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# The Tree of Gnosis



*Gnostic Mythology from Early  
Christianity to Modern Nihilism*



Ioan P. Couliano

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# The Tree of Gnosis

The intellectual adventure story that explains and challenges the way we think about ourselves, the world, and belief itself.

In this landmark work, Ioan Couliano, a path-breaking religious scholar in the tradition of Mircea Eliade, explores Gnosticism (a branch of early Christianity) and the worldview that divides reality into radically opposed absolutes. From Gnosticism to Zoroastrianism to modern nihilism, Couliano traces the roots of this enduring construction, and clarifies the profound reasons for its perennial appeal. In a comprehensive history of this pervasive but largely unacknowledged outlook that there exists a primeval, ineradicable division between God and creation, good and evil, the spiritual and the material, Couliano draws on thinkers from St. Augustine to Albert Einstein and Elaine Pagels.

Using as a framework the study of Gnosticism and dualism, Couliano probes the philosophical theories and practical consequences of Western thought. In a bold challenge, he posits dualism as the essential defining characteristic of Gnosticism, relating it to the myth of the Trickster. Couliano denies that dualism implies a negative attitude toward the world, and he questions the appropriateness of most modern analogies. In the process, he offers the reader a thorough, provocative history of an idea, including its place in modern intellectual debates.

*The Tree of Gnosis* also advances a remarkable interpretation of religions as serious games based on relatively simple, but distinct, premises and sets of rules. "The fascination many of us have with chess and other games derives from their ability to challenge the mind's computational skills, which, we

*(continued on back flap)*

*(continued from front flap)*

may add, is all the mind has, when viewed at a certain level," Couliano writes. "Fascination with religion . . . derives—although much more unexpectedly—from the same source, for religion, like philosophy, science, and even literature, is equally a computational process."

Couliano's highly original work, praised by such figures as Harold Bloom and Umberto Eco, establishes an entirely new paradigm for understanding not only gnostic mythology, but the nature of religion and the human mind.



IOAN P. COULIANO (1950–1991) is the author of *Experiences of Ecstasy, Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, *Outward Bound: History of Otherworldly Journeys and Visions*, and many other books. He is coauthor, with Mircea Eliade, of *The Eliade Guide to the World's Religions*.

Jacket design by Dorothy Marschall

# The Tree of Gnosis

"... an erudite and multilingual man... Couliano was a soft-spoken man who loved the magic and mystery of ancient religions and wrote about them like a poet."

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A brilliant work that provides the first comprehensive account of the dualistic mythos that constitutes a crucial hidden dimension in Western culture and radically challenges how we think about religion itself.

"In appearance, and in appearance only, the topic of this book is the study of a number of trends, first in religion and then in philosophy, literature, and science, that share a common set of assumptions, such as that this world and its Creator are, if not evil, at least inferior. To this extent, not only will students of medieval history find in this book a completely updated version of Runciman's classic *The Medieval Manichees*, now obsolete, but students of late antiquity will encounter the most complete exposition of gnostic mythology (including Manichaeism and the non-gnostic Marcion) yet attempted.

"The basic novelty of this work... reside[s] in its method. Our modern view of history is vague and outdated. It is need of radical revision in the light of what is occurring in more sophisticated areas of knowledge, whose worldview started changing a hundred years ago."  
—from the foreword

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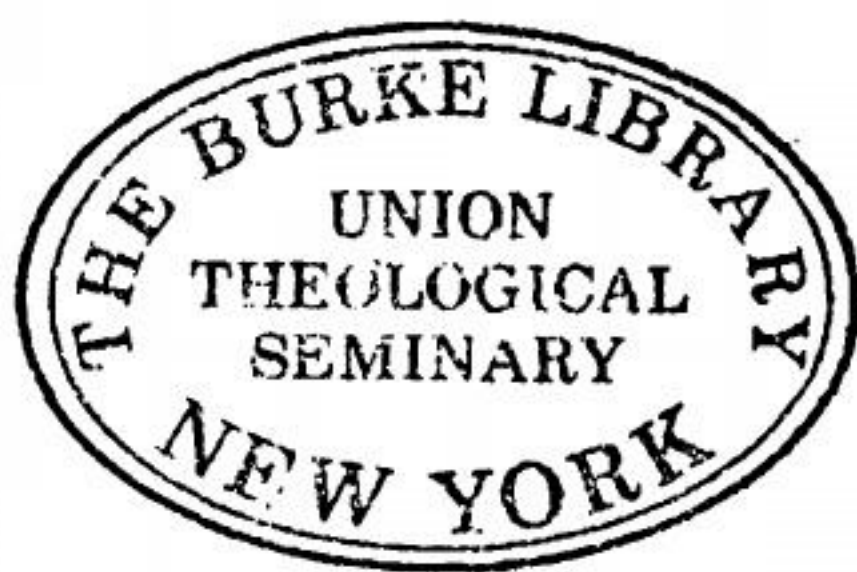
—UMBERTO ECO

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to Modern Nihilism

*Ioan P. Couliano*

*Translated into English by H. S. Wiesner  
and the author*



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*The Mind is its own place, and in it self  
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.*

—MILTON, *Paradise Lost* I. 254–5



# Foreword

In appearance, and in appearance only, the topic of this book is the study of a number of trends, first in religion and then in philosophy, literature, and science, that share a set of common assumptions, such as that this world and its Creator are, if not evil, at least inferior. To this extent, not only will students of medieval history find in this book a completely updated version of Steven Runciman's classic *The Medieval Manichees*, now obsolete, but students of late antiquity will encounter the most complete exposition of gnostic mythology (including Manichaeism and the non-gnostic Marcion) yet attempted.

Although I expect the book to be challenging enough for specialists in all the above mentioned areas, from the historian of late antiquity to the medievalist, I think that the basic novelty of this work does not reside as much in the bulk of information put together for the first time as in its method. Our modern view of history is vague and outdated. It is in need of radical revision in the light of what is occurring in more sophisticated areas of knowledge, whose worldview started changing a hundred years ago. The discipline of history failed to join this trend and in fact has not explicitly changed its general premises perhaps for millennia. This is an embarrassing situation. Its remedy should be far more radical than the invention of a few fashionable labels, in German or more recently in French, that would keep both the scholars and the audience quietly satisfied for a few decades.

Some may object after reading this book that it does not actually go much beyond the methodology of structuralism, in so far as its greatest achievement can be said to consist in showing that the ideas of the different trends of dualistic Gnosis—from Gnosticism to the Cathars to Romantic poets and XXth-century philosophers and biologists—hold together by virtue of belonging *to the same system*, generated by similar premises. They cannot be explained as being derived from each other or anyway not according to the dominating concept of derivation or "descent" commonly used in historical disciplines. (As we will see, in some cases we are confronted with a process that can be defined as "cognitive transmission.") But is this not what a structuralist means by saying that ideas are "synchronic"?

That is undeniable. A structuralist may indeed identify parts of what we call ideal objects, that is, systems of ideas that exist in their "logical dimension" (for an explanation see the Introduction). In order to identify whole systems, the criterion of complexity should be satisfied (the more data we have, the more correct the identification). The form of structuralism practiced by Claude Lévi-Strauss meets this requirement as well. Then to what extent does my approach claim to exceed structuralism's possibilities and intentions?

As the Introduction of this book endeavors to show, ideal objects interact in time to form history. In other words, the mere "morphology" of a system, which is the aim of a structuralist description, is integrated into a dynamic process of extraordinary proportions that is the temporal interaction of all such systems. This process with an infinite number of dimensions we call history. Given its infinite-dimensional character, can we ever hope to understand it? Is it perhaps not wiser to revert to mere "morphologies" of ideal objects instead of attempting to have a look at their uncannily complex patterns of interaction?

At this stage it is perhaps difficult to go far beyond the morphology of systems. Yet it should be repeatedly emphasized that what we aim at is "morphodynamics," the study of events in space-time. In other words, I favor a cognitive approach that would involve diachrony as an obligatory dimension of the world, not one we can dispense with.

The main object of my research is formed by a number of Western religious trends, from Gnosticism to the Provençal and Lombard Cathars, usually called dualistic. A certain generic resemblance among these trends had already been recognized by medieval heresiologists. It was reluctantly confirmed by modern scholarship (understandably inclined to dismiss heresiological reports), starting with Ignaz von Döllinger (1890), according to variable procedures that tended to become more sophisticated in the 1960s. In most cases the direct descent of one of these medieval trends from the chronologically preceding one was sought for (and found only by unscrupulous scholars). This approach delivered surprising results only when huge chronological leaps were ascertained (as between Origenism and Catharism); this meant that old ascetic ideologies were simply reinstated by medieval revivalistic movements.

At the same time, an insistent search for the invariants of "dualism" was taking place, which led, at least in some circles, to the conviction that Western dualistic trends shared a number of traits, such as anticosmism, or the idea that this world is evil; antisomatism, or the idea that the body is evil; encratism, that is, asceticism that went so far as to ban

marriage and procreation. Other traits, although not universal, were often discerned in these movements, such as docetism (the belief that Christ's passion and death on the cross were illusory, as was his body, although the extent of the illusion and the script remained negotiable) and complete or partial vegetarianism. Likewise, from all—even contradictory—viewpoints of the moral systems of different periods, including the Roman, the Jewish, and the Christian, these trends have been described as antinomian, that is, opposed to common order (nomos).

Once we dismiss as illusory the quest for the "pre-Christian" origins of Gnosticism—chronologically first of a long series of Western dualistic movements—which animated the now altogether compromised German school of history of religions (*religionsgeschichtliche Schule*), then the question is legitimate whether Western dualism is anything else but an extremist fringe of Christianity. Such a solution, advanced a number of times with renewed arguments, is certainly tempting.

Yet one is compelled to acknowledge that, beginning with the immediate successors of the apostles, the Church Fathers would condemn docetism. By the mid-II<sup>nd</sup> century, with Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165), the first thorough condemnation of Gnosticism (and of Marcion, viewed as a gnostic, which he was not) resounded. Already by 180–85, when the heresiologist Irenaeus from Asia Minor, who had become bishop of Lyon in the Roman province of Gaul (today France), wrote his long "Exposure and Reversal of the False Gnosis" (*Elenchos kai anatropē tēs pseudōnymou gnōseōs*), the gnostics were the major preoccupation of mainstream Christianity.

In the jungle of diplomatic nuances that scholarship avoids much less than we like to think, it became predictable that some scholars would emphasize the independence of Gnosticism from Christianity while others would try to vindicate the heresiologists by showing that, after all, gnostics were indeed Christian heretics. For whatever reasons generations of German scholars tried (and a few still try) to emphasize the extremely unlikely Iranian roots of both Gnosticism and Christianity, and the derivation of the latter from the former rather than the opposite, it should offend no one to recognize a more than tenuous link between this strange opinion and the Zeitgeist out of which full-blown Nazism sprang at a later stage. That the trend is reversed today, and Gnosticism made almost into a Jewish heresy, is certainly an improvement, yet only to the extent that gnostics used the Tanakh and perhaps early midrashim no less than the Christians, and at times apparently slightly more. Original gnostic mythology is as little Jewish as it is Iranian or Christian.

Then what is gnostic mythology?

Scholars of Gnosticism have a background in biblical philology and theology yet hardly know how anthropologists define myth and how they analyze it. Therefore, anytime the merely "dualistic" roots of gnostic myth are brought to their attention, they dismiss the matter by proudly asserting that, even if it may be true that gnostics "borrowed" some popular stories of creation, they made of them something quite superior and semiphilosophical. Yet one more question arises, which theologians tend to interpret rather naively in a perspective fortunately abandoned by anthropology: If something is "borrowed," one must find a *precise source*. In other words, if gnostic myth is "borrowed" from "popular religion," wherever and whenever this transmission may occur has to be precisely documented. Anthropologists, by contrast, recognized long ago that myth exists in innumerable variants that are transformations of one another and may originate quite independently in the operations of human minds in any setting. To this extent gnostic myth is a particular transformation that belongs to a vast series of myths known as "dualistic" (see chapter 1). The perennial and frustrating quest for establishing unequivocally the "origins" of gnostic myth is thus dismissed as redundant, since any transformation of myth has by definition a cognitive origin. A radical shift of emphasis from the "origins" of Western dualism to the *system* of Gnosis in itself has become necessary, and this book intends to effect it.

This perspective will help us understand that the first link in the chain of Western dualism, Gnosticism, is not a monolithic doctrine but simply a set of transformations belonging to a multidimensional, variable system that allows room for illimitable variation. This system is based on different inherited assumptions, stable though interpretable, of which the myth of the Book of Genesis seems to be the most common. (Clearly, as Birger Pearson noticed, this explains why Gnosticism shares so much with Judaism: the basic data come from the Torah, but the type of exegesis they are submitted to often runs contrary to the major assumptions of the Torah.)

But gnostics do not establish a real tradition, based on hermeneutical continuity, to the extent that they could be defined by "invariants." As a matter of fact, any definition of Gnosticism by invariants is bound to be wrong, as based only on incomplete inference contradicted by whole sectors of data in our possession. Thus not all gnostics were anticosmic, encratite, or docetist; not all of them believed in the Demiurge of this world or even that this world was evil, and not all of them believed in metempsychosis or reincarnation of the preexistent soul.

Yet if gnostics were free to believe everything and its contrary, why do we still maintain the existence of a phenomenon called Gnosticism? This book will show that the system of Western dualism starts from certain premises and has an undeniable existence in its logical dimension. I define as gnostic slices through this system, which are transformations of one another to the extent that the system itself allows them.

On a more general level, though, we have two good criteria that allow us to understand why, and to what extent, Gnosticism was revolutionary in its cultural setting. At this stage the selection of these criteria may seem arbitrary; later on, it will become quite apparent that they are central to the concerns of any culture. One is the criterion of ecosystemic intelligence—that is, the degree to which the universe in which we live can be attributed to an intelligent and good cause. The other one is the anthropic principle—that is, the affirmation of the commensurability and mutual link between human beings and the universe.

If we examine the most important cultural proposals present for consumption at the outset of the Christian era—Platonism, Judaism, and Christianity—we come to the conclusion that they share both the principle of ecosystemic intelligence (this universe is created by a good and highly intelligent cause and is basically good) and the anthropic principle, the proper fit of the universe to its human occupants. Yet Gnosticism rejects both of these principles: even when the gnostic Demiurge is fairly good, he remains inferior and ignorant, while human beings do not belong to this world. This position has been traditionally defined as pessimistic, yet it obviously represents an exceedingly radical form of acosmic optimism, for human beings belong to a higher and better world than this one. Hans Jonas seemed to point this out when he compared Gnosticism and existentialist philosophy, the latter being a rather naively excessive transformation of pessimism in so far as it does reject the anthropic principle but posits no consanguinity between humans and a better world. (According to existentialism, you are simply lost in a world where you do not belong; according to Gnosticism, you are lost in a lower realm as long as you ignore that you belong to a higher one.)

Compared with the major trends that define culture, Gnosticism is certainly a phenomenon of counterculture, and the situation remains more or less the same for all Western dualistic trends that will be analyzed here.

The system of Gnosticism is extremely complex, implying innumerable transformations. Compared with it, all other dualistic trends are simpler. Marcion (chapter 5) shares the rules of gnostic exegesis without being a gnostic. Manichaeism (chapter 6) is a further transformation of a

certain type of Gnosticism. Among medieval movements, the situations vary largely. Paulicianism (chapter 7) is a transformation of Marcionism, whereas Bogomilism (chapter 8) is just a form of orthodox—be it outlandishly archaic—Christianity. Catharism (chapter 9) consists of two doctrines: one is just classical Bogomilism, the other a transformation of IVth-century Origenism, doubtlessly synthesized among a circle of revivalist Eastern monks. Yet beyond their variegated appearances, all Western dualistic trends can be envisaged as different facets of a single larger system.

From the beginning of the XVth to the end of the XVIIIth century, dualism seems to exist only as a historical curiosity in the books of heresiologists and encyclopedists. Yet by 1850 there was already a whole efflorescence of Romantic myth showing extraordinary resemblances to gnostic myth. The last chapter of this book will explore the mechanism that produces pseudognostic scenarios as part of a system set in motion by modern nihilism.

