

# Light and Darkness: The Origins of Europe's Ethical Heritage and the Return to Fundamental Values as a Factor of Spiritual Self-Defense

**Alisa Lukashenko** (ORCID 0000-0001-5136-5657)

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University (Kyiv, Ukraine)

**Vitaliy Andryeyev** (ORCID 0000-0003-1830-0629)

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University (Kyiv, Ukraine)

The study of dualistic belief systems in prehistoric and early historical contexts provides a deeper understanding of the roots of contemporary religious and ideological conflicts. Such research helps trace the origins of dichotomies that continue to shape the collective cultural memory of humanity. The relevance of the topic is further reinforced by the growing interest in religious pluralism, intercultural dialogue, and the search for universal spiritual foundations – themes that acquire particular significance in the modern era of globalization and religious diversity. The relevance of the theme of good and evil is driven by a historical and philosophical return to the rethinking of fundamental human values built on the principles of non-violence and humanity, which, in the context of Russia's war against the civilized world, take on the meaning of spiritual self-defense and the basis of human physical survival. The purpose of the article is to clarify the origins, stages of formation, and evolution of dualistic ideas in the religious consciousness of ancient civilizations from the earliest times to the beginning of our era. The research methodology is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical-religious, comparative, hermeneutic, and cultural-historical methods. Elements of structural analysis of mythological texts, as well as historical-typological comparison of religious systems, are also applied. The authors trace the historical dynamics of the transition from the mythological opposition of light and darkness to systemic ontological dualism, which formed the basis for the emergence of Gnostic ideologemes. It is shown that the evolution of ideas about good and evil, God and the Devil, demonstrates a gradual transition from the syncretic beliefs of ancient civilizations to complex theological concepts. In Zoroastrianism, the dualism of light and darkness is clearly traced for the first time, which subsequently transforms into the Christian opposition between God and the Devil. Christianity formulated the moral and ethical dimension of dualism, recognizing evil as a consequence of turning away from God's will rather than as an equal force. In an era of global threats and the war that Russia is waging against the European space, it is especially important to realize that violence, aggression, and the devaluation of human life stand on the opposite side of civilization. Such an understanding should unite nations, strengthen moral resilience, and leave no room for the legitimization of evil or the justification of aggression as a "normal" form of interaction.

## KEYWORDS

*dualistic religious beliefs, ancient society, policy, romanization, Zoroastrianism, Gnosticism, Christianity, integration*

## Introduction

The study of the origins and development of dualistic religious beliefs is highly relevant in the context of modern interdisciplinary research, encompassing religious studies, philosophy, cultural history, anthropology, and the history of ideas. Dualism, understood as a concept of struggle or co-existence of opposites (good and evil, spirit and matter, light and darkness) – is one of the fundamental worldview models that has profoundly influenced the formation of religious systems, mythologies, and social structures in various civiliza-

tions. Examining such beliefs in the pre-Christian era allows us to trace how archaic ideas were transformed under the influence of cultural exchange, religious reforms, geopolitical changes, and social development.

Special emphasis is placed on the analysis of the religions of the Middle East, Iran, India, and the Hellenistic world, where dualistic motifs not only acquired a systemic philosophical form but also prepared the ground for the further development of Gnostic and Christian doctrines. Nevertheless, studying dualistic beliefs in the context of pre-

and early historical periods allows for a deeper understanding of the sources of modern religious and ideological conflicts, particularly by identifying the origins of dichotomies that persist in the cultural memory of humanity. The relevance of the topic is also driven by a growing interest in issues of religious pluralism, intercultural dialogue, and the search for universal spiritual foundations, which becomes especially important in the age of globalization and religious polyvalence.

The study of the genesis of dualism, particularly Christian dualism, holds special significance for contemporary European society and for Ukraine, as it helps to comprehend the historical roots of the concepts of good and evil, morality and sin, light and darkness those spiritual categories upon which European civilization was built. In times of crises, wars, and value disruptions, it is vitally important to clearly differentiate between good and evil in order to avoid the dangerous substitution of meanings that blurs moral reference points and justifies violence or falsehood. Christian dualism, in its profound essence, not only contrasts but also directs the human being toward an inner choice in favor of goodness, truth, and compassion. For Ukraine, which is undergoing severe trials, returning to the comprehension of these fundamental moral categories within the context of its own cultural and value identity is not only a philosophical task but also a condition for spiritual self-preservation and unity with the European humanistic space.

