic sources, they have no difficulty in justifying their recourse to that polemical motif, even relying on biblical exegesis (as Erasmus does on John 6:44, also evoking Chrysostom). Eck, moreover, had already in his youth, before the Lutheran protest, attacked a theology of grace and free will that he called ‘Manichaeism,’ and was thus able to integrate this argument seamlessly into his anti-Lutheran polemics. Sepúlveda reintroduces the parallel, centered on determinism and the denial of free will, in 1526 (prior to the edition of Eck’s *Enchiridion* that contains the chapter *De libero arbitrio*). However, he largely reiterates what Erasmus had said. After this period, the anti-Protestant ‘Manichaeism’ argument resurfaces mainly from the mid-1530s, coinciding with Melancthon’s use of the argument against Lutherans who are, in his view, ‘heterodox,’ and remained in circulation until the end of the period considered here, the eve of the Council of Trent. In those years, it mainly consists of the repetition of polemical, controversialist ‘keywords’ and motifs without exploring new declinations of the parallel, as already illustrated by Fisher, Eck, and Erasmus; it is nonetheless interesting to map its diffusion, also as an example of the Italian reception of such authors (Eck is often echoed almost verbatim).

It is important to emphasize that the survey conducted in this paper is meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive. Given the impossibility of examining the entire written production of Catholic authors between 1517/20 and 1545, or each and every reference to Manichaeism, I have focused mainly (though not exclusively) on polemical works, paying particular attention to the themes of free will, justification, and predestination. In addition to Fisher, Eck and Erasmus, whose role in setting the coordinates of the Luther–Mani polemical parallel is crucial (possibly alongside the Edict of Worms), I chose to analyze Italian authors, and those with significant influence in Italy, to delimit the scope of research and thus increase its accuracy. So, although not exhaustive, the mapping of occurrences conducted here appears indicative, highlighting some lines of tendency. Also relevant are the cases in which the polemical juxtaposition between Lutheranism and Manichaeism is *not* taken, which not surprisingly are found in authors whose approach to confessional debate is more conciliatory and less harsh, including De Vio, Contarini, and Sadoletto. A table at the end of this essay summarizes these findings, listing the most significant treatises in chronological order. According to several Catholic polemicists involved in the confessional debate before Trent, Luther was indeed ‘Mani *redivivus*.’

**Appendix: Summary Table (Chronological Order)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Work (abbr. title)</b>	<b>Parallel Lutheranism–Manichaeism</b>
1518	Mazzolini	<i>Replica ad Martinum Lutherum</i>	Yes, but vague (Luther resembles certain ‘unorthodox’ ones...)
1519	Eck	<i>Expurgatio</i>	Yes, on Karlstadt and free will
1520	Catarino	<i>Apologia</i>	Yes, on human nature and evil
1521	[Aleandro]	Edict of Worms	Yes, on free will
1523	Fisher	<i>Assertionis Lutheranae Confutatio</i>	Yes, on free will
1524	Erasmus	<i>De immensa misericordia</i>	No, but he criticizes Manichaean dualism
1524	Erasmus	<i>De libero arbitrio</i>	Implicitly, on free will (cf. <i>Hyperasp.</i> )
1525	Calcagnini	<i>De libero animi motu</i>	No
1525	Eck	<i>Enchiridion</i>	Yes (but, on free will, only as of the 1527 edn; see however <i>Chrysopassus</i> , 1514)
1526	Ginés de Sepúlveda	<i>De fato et libero arbitrio</i>	Yes, on determinism and free will
1526-1527	Erasmus	<i>Hyperaspistes</i> I and II	Yes, on free will
1530	Steuco	<i>Pro religione christiana</i>	Yes, but general
1532	Giovanni of Fano	<i>Opera utilissima</i>	Yes (although not explicitly on free will)
1535	Melanchthon	<i>Loci communes</i> (2nd edn)	Parallel between Manichaeans and ‘radical’ Lutherans: they nullify human will
1536	Contarini	<i>De libero arbitrio</i>	No (not even in other works on related topics)
1537	Giaccari	<i>Libellus de libero arbitrio</i>	Yes, on free will
1538	Verrati	<i>Disputationes adversus Lutheranos</i>	Yet, but not on free will (while in the 1544 edn, also on free will)
1538	Calcagnini	Letter to Morato	C. mentions but rejects the polemical parallel Protestantism–Manichaeism
1540	Catarino	<i>Speculum haeticorum</i>	Yes (on penance)
1543	Raffaele of Como	<i>De praedestinatione</i>	Yes, on free will
1544	Catarino	<i>Resolutione sommaria</i>	Yes, on free will and good works
Various	De Vio (Cajetan)		No (controversialist works)
Various	Sadoletto		No (notwithstanding his criticisms of <i>servum arbitrium</i> )

## Abbreviations

Allen = *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. Percy Stafford Allen *et alii*, 12 vol., Oxford: Clarendon, 1906–1958.

ASD = *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, Amsterdam: North Holland [then Leiden: Brill], 1969–.

CCSL = *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*, Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–.

CR = *Corpus Reformatorum*, Halle/Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1834–.

CSEL = *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften 1866– (as of 2012: Berlin: de Gruyter).

CWE = *Collected Works of Erasmus*, Toronto/Buffalo/London: Toronto University Press, 1974–.

DBI = *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–.

LB = *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami Opera Omnia*, ed. Jean Le Clerc, 10 vol., Leiden: Vander, 1703–1706.

NPNF = *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Series I*, ed. Philip Schaff, 14 vol., Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1886–1890.

PG = *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, Paris, 1857–1866.

WA = *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 109 vol., Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–2009 [WA Br = *Briefwechsel*].

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