Concerned with structure and system, this book cannot dwell on vague, romantic hypotheses meant to show some interaction between dualism and society. It can only energetically dismiss the wild claim, made only too often, that a correlation exists between dualism and social "crisis." History is a mechanism too vast to slip us secret formulas. It can, now and then, allow us a view of systems of ideas in their logical dimension, but it still withholds from us the infinitely complex map of interaction of such systems.

# Acknowledgments

The project of this book was conceived in 1973, and some of its themes have appeared in my work—a number of other books and a steady flow of articles and book reviews—from 1973 to date. Its French edition, of which the English is an entirely revised version, was written in 1986 during my tenure as a Fellow of the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Study in Wassenaar. My thanks go to Dirk van de Kaa, the director of this institution, which kept me away for one year from the *bellum omnium contra omnes* that follows from the perennial predicament of Dutch universities.

Several times, before and after publication, the ideas of this book have been submitted to larger audiences. During the spring quarter of 1986 they were discussed in a graduate seminar at the University of Chicago. Its students (Carol Anderson, Philip Cray, Ramona Hartweg, Richard Heinemann, and Karen Pechilis) and auditors alike deserve my gratitude. Parts of the book formed the topic of a number of lectures at the University of Chicago: one of the 1986 Hiram Thomas Lectures and one of the 1987 Nathaniel Colver Lectures. For the special warmth of my reception in Chicago I would like to thank many colleagues (and often-times their partners): Gosta Ahlstrom, Dieter Betz, Jerald Brauer, Anne Carr, Wendy Doniger, the late Mircea Eliade, Chris Gamwell, Brian Gerrish, Clark Gilpin, Robert Grant, Joseph M. Kitagawa, Martin Marty, Bernard McGinn, the late Arnaldo Momigliano, Michael Murrin, Frank Reynolds, J. Z. Smith, Larry Sullivan, David Tracy, and Tony Yu, among others.

I lectured on related topics on several other occasions: at the University of Rome, upon the invitation of Ugo Bianchi in February 1989; at the 1989 AAR-SBL meeting in Anaheim, California (both in the Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism section and in the Manichaeism Seminar); at the University of Salerno, at the invitation of Massimo Oldoni and Roberto Rusconi; at Trinity College, Dublin, upon the invitation of Andrew Massey and Werner Jeanrond; as moderator of the colloquium on myth, Torino Book Fair, 1990; and in several other places. I would like to thank all of my associates who made these occasions possible.

During many years I had fruitful exchanges with a great number of scholars. I learned Coptic to check existing translations from Gerard Luttikhuisen (and took exams with him and Herman te Velde at the University of Groningen). And I constantly received offprints and/or support from many in the field, of whom I would especially like to mention Bernard Barc, Dieter Betz, Ugo Bianchi, François Bovon, R. van den Broek, Hubert Cancik, Giovanni Casadio, M. V. Cerutti, J. J. Collins, Carsten Colpe, Arthur Droge, Robert Grant, Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, Giovanni Filoramo, Jarl Fossum, Jean-Claude Fredouille, Florentino Garcia, Gherardo Gnoli, Ithamar Gruenwald, David Hellholm, Moshe Idel, Hans Jonas, Hans Kippenberg, Gerard Luttikhuisen, Giancarlo Mantovani, George MacRae, Michel Meslin, the late Arnaldo Momigliano, Tito Orlandi, Luciano Pellicani, Gilles Quispel, Mac Ricketts, Julien Ries, Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, Alan Segal, Michael Stone, Guy Stroumsa, Lawrence Sullivan, Jacob Taubes, André Vauchez, the late Maarten Vermaseren, Adela Yarbro Collins, Hans Witte, Elémire Zolla—with apologies to those many whom I must have inadvertently omitted from this enumeration.

When I changed my area of study in 1973 from Indology to Gnosticism, and studied with Ugo Bianchi in Milan for almost four years, during which I took various exams in early Christianity, New Testament, biblical theology, anthropology, medieval history, and several other disciplines, I felt myself attracted to Gnosticism in a way that Hans Jonas—whom I had the privilege to meet many times thereafter—would have defined as “existentially rooted.” Now, after a dispassionate analysis of all Western dualistic trends, I think that my apprehension of the world during that period was certainly derived from the twenty-two years I had spent in one of the most totalitarian communist countries: Romania. I escaped in 1972, but the trauma persisted for roughly ten years and was not entirely cured until December 1989, when I saw on television the bodies of the executed Archon of that world and his equally evil consort. If I found healing, Romania has not yet, but that is an entirely different topic. Anyway, for my share of personal interest in Gnosticism I am bitterly indebted to the evil Archons who chased me into exile until I found a hospitable land.



# Introduction

In 1916 Albert Einstein published one of those very few books that matter in human history, called *The Special and General Theory of Relativity, for General Understanding*. The German word is *gemeinverständlich*. To his friends, Einstein jokingly referred to it as *gemeinunverständlich*, “for general misunderstanding.”<sup>1</sup>

The private Einstein was more correct than the public one. To the lay person who tries to figure out the consequences of Einstein’s theory, the ensuing worldview is mind-boggling. It is so remote from experience that it can in no way be represented without at least some explanation. Einstein himself gave that elsewhere, in cryptic words that say that imagination, dream, and vision, albeit disavowed by scholars, play a part that exceeds mere reasoning in scientific theories.<sup>2</sup>

With a little historical background, one can follow some of Einstein’s references. To explain why we are not in a position to understand the world from inside out, he resorts to a rather famous fable: the fable of *Flatland* devised by a Shakespearean scholar, the Reverend Edwin Abbott Abbott,<sup>3</sup> in the early 1880s. Let us suppose that we have a two-dimensional world, with two-dimensional inhabitants. They would be wholly unaware of the existence of the third dimension, and phenomena whose explanation is trivial in a three-dimensional world would be as many riddles to them, which only *Flatland* geniuses might be able to comprehend. Starting from this analogy, Einstein developed his view of the universe as being the hypersurface<sup>4</sup> of a hypersphere. If five dimensions were enough for Einstein to make sense of the physical forces known to him, today physicists in search of a Grand Unified Theory (GUT) of the universe increase the number of dimensions to ten or eleven, seven of which are wrapped up in tiny particles.<sup>5</sup> To give one striking example of the usefulness of this theory, we could just mention that electricity is explained as the result—or rather the reception—of four-dimensional gravity in our three-dimensional world.<sup>6</sup>

Einstein’s view of the universe, as predicted, was “generally misunderstood.” Nevertheless it gave rise to a proliferation of methods of investigation that profoundly affected the humanities. We can say that, with a few exceptions—the most noteworthy being the biologist D’Arcy

Wentworth Thompson—scholars were not usually establishing any direct filiation between their theories and the Einsteinian universe. Yet, when properly reinterpreted in their historical context, all these theories show astounding similarities. Today we call them cognitive;<sup>7</sup> the Russian scholars, writers, and artists who in the 1920s began a whole movement that bore fruit in linguistics and literary theory called them formalism; they are better known from their French version, which spread under the name of “structuralism.”

No matter how apparently divergent their premises, all of these cognitive methods have one thing in common: They recognize a synchronic or systemic dimension to any historical phenomenon, and, in most cases, they reject our common views of history as meaningless. (In fact the word *history* is meaningless; it is what Gregory Bateson calls an explanatory principle—that is, a principle that, without explaining anything, simply states the limits of our knowledge.) In what follows, I will describe the essence of some of these methods. Yet I have to say from the outset that many of them are of little use to the historian, in so far as they fail in their attempt to integrate system and history, synchrony and diachrony.

The most extraordinary consequence of the Einsteinian space-time continuum for the historian of ideas is the existence of “ideal objects” which become understandable only when they are recognized as such in their own dimension. This may sound even more incomprehensible than Einstein’s universe. To make it understandable let us revert to *Flatland*, and suppose that the flat country is the surface of the soup in a dish. Let us suppose that the circles of oil on that surface are the intelligent inhabitants of Flatland. Obviously, being two-dimensional they can move in two directions only: left-right and forward-backward. The direction up-down is as meaningless to them as would be a new direction to us, toward an unknown fourth dimension (the mathematician Rudy Rucker calls such a direction *ana-kata*).<sup>8</sup> What they see of each other is a line, any space (such as a house or a bank) being closed to them by a line only. Yet, seeing them from a third direction of space, we can directly see their entrails, the interiors of their houses, and we could easily steal from their most well guarded bank safe. (As strange as it might seem, a being in a hypothetical fourth dimension of space would equally enjoy these advantages relative to us.)

Let us now suppose that I disturb all this flat world by starting to eat the soup with a spoon. How would a Souplander experience the spoon?

He or she would be horrified by a strange phenomenon. First a rather short line, corresponding to the tip of the spoon, would appear in

Soupland, which would increase as the spoon reaches for the bottom of the dish and would decrease again when the handle crosses the surface. Then, all of a sudden, a tremendous soupquake would take place, and part of the world would be absorbed into nowhere. The disruption would continue for a while, as soup drips out of the spoon and crosses Soupland, then the situation would revert to normal.

To the Souplander, the spoon does not appear as a solid, vertical object, as it appears to us. *Souplanders can experience the spoon only as a series of phenomena in time.* It should not come as a surprise that life expectations are rather short in Soupland. Therefore it would take millions or billions of generations of Souplanders to make sense of the spoon phenomena. And it would take a genius of uncommon depth to make calculations that would show that the only way to put them together would be to postulate the existence of a superior dimension—the third—in which objects of an unknown sort exist. (Since they cannot possibly see us, even the most intelligent of the Souplanders would probably believe that the third dimension is just a mathematical fiction that serves only as a heuristic device.)

Similarly, we fail to understand what phenomena may be in space-time (and what “history” really means), especially when the objects of our inquiry are not tangible. Many do not even believe a “history of ideas” to be possible, let alone a history that would not be mere summation but something having to do with “space-time”! Yet the novelty of the multifarious methods that belong to the cognitive approach was to show that ideas are synchronous. In other words, ideas form systems that can be envisaged as “ideal objects.” These ideal objects cross the surface of history called time as the spoon crosses Soupland, that is, in an apparently unpredictable sequence of temporal events.

As I indicated before, no matter how all cognitive methods treating historical phenomena (including ideal objects) synchronically have so far enriched our understanding of the past, it is legitimate to draw a line between those that failed to provide meaningful clues for the integration of synchrony and diachrony and those that did not shrug before this supreme test of our discipline. The century’s fascination with archetypes and repetition, formalism, structuralism, and “morphologies” of different kinds needs neither proof nor exposition here. Yet only a very few of the forebears of the cognitive approach could understand (and a great many of them would be as surprised to find out about this as their critics) that what had triggered their dissatisfaction with traditional methods was actually the new view of time implied in Einstein’s theory of general relativity.

Which are the theories most frequently cited in favor of a synchronic or "morphological" approach? A few scholars would be bold enough to cite Goethe's *Metamorphosis of Plants*, either as tribute to an innocent precursor or because they did not know better. In his second essay on the *Metamorphosis of Plants* (ca. 1790), Goethe thus defined morphology: "Morphology should include the theory of form, formation, and transformation of organic natures."<sup>9</sup> The main idea of Goethe's morphology (which had already been formulated by Caspar Friedrich Wolff in 1759) was that all parts of a plant were metamorphoses of its leaves. In his later years Goethe also "postulated a general spiral trend, supposed to be inherent throughout the plant kingdom and correlated with the vertical upward trend of the stem."<sup>10</sup>

During his travels in Italy (1786–88), Goethe had been looking for the archetypal plant, the *Urpflanze*, "a plant which would be as simple as possible in structure—so elementary in fact that all other forms of growth could be traced to it."<sup>11</sup> Goethe did not know that what he was looking for was not a natural object but its ideal program. He felt insulted when Schiller pointed out the difference to him. Later on he acknowledged that the *Urpflanze* was a "type" (*Typus*), a mental construct, but even then he—together with 150 years of positivism after him—failed to understand that this basic transformation is in a certain sense more real than the plant itself. In Goethe's theory there is a certain general recognition of homologies, but the way transformation takes place remains basically unaccounted for.

Far more than Goethe, the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) was the main source upon which structuralists drew, continually referring to his distinction between "synchrony" and "diachrony" of a language and his emphasis on the synchronic study thereof.<sup>12</sup> With refinements introduced first by Prince Nicholas S. Trubetskoy (*Principles of Phonology*, 1939) and then by Roman Jakobson, phonology became the main model for the analysis of myth and narrative.

The man behind this trend was the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who called the world's attention to forgotten scholarship on the constant structures of narrative, such as *The Morphology of Folktales* by Vl. Ja. Propp (1928) and many other studies by Russian formalists. As it has often been emphasized, Lévi-Strauss's first view of myth as an "invariant" (like the phoneme in linguistics) proved to be wrong and was tacitly discarded by its author, who later used the more sophisticated concept of "transformation." Despite his cautious attitude toward enouncing theories, Lévi-Strauss nevertheless explained the wealth of analogy between myths in unrelated geographical areas as a result of the

basic structural identity of the operations performed by human minds everywhere. [In other words, confronted with similar facts, the mind will always produce similar outcomes.]

From his first essays on myth to his formidable *Mythologiques* (1964–1971), a study of South American mythologies in four volumes, Lévi-Strauss made a breakthrough: the discovery of *time*. Yet, notwithstanding his concept of “transformation,” he could never explain how time itself fit into the picture. For his failure to integrate history into his theory, Lévi-Strauss remains—literally and only literally—the most distinguished “prehistorical” ancestor of the cognitive approach.

Many other scholars of religion and myth made use of systemic tools in their approaches. Among the most important were Émile Durkheim, Georges Dumézil, and Mircea Eliade. Durkheim and Dumézil, contrary to Lévi-Strauss and Eliade, thought that religion was heteronomous, that is, that it encoded social relationships. Eliade, by contrast, emphasized the autonomy and irreducibility of religion and endeavored to delineate its depth structures. He did so by rejuvenating the old tool of religious phenomenology, invented around 1850 by Dutch and German Protestant scholars and perfected by an ambiguous master: the Dutchman Gerardus van der Leeuw, professor of theology at the University of Groningen. Unfortunately, phenomenology shares with Goethe’s morphology the impossibility of accounting for historical transformations. Much like Carl Gustav Jung’s version of psychoanalysis, it works with the assumption of certain inexplicable (or not yet explainable) “archetypes” that would be stored in the human “psyche” like a mysterious genetic code. Even if one admits the possibility of such phylogenetic accretions on the individual psyche, one would still have to struggle against the oddities of Jungian theory. In his later years, Eliade tried to combine phenomenology and history in a large tractate on the history of religions.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most sophisticated cognitive scholars of this century remains the biologist D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson (1860–1948), professor at Saint Andrew’s University in Scotland, who was at the same time a powerful mathematician and a consummate classical scholar. He could write with equal ease on Greek mathematics, Greek children’s games, Aristotle, Plato, the morphology of plants and animals, and many other topics. His main work, *On Growth and Form* (1917), was one of the most original (and therefore controversial) of this century.<sup>14</sup> Out of print since 1952, it exists in an abridged edition.<sup>15</sup> Yet Thompson may still become one of the major factors in the new morphological trend present in the works of mathematicians like Rudy Rucker.<sup>16</sup>

D'Arcy Thompson knew too much mathematics to subscribe to the current statement of Neo-Darwinism according to which, given enough time, one hundred monkeys on one hundred typewriters would eventually type the *Divine Comedy*. In fact, given the order of temporal magnitude of this universe, the probability of such an occurrence is practically zero. Being equally harsh on Neo-Darwinian attempts at proving evolution with the aid of morphology, Thompson was marginalized by a scientific community that saw Darwinism vindicated by the progress of genetics. Yet Thompson certainly did not deny heredity. He wrote that heredity was "one of the great factors in biology," "a vastly important as well as mysterious thing"<sup>17</sup>—thereby implying that the Neo-Darwinian viewpoint on it might have been largely wrong. What he categorically dismissed was natural selection, which he qualified as "mystical idealism."<sup>18</sup> Far from criticizing Darwin from some vaguely psychologicistic position, Thompson used to repeat the words of the German morphologist W. His: "To think that heredity will build organic beings without mechanical means is a piece of unscientific mysticism."<sup>19</sup>

Thompson used advanced mathematics, including Riemannian topology, to prove a number of crucial things. One was that the form of living creatures, from cells to tissues to skeletons, is largely determined by mechanical forces operating in nature. (Simple life-forms such as protozoa obey the rules of the mechanics of fluids.) Thompson's evolution was first of all determined by hard physical boundaries set upon the magnitude, growth rate, cell structure, cell aggregates, skeletons, and so forth of vegetal and animal species. Accordingly, the celebrated theory of ontogeny repeating phylogeny could be dismissed as false.<sup>20</sup> Another crucial discovery made by Thompson concerned "deformation," which was part of his theory of transformation based on the method of coordinates. Thompson was able to show quite convincingly that many forms in nature are just transformations of one another: the cannon-bone of the ox is a geometrical transformation of the cannon-bone of the giraffe or of the sheep; lanceolate, ovate, and cordate leaves are radial transformations of each other, the leaf veins working as a beautiful system of isogonal coordinates; the straight conical shell of the Pteropon can be changed "into the logarithmic spiral of the Nautiloid" by a simple mathematical operation. And most mammalian skulls, including human ones, can be explained as mathematical deformations of one another.<sup>21</sup>

Yet simple morphology did not satisfy Thompson's exigencies. This extraordinary scholar was aware that the form of an organism was not just a configuration in space, but "an event in spacetime."<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, the discipline studying it could only be defined as "morphodynamics."<sup>23</sup>

If recent studies have shown that new topologies and the theory of fractals allow us an improved view of the morphodynamics of nature, can we ever hope to develop a similar methodology for ideal objects (such as religion, philosophy, science itself)?