The study of the evolution of dualistic religious beliefs should begin with an analysis of works that shed light on the formation of the religious worldview and the emergence of the «cult of the anti-god». In this context, the works of H. Cunow, J. G. Frazer, and L. Lévy-Bruhl deserve attention. The German historian and ethnographer H. Cunow, in his research, demonstrates the close connection between religious beliefs and the natural environment, emphasizing that the belief in God and immortality among different peoples has common foundations (Cunow, 1920). The British historian of religion, anthropologist, and ethnologist J.-G. Frazer, in his comparative study of mythology and religion, examines the coexistence of good and evil principles in mythology, from which religion later emerged (Frazer, 1894). At the same time, in his opinion, the religious context deals with forces that transcend humanity. The French anthropologist L. Lévy-Bruhl, studying primitive thinking and ideas about the supernatural, shows that ancient man was aware of the existence of both good forces that help and evil ones that harm. He also provides examples of rituals aimed at appeasing both types of invisible forces (Lévy-Bruhl, 1910).

The French philosopher E. Renan, in his research, draws attention to the underestimation by modern historians of the role of "faith" among the first followers of Christ (Renan, 1870). Seeing him as the son of God, they significantly influenced the formation of the Christian understanding of God. Ukrainian researchers V. M. Petryk and V. V. Ostroukhov analyze the origins and development of the image of the Christian God's antipode, which has its roots in the Zoroastrian Avesta and the beliefs of the Paleolithic era, where people worshipped both good and evil spirits (Petryk, 2005). Historian A. Lukashenko, researching the influence of dualistic religious beliefs on the socio-cultural life of Western and Eastern Europe, also pays attention to the origin and evolution of dualism (Lukashenko, 2012a; 2017). Researchers T. Churton and B. Aland, in their works, examine the Gnostic vision of the world, which combined various spiritual traditions but was later declared

heretical by the Christian Church (Churton, 2005; Aland, 2014).

Dualistic religious beliefs, from their earliest origins to their interpretations in world religions, have rarely been the subject of a holistic and systematic study. Most often, they have been examined fragmentarily, within the study of other aspects of the religious worldview. That is why it is particularly important to trace their full evolution - from primitive mythological images to complex theological concepts. Such an analysis allows not only to reconstruct the process of development of religious ideas but also to understand how human consciousness changed and how the concept of good and evil was formed. This understanding is necessary to comprehend the lessons of the past and to prevent the repetition of history's mistakes.

The **purpose of the article** is to clarify the origins, developmental stages, and evolution of dualistic ideas in the religious consciousness of ancient civilizations from the earliest times to the beginning of the Common Era. The focus is on the analysis of the symbolism of light and darkness as manifestations of a sacred confrontation, the identification of their cultural and regional features, assessing the role of these beliefs in the formation of later religious and philosophical doctrines, particularly Gnosticism and early Christianity.

### Research methods

The methodological basis of the study is a complex of general scientific and philosophical methods chosen for a comprehensive analysis of Europe's ethical heritage in the context of contemporary challenges. In particular, the comparative method was used to conduct a comparative analysis of the value orientations of European civilization in historical retrospect and their transformation in the postmodern world. The hermeneutic method was applied to interpret classical philosophical texts and reveal the hidden meanings of the ethical concepts of "light" and "darkness," while the dialectical method allowed for the study of the contradictory nature of progress and the interaction of rational and spiritual factors in the formation of humanitarian security. Axiological approach plays a leading role in the work, becoming key to assessing the significance of moral virtues as instruments of spiritual self-defense of the individual. At the same time, the systemic approach ensured the consideration of spiritual security as a holistic structure based on the integration of ancient and Christian traditions, and the method of historical analysis contributed to tracing the genesis of the ethical foundations of European identity and their resilience to external ideological manipulations.

### Results and Discussion

Primitive man initially adhered to religious forms such as animism, totemism, fetishism, and magic. With the expansion of worldview concepts and the emergence of clearer value orientations, polytheism gradually formed. Life experience taught man which spirits were considered favorable and which were harmful. For example, the sun, which awakened nature in the spring, was perceived as a benevolent force. In contrast, the wind, due to its destructive consequences, was associated with a sinister element. Humans distinguished the spirits of nature as benevolent and hostile, but this division was conditional, lacking absolute antagonism. They were considered good or evil depending on their influence on people: beneficial actions testified to their benevolence, while harm was interpreted as a manifestation of evil. Moreover, the same spirits could bring both benefit and harm simultaneously.