The study of form is not confined to biology. One consequential discovery was made in 1937 by a historian of fashion, Agnes Brooks Young. Prior to that time, fashion was supposed to be a whimsical, ever-changing phenomenon depending on some mysterious *Zeitgeist*. Against this generally held view, Brooks Young noticed that fashion is recurrent. It evolves in formal cycles. As a matter of fact, dress can only vary between tubular and fully expanded. When it attains a maximum expansion it can only revert to tubular, going through the intermediate state of "back-fulness."<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately structuralism obscured Brooks Young's fruitful intuition by narrowing down the meaning of synchrony and reducing the morphodynamics of fashion to a mere morphology. Responsible for this methodological impoverishment was Roland Barthes, according to whom "system of fashion" simply meant a static correlation between accessories. It is as if Barthes operated in Flatland, reducing fashion to two dimensions and excluding time from the process. Agnes Brooks Young, by contrast, was looking for synchronicity in diachrony; she was rather reconstructing the spoon that crosses the soup's surface as a logical object moving through our world.

Like the physical constraints that compel the cell to be spherical and organisms not to expand beyond a certain size dictated by gravity; like the dress that cannot indefinitely expand without becoming disquietingly dysfunctional, and is bound not to contract much beyond the physical contours of the human body, ideal objects are systems operating in a logical dimension and cannot go beyond their (generally quite simple) premises. Systems are fractalic in nature, that is, they tend to produce solutions ad infinitum according to (simple) production rules. And they interact with each other in quite strange ways, forming other systems whose general pattern of uncanny complexity may be called history. At this stage of research, we are unable to go much beyond the mere recognition of systems in their logical dimension, following the analogy of the spoon that crosses Soupland. In other words, we are able to conceive of the spoon, yet the superdimensional world from which the spoon comes is still a riddle to us, and so is the way the spoon inter-

acts with other, innumerable systems from their own logical dimensions to form the complex pattern of what we call history.

In what follows we intend to go far beyond generalities in the study of such ideal objects. The example we therefore choose is one of great complexity, split for convenience into a rather large number of chronological occurrences, ranging from late antiquity to the present day. (Analogies between these occurrences have been noticed earlier, yet so far they have not all been studied in connection with each other.) Yet before we begin delineating the complex mechanism of the system of what could be called Western dualistic Gnosis, we should dwell on a simpler example whose role is both to show explicitly what ideal objects are and of how many sorts they are, and to prepare us for an understanding of the emergence and structure of Gnosis. The German school of history of religions (*religionsgeschichtliche Schule*) postulated for Gnosticism an early, pre-Christian origin. Today this idea has been largely discarded. Indeed, we witness a pattern of complex interaction between Gnosticism and early Christianity. To this extent, early Christian christological and trinitarian debates are of crucial importance for understanding Gnosticism. By showing that those controversies are a typical example of an ideal object that exists in its own synchronical and logical dimension, we would provide likewise one of the necessary keys to the understanding of Gnosticism.

For four hundred years the Christian Fathers debated the nature of Christ and of the Trinity. These debates were by no means primitive, and they involved some of the best minds of that period. Yet it is possible to study them as so many solutions generated by a system that works according to premises set by a number of unquestionable authorities and develops along predictable logical lines. Still, what we know about is just a long series of controversies. Therefore the only legitimate procedure we can follow is to trace first the chronology of the christological and trinitarian controversies and then examine the possibility of rearranging the outcomes according to a systemic logic.

It wasn't for nothing that Saint Jerome declared, "The word *hypostasis* is the poison of faith" (*Ep. XV ad Damasum*). That word's vague meaning of nature, substance, or person was scarcely distinguishable from the meanings of other frequently used Greek words such as *ousia*, *physis*, and *prosōpon*. The Latin Bible translated *hypostasis* with *substantia*, Tertullian with *origo* and *genitura*. Later in the IVth century, Marius Victorinus and Rufinus of Aquileia preferred the word *subsistentia*. The indiscriminate use of the word *hypostasis* in the many semantic contexts in which it can function led to prolonged and fierce theological debates.



In his classic work *Two Ancient Christologies* (1940), R. V. Sellers attributed many IVth- and Vth-century doctrinal disputes to terminological confusion. Indeed, since *hypostasis* could mean either "substance, nature" (*ousia, physis*) or "person" (*prosōpon*), the provision of the Synod of Alexandria (362) that allowed everyone the freedom to say either that in God there was one or there were three *hypostaseis* could only make the problem worse.<sup>25</sup>

Eventually the meaning of *hypostasis* was narrowed down to that of *prosōpon* (*persona*), of which it became an equivalent or near equivalent. The Council of Constantinople (381) would state that the Trinity was composed of "one substance and three hypostases" (i.e., "persons") (*mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*); and the Council of Chalcedon (451), that Christ was "a single [entity] in two natures [*en dyo physeis*], united in a single person and hypostasis [*eis hēn prosōpon kai mian hypostasin*]."

What were the hypostases with which Jesus Christ was to be identified? Whatever the status of the Logos hymn that opens the Gospel of John, it is certainly one of the earliest, if not the earliest, instance of a christology in which Christ is identified with the divine hypostasis called Logos. Logos, meaning many things, including "word" and "reason" in Greek, signified in contemporary Greek philosophy and science a facet of the divine mind, the creating and structuring force of the universe. Although in such early Christian writings as the *Shepherd of Hermas* Christ is identified with the Holy Spirit and appears in the hypostasis of an angel (9.12.6–8), the Logos christology, also known as "high" christology, becomes by the beginning of the II<sup>nd</sup> century more influential than all of its alternatives. Not all of these were hypostatic. A "low," Jewish-Christian christology existed in the beginning, which held Christ for a man and a prophet. Irenaeus of Lyon describes this option at length under the name of "Ebionism" and denounces it.<sup>26</sup> Out of it the "adoptionist" solution developed, according to which Jesus was born a human being and was adopted into divine sonship at baptism.

The career of "high" christology, with a tendency toward docetism, is more marked in the theological school of Alexandria, whereas "low" christology, although now a Logos christology in its own right, develops in Antioch. In the fierce IVth- and Vth-century faith controversies, the Alexandrian school progressively defeats the Antiochene school and declares some of its masters heretics.

Among the subapostolic Fathers, Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110 C.E.) is the first to insist on the Logos nature of Christ,<sup>27</sup> which does not eliminate his human nature.<sup>28</sup> As was predictable, by the mid-II<sup>nd</sup> century, with Justin Martyr, Logos christology would develop along the lines

traced by the Jewish Platonist Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.E.–40 C.E.): the Logos is the Reason of God in which the plan for this universe is inscribed. Jesus Christ is Logos incarnated. By the beginning of the IIIrd century, all major theologians adhere to a Logos christology: Irenaeus of Lyon,<sup>29</sup> Tertullian of Carthage,<sup>30</sup> and Clement of Alexandria.<sup>31</sup>

Philo of Alexandria had already established the equivalence between Logos and biblical Wisdom (Sophia/Hokmah). More than one influential christology would develop along this line. The earliest representative of a Logos/Sophia christology is Theophilus of Antioch, a Greek Christian apologist who probably became bishop of Antioch in 169 C.E. Theophilus keeps up the Philonic and Stoic distinction between a Logos internal to God,<sup>32</sup> also called Sophia (cf. Prov. 8:22), and the Logos “pronounced”<sup>33</sup> as Word. Using biblical imagery, Theophilus develops a naturalistic christology:

Therefore God, having his own Logos innate in his own bowels generated him together with his own Sophia, vomiting him forth [*exereuxamenos*: II.10; cf. Ps. 44:2] before everything else. He used this Logos as his servant in the things created by him, and through him he made all things [cf. John 1:3]. He is called Beginning because he leads and dominates everything fashioned through him. It was he, Spirit of God and Beginning and Sophia and Power of the Most High, who came down into the prophets and spoke through them about the creation of the world and all the rest. For the prophets did not exist when the world came into existence; there were the Sophia of God which is in him and his holy Logos who is always present with him.<sup>34</sup>

The christology of the most distinguished IIIrd-century Father, Origen of Alexandria, is likewise a Logos/Sophia christology. Like Theophilus, Origen tends to call Sophia the Logos preexistent with God.<sup>35</sup>

In the heat of the IVth-century controversies, statements of this kind were suspect of heresy. Arius might have been a pure Origenist when he asserted, according to his fierce opponent Athanasius, that “there are two ‘Wisdoms’ [*sophiai*]: one that is proper to God and exists together with him, and the other the Son who has been brought into being in this Wisdom; only by participating in this Wisdom is the Son called Wisdom and Word.”<sup>36</sup>

Starting with Ignatius of Antioch, the mainstream Church fights both “low” christology, which makes Jesus Christ into a mere human being, and excessive Platonizing christology, known as docetism (from Greek *dokēsis*, “appearance”), which tends to make his body into a mere phantasm made of dream substance (*phantasiasm* is the name of this trend in its extreme form). The middle way is indicated in many early

formulas of faith, emphasizing both Christ's divinity and his humanity. If we read, for example, Origen's christological statements, we can already discern to what extent his vague assumptions were going to become major stumbling blocks in the IVth-century controversies.<sup>37</sup>

Let us briefly mention the main contenders of incarnationist theology around Origen's time, indirectly answered in his formula of faith. One trend was adoptionism or *psilanthropism*, which held Christ for a mere man (*psilos anthrōpos*). Adoptionism evolved from the Jewish-Christian Ebionism denounced by the early Fathers.<sup>38</sup> According to Hippolytus (VII.35), the father of adoptionism was a certain Theodotus the leather merchant from Constantinople, who went to Rome about 190. According to him, Jesus Christ was a simple man—although supremely virtuous—until his baptism, when the Spirit-Christ descended upon him. He never became divine. Others held that he became divine after his resurrection.

Theodotus the leather merchant was followed by Theodotus the banker, Asclepiodotus, and Artemas or Artemon.<sup>39</sup> A later representative of that trend might have been Paul of Samosata, condemned at the Council of Antioch in 268. His doctrine is only scarcely known.<sup>40</sup>

The Logos christology was also rejected by the modalists (or modalistic monarchians), in so far as it seemed to entail binitarianism or belief in two Gods. This impression might have been enhanced by the Philonic use of the expression "God" or "Second God" for the Christ-Logos, as it can be found in Origen. The first modalist was a certain Noetus of Smyrna.<sup>41</sup> His disciple Epigonus went to Rome and found a certain Cleomenes, who accepted his ideas.

It is to the credit of Origen's genius that he tried to solve as many christological problems as he could. He anticipated IVth-century controversies in his insistence that the Logos had merged with a human soul.<sup>42</sup> There is evidence that the chief opponent of the Origenist Arius, Athanasius of Alexandria, did not think that the Logos took on a human soul.<sup>43</sup> At any rate, Apollinaris of Laodicea interpreted the formula saying that Christ was "God made flesh" (*theos ensarkos*) as meaning that the Logos had taken the place of Christ's human mind. This assumption can be understood in the light of the Platonic body-soul-mind (*nous*) trichotomy, according to which the Logos could easily replace the rational soul of a human being. Sensing this, Apollinaris made it his main concern to show, against the adoptionistic tendencies of the theological school of Antioch, that "God in flesh" was radically different from "man deified."<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, he developed the doctrine of Christ as *tertium genus* between God and man, a being whose *flesh* itself was deified and

"united in substance" (*synousiomenon*) with God.<sup>45</sup> Only on this condition can Christ's body save us. Obviously, Apollinaris was trying to answer the problems raised by the bodily assumption of Jesus Christ to heaven, which was part of Christian dogma. He was condemned for his attempt, yet the problem remained unsolved.

The school of Antioch—specifically Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428)—gave Apollinaris an answer that was likewise rejected. They preached disjunction of the two natures (*physeis*) of Christ, which in the union of God and man remained unmixed. An adoptionistic nuance continued indeed to exist in this school, for the union of God and man was not a union of nature: for Diodorus, it was a union by God's grace, whereas for Theodore it was *kat' eudokian*, that is, by God's favor or "good pleasure." Only by virtue of this union without mixture could the Son be referred to as a "person"<sup>46</sup> with two distinct hypostases.<sup>47</sup>

Alexandrian theology could not tolerate this explanation. A conflict no less formidable than the one between Arius and Athanasius now engrossed Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius of Constantinople. It led to the Council of Ephesus (431), where Nestorius was condemned by Cyril's machinations. What were the issues at stake? Was indeed the controversy based on mere verbal misunderstanding (as asserted by R. V. Sellers)? Or was it one more episode in the war between the two theological schools, the Alexandrian and the Antiochene, and their divergent positions, which, in the last instance, would be "high" and "low" christology, Platonizing and adoptionistic tendencies (as recently reconfirmed by R. M. Grant)?<sup>48</sup>

Recent scholarship discovered that between Cyril and Nestorius, Cyril was the heretic. He had been fooled by pseudepigraphers (what scholars call ancient forgers), and had relied on three writings of Apollinaris of Laodicea preserved under false names.<sup>49</sup> From Apollinaris "he adopted monophysite formulae to counter the dyophysite position" of Nestorius.<sup>50</sup> The main concern of the Antiochene school, and of Nestorius in particular, had been to fight Apollinaris's theology. Therefore Nestorius could not accept Cyril's formula, according to which the union between God and man in Christ was "hypostatic." God and man in Christ were, according to Nestorius (and Theodore of Mopsuestia), two *ousiai* and two hypostases unmixed, but one *prosōpon* or person. Anything else would be Apollinarianism. Cyril's contention would prevail, and they would become one *physis* and one hypostasis. Only by affirming this indissoluble union could Cyril explain why Christ's body had been assumed to heaven. This, indeed, is his most powerful argument in the *Second Epistle to Nestorius*:<sup>51</sup> "the body of the

Logos is not alien to him but accompanies him even as he is enthroned with the Father. Again, it is not that there are two Sons enthroned together but rather there is one, on account of the [Logos's] union with the flesh." Although Christ's body was not heavenly,<sup>52</sup> it went to heaven. Only a good deal of Apollinarianism could solve this profound riddle, and Cyril has been accused of subtle docetic inclinations.

With Eutyches of Constantinople the problem rises again and leads to the Council of Chalcedon (451). His christology crosses the labile borderline between Apollinarianism and orthodoxy that had not been completely erased by Cyril of Alexandria. By proclaiming (447) the one nature (*physis*, hence the name of "monophysism" for his movement) of Logos incarnate, Eutyches implicitly asserted that Christ was not a human being like us but a *tertium genus* existing in a nonhuman flesh. The Council of Ephesus (449) declared orthodox his doctrine of "two natures before union, one nature after union," but Pope Leo I challenged it and it was condemned, albeit with the reluctance of the Eastern bishops, at the Council of Chalcedon (451).<sup>53</sup> The Chalcedonian definition of faith asserts that Christ "as to his humanness" was born from the Virgin Mary, Theotokos; he was "made known to us in two natures [*en dyo physessin*], unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably":<sup>54</sup> briefly, one prosopon, one hypostasis, and two natures, which was a decision against Cyril's "one nature, one hypostasis" doctrine as well as against Nestorius's two ousiai, two hypostases, and one prosopon doctrine.

We have tried to describe the major christological debates of this period without excessive simplification yet without going into more detail than necessary. These materials certainly meet one requirement of systemic interpretation: the requirement of *complexity*. Indeed, only in the presence of complexity are the lines of the system discernible; yet complexity itself can disguise and blur the traces of the system to the point where they become unrecognizable.

Based on a prior, simplified christological scheme we developed,<sup>55</sup> we can already specify that the root distinction of the christological system is between "low" and "high" christology—one tending to lower Christ to the human dimension, the other tending to divinize him completely. All other christologies are in between these two.

Let us sum up, in a systematic form, the dichotomies we already traced in the christological debates. The most important is the human-versus-divine opposition. The extremes seem to be psilanthropism and phantasiastic docetism, which would respond to the specifications *only*

human versus *only* divine. The remaining points of contention seem to be situated in a zone where Christ is not denied either humanity or divinity (he is not *only* human or *only* divine). They can thus be stated as follows:

1. Christ is more human than divine.
  2. He is equally human and divine.
  3. He is more divine than human.
1. Whereas the psilanthropic position, illustrated by Ebionism and early adoptionism, states that Christ was only transitorily connected with the divine, later adoptionism, and certainly Paul of Samosata, asserted that he was permanently connected with the divine.
  2. Both orthodoxy, which is closer to "high" Alexandrian christology, and the school of Antioch illustrate the "theandric" position (Christ is fully and equally God and man). Yet Antiochene christology would always share with adoptionism the idea that Christ was not united *by nature* with God the Father. On the contrary, the orthodox would assert that God and Christ had the same nature (*physis, ousia*). According to its "middle-high" tendency, orthodoxy would also adopt Origen's viewpoint, according to which Christ was wholly man, that is, had a human soul.
  3. This was contested by "high" christology, even by those representatives of the school of Alexandria who passed into history as champions of orthodoxy, like Athanasius. The most extreme Alexandrian trend, monophysism (illustrated by Apollinaris of Laodicea and later by Eutyches of Constantinople), asserted that Christ not only did not have a human soul but that he was neither divine nor human: he was a *tertium genus*, for in him the two essences (*hypostaseis*) of Godhood and humankind were mixed together.

Although very close to Apollinaris, Cyril of Alexandria, who acted for a while as representative of orthodoxy, took care to refute the view according to which Christ was a *tertium genus* between human and divine, by affirming that the hypostases were united yet *not mixed*. The lines according to which the system infallibly develops are the following:

divine (1) vs human (2)

only divine (docetism) (1.1) vs not only divine (1.2)

not only human (2.1) vs only human (psilanthropism) (2.2)

more divine than human (1.2.1) vs equally divine and human (1/2)  
vs more human than divine (2.1.1)

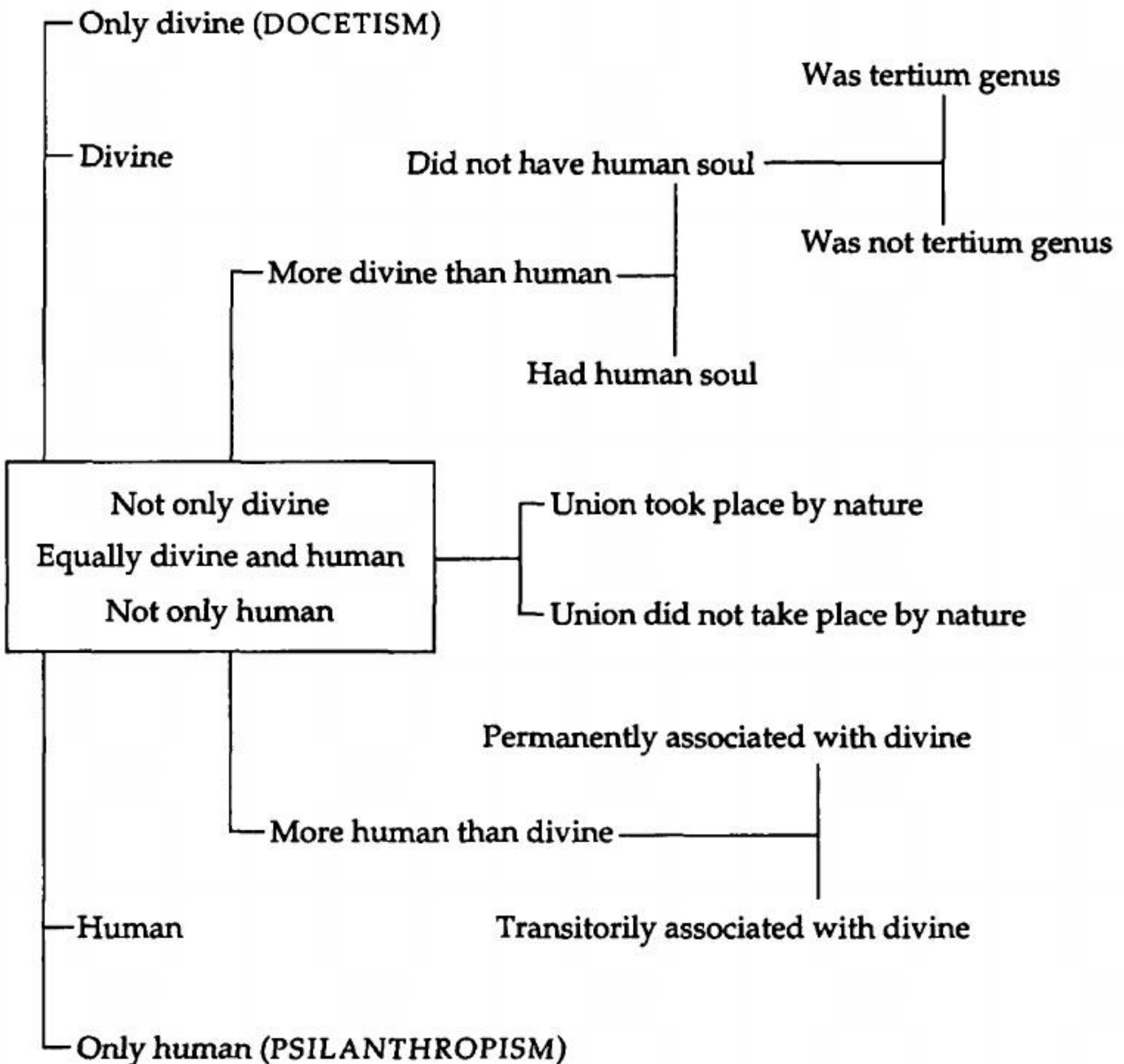
did not have human soul (Athanasius) (1.2.1.1) vs had human soul  
(Origen) (1.2.1.2 or 1/2.1)

was tertium genus (monophysism) (1.2.1.2.1) vs was not tertium  
genus (orthodoxy) (1.2.1.2.2 or 1/2.1.1)

was permanently associated with the divine (Antiochene school)  
(2.1.1.1) vs was not permanently associated with the divine  
(adoptionism) (2.1.1.2 but also 2.2.1)

the union between God and man took place by nature (Cyril of  
Alexandria) (1/2.1.1) vs the union did not take place by nature  
(1/2.1.2 but according to some 2.1.1.1.2).

These were a few relevant dichotomies according to which the system works. It would be easier to trace the binary oppositions on a table:



At this point we can already draw a conclusion: christology, if interpreted as a viable whole, is not a succession of anarchic, unrelated events in time but a system made up of binary switches that, much like the spoon in Soupland, crosses time in an unpredictable sequence. If the same applies to trinitarian controversies, our case is practically demonstrated: "ideal objects" exist in their logical space, and their morphodynamics is the correct approach to the comprehensive understanding of history.<sup>56</sup>

Trinitarian controversies concern the relationship between the three hypostases of divinity: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The latter is a being even more elusive than the Logos, sometimes identified in early Jewish Christianity with Christ himself, sometimes with an angel, and sometimes even with a feminine hypostasis (*rûah* in Semitic languages is feminine), Mother of the Logos.<sup>57</sup> The hierarchical structure of the Trinity was not actually established before Origen, who, according to Jerome, was subordinationist.<sup>58</sup> Like Philo, Origen calls God *ho theos* and the Son simply *theos* or even "second God,"<sup>59</sup> and states that the three are distinct *hypostaseis*. According to H. A. Wolfson,<sup>60</sup> Origen and Plotinus alike learned from Ammonios Saccas that the Logos is eternally generated. Various Christian theologians borrowed this principle from Plotinus rather than Origen.<sup>61</sup>

The modalist Noetus of Smyrna, according to Tertullian, was a monarchianist in so far as he admitted one God only. The consequence was that God died on the cross—called by Tertullian "patripassianism" (God the Father suffered).<sup>62</sup> This rather naive modalism was made into a serious system by Sabellius,<sup>63</sup> who went to Rome about 215 C.E. and was excommunicated by Pope Callistus (217–22) after having first been supported by him. Sabellius regarded God as a monad called Sonfather (*hyiopator*). Like the sun, Sonfather radiates heat and light without division. God is thus one, but has three "modalities": according to creation and order he is Father, according to redemption he is Son, according to grace he is Holy Spirit.

In condemning Sabellianism, orthodoxy repudiated Origen's subordinationism by establishing equality between heavenly hypostases. Antiochene theology, to which a constant adoptionist tendency has been ascribed, whose import would be the avoidance of any mixture between the divine Logos and man in Christ, was perhaps closer to the Origenist distinctions on this point. Paul of Samosata's trinitarian doctrine is not exactly known. It was perhaps a subtle form of unitarianism, which entailed formal acceptance of the trinitarian formula. He may have taught that the Word was not a substance (*ousia*) but a verbal utterance of the Father, as such not distinct from the Father himself.



The Alexandrian presbyter (ordained 313) Arius (d. 336) was excommunicated by Bishop Alexander of Alexandria in 318. The Nicene formula of faith (325), with its controversial statement that Father and Son are *homoousios*, mainly reflects the Arian controversy. Only three texts can be ascribed to Arius with certainty: a confession of faith presented to Bishop Alexander, a letter to his supporter Eusebius of Nicomedia, and a confession submitted to Emperor Constantine (325 or 327). Some fragments of his poem *Thalia* (ca. 322) are reported by his formidable opponent Athanasius. The letter to Alexander asserts that the Son exists in actuality, yet he is not *agennētos* (ungenerated). The letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia affirms that God and his Son do not coexist, for God must preexist his Son. If not, the Son must be either part of God, or an emanation, or a second god. For Arius, only God is *anarchos*, the Son has an *archē*.

If Athanasius is correct, Arius believed that God and the Son did not share the same *ousia*. He also stated that the Father is invisible and unknowable to the Son. Moreover, the Son is unable to comprehend his own *ousia*. An excerpt from *Thalia* confirms this.<sup>64</sup> The Son is clearly subordinated to the Father. So was he in Origen. According to Origen, Christ was *hypostasis* and *ousia*—that is, real individual subsistence as opposed to a conceptual existence. Faith involves belief in three *hypostaseis* having three different *ousiai* (*In Iohann.* II.10). Origen would not have subscribed to the word *homoousios* as concerning the three persons of the Trinity, simply because *hypostasis* to him was quasi-synonymous with *ousia*. Here Arius simply follows Origen.<sup>65</sup>

In the 362 Council of Alexandria, a number of bishops opted for *homoiousios* (of like substance) instead of *homoousios*. The 381 Council of Constantinople, under pressure of the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers—Basil of Caesarea (d. 379), his friend Gregory of Nazianzus, and his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa—reinstated the word *homoousios* in the light of Gregory of Nazianzus's explanations and decided that the three members of the Trinity were one *ousia* and three *hypostaseis*.

Augustine's discussion of the trinitarian formula ("one essence, three persons") contains only one element fundamentally new, later incorporated in the pseudo-Athanasian credo adopted in the West: that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son.<sup>66</sup>

At first glance the system of trinitarian controversies is simple and seems to be organized along three basic dichotomies: one "person" in the Godhead versus more "persons," equal versus subordinate, and distinct versus indistinct. Each element of these dichotomies may act like a

building block in virtually any combination (a situation different from the hierarchical dichotomies in the christological system). Thus it is possible to have a theology that is monarchian, subordinationist, and does not distinguish between Father and Son (modalism, patripassian variant); a trinitarian theology that is subordinationist yet distinguishes Father from Son (Origen, Arius); a trinitarian theology subordinationist and without distinction (Paul of Samosata?); and a trinitarian theology that is not subordinationist and distinguishes between Father and Son ("orthodoxy"). The same system can also be described according to the terminological distinctions of the Fathers themselves (hypostasis versus ousia versus prosopon), but confusion among terms is a strong deterrent against such an endeavor.

At the conclusion of this short analysis, it seems possible to state that trinitarian theology is definitely a "system," that is, an ideal object that exists in its own logical space. Although both christological and trinitarian debates form such systems based on dichotomies, the two systems are different in so far as one is based on a hierarchy of binary oppositions, and the other is composed of units, where single elements can enter virtually any possible combination.

Yet, as we will see in the course of our study, the binary oppositions that belong to the structure of a hierarchical system may easily come loose and enter—as single units or building elements—the composition of another system, either hierarchical or made up of other similar "bricks." This shows not only the flexibility of hierarchies but also the fact that a pattern of active interaction exists between systems that we choose to classify as independent, such as Christianity and Gnosticism. In fact, in many respects the two share the basic system but activate different options in it. This in itself should demonstrate the uselessness of labels, which belie the contiguity of systems of thought. In morphodynamic terms, Christianity and Gnosticism are on a number of accounts transformations (or deformations) of each other, hence perspectives on (and within) the same system.

Whoever has the slightest notion of the history of early Christianity knows how terrible theological debates could be, especially after the Constantinian toleration of Christians (313), and how inconceivably obnoxious were many of those whom the Church has canonized. There seemed to be a lot at stake if, according to a IVth-century Church Father, even in the market people would forget their daily concerns in order to argue about hypostases and prosopa. And we also know that where a few triumphed, many were humiliated, exiled, stoned, or eliminated morally and even physically by abject means perhaps worthy of higher

stakes. Why all this, if what the theologians were playing was only a mental game (not unlike the game of chess, yet relatively simpler)? It was a powerful game, whose rules occupied their minds for centuries and continue to occupy ours. It is interesting to ascertain that power was involved in such a way that, among all possible solutions of the system (which are equally true or equally false), a middle-higher solution would triumph and be proclaimed "orthodox." When the Church decided that the Holy Spirit speaks through conciliar statements, they probably were correct in so far as the rule of the system seems to stabilize it in the middle.

D'Arcy Thompson remarks that the modern founder of species classification, Linnaeus (1707–1778), used the simple, descriptive terms used in plant and animal categorization to group crystals he found by color and shape. When the structural connections that give minerals their distinctive shapes and qualities were discovered to be strictly mathematical, crystals were defined by formulas thereafter. The nature of the object and its study were forever changed.

It is our intention to demonstrate that religion is similarly analyzable. Although, from our viewpoint, scattered across time through history, it is a combination of "ideal objects," not unlike philosophy, and even science. In the course of this work, we will discover more: not only that the structure of all these religious trends, from Gnosticism to Catharism, depends on the same system but also that religion, philosophy, and science do not construct their "ideal objects" differently. Consequently they speak about the same things, in ways that may sound heuristically different if not incompatible but that are systemically identical.