Deities were endowed with human traits and passions; they could be merciful at one moment and severe at another. Benevolent gods were not revered more than fierce ones. The concept of evil as an independent force was not yet clearly defined; there is only a hint of the figure of the figure of Satan existed only as a destroyer, not yet as a tempter. With the development of moral concepts, humanity came to realize the existence of not only physical but also moral evil. Morality, which constitutes a set of rules for human behavior for the benefit of others, was not immediately instilled in primitive people or tribes. In the process of evolution, man began to observe an internal struggle within himself, similar to that which exists in nature. Yet, by inertia, moral evil was often associated with divine or demonic forces. Thus, by dividing nature into good and evil and projecting their own ideas of moral good and evil onto it, people created gods and demons according to their subjective assessments.

Over time, moral consciousness gradually established the dominance of good over evil, resulting in a clear demarcation between good and evil: the demon was separated from God. God appears as the embodiment of light, life, and love, while the demon represents darkness, death, and hatred. Thus, the opposition of the forces of good and evil is established, which is later manifested in all religious systems.

In the earliest religious beliefs, evil spirits already exist, but they are not yet separated from natural phenomena and do not have an independent status. With the development of religion, evil begins to acquire attributes of power and personal characteristics. Often, gods who were previously worshipped by a certain people were transformed into demons with the appearance of new cults. Such a fate befell, for example, the ancient Egyptian Set. A similar process occurred in the Aryan religion, recorded in the "Vedas," where the ancient Indian deities, the devas, became evil spirits (daevas) in the "Zend-Avesta." The gods of Ancient Greece and Rome were reinterpreted as evil spirits in the works of the Christian church fathers (Cunow, 1920).

The oldest, yet relatively reliable, information concerning dualistic beliefs is preserved in the religion of Ancient Egypt. The good deities were considered to be Ra, Amon, Osiris, and Isis, who were opposed by the serpent Apep, who personified the negative aspects of Set - the god of deceit and evil. The Egyptian Set, known to the Greeks by the name Typhon, was not always perceived as the personification of evil. However, as a result of religious transformations, he was excluded from the circle of good gods and turned into a demonic deity. Thus, although Set remained a sun god, he concentrated in himself the destructive and harmful aspects of the infernal heat, which the new moral consciousness could no longer identify with the absolute Sun-good, represented by Osiris or Horus.

Babylonian mythology also contains significant information about the confrontation between good and evil. A striking example is the epic of Gilgamesh and Huwawa. This myth was known throughout the Ancient Near East and influenced the formation of the image of the devil in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The plot clearly shows that the demonic image of Huwawa is not yet completely separated from the god Enlil. The killing of Huwawa provoked Enlil's outrage, as Huwawa was a kind of dark aspect of the deity and the executor of his will.

Besides is the Assyrian myth about the battle of Ninurta with the bird Anzu. The main theme here is the struggle against the power of the supreme god Enlil. Anzu, who

harbored a desire to destroy Enlil's power, acts as the archetype of the rebellious angel. The idea of evil in this myth has advanced further than in previous examples, but here too, we are not yet talking about a figure equivalent to the Christian Devil.

The dualistic opposition of good and evil was characteristic of the religion of the ancient Persians, set forth in *Zend-Avesta*. Here, the personification of the good principle in the image of Ahura-Mazda (Ormuzd) and the evil one in Angra-Mainyu (Ahriman) is clearly embodied. The first symbolizes light, truth, and goodness; the second - darkness, falsehood, and destruction. An incessant struggle for dominion over the world continues between these principles, and man is seen as an active participant in this confrontation. A person's good deeds strengthen the forces of light, while evil ones enhance the power of darkness. It is from this that the concept of posthumous reward for good deeds and punishment for sins committed during life originates.

The ancient society of Greeks and Romans did not have separate gods who personified evil. Instead, mythology is filled with stories about monsters and evil spirits - such as Typhon, Medusa Gorgon, Geryon, Python, as well as various insidious demons, lemures, and lares. Etymologically, the ancient Greek word "demon" meant a deity or spirit. The pantheon of Greek and Roman gods included Zeus (Jupiter), Poseidon (Neptune), Aphrodite (Venus), Ares (Mars), Athena (Minerva), Hera (Juno), Hermes (Mercury), Dionysus (Bacchus), Hephaestus (Vulcan), Nike (Victoria), and others.