## Notes

1. See Abraham Pais, *"Subtle Is the Lord . . .": The Science and the Life of Albert Einstein* (Oxford Univ. Press: New York, 1982), 266ff.
2. See Pais, *Subtle*, 319.
3. The first edition of *Flatland* must have been in print in 1883; it is no longer extant. Reprints of successive editions are available (see E. Abbott Abbott, *Flatland*, with a preface by Isaac Asimov [Harper & Row: New York, 1983]). The hero of the story is called A Square, as undoubtedly Abbott Abbott himself must have been called in school; see Rudy Rucker, *Geometry, Relativity, and the Fourth Dimension* (Dover: New York, 1977); by the same, *The Fourth Dimension: A Guided Tour of the Higher Universes* (Houghton and Mifflin: Boston, 1984). See my article "A Historian's Kit for the Fourth Dimension," in *Incognita 2* (1990), 113–29, and my book *Out of This World: A History of Otherworldly Journeys and Out-of-Body Experiences, from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Shambhala: Boston, 1991).

4. The Greek prefix *hyper* or the Latin prefix *super* indicates an object with one dimension more than three; for Einstein, such a dimension is time.
5. See my article "A Historian's Kit for the Fourth Dimension."
6. This does not entail the existence of another world in superspace, as the journalist P. D. Ouspensky believed at the beginning of this century.
7. See Howard Gardner, *The Mind's New Science: A History of the Cognitive Revolution*, (Basic Books: New York, 1985).
8. See Rudy Rucker, *The Fourth Dimension*; more references in my "Historian's Kit for the Fourth Dimension" and in my *Out of This World*.
9. *Goethe's Botanical Writings*, trans. B. Mueller (Univ. of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, 1952), 88.
10. See Rudolf Magnus, *Goethe as a Scientist*, trans. H. Norden (Schuman: New York, 1949), 79.
11. Magnus, *Goethe as a Scientist*, 44-45.
12. Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* was first published in 1916, three years after the scholar's death, based on the class notes taken by his disciples.
13. Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, 3 vols., trans. W. R. Trask et al. (Univ. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1978-85).
14. See W. E. Le Gros Clark and P. B. Medawar, *Essays on Growth and Form Presented to D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1945).
15. The second edition of the complete work was published in 2 vols. by Cambridge Univ. Press in 1942 (1116 pages) and reprinted in 1952.
16. See Rudy Rucker, *Mind Tools* (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1987).
17. *On Growth and Form* (1942 ed.), vol. 2, 1023.
18. Thompson, *On Growth and Form*, vol. 2, 933.
19. Thompson, *On Growth and Form*, vol. 1, 85 n.
20. Thompson, *On Growth and Form*, 285.
21. See D'Arcy W. Thompson, "Morphology and Mathematics," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* 50 (1916), pt. 4, no. 27, 857-95.
22. *On Growth and Form*, vol. 1, 283.
23. *On Growth and Form*, vol. 1, 286. The word had been coined by A. Giard in 1876.
24. Agnes Brooks Young, *Recurring Cycles of Fashion* (Harper & Row: New York, 1937); see my "A Corpus for the Body," *Journal of Modern History*, March 1991.
25. Arians could claim that there were three hypostases in God, thereby meaning that there were three substances; Sabellians could claim that there was one hypostasis in God, thereby meaning one person; and the Monophysites could legitimately claim that there was one hypostasis in Christ, thereby meaning one substance.
26. *Adv. haer.* III.19f.
27. *Ad Magn.* 8.2.
28. *Ad Trall.* 9.1-2.
29. *Adv. haer.* III.18.
30. *Adversus Praxean* 27.
31. *Paed.* I.8; *Protrept.* XI.
32. *Endiathetos: Ad Autolyicum* II.10, in Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*, ed. and trans. R. M. Grant (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1970), 39.
33. *Prophorikos*.
34. *Ad Autolyicum* II.10, trans. Grant.
35. "Qui antem initium dat Verbo Dei vel Sapientiae Dei, intueri ne magis in ipsum ingenitum patrem impietatem suam iacet, cum eum neget semper patrem fuisse et genuisse Verbum et habuisse Sapientiam in omnibus anterioribus vel temporibus vel saeculis, vel si quid illud est quod nominari potest" (*De principiis* I.3.31.1-4, p. 126 Gorgemanns-Krapp).
36. Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*; cf. R. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Darton, Longman & Todd: London, 1987).

37. "Tum deinde quia Christus Iesus, ipse qui venit, ante omnem creaturam natus ex patre est. Qui cum in omnium conditione patri ministrasset ("per ipsum" namque "omnia facta sunt"), novissimis temporibus se ipsum exinaniens homo factus est, incarnatus est, cum deus esset, et homo factus mansit quod erat, deus. Corpus assumpsit nostro corpori simile, eo solo differens, quod natum ex virgine et spiritu sancto est. Et quoniam hic Iesus Christus natus et passus est in veritate et non per phantasiam, communem hanc mortem vere mortuus; vere enim et a mortuis resurrexit et post resurrectionem conversatus cum discipulis suis assumptus est" (*De princ.* I.Praef.4, pp. 88–90 Görgemanns-Krapp).
38. Justin, *Dial. cum Trypho* 47; *Iren.* I.26.1; III.11.7; III.21.1.
39. Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccles.* V.28–29.
40. Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (1960; Harper & Row: San Francisco, 1978), 115ff.
41. In the II<sup>nd</sup>–III<sup>rd</sup> century; cf. Hipp., *Ref.* ix; Epiph., *Pan.* 57.1.8.
42. *De princ.* II.6.3.
43. Frances Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1983), 74.
44. *Anthrōpos entheos*; Young, *From Nicaea*, 185–86.
45. Young, *From Nicaea*, 188–89.
46. *Prosōpon*; Young, *From Nicaea*, 191–210.
47. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *De incarnatione* VII.4, in R. A. Norris, *The Christological Controversy* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1980), 118.
48. R. M. Grant, *Gods and the One God* (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1986); see my review in *History of Religions* 27 (1987), 97–98.
49. Young, *From Nicaea*, 259f.
50. Young, *From Nicaea*, 262.
51. In Norris, *Christological*, 134.
52. *Letter to John of Antioch*, in Norris, *Christological*, 143.
53. W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement* (Cambridge Univ. Press: Cambridge, 1972), 29–30.
54. Frend, *The Rise*, 2–3.
55. See Mircea Eliade and I. P. Couliano, *Dictionnaire des religions* (Plon: Paris, 1990), 127–29 (Eng. ed., HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).
56. As we will see, history could indeed be defined as "integrated morphodynamics of ideal objects."
57. See James M. Robinson, "Very Goddess and Very Man: Jesus' Better Self," in Karen L. King, ed., *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1988), 113–27.
58. *Ep. ad Avitum*, 124.2: "Filiū quoque minorem a patre eo quod secundus ab illo sit, et spiritum sanctum inferiorem a filio in sanctis quibusque versari, atque hoc ordine maiorem patris fortitudinem esse quam filii et spiritus sancti, et rursum maiorem filii fortitudinem esse quam spiritus sancti, et consequenter ipsius sancti spiritus maiorem esse virtutem ceteris, quae sancta dicuntur."
59. W. G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1980), 14; cf. *C. Cels.* V.39.
60. Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (1956; Harvard Univ. Press: Cambridge, MA, 1976<sup>3</sup>), 219–22.
61. Alexander of Alexandria (cf. Theodoretus, *Eccl. hist.* I.3–4; Epiph., *Pan.* 69.6), Marius Victorinus (*Adv. Arium* I.34), and Augustine, who knew part of the *Enneads* in Victorinus's translation (*Enar. in Ps.* 2.6; *Epist.* 238.24; *De Div. Quaest.*, 37; *De Trinit.* V.5.6).
62. Tertullian summarizes in the following words the position of the modalists Epigonus and Cleomenes: "duos unum volunt esse, ut idem pater et filius habeatur" (*Adversus*

*Praxean*, ca. 213). According to them, the Word (*Verbum*) is only *vox et sonus oris*, he has a merely nominal existence. When the Son suffers (*patitur*), the Father suffers with him (*copatitur*).

63. Cf. Hipp. IX.11ff.

64. Cf. Athanasius, *De synodis* 15.

65. Cf. R. Williams, *Arius*, 132–43.

66. Wolfson, *The Philosophy*, 350–59.

# Chapter 1

## Dualism: A Chronology

Heresy begins when lay people start reading and commenting on the Scriptures.

—PETER OF SICILY

### 1. A Working Definition

The word *dualism* (*dualismus*) was coined in 1700 by Thomas Hardy to describe the Zoroastrian doctrine of the two opposite Spirits, the Beneficent and the Maleficent. Its meaning in the history of religions ended up being more technical than it is in philosophy, where it usually designates the opposition of soul and body, or form and matter, or the Cartesian opposition Mind versus Extension, as in A. O. Lovejoy's classic *Revolt Against Dualism*. Under more careful scrutiny, it appears that philosophical dualism is but a species of the broader usage in the history of religions. Here it also came to be applied to all doctrines in which the world and/or human beings, or parts thereof, are the result of separate creations performed by separate creators.<sup>1</sup>

Dualism is a device serving theodicy, which is the attempt to reconcile the existence of a good Creator with the patent imperfections of the world and of human existence. Obviously the problem from its outset is perfectly insoluble unless a certain type of definition of God is used, called *apophatic* (from the Greek *apophasis*, "denial, negation") or negative, in which God appears as unfathomable and beyond any positive predicate such as "good" or "providential." Being beyond good and evil, God may be responsible for occurrences that our limited understanding interprets as painful and nonsensical, such as suffering and death. Although the technique of apophatic theology is very ancient (it is illustrated in Plato's dialogue *Parmenides*), even the masters of this style refused to carry God's unpredictability to a conclusion that seems nevertheless to be

corroborated by several passages of the Tanakh (1 Sam. 2, etc.): that God is the author of evil, reiterated of the omnipotent God of the Qur'an (e.g., VI.17, 39, 65, etc.).

Therefore, given the state of this world, it should not surprise us that such champions of apophatic theology as the gnostics would try to clear the transcendent God of any involvement with the creation of this inferior world. Thus, inventing a second principle responsible for evil appears to be a common device even when it is superfluous.

What is more important, definitions of evil vary. In Zoroastrianism the two Spirits are each in charge of a separate creation, and thus reality is the object of a dual classification: the dog is a good animal, the donkey an evil one. In Plato the body is evil; in later Platonism, matter in general.

Dualistic myths of creation or doctrines of the world abound in the religions and philosophies of humankind. Sometimes the borderline that separates them from monarchian views (holding one principle or *archē*) is tenuous to the point where dualistic developments may characterize monarchian myths and monistic doctrines. In general we cease to consider dualistic a doctrine in which the second principle is created by the first and holds no real power over him, but this is a matter of opinion. Thus, for example, from early Christianity onward the myth of the fall of Lucifer has been used to explain all evil—including original sin according to Augustine. Defining this myth as dualistic, J. B. Russell thinks that medieval Christianity in its entirety was dualistic.<sup>2</sup> A label should not detain us longer than necessary. Whether Christianity was dualistic or not, it certainly differed from Gnosticism in so far as it never implied that this world was created by anyone other than God himself. A poem like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which to a certain extent emphasizes the grandness of the Opponent and his attempts to spoil God's creation, never forgets that Satan is but a subordinate. A great observer of dualism, Harold Bloom, did not fail to notice this: "Milton," he wrote, "who declined every dualism, is . . . read wholly dualistically by the dominant tradition of interpretation, of which C. S. Lewis was a leading representative."<sup>3</sup>

Sophisticated as it may become, dualism is essentially a very simple solution devised by the human mind to account for the manifest flaws of existence. People did not wait for the invention of writing to express it. It occurs in most regions of the world, in myths recorded by anthropologists.<sup>4</sup> A character more often male than female, who may be coeternal with the Primordial Being or born later (sometimes from the Primordial Being himself), spoils creation as a result of his clumsiness



or, more often, of his irresistible urge to play tricks. (Indeed, this character is known as a Trickster.<sup>5</sup>) Anthropologists call dualistic those myths in which the Trickster appears as an antagonist of the Primordial Being.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Quest for the Origins

At the time the massive presence of dualistic myths in Europe was discovered, historians believed perhaps even more than today that the main task of their discipline was to trace back the origin of phenomena. Accordingly, "origins" were endowed with nearly mystical power and prestige. The long quest for the origins of dualism started with A. N. Veselovskii (1872), who attributed the rise of Slavic dualistic legends to the spread of Bogomilism. Dissuaded by the Finnish scholar Julian Kron, Veselovskii converted in 1889 to his hypothesis: Dualistic legends are Finno-Ugrian and Uralo-Altaiic in origin. Two years later (1891), discovering that the French anthropologist De Charencey had published North American dualistic myths, Veselovskii cautiously concluded that the genesis of dualism must have taken place independently in different geographic areas.<sup>7</sup>

The matter would have been settled—and perhaps wisely so—if the extension of dualism had not been discovered to be vaster, both in space and in time, than presumed. To integrate these new factors in his theory, the Ukrainian scholar M. P. Dragomanov had to perform, in 1892–94, an actual tour de force. This exertion notwithstanding, his theory would hold together only with the help of a few quantum leaps, not to mention that even then its premise of mere territorial diffusion appears rather monstrous.

Having assessed that a sizable group of legends in which the Trickster is said to dive after mud needed for the creation of the earth could only have originated in a maritime setting, Dragomanov decided that this setting had to be India. From India the myth migrated to Mesopotamia, from Mesopotamia to Iran (where it influenced Zurvanism, a form of heretical Zoroastrianism that enjoyed perhaps brief favor under a few Sassanian rulers), and from there to both the Caucasus and Europe, where it gave rise to Gnosticism. Through Manichaeism (a form of Gnosticism) the myth reached Central Asia; through the Armenian Paulicians it came back to Europe and influenced Bogomilism. Dragomanov eventually became conscious of his theory's inability to explain North American occurrences of dualistic myths. Therefore,

without seeming to realize it, he contradicted himself altogether by resorting to the assertion of an "independent origination" in different areas.<sup>8</sup>

Oskar Dähnhardt (in 1907–12) distinguished between two main variants of these legends and called one Asian and the other Bogomil. In the Asian type the Trickster is usually a bird, while in the Bogomil type he is called Satana(el). Moreover, two distinct motifs occur in these legends: the "diving" (*Tauchmotif*), possible only in a maritime setting, and dualism. As to the dissemination of the two types, Dähnhardt followed Dragomanov, explaining the North American version as a result of the Asian migrations over the Bering Strait.<sup>9</sup>

That Iran was the homeland of dualism would become an extremely elaborate and fashionable hypothesis with the German school of history of religions (*religionsgeschichtliche Schule*), whose most important representatives were Wilhelm Bousset and Richard Reitzenstein. The critique of their ideas has been offered elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Today they appear as one of the most massively organized and highly acclaimed scholarly blunders of this century, backed by the powerful tools of German philology and its reputation for *Gründlichkeit* (thoroughness). As if to contradict such common ethno-geographical beliefs, Reitzenstein was a volatile spirit indeed, yet able to cling to the latest idea to come to his attention. Thus he was first persuaded that everything late antique came from Egypt, but toward 1920 he switched radically to Iran, using IXth-century C.E. compilations to establish the Persian origins of Platonism(!). Reitzenstein invented the so-called Iranian Mystery of Liberation (*Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium*, 1921), a sort of mystical doctrine that would explain not only Christianity and Gnosticism but even ancient Platonism. The misconception was thoroughly exposed by Carsten Colpe in the early 1960s,<sup>11</sup> yet some of the ideas of the German school still loom large over modern scholarship. This should detain us here no further.<sup>12</sup>

By the 1960s the proliferation of hypotheses concerning the origins of Gnosticism had assumed such proportions that an international convention had to be held in Messene, Italy, in order to assess their validity.<sup>13</sup> It became clear that, although especially the existence of Jewish and Samaritan elements in Gnosticism was emphasized, the most compelling view of gnostic dualism remained that advanced by the French scholar Simone Pétrement<sup>14</sup> and by Ugo Bianchi.<sup>15</sup> In his studies, Bianchi has formulated a typology of dualism more extensive and more complete than his predecessors (including Pétrement) and has attempted—using elements from a theory devised by his master Raffaele Pettazzoni<sup>16</sup>—to transform it into a historical sequence.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Do "Historical Typologies" Work?

Compared with the coarse theory of migration first formulated by Veselovskii and later developed by the German School of Religion, Bianchi's viewpoint represents a huge step forward in the understanding of dualism as a mental process with a sequence in time. Yet like most historians, Bianchi failed to see dualism as an "ideal object" in its logical dimension. The phenomenon appeared thus impoverished and forced into a temporal scheme too narrow to contain it.

Bianchi established a rule of diffusion that utterly disarmed the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*: for a trait to be inherited, it must be present both in the original doctrine and in the derivative product. Zoroastrian dualism is procosmic, Gnosticism is anticosmic. The latter could not be derived from the former. Sassanian Zurvanism entails, it is true, certain elements—a transformation of popular dualism—that seriously question the intelligence of the good principle Ohrmazd.<sup>18</sup> But Zurvanism is no older than the IIIrd century, and Gnosticism appears no later than the beginning of the IIInd. The Iranian origin of gnostic dualism is thus excluded.

Dualism in general had been treated by Bianchi as a historicocultural<sup>19</sup> phenomenon: there is a phase in the development of human communities in which certain culturally related ideas appear with compelling force. This, of course, does not exclude diffusion, which remains one of the major factors in the explanation of similarities between cultures. Yet Gnosticism could not be considered as a mere derivate of something else. It was part of a subterranean trend of great importance in the religious life of the Greeks. Here Bianchi largely agreed with Simone Pétrement's thesis, drawing, however, Plato's precursors—and especially Orphism—into discussion.

Even if the existence of ancient Orphic communities has been denied, an Orphic ideology certainly existed before Plato. It entailed world rejection and devaluation of the body, based on the myth of the infant Dionysus killed and eaten by the Titans.<sup>20</sup> From it, the followers of the "Orphic life-style" (*bios orphikos*) derived the concept of a sin (*timōria*, *scelus*) that preceded the birth of humankind, yet which humankind inherited. To expiate it, abstentions (*apochai*) were necessary, entailing vegetarianism. These "Greek Puritans," as they have been defined,<sup>21</sup> also believed in metempsychosis or reincarnation. Here we have already, in the IVth century B.C.E. if not earlier, a set of traits that strongly resemble Gnosticism and the other forms of Western dualism down to the medieval Cathars.

Platonism has much in common with Orphism: the devaluation of the body (antisomatism), the idea of an unspecified "sin" that destined the individual souls to fall and become embodied, metempsychosis.<sup>22</sup> Contrary to those who, like Arthur Darby Nock, make of Gnosticism a sort of Platonism "run wild," Bianchi thinks that Gnosticism is so close to Platonism because both of them originate from dualistic speculations of the kind embodied in Orphism.<sup>23</sup> With the latter, Gnosticism also shares the idea of election and consubstantiality with the divine, for in Orphic myth humankind was born from the ashes of the Titans struck with lightning by Zeus for their deicide, and we thus contain the fragments of Dionysus swallowed by the Titans.

Although Bianchi insisted on saying that it would be an oversimplification to ascribe to him the derivation of Gnosticism from Orphism, his theory of invariants failed to provide an explanation for actual historical occurrences. If Gnosticism is not derived from Orphism, what is the link between the two? Or between Gnosticism and Platonism? Notwithstanding Bianchi's unique knowledge of dualism and his system of distinctive traits that define its species and subspecies, he still saw the relation between them as "historical," that is, chronological, instead of purely logical. Bianchi never envisioned dualism as an "ideal object" and therefore did not recognize that the dimension shared by Orphism, Platonism, Gnosticism, and Western dualistic trends is first and foremost logical. Instead of originating from one another, they all derive from a common source: the human mind.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4. Western Dualism: A Chronology

The system of Western dualism nevertheless crosses time in a sequence with which the reader should be familiar, as again she or he should be familiar with other possible outcomes of Western dualism, in time, space, or culture.

"Western dualism" is a label that includes a number of religious trends, most of which did originate outside Western Europe or North Africa. Marcion came from Sinope in Asia Minor. Mani was Persian and preached in Persia. The Paulicians flourished in Mesopotamia and the Bogomils in Bulgaria and Byzantium. Yet, with the exception of the Paulicians, all these trends, from Gnosticism to the French and Italian Cathars, had a serious impact on Western history and were dealt with by the Western Church as internal heresies.<sup>25</sup>

The "origin" of Gnosticism is practically unknown, the history of its beginnings controversial, but a birthdate after 70 C.E.—related or not to the fall of the Jerusalem Temple—is probable. That is when "Protognosticism" should be placed (see chapter 1.7 below). The great gnostic thinkers belong to the II<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. Basilides was active in Alexandria under the emperors Hadrian and Antoninus Pius (117–61). His life history is unknown, but perhaps a later phase of his doctrine is exposed by a number of sources (see chapters 3 and 4 below), sources far more parsimonious when it comes to his "son"—carnal or spiritual—Isidorus, who enriched gnostic doctrine with a tractate, now lost, on the astral wrappings of the soul.

During the same period falls the activity of Marcion, born at Sinope on the Pontus (Black Sea) in Asia Minor, where his father might have been the bishop of the local Christians. Marcion is not a gnostic. In some respects (see chapter 5) his teachings run contrary to those of the gnostics. Adolf von Harnack placed his birthdate about 85 and his death about 160; more radical researchers give as an alternative 70–150, making him a contemporary of the subapostolic Fathers. The last mention of this character, said to be old and influential, occurs about 150 in the *First Apology* of Justin Martyr.

Since the Jewish community of Sinope must have been important, some make of Marcion a christianized Jew. Ancient heresiologists slander him by attributing to him the seduction of a young girl in Sinope, in consequence of which he was alleged to have been excommunicated by his own father. Harnack is probably right in interpreting this as a simple deformation of the common Christian metaphor according to which the heretics have defiled the pure virgin who is the Church. Excommunicated or not, Marcion was able to prove that he had belonged to the Christian community of Sinope.

Marcion was by profession a shipowner and made sea voyages frequently. He stopped in Rome for a few years (139–44 according to Harnack), where he started by making the Roman church a gift of 200,000 sesterces. This is Tertullian's estimate. According to R. M. Grant, "200,000" is not an accurate figure; in popular language it simply means "a lot." Yet many historians, like Hubert Cancik, took it seriously and calculated that the money would have been enough for Marcion to keep house in Rome for twenty-five years.<sup>26</sup>

According to Harnack's calculations, at the end of July 144 C.E., Marcion gave his famous speech on the parable of the good and the bad tree (Luke 6:43) before the assembly of the presbyters of Rome. The

Romans rejected his doctrine and returned his gift. About 150, Justin Martyr ascertained that his heresy had corrupted the whole world. Irenaeus (ca. 180–85) makes him meet the gnostic Cerdo, who went to Rome from Syria under Bishop Hyginus (Iren. I.27.1). If the encounter took place, it certainly remained inconclusive.

The Marcionite church was well organized and, according to Tertullian, closely resembled the Christian church. It had a functional hierarchy, submitted to the same strict discipline as the rest of the faithful. Women held some leadership roles. All members of the community practiced strict asceticism and encratism (rejection of marriage). Meat and wine were forbidden, but fish was not. The sabbath was a fast day. Marcionite ethics were heroic in all respects. Contrary to Christians, who were supposed to accept martyrdom, Marcionites provoked it.

The Marcionite church was missionary. In the II<sup>nd</sup> century it posed serious competition to the Christians, but in the III<sup>rd</sup> it lost all its power in the West. Repeated persecutions obliged Eastern Marcionites to withdraw to rural areas. In the V<sup>th</sup> century, Theodoret of Cyrillus converted eight Marcionite villages in his diocese to orthodoxy.

About 140, another Christian who was going to be revealed as heterodox—but, in this case, a gnostic—Valentinus, left Alexandria for Rome. Tertullian made him a failed competitor for the Holy See, which could only apply to the succession of Bishop Pius in 143. He was present in Rome until the pontificate of Anicetus (154–65). According to Epiphanius of Salamis (late IV<sup>th</sup> century), he settled on the island of Cyprus.

Despite honorable attempts, the original doctrine of Valentinus cannot be reconstructed out of the few extant fragments. Two schools were born from his teaching: the Western school of Ptolemy (Irenaeus's contemporary) and Heracleon, and the Eastern or Anatolian school, to which belonged Markos (Irenaeus's contemporary), Axionicus of Antioch, and Theodotus (of Constantinople?).

Some minor gnostics are vaguely known: Monoimos "the Arab," Prodikos, and the painter Hermogenes of Antioch, who provoked Tertullian's satirical pen.

From the amount of antignostic literature, one may deduce that gnostics were numerous in the first Christian centuries. How many of them were there in Rome? One historian estimates that, for a population of approximately one million inhabitants, II<sup>nd</sup>-century Rome sheltered fifty to eighty thousand practicing Jews, twenty to thirty thousand adepts of Egyptian cults, the same figure for Syrian cults, some twenty thousand Christians, and ten thousand adepts of Mithra. Gnostics are not imagined in excess of a few hundred, perhaps less.<sup>27</sup>

Even if these figures are tentative, it appears that the actual weight of Gnosticism was not numerical but intellectual. About 215–17, Origen begins writing in order to bring back to the Church a lost sheep—his rich friend Ambrose of Alexandria, who was leaning toward Valentinian gnosis.<sup>28</sup> By the mid-IIIrd century, Plotinus critiques the Valentinian gnostics who were present at his own school.<sup>29</sup> Gnostics still existed in Egypt at the end of the IVth century, as witnessed in the Coptic translations of their original tractates; the later of these, like *Pistis Sophia*, are heavily influenced by Manichaeism.

Not much is known about the social history of late Gnosticism. It is probable, however, that gnostic writings circulated among the ascetic cenobites of the first Christian monasteries, founded in Egypt by Pachomius in the second half of the IIIrd century. The burial of the mysterious Nag Hammadi jar, whose discovery in 1945 opened up a new (and far from concluded) chapter in the study of Gnosticism, may be explained by an encyclical of the vigorous Patriarch of Alexandria, Athanasius (d. 373), which forbade, in 367, the possession of extracanonical books. In this case, the Nag Hammadi writings had been the property of a monk.<sup>30</sup>

The most impressive gnostic system and the most successful missionary church are the work of Mani in the IIIrd century.

Mani was born on 14 April 216 C.E. According to the Muslim doxographer Ibn al-Nadīm (ca. 988), his father, Pattek (Arabic Futtuq, Greek Pattikios or Patekios, Latin Patticius), a native of Ecbatana/Hamadan, had moved to the twin cities Seleucia-Ctesiphon/al-Madā'in. Struck by a revelation, Mani's father had joined a baptist community, the Elkesaites, Mughtasilah, or Sabeans of the Mesopotamian marshland.<sup>31</sup> After his birth, Mani remained with his mother, whose name is not certain (she is called Mais, Utāhim, or Maryam); she was an Ashgānīa, that is, she belonged to the imperial family of the Arsacids. Later on, Pattek introduced his son to the sect.

At twelve Mani met for the first time his heavenly double, the Twin,<sup>32</sup> Coptic *saich*, Pahlavi *arjamig*, Arabic *al-taumi* (after the Aramaic *tômā*), who told him that he was going to leave the Mughtasilah. Fragments of the Cologne Mani Codex indicate that he intended to reform the religion of the Elkesaites by ascribing to their mythical founder Alchasaïos a revelation that would have determined him not to molest the elements anymore. In particular, the frequent ablutions of the Mughtasilah constituted a serious disturbance to Water.

Twelve years later—on 19 April 240, according to L. Koenen<sup>33</sup>—Mani received a second visit from his Twin and split from the Elkesaites.

He went to Turan (whose shah he converted) and Makran and reverted to Iran under Shāpūr I (242–72). He reached the city Rēw-Ardashīr on the Persian Gulf, then Babylonia, then Messene and Susiana. In Messene he converted the Lord Mihrshah by causing him to visit in trance the Paradise of Light.<sup>34</sup> Introduced to Shāpūr I, he joined his retinue following an uncertain event—either the fear that seized the emperor at his sight or the cure of a young girl of his house.<sup>35</sup>

After Shāpūr's death, Mani maintained his position under the short reign of Hormizd I (273–74), but expecting a fall from grace with Bahrām I (274–76 or 277) he made plans to leave Susiana for Khorāsān. His projects thwarted, he took the road to Messene, stopping in Ctesiphon and Belabad, whose Viceroy Baat was his disciple. There he was caught and thrown into prison under charges advanced by powerful enemies: Kerdēr, the chief of the Magi priests (*Mōbadān mōbad*), and the chief of the Fire priests (*Hērbadān hērbad*). According to al-Bīrūnī, Bahram justified this action thus: "This man wishes the destruction of the world. Therefore it is necessary to start with his own destruction, before he could realize his project."<sup>36</sup> On the 4th of the month of Phamenoth, on a Monday at 11:00 A.M.,<sup>37</sup> Mani died after twenty-six days in prison.<sup>38</sup> Two Syriac sources mention that his body, flayed and his skin stuffed with hay, was displayed at the gates of Bēt-Lapat, the city of the Elamites.<sup>39</sup>

His death was followed by a sort of interregnum, after which Sisinnios (Mār Sīsin) and his ally Gabriabios (Mār Gabriab) succeeded him as leaders of the community. Sisinnios's successor was Innaios. Missions were dispatched to east and west. The great Western missionaries were Gabriabios, Mār Zāko, Patecius, Abzaxyā, and Addai, known by Augustine under the name Adimantus. The most successful Eastern missionary was Mār 'Ammō.

Manichaeism saw a considerable expansion. It spread to Syria, Egypt, Palestine, Asia Minor, North Africa, Europe, Eastern Iran, and, later, Central Asia.<sup>40</sup> Rome sheltered Manichaeans from the early IVth century. In 372 their presence in the Holy City was attested by a decree of the Emperor Valentinian. Ten years later the Manichaean auditor Augustine was given hospitality by them and conversed about doctrines.<sup>41</sup> With their recommendation, he was appointed rhetor in the city of Milan, where Ambrose and Filastrius of Brescia had declared a merciless war against Manichaeism.

When Augustine's recantation launched him on a brilliant career in the Catholic church, it was an auditor from Rome, Secundinus, who wrote to him at Hippo (405) in order to call him back to the Manichaean faith.<sup>42</sup> In 443 most Italian Manichaeans apparently lived in Rome,



where their community would be found existing still under Pope Hormisdas (514–23). Yet, it is especially in Asia Minor, at a distance from the threat to their churches, that Manichaeans would proliferate,<sup>43</sup> although by the mid-VIth century the only places where they could be found seemed to be Constantinople and Haran in northern Mesopotamia.<sup>44</sup>

Manichaeism was probably taken to China by a Persian missionary in 694. In 719 a Manichaean astronomer apparently visited the Chinese court. Manichaean books in Chinese were in circulation by the beginning of the VIIIth century, which led to a severe condemnation of their perverse doctrine in 732, but adepts were not prosecuted.

In 758 the officer An Lushān revolted against Emperor Xuan Zōng of the Tang dynasty and occupied the capitals Sian and Luoyang. The emperor called for help, and the Uigur Turks freed Luoyang in November 762. The Uigur Lord Mon Yu, who stayed in Luoyang between November 762 and March 763, met Manichaean monks and, impressed by their doctrine, took four of them to the Uigur court. Shortly thereafter, Manichaeism was declared the state religion in the Uigur Empire, with the result that Manichaeans in China were free to profess their religion. In 840 the Khirgiz destroyed Uigur power; consequently in 843 a harsh persecution against Chinese Manichaeans began. About 981–84 a group of Uigur refugees that had settled near Turfan continued to profess Manichaeism openly, alongside Chinese Buddhism.<sup>45</sup>

In the second half of the IVth century, Christianity merged with Roman society. Many priests and bishops married and had children; bishops were elected by the patriciate, with a view toward their management skills rather than virtue.<sup>46</sup> The peripheries of the empire—Syria, Egypt, and Spain—were cradles of ascetic movements, part of which would sooner or later be declared heretical. Since a number of them have been named in connection with dualism, it is necessary to mention them briefly in order to confirm or dismiss this connection.