Poseidon ruled the seas and was the god of seafaring, but sometimes he destroyed ships. Hephaestus was considered the patron of blacksmithing, but he controlled volcanoes that could destroy people and cities (Petryk, 2005). Dionysus was the god of viticulture and, at the same time, the god of drunkenness. Thus, the Greek gods combined both good and evil principles. In mythology, they were corporeal beings, and only with the development of philosophical thought did they lose their material shell. There were also beliefs that some people became gods after death if they performed outstanding deeds in life and gained reverence as immortals.

However, The Romans employed a cultural romanization practice which involved equating foreign deities with the most closely matching gods in their own pantheon. While this approach was first applied to the Greek gods it was later extended to the numerous other cults encountered across empire until Christianity. This is because most of the Roman Gods trace their origin to the Etruscan Gods. This is explained by the fact that most of the Roman Gods trace their origin to the Etruscan Gods, whose syncretism can be traced to the Greek poleis of Magna Graecia (southern Italy). However, there is no common denominator between them. For example, Ares embodied the horrors of war, massacre and rage, which is why his cult was not widespread. On the other side, Mars was the god of war, but also the god of growth and agriculture. This can be partly explained by the fact that the majority of the Roman militia was formed from landowning citizens. So, meaning of war for the Romans was not for plunder and murder, but for establishing order and protecting the land from invaders.

The teachings of the Kabbalah also contains mentions of the Devil. According to its teachings, for every person, there are 11,000 demons: one thousand on the right and ten thousand on the left. Demons are created from fire, air, and water; they are credited with the ability of

instantaneous movement. Such Kabbalistic ideas influenced Judaism, strengthening belief in both God and the Devil. Kabbalah also had an impact on Christian theologians, notably Thomas Aquinas, as well as on the development of medieval demonology.

Evidently, the religion of the ancient Persians also influenced Jewish religious beliefs during the period of Persian rule over the Semites. In the Old Testament, evil is often identified with the worship of foreign gods. An example is the Jewish goat-god – the evil desert spirit Azazel, to whom a "scapegoat" was offered on the Day of Atonement, laying human sins upon it (Leviticus 16:10). In the texts of Moses, Satan is depicted as a cunning creature – a serpent. In the Old Testament, the name Beelzebub is mentioned as a deity of idolaters. In the Book of Job, Satan is not yet an adversary of God or a destroyer of the Universe, but acts as a spirit who doubts man and functions as an executor of God's will. He is a kind of fate, an instrument for carrying out trials. By the Book of prophet Zechariah, he already appears as an adversary and accuser of the chosen people, seeking to deprive them of God's grace. In *Book of the Wisdom of Solomon* Satan appears as a destroyer and tempter who, out of envy, prompted the first parents to sin and brought death into the world (Aland, 2014).

In the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*, particularly in its oldest parts, the idea of a close connection between the Devil and man is first traced. His guilt consisted in apostasy from God for the sake of man and the betrayal of heaven for the earthly. The devils of Enoch are angels who fell through love for the daughters of men and allowed themselves to be drawn into materiality and lust. The Jews believed that a constant struggle between good and evil takes place within a person, as the body is the human principle, while the soul is divine. However, in Judaism, the Devil as a separate, independent personality did not acquire a clear image. He remains rather a negative facet of the jealous Yahweh, who personifies both good and evil simultaneously. In the Old Testament, demons are not given a significant role.

The dualistic understanding of the world – the opposition of God and matter, the finite and the infinite, the concept of dead matter and the idea of creation, as well as the identification of the body with the source of evil – constituted the main content of the philosophy of the Jewish Hellenist Philo of Alexandria. His ideas became the foundation for the formation of the theological doctrines of the first Christian thinkers.

In Christianity, God appears as the primordial, omnipresent, omnipotent, and eternal essence, the creator of all that exists. He is the source of being, and man is created by Him in His image. The Bible testifies that God actively intervenes in human history, sending prophets or carrying out punitive actions, such as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah or the Great Flood. Christian teaching asserts that man is endowed with free will but, tempted by the Devil, turned away from God. The Fall became the source of humanity's suffering – illness, war, death – and separated man from God. From this arose the need for salvation, which, according to Christian belief, was accomplished by Jesus Christ – God the Son – through his death and resurrection. This allows a person to return to a sinless state and gain eternal life.