The Messalians—from the Syriac *msalleyânê*, “those who pray”<sup>47</sup>—have many names in Greek: Enthousiasts, Choreutes, Adelphians, Eustathians, Lampetians, and Marcianites, among others. They were first mentioned about 370 C.E.<sup>48</sup> The most famous Messalian, perhaps founder of the movement, was a certain Adelphius, who revealed the secrets of the sect to Flavian, patriarch of Antioch (381–404), thus causing the Messalians to be expelled from Syria. They took refuge in the dioceses of Asia and Pontus (Lycaonia and Pamphylia). They were condemned about 388 at Side and anathematized about 390 by the Synod of

Antioch, before being again condemned by the Council of Ephesus (431). During the second half of the Vth century, a certain Lampetius, ordained Christian priest about 460, founded Messalian monasteries in the mountains between Cilicia and Isauria; in Syria, Lampetians were still around about 532-34.

At the end of the VIth century the Messalians were called Marcianites (not Marcionites), after one of their leaders, Marcian, money changer in Constantinople under Justinian and Justin II.

Under persecution, the Messalians of Mesopotamia took refuge in Sassanian Persia. Denounced and condemned by the councils of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (486, 576, 585, perhaps 596), they would be tracked down in the VIIth century by Babai the Great, inspector of the monasteries during the vacancy of the patriarchal see from 607 to 628. These must have been the last actual Messalians. The accusation of Messalianism still occurred thereafter, but as a formula devoid of meaning.<sup>49</sup>

The doctrine of the Messalians was not actually dualistic, or at least no more than Christian orthodoxy is dualistic. Evil abides in humans as a demon. Three years of prayer expel the demon, bringing back the Holy Spirit. The latter visibly and tangibly settles in a person, similar to a fire that transforms whoever possesses it into a being capable of reading other hearts, having revelations, and above all seeing the demons invisible to others. The expulsion of the demon is a physical operation; he is strenuously evacuated through the mouth and through the nose, spitting and blowing. The "spirituals" can see the demon leaving in panic, like a smoke or a snake.<sup>50</sup> The Spirit confers complete quietude upon those who possess it; the Messalian could therefore in principle indulge in any license, for the Spirit would not be spoiled by it.<sup>51</sup>

The writings of a late-IVth-century monk, Symeon of Mesopotamia, were used in Messalian circles condemned at the Synod of Side in 400.<sup>52</sup> In 1941 Hermann Dörries sought to demonstrate that the writings of Symeon, attributed to Macarius the Great, were Messalian indeed. In a beautiful book published in 1978, Dörries changed his mind, showing that Symeon was neither a Messalian nor a dualist.<sup>53</sup> Symeon believed that evil dominates this world, from which neither Roman legislation nor the message of the Bible were able to expel it.<sup>54</sup> It is an occult power that determines the destiny of humankind, yet *it does not belong to human nature*: on the contrary, it is *against nature*.<sup>55</sup> Evil is not a second principle: it was created good by God and became evil only by exerting its own free will.<sup>56</sup> God uses Satan to test man.<sup>57</sup> According to Dörries, Symeon was not only anti-Manichaeism,<sup>58</sup> he was anti-Messalian as well.<sup>59</sup>

In the far West, Priscillian of Ávila, a Spanish ascetic whose intention was perfectly orthodox and whose doctrine was only slightly less so, attained the special status of being the first Christian beheaded for heresy with the complicity of the Church (at Treves in 385). It is now generally believed that the accusations of Manichaeism and magic raised against him by another Spanish bishop, Itacius of Ossonoba, were simply drawn by the latter from well-known heresiological sources without any actual reference to Priscillianism.<sup>60</sup> Despite their condemnation by two councils of Toledo, in 400 and 447, the Council of Braga in 561 still ascertained the existence of Priscillians. The martyrdom of their master, whom they knew to be innocent, had strengthened them to resist for over two centuries, and it is not impossible that his secret tomb became the famous pilgrimage place of Santiago de Compostela.

In Egypt, if Evagrius of Pontus (b. Iborá, 345; d. Egypt, 399) was not the only Origenist, he was certainly the most famous. Thanks to the *Historia lausiaca* of his contemporary Palladius, Evagrius's biography is relatively well known. Born in 345 on the Black Sea coast, he received the lectorate from Basil the Great, and, after the latter's death in 379, he was ordained deacon by Gregory Nazianzen, whom he followed to Constantinople. In 381, when Gregory resigned from the patriarchal see, Evagrius stayed with his successor Nectarius and became infatuated with the wife of a high imperial officer. As a last resort against the consumptive flame of this passion, he fled to Jerusalem, where he was received by Melany the Elder, who persuaded him to take to the desert. Thus in 383 he settled at Nitria for two years, then for fourteen years, until his death, at the Cells desert nearby. The rude Egyptian monks did not greet this Origenist intellectual warmly, but at the Cells he met a number of friends of Melany who shared his views. The most influential among them was Ammonios, nicknamed *ho Parōtēs* ("Earbandage"), since he had cut his ear in order to escape nomination to bishop. Ammonios had three brothers, tall like himself, and the four of them, all disciples of Apa Pambō, were called *hoi Makroi*, "the Tall Ones."

Things went relatively smoothly before the arrival in Palestine of the formidable heresiologist Epiphanius in 393. Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria bestowed his protection upon the Origenists until 399, when he withdrew it not over matters of doctrine but in a petty and insignificant argument. A synod gathered in 400 at Alexandria condemned the works of Origen and those who read them. Expelled from Egypt, the Tall Brothers found fragile hospitality in Constantinople with another victim of intrigues: John Chrysostom. In the meantime Evagrius had died, shortly before Epiphany of 399.

The intellectual protagonist of the anti-Origenist fight was the fierce and erratic Jerome, who had settled in 386 at Bethlehem in a monastery founded by Paula. First a convinced Origenist, Jerome had joined Epiphanius in 393, breaking with his distinguished, longtime friend, Rufinus of Aquileia and many others. In 404 the local dispute came to an end through the reconciliation of Theophilus and the Tall Brothers. But Origenism would be definitively and repeatedly condemned, in 543 and in 553 at the Vth ecumenical council, where Evagrius Ponticus and Didymus the Blind (Rufinus's master and onetime favorite of Jerome's, who called the blind man "Didymus the Seeing") were anathematized. Their condemnation was repeated in 692 and 787, at the VIIth Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.<sup>61</sup> We will later discuss Origenism (chapter 9) according to late-IVth-century heresiological sources.<sup>62</sup>

### 5. Gnosticism in the Middle East?

The German scholar Heinz Halm is the champion of the theory of continuity between Gnosticism and two Shiite traditions: the Extremists or *ghulāt*, who originate in VIIIth-century Iraq and are represented today by the Syrian Nusairi, and the Ismaelites or Qarmatians (Iraq, IXth century), from which the Syrian Druzes split in the XIth century.<sup>63</sup> The analogies found by Halm are rather superficial and involve esoteric speculations on the creation, the letters of the alphabet, syzygies of heavenly aeons, series of prophets, and so forth<sup>64</sup>—all topics sometimes present in Gnosticism (as well as in Jewish mysticism) but not specifically gnostic. The foremost argument devised by Halm in favor of his thesis rests on the alleged resemblances he discovers between the gnostic Demiurge and the Demiurge in certain sectarian Shiite writings. For example, an Ismaili cosmogony of the Xth century features a female hypostasis called Kūnī (feminine imperative: "Be!") that acts like the gnostic demiurge.<sup>65</sup> The text does not communicate to every reader Halm's unshakable conviction.

Similarly, there is nothing gnostic in the myth of *Umm al-kitāb*, the Primordial Book (lit. "Mother of the Book"), written in Persian and not by Ismailis, although found among them at the beginning of the XXth century. According to Halm, the most ancient part of the writing was redacted in Iraq during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (170–93 H./786–809 C.E.). The first sequence derives from the apocryphal *Life of Adam and Eve*, which might have circulated among gnostics and is the source of the story of Iblis in the Qur'ān (VII.11); but it was not originally gnostic.

It tells how Azazil (the Qur'anic Iblis) refuses to worship Salman, the Primordial Man. Therefore Azazil and his 124,000 followers are expelled from the kingdom of heaven. God draws from Azazil his red color, from which God makes a curtain to hide himself from the rebellious angels. Every thousand years God comes out and makes a peace proposal, and every time the rebels reject it. With every rejection God makes a new heaven from a new red curtain, and so far he made eight of them.<sup>66</sup> A similar cosmogony exists among the Syrian Nusairi.<sup>67</sup> Like the Bogomil myth (see chapter 8 below), it unites popular tastes with esoteric knowledge and tends to come up with an answer concerning the number of fallen angels, which, according to Augustine, gives the *numerus praedestinatorum*, the number of free seats for the Righteous in heaven.

Bogomilism, Catharism, and Lurian Kabbalah are deeply interested in the same kind of speculations. However, there is nothing gnostic about them, let alone dualistic. The fall of the Devil is here a Qur'anic story; the Devil is *not* a second principle, and all heavens are created by God from a substance—red color—that belonged to the archangel Azazil. One is obliged to conclude that none of the parallels emphasized by Halm hints at a possible convergence between Gnosticism and Shiite doctrines, let alone at a possible derivation of the latter from the former.

The same applies to materials not studied by Halm, as for example the cosmogony of the *Ahl-i haqq*, who in the 1970s still existed in western Iran, in the Kurdish province Kermanshah.<sup>68</sup> Creation starts with a primordial pearl, after which God wishes to give life to Pīr-Benyāmīn or Jibrayil (the archangel Gabriel), who does not know his creator. When God talks to him, Gabriel answers like the gnostic demiurge: "I do not know who you are, you who talk to me in secret; for I am a free being in the world, and I know no more. No one has mastery over me, and besides me I know no one."<sup>69</sup> But after his ignorance costs him his wings, burned by God's anger, Gabriel is pardoned, recognizes his impotence, and declares himself God's humble servant.<sup>70</sup> No episode of creation follows this brief demonstration of God's omnipotence. No more than the myth of the Yezidis<sup>71</sup> does the cosmogony of the *Ahl-i haqq* contain any gnostic motif.

The situation of the Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran is quite different from that of Shiite sects. Like the Jews, the Christians, and the Zoroastrians, they are "people of the book" (*ahl al-kitāb*). Their language is an eastern Aramaic dialect that came into being in lower Babylonia and is related to the upper Babylonian dialect of the Talmud.<sup>72</sup> Their writings are polemical toward Islam, Christianity, and especially Judaism.<sup>73</sup>

Mandaean theogonies are various and contradictory.<sup>74</sup> Mandaean dualism is directly borrowed from Manichaeism. It is based on the opposition between the world of Light and Life and the world of Darkness. Darkness is either coeternal with Light or younger than it. Darkness contains the terrifying Hēwāt/Rūhā (*hēwāt* hints at her shape of beast or reptile), Dark or Muddy Water, the Dragons and the evil Rebels. The King of Darkness is the son of the archdemoness Rūhā. He is also called Snake, Dragon, Monster, Giant, Lord of the World. A tractate of the *Right Ginza*<sup>75</sup> borrows from Manichaeism the formidable appearance of the King of Darkness: he has the head of a lion, the body of a dragon, the wings of an eagle, the sides of a turtle, the hands and feet of a monster (see chapter 6 below). Mandaean cosmogonies oscillate between radical and monarchianist dualism. Mandaeism is a precious resource, in so far as it incorporates many authentic gnostic and Manichaean motifs in a kind of unique, undigested patchwork made up of pieces of Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Islam, in which predominates the gnostic polemical tone toward the cosmic Rulers of the World, the Planets, and the Signs of the Zodiac—all children of Rūhā.

Yet the contention of the German school of history of religions, kept up by a number of modern scholars, that Mandaeism would represent not only a relatively recent blend of religious themes borrowed from all possible quarters but at the same time an example of "pre-Christian Gnosis" is totally unverifiable. Even the most ancient layers of Mandaeism, which are not gnostic at all but simply Jewish Christian and baptist, cannot be much older than Manichaeism.

Nothing concerning early Gnosticism—its origin, chronology, mythology—can be inferred from Mandaeism. Yet a contact between Gnosticism and Mandaeism in its present form took place at some point, probably after the IIIrd or IVth century, which is not the case as far as any Shiite sects are concerned. Any resemblances between Shiite doctrines and Gnosticism, as far as they exist—and they are dim indeed—are due to similar mind processes, yet starting from largely different premises.

## 6. East and West: A Common History?

If the data furnished by the Byzantine writer Peter of Sicily, monk and higoumen, are correct, the sect of the Paulicians, a popular derivate of Marcionism (see chapter 7 below), was constituted in the VIIth century.

Peter of Sicily was sent in 869 by the Byzantine Emperor Basil I to Tibrikē or Tephrik (Tephrikē) on the upper Euphrates River on a concil-

iatory mission to the Paulician chief Chrysokeir during a period when the military power of the Paulicians, allies of the Moslems, had reached an unpleasant climax. In 867 or 868 Chrysokeir had raided the city of Ephesus, making the Church of Saint John into a stable for his horses. Peter of Sicily stayed in Tibrikē nine months without making any progress. Basil was forced to undertake military action in 870, which ended up in disaster in front of the walls of Tibrikē. Yet two years later (872) his son-in-law brilliantly defeated the Paulician army; Chrysokeir was beheaded by a bounty hunter. One century later the Emperor John Tsimisces deported many Paulicians to the province of Thrace (now Bulgaria), around the fortress of Philippopolis. Naturally scholars jumped to the conclusion that they must have been the ancestors of the Bogomils, but the matter is not that simple. In exchange for their military support, the Paulicians were granted religious toleration, but their loyalty was mediocre. During the Epirus campaign against the Normands (1081) about twenty-five hundred Paulicians deserted, and toleration was revoked. The Emperor Alexis I Comnenos, later a notorious persecutor of the Bogomils, intervened personally at Philippopolis to perform mass conversions to orthodoxy. The rest was accomplished by Jesuits in the XVIIth century.

A certain conflation of the Paulicians described by Peter of Sicily with certain "Paulicians," Armenian adoptionists, must have taken place early, for Peter ascribes the founding of the sect of the Paulicians to a certain Paul of Samosata and his brother John, sons of a "Manichaean" woman called Callinice. This Paul must be the heresiarch Paul, bishop of Samosata, a refined adoptionist of the IIIrd century.

The actual founder of the Paulicians was probably a certain Constantine of Mananali on the upper Euphrates (north of Samosata), who received, during the reign of Constans II (641-68) a New Testament (orthodox canon) from a Syrian deacon who was passing by. Heresy, declares Peter, enouncing the common opinion held by his Church for nearly two thousand years, begins when lay people start reading and commenting on the Scriptures. Constantine took the name of one of Paul's disciples (Silvanus), a tradition that was to be kept up by all Paulician leaders and that seems to indicate that someone had simply introduced him to the basic principles of Marcionite New Testament exegesis. (Paul had been Marcion's only hero.)

The Paulicians were persecuted, adherents forced to move often from place to place. Then the sect split and the remaining branch settled near Antioch in Pisidia, knowing its best times under a particularly gifted heresiarch, a certain Sergius-Tychicus, who led for about thirty-five years. Prosecuted for terrorist actions performed in the province of New

Caesarea, the Paulicians were forced to flee the Byzantine Empire and take refuge in Moslem territory with the emir of Melitene, who offered them the village of Argaoun. The collaborative incursions of Sergius and the Moslems doubled in intensity after the former's death in 835, when the leader of the Paulicians became a certain Karbeas, former captain of the imperial guard in the Theme of Anatolia, who had deserted with five thousand soldiers. The most glorious times of the Paulician state were reached under his son-in-law Chrysokeir, and so was its abrupt end.