God in Christianity is defined by several attributes: He is Spirit, Light, Omniscient, Omnipresent, Omnipotent, Unchanging, and a Just Judge. His main characteristic is love for humanity. Despite His love, God remains

mysterious and incomprehensible. Christians come to know Him through Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and mystical experience (Lukashenko, 2012b).

The Christian concept of good and evil is founded on a systematic dualism: God is the source of light and good, the Devil is the personification of darkness and evil. The Devil (Satan, Lucifer) was initially a perfect angel but fell through pride, seeking to become equal to God. For this, he was cast out of heaven and now acts as the "prince of this world," tempting people and inclining them to sin, seeking to deprive them of salvation. His servants are demons – angels who fell with him. In Christianity, the Devil does not act as God's equal opponent, rather, he remains a creature under God's control. That is why his direct opponent is often the archangel Michael, who resists the forces of evil. The coming of Christ becomes necessary because of human sin and the actions of the Devil: without the Devil, there would be no redemption. The Bible states that at the end of the world, the Devil will be finally defeated and cast into the lake of fire. The idea of his possible forgiveness (apocatastasis), proposed by Origen, was later rejected as heretical. Thus, Christianity creates a clear polarization of good and evil, embodied in the figures of God and the Devil, which determines the fundamental religious and worldview principles of the Christian tradition and its history.

In parallel with Christianity, in the 1st–2nd centuries CE, a religious-philosophical movement known as Gnosticism spread throughout the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Its teaching is based on the idea that the material world is an imperfect or evil creation of a lower deity (the Demiurge), and true salvation is possible only through acquiring secret knowledge (gnosis) of the divine spiritual nature of man. Gnosticism spread among Christian, Jewish, and Hellenistic communities, particularly in Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, and Rome.

It is particularly interesting to consider the problem of the relationship between good and evil through the example of Christian teaching and Gnosticism, because, despite their relative similarity, these two systems of thought have significant differences in their understanding of the ontological nature of good and evil, the essence of God, and the status of the Devil. It was these differences that became the basis for the Christian church to declare Gnosticism a heresy.

In Christianity, God is interpreted as an absolute, singular, good, and omnipresent entity who created the world out of love and wisdom. The biblical God is not only the Creator of all that exists – visible and invisible – but also the source of all good. The material world, according to Christian theologians, was created good, as testified in the Book of Genesis: "And God saw that it was good." In the Christian concept, evil is not a substantial or independent force. It is interpreted as a distortion or deviation from good, as a consequence of the free choice of creatures – primarily the fallen angels, as well as humans who turned away from God through the Fall. Christian theology asserts that evil has no independent nature and exists only insofar as a creature departs from its Creator. Thus, the opposition of good and evil in Christianity is not an absolute dualism of two co-equal principles, as evil exists only as a negation of good and is incapable of competing with God's omnipotence.

A different approach is demonstrated by Gnosticism – a religious-philosophical movement that gained significant popularity in the first centuries of our era. At the center of Gnostic beliefs lies the idea of two fundamentally different

realities: the world of the perfect, pure spirit, and the world of matter, which is seen as a prison for the soul. Gnosticism is characterized by the idea of a transcendent Supreme God (the Pleroma), who exists beyond the material world and has no direct connection to it. The material world, according to Gnostic beliefs, was not created by this Absolute, but by a lower divine being – the Demiurge, who is sometimes identified with the biblical Yahweh. The Demiurge in many Gnostic texts is treated as an imperfect being, and sometimes even as hostile to humanity, who creates the world from chaos without being aware of the true divine reality. That is why the material world in Gnosticism is often seen as evil or, at the very least, as a prison for the spiritual principle.

This divergence has fundamental consequences for the interpretation of the concept of evil. In Christianity, evil is a violation of free will, a sin as a conscious opposition to God, but matter as such remains good because it was created by God. In Gnosticism, on the other hand, evil is often identified with material existence itself. In Gnostic systems, man is considered a particle of the divine spark, imprisoned in a material body. Sin consists not only in bad deeds but primarily in ignorance of one's true spiritual nature. Salvation in Gnosticism consists in acquiring special knowledge (gnosis), through which a person realizes their origin from the Supreme God and seeks liberation from the material shackles (Churton, 2005), (Aland, 2014).

In this context, Christ in Gnosticism is seen primarily as an emissary of the transcendent God who brings secret knowledge to people, and not necessarily as a Savior through sacrifice and resurrection. Many Gnostic teachings even denied the real incarnation of Christ, which took the form of docetism - the doctrine according to which Christ's body was only an appearance, and He did not truly suffer on the cross.

Thus, there are fundamental differences between Christianity and Gnosticism in the ontology of good and evil. The Christian faith proclaims that the world and the human body are good by their nature, and that evil is only a deviation from good, correctable through Divine grace. Gnosticism, however, forms a dualistic picture in which the material world is perceived as an evil or imperfect sphere from which one must be liberated through gnosis.

The Church declared Gnosticism a heresy for several main reasons. First, Gnosticism demeans the God of the Old Testament, equating Him with an imperfect or even evil Demiurge, which contradicts the Christian doctrine of a single, good, and just God. Second, the devaluation of the material world and the human body denies the central Christian teaching of the real incarnation, suffering, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Christianity, the incarnation of Christ is proof that material creation is not evil and that God acts in the material world for human salvation. Third, Gnosticism created an elitist model of salvation, available only to the chosen few who possess secret knowledge, whereas Christianity proclaims salvation to be open to all through faith, repentance, and grace. Finally, Gnostic ethical guidelines often led either to excessive asceticism or to moral permissiveness, which contradicted the Christian teaching of a holy and righteous way of life (Churton, 2005).

Therefore, the Christian Church recognized Gnosticism as a heresy because it undermined the foundations of Christian anthropology, soteriology, and cosmogony. The opposition of God and the Demiurge, the idea of matter as evil, and the denial of the real incarnation of the Son of God

became key points of conflict. In Christianity, God remains the one and good Creator, and the Devil is a creature who fell away from God but does not have a status equal to Him. In Gnosticism, however, evil often appears as a cosmic principle embedded in the very structure of the world, which takes the concept of the struggle between good and evil to another level, far from Christian monotheism. Thus, the concept of good and evil in Gnosticism and Christianity not only has a different theoretical basis but also significantly different consequences for religious practice, the understanding of God, man, and the paths to his salvation. It was these profound differences that led to the sharply negative attitude of Christian orthodoxy towards Gnostic teachings and their condemnation as heretical (Aland, 2014).

The origins of dualism can be explained by several interrelated factors.

First, natural opposites – day and night, life and death – led to the emergence of symbolic thinking, which was expressed in myths as a struggle between two principles.

Second, social and moral experience gave rise to the need to bring order to chaos: to define good and evil, allies and enemies.

Third, social divisions (between "us" and "them") contributed to the establishment of dualistic patterns in religious beliefs.

Finally, philosophical and cultural influences—from Plato to Orphism and Eastern traditions—transformed dualism into a universal way of understanding existence. One of the main difficulties in studying the origins of dualism is the lack of direct sources: artifacts, myths, and folklore leave room for different interpretations. As Hans and Max Henning (Hans Henning, Max Henning, 2022) point out, dualistic systems often formed in conditions of social competition. At the same time, it is important to note that there is a continuum between dualism and non-dualism: in many Eastern philosophies, "light" and "darkness" appear as complementary forces. This approach helps us understand contemporary ideological conflicts not as a struggle between good and evil, but as a clash of values and worldviews. Therefore, the study of dualism requires avoiding simplistic explanations: each culture forms its own model of opposites in accordance with its historical and symbolic context.

### Conclusions

The analysis of the development of religious ideas about the nature of good and evil, God, and the Devil reveals a complex and multifaceted path of the formation of these concepts, from primitive beliefs to developed religious systems. In the religions of ancient civilizations, such as Egyptian, Babylonian, or Persian, good and evil were not yet clearly demarcated principles, and deities combined both good and evil traits. At the same time, in Zoroastrianism, a distinct dualism between light and darkness, good and evil, can already be traced. In the Old Testament, the Devil initially appears not as an independent antagonistic force, but as an instrument of divine justice, which changes in later Jewish and Christian texts.

Christianity was the first to clearly outline the polarization of good and evil, personified in the figures of God - the absolute, benevolent, omnipotent Creator - and the Devil, a creature who fell through pride and became the personification of darkness, temptation and sin. Evil in the Christian understanding is not an independent substance, but rather a consequence of creatures' departure from God's will. Salvation, accordingly, consists in man's return to God

through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who conquered evil on the cross.

Gnosticism, which emerged in the 1st–2nd centuries CE in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, proposed a different cosmogonic and soteriological model. It proclaimed the existence of a transcendent Supreme God, while considering the material world an imperfect creation of a lower deity - the Demiurge. In Gnosticism, evil is often identified with matter, and salvation consists in acquiring secret knowledge (gnosis) about the divine nature of man. Such a doctrine contradicted the Christian doctrine of the good nature of creation, the real incarnation and saving sacrifice of Christ, and also undermined the universality of Christian salvation by offering an elitist path of salvation only for the chosen. This is precisely what led to the Church's recognition of Gnosticism as a heresy.

Thus, the history of ideas about God, the Devil, good, and evil testifies to the evolution of human religious thought from mythological syncretic images to profound theological concepts that have defined not only the religious but also the cultural and social development of civilizations. Christianity, by proposing a dualistic yet not co-equal opposition of good and evil, gave these concepts a moral-ethical dimension, while at the same time defending the principle of a single, good God-Creator, which became one of the key differences from Gnostic teachings.

Reconsideration and self-reflection on the questions of good and evil must become an important step toward returning not only to the origins of Christian values but also to the universal foundations of the civilized world. Throughout its conscious history, humanity has sought to understand what is good and what is evil, for when confronted with violence, crises, and moral trials, it has always searched for a way out – a path toward light, justice, and the preservation of humanity. In an era of global threats and the war that Russia is waging against the European space, it is especially important to realize that violence, aggression, and the devaluation of human life stand on the opposite side of civilization. Such an understanding should unite nations, strengthen moral resilience, and leave no

room for legitimizing evil or justifying aggression as a “normal” form of interaction. Only principledness, unity, and fidelity to spiritual and ethical foundations can become a true wall that protects the civilized world and ensures its survival.

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# Світло і темрява: витоки етичної спадщини Європи та повернення до базових цінностей як чинник духовного самозахисту

Аліса Лукашенко (ORCID 0000-0001-5136-5657)

Київський столичний університет імені Бориса Грінченка (Україна)

Віталій Андреєв (ORCID 0000-0003-1830-0629)

Київський столичний університет імені Бориса Грінченка (Україна)

Дослідження дуалістичних систем вірувань у доісторичному та ранньому історичному контекстах дає глибше розуміння коренів сучасних релігійних та ідеологічних конфліктів. Таке дослідження допомагає простежити витоки дихотомії, які продовжують формувати колективну культурну пам'ять людства. Актуальність теми ще більше підкріплюється зростаючим інтересом до релігійного плюралізму, міжкультурного діалогу та пошуку універсальних духовних основ - тем, які набувають особливого значення в сучасну епоху глобалізації та релігійного різноманіття. Актуальність теми добра і зла зумовлена історико-філософським поверненням до переосмислення зasadничих людських цінностей, побудованих на принципах ненасильства й людяності, які в умовах війни росії проти цивілізованого світу набувають значення духовного самозахисту та основи фізичного виживання людини. Метою статті є з'ясування витоків, етапів формування та еволюції дуалістичних уявлень у релігійній свідомості давніх цивілізацій

від найдавніших часів до початку нашої ери. Методологія дослідження ґрунтуються на міждисциплінарному підході, що поєднує історико-релігієзнавчий, компаративний, герменевтичний та культурологічний методи. Застосовано також елементи структурного аналізу міфологічних текстів, а також історико-типологічне порівняння релігійних систем. Автори простежують історичну динаміку переходу від міфологічної опозиції світла і темряви до системного онтологічного дуалізму, що сформував підґрунтя для виникнення гностичних ідеологем. Показано, що еволюція уявлень про добро і зло, Бога та Диявола демонструє поступовий переход від синкретичних вірувань давніх цивілізацій до складних теологічних концепцій. У зороастризмі вперше чітко простежується дуалізм світла і темряви, що згодом трансформується у християнську опозицію між Богом і Дияволом. Християнство сформулювало морально-етичний вимір дуалізму, визнаючи зло як наслідок відступу від Божої волі, а не як рівносильну силу. В епоху глобальних загроз та війни, яку росія веде проти європейського простору, особливо важливо усвідомити, що насильство, агресія та знецінення людського життя стоять на протилежному боці цивілізації. Таке розуміння має об'єднувати народи, зміцнювати моральну стійкість і не залишати місця для легітимізації зла чи виправдання агресії як «нормальної» форми взаємодії.

**Ключові слова:** дуалістичні релігійні уявлення, античне суспільство, поліс, романізація, зороастризм, гностицизм, християнство, інтеграція.

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