Superficially, Bogomils and Paulicians have a few things in common, yet their doctrines show no serious relation. Contrary to Paulicianism, Bogomilism does not assert that this world is produced by a second principle. Despite the presence of an apparently bizarre myth, the premises of Bogomilism seem orthodox, yet the ensuing anthropological and ethical consequences have heavy dualistic undertones. The movement deserves to be called pseudodualistic (see chapter 8 below).

Bogomilism was noted for the first time in Bulgaria around 950; after 972 it was the object of a long refutation by a priest Cosmas. Nothing is known about its founder, the priest Bogomil. At the beginning of the XIth century the heresy was present in the Theme of Opsikion in Asia Minor, where the heretics were called *phoundaites*, from Latin *funda*, "bag," borrowed in Greek. These bag-people (Bulgarian *torbeshi*) were beggars, collecting alms in bags. They called themselves Christians. Both medieval heresiologists and modern scholars derive Bogomilism's beliefs, for obscure reasons, from Messalianism.

During Alexis Comnenos's reign, Bogomils had settled in Constantinople. The emperor lured their leader, a pious man called Basil, into a nasty trap: he pretended to contemplate conversion and had Basil spill out all the secrets of his faith while a secretary, hidden behind a curtain, recorded everything, in the presence of the dignitaries of the empire. Embittered and hardened by such guile, Basil refused to retract and was burned at the stake.

Influential Bogomil churches still existed in 1167 in Constantinople, in Bulgaria, and in a territory that Italian sources call Sclavonia—probably Bosnia on the Dalmatian coast, where heterodox Christians, mentioned for the first time in 1199, ended up thirty years later constituting a powerful church. Unfortunately their doctrine is known to us only from late sources (XIVth–XVth century), which attribute to it *radical* dualism. On the contrary, according to the earlier heresiologists, the church of the "Sclavs" professed a monarchianist doctrine similar to the Bogomils'.

If the Bosnians had been radical dualists in the XIIth century, the riddle of Catharism would be solved. But since they were not, it subsists.



As a matter of fact, the Cathars belonged to two quite different groups: one that was simply Bogomil, and another one that preached a radical dualism of intellectual origin, made up of a concoction of Origenism and Manichaeism, with much more of the former than the latter. The two types of Catharism may not share common doctrines but they have similar ethics, stemming from Bogomilism. Radical Catharism was probably fashioned in the Byzantine Empire; the Byzantine priest Nicetas, who visited Provence in 1167, already belonged to the radical order of Drugunthia-Dragovitsa.

The route followed by Bogomilism into Western Europe is supposedly via the Dalmatian coast into Venice, Lombardy, Piedmont, Provence, and into France (Provence at that time was not a territory of the French crown). Two isolated episodes at the beginning of the XIth century may already indicate the penetration of Catharism. In 1143 Cathars were at Cologne. By the mid-XIIth century their northern center was in the province of Champagne, at Mont-Aimé in the region of Vertus.<sup>76</sup> Guibert de Nogent had already signaled a heresy similar to Catharism in 1114 in the Soissonais.<sup>77</sup>

In 1167 the famous Cathar "council" of Saint-Félix-du-Lauragais took place in the presence of *papas* Nicetas, Bogomil bishop of Constantinople, whom the Westerners call *papa* (pope) by analogy (*papas* meaning simply "priest" in Greek). Nicetas confirmed the Cathar bishops for the dioceses of France (Robert d'Épernon) and Albi (Sicard Cellerier); reconsoled (*consolamentum* was the name of the Cathar investiture, as we will see) Marc, bishop of Lombardy, who passed from the Bulgarian order (Bogomilism) to the order of Drugunthia-Dragovitsa (radical dualism); and created three new bishops: Bernard Raimond for the diocese of Toulouse, Guiraud Mercier for Carcassonne, and Raimond de Casals for Agen.<sup>78</sup>

In Lombardy, monarchianist dualism proved much stronger than the radical doctrine (see chapter 9 below). After the Cathar organization was destroyed in Provence by a crusade and the fall of the stronghold of Montségur on 16 March 1244, only about two hundred "perfects" ("parfaits") of the radical church remained. At the beginning of the XIVth century, in spite of the fearsome Inquisition, the notary Pierre Authié was intensely active in South France. He had received the *consolamentum* in Lombardy, probably in the church "of the French," and had become monarchian. His doctrine has almost nothing to do with the gloomy radical dualism of the Albigenses one century before.

The fate of the Italian Cathars became problematic after 1300. Tracked down mercilessly, they fled to Sicily or disappeared in the

Piedmontese Alps. They are not mentioned any more after 1412.<sup>79</sup> Jean Duvernoy sees a connection between the emigration of the Cathars to Lombardy and the sudden appearance of the famous Lombard bankers in the XIVth century.<sup>80</sup>

## 7. Jewish Gnosticism?

It was one of Gershom Scholem's favorite ideas that early Jewish mysticism was a form of Gnosticism.<sup>81</sup> It is easy to see that this is not so: multiplication of heavenly angels, watchwords, and seals is something some gnostic texts have in common with Merkabah mysticism, yet it is neither gnostic nor Jewish. It is common Hellenistic currency that circulates among the magical papyri as well. If we were inclined to search for "origins," the late Egyptian derivative of the Pyramid and Coffin texts known as "The Book of the Dead" is probably the closest we could get.<sup>82</sup>

Unfortunately the relation between Jewish mysticism and Gnosticism became one of Scholem's *idées fixes*, leading him to the invention of a "gnostic tradition" that would lead, through Bogomilism and Catharism, to the early Kabbalists of Provence and to the XIth-century book *Bahir*, which features God as "bearer of the cosmic potencies . . . hypostatized as aeons."<sup>83</sup> Yet *nothing* from the fragments of the *Bahir* commented upon by Scholem himself, or translated in English by others,<sup>84</sup> justifies such interpretation. The organization of the world, or humanity, as a tree is an ancient (and banal) analogue or metaphor. Plato spoke of humanity as a tree rooted in heaven. Nowhere do gnostics—who otherwise speculate widely—conceive of God or the world or the Anthropos or the like in terms of a tree of aeons, although they obviously develop contradictory theories concerning the trees of Paradise. The *middoth*, attributes or Powers of God, are not gnostic aeons any more than Philonic Neoplatonic *dynameis*. And the traces of "two Sophias"—an upper and a lower—are illusory.

This being said, it is not surprising to find in the Kabbalistic school of Isaac Luria (1534–1572)—the Holy Lion ('Arî ha-Qadosh) of Safed, whose teachings were mainly preserved by his disciple Hayyim Vital (1534–1620)—some reflections that at first sight have a gnostic flavor.

Luria's doctrine is extremely complex.<sup>85</sup> A few things about it are commonly known, such as God's withdrawal (*tsimtsûm*, "contraction") in himself in order to free space for creation (*tehiru*), or the "breaking of the vessels" (*shevirat ha-kelim*)—that is, the interruption of godly procession and the invasion of the spiritual "channels" by matter, which leads

to the appearance of Evil: the *qelipot*, shards or "shells" of the spiritual channels fallen down in the void of space. Yet out of this initial picture, a whole doctrine develops that the gnostics never imagined.

The world will exist as long as there are souls of the chosen people to be saved, that is, drawn out of the *qelipot*.<sup>86</sup> This happens in only one way: when the just copulate and have children. Thus procreation and reincarnation are positively valued; the "gate of birth" is the only one that recovers great souls engulfed in the shells, for the shells detain not the lesser souls but the greater ones: the more spiritual a soul, the more she is ensnared by Evil, which is likewise spiritual. More than one soul, or "spark" of a soul, can be obtained by a human being.

The number of souls of Israel is 600,000. When all are recovered, the world will end. Many were the speculations on the number of souls, or seats in heaven. They compare nicely with an Augustinian frame of mind, for it was the theologian of Hippo who asserted that the number of seats for the Righteous in heaven is equal with the number of places freed by the fallen angels. Calculations of the kind were current in Bogomilism and Catharism, but not so in Gnosticism. As for reincarnation, it is such a widespread idea that half of the people of the earth share it. It is easy to fall within this half without being gnostic, or Hindu. Some among the gnostics fall together with Lurian Kabbalists, but so do many Melanesian, Polynesian, and North American natives (see Chapter 4 below).

It is impossible to prove either that Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) did or did not have any acquaintance with Kabbalah. For him the Godhead is *Ungrund*. Without his Son, his image is sinister: it is that of the Devil. It is in Christ only that original Darkness becomes God.<sup>87</sup> The body is "frozen desire."<sup>88</sup> God has two expressions: a frightening one, the Old Testament divinity who is only just; and the true God, who is the God of love, not of justice.<sup>89</sup> The Old Testament god is actually the Devil.<sup>90</sup>

Böhme's cosmology has three principles: Darkness, Light, and their mixture.<sup>91</sup> The creation of the world proceeds in two steps, through two demiurges: the first one, called *Verbum fiat*, is a Saturnian entity; the other one, creator of the visible world and World Soul, is the angry god of the Old Testament.<sup>92</sup> The two-stage cosmology presupposes a two-stage anthropology: "Adam is created with two bodies. One is a body of light, perfect image of the human form represented from all eternity by Wisdom and once possessed by Lucifer. The other one is a body of darkness. It resembles the spirit of this world, the spirit of the macrocosm."<sup>93</sup>

Böhme is an important link in a theory that wants to bring Gnosticism very close to us. Here we will examine only that part of it that is

based on historical continuity (the rest will be dealt with in chapter 11 below). Ernst Topitsch believes that, more than any other current of thought at the dawn of modernity, it was German evangelical theology that kept up many Neoplatonic and gnostic motifs carried over by Christian Kabbalah. This powerful combination still formed, until a very recent epoch, the German Ideology, a sort of "family inheritance" which only a very few German philosophers ever abandoned. In the transmission of "gnostic" motifs to the young Hegel, Topitsch assigns a key role to the Pietist Theosophist Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782; see chapter 11 below).<sup>94</sup> If one contemporary philosopher drew largely upon the old "German Ideology," that was certainly Martin Heidegger. The discussion of Heidegger's presumed Gnosticism will be among the last in this book.

Here our brief chronology of dualism comes to an end. The *history* of dualism does in no way form the object of the present study. This research is exclusively concerned with the mythical structures of Western dualistic trends, from Gnosticism to Catharism, and with the discussion concerning the existence of modern Gnosticism. In fact, the debate surrounding Gnosticism and modern nihilism still belongs to the system of Western dualism and can be analyzed as a sequel to it, although a polarity inversion has taken place in the basic rule of production of nihilistic myths and moods (see chapter 11 below). This inversion of polarity accounts for the main difference between Gnosticism and existentialistic nihilism: the former is excessively optimistic, the latter is utterly pessimistic.

## Notes

1. Definitions of dualism have been plentifully produced by Ugo Bianchi, from the first edition of his classic *Il Dualismo religioso: Saggio storico ed etnologico* (L'Erma di Bretschneider: Rome, 1958) to the article "Dualism" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (Macmillan: New York, 1987). Other definitions may be found in the second edition of Bianchi's *Dualismo* (1983), in his *Selected Essays on Gnosticism, Dualism and Mysteriesophy* (Brill: Leiden, 1978), and in his *Prometeo Orfeo Adamo: Tematiche religiose sul destino, il male, la salvezza* (Ateneo & Bizzarri: Rome, 1976).
2. J. B. Russell, *Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages* (Univ. of California Press: Berkeley, 1965), 188–91.
3. Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (Continuum: New York, 1983), 104.
4. Ugo Bianchi (*Il Dualismo*, 194–97; *Selected Essays*, 75–85) confines the original area of dualism to central and northeastern Asia, northern Eurasia, Australia, Oceania, and Tierra

del Fuego. From Asia dualism spread to North America, Europe, and Africa. This is a genetic view that may be superfluous. Because of the predictable character of the dualistic response to the world, it need not be confined to any specific world area.

5. On the Trickster, the latest bibliography is included in the articles in *The Encyclopedia of Religions*, vol. 15, by L. E. Sullivan, "Tricksters: An Overview," 45–46; R. Pelton, "African Tricksters," 46–48; M. Linscott Ricketts, "North American Tricksters," 48–51; L. E. Sullivan, "Mesoamerican and South American Tricksters," 51–53.
6. According to such a definition, South America—with the exception of Tierra del Fuego—was considered exempt from dualism. Yet dualistic myths having a woman as protagonist seem to exist in this area as well; see my "Feminine versus Masculine: The Sophia Myth and the Origins of Feminism," in H. G. Kippenberg, ed., *Struggles of Gods* (Mouton: Berlin, New York, Amsterdam, 1984), 65–98.
7. See esp. M. P. Dragomanov, *Notes on the Slavic Religio-Ethical Legends: The Dualistic Creation of the World* (1892–94), trans. E. W. Count (Mouton: The Hague, 1961); and Jordan Ivanov, *Livres et légendes bogomiles* (1925), trans. M. Ribeyrol (Maisonneuve-Larose: Paris, 1976).
8. Dragomanov, *Notes*, 21, n. 6. Obviously North American dualistic myths could be explained as a result of the migration of the ancestors of American natives from Asia, yet this would not account for the absence of dualism from South America.
9. See Oskar Dähnhardt, ed., *Natursagen: Eine Sammlung naturdeutender Sagen Märchen Fabeln und Legenden*, vol. 1 (1907): *Sagen zum Alten Testament* (reprint, Burt Franklin: New York, 1970), esp. 1–36. The last scholars to analyze these legends in a diffusionistic perspective were Mircea Eliade, in *Zalmoxis, the Vanishing God: Comparative Studies in the Religions and Folklore of Dacia and Eastern Europe*, trans. W. R. Trask (Univ. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1972), 76ff, and Hannjost Lixfeld, *Gott und Teufel als Weltschöpfer* (Fink: Munich, 1971).
10. Especially in my books *Psychanodia I: A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Brill: Leiden, 1983), 16–23, and *Expériences de l'extase, de l'Hellénisme au Moyen Age* (Payot: Paris, 1984), 9–10, hereinafter referred to as *Exp.*
11. Carsten Colpe, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule: Darstellung und Kritik ihres Bildes vom gnostischen Erlösermythus* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1961).
12. I expressed my viewpoint—which is, I believe, the viewpoint of a whole generation of scholarship—on recent representatives of the German school in a series of articles and book reviews. I will spare the reader the details of this debate.
13. Ugo Bianchi, ed., *The Origins of Gnosticism* (Brill: Leiden, 1967).
14. Simone Pétrement, *Le Dualisme chez Platon, les Gnostiques et les Manichéens* (1947; reprint, G. Monfort: Brionne, 1982).
15. Bianchi, *Il Dualismo; Selected Essays*.
16. Raffaele Pettazzoni, *I Misteri: Saggio di una teoria storico-religiosa* (Bologna, 1923).
17. Bianchi's typology is certainly the most thoroughgoing morphology of dualism by the method of invariants. Unfortunately it is not flawless. The Italian scholar has ascertained that dualism in its multifarious occurrences is characterized by certain constants: It can be radical versus mitigated, eschatological (or linear) versus dialectical (cyclical), antic cosmic versus pro cosmic. Radical dualism entails the opposition of two coeternal principles, mitigated dualism entails the appearance of the second principle at a certain point in time. Eschatological dualism entails the destruction of the negative principle at doomsday, cyclical dualism the resumption of the original situation in a new cycle. Antic cosmic dualism entails the devaluation of the world, pro cosmic does not. Although Bianchi also considers the pair of opposites antisomatic versus prosomatic, he fails to use it consistently in his typology. Yet there are examples of dualisms that do not devalue the body. As we will see further (chapter 9), Origen's dualism is prosomatic. To be exhaustive, Bianchi should have coined one more dichotomy: anti-hylic (against matter) versus prohylic.

Based on this table of binary oppositions, Bianchi defined individual forms of dualism by distinctive traits as follows:

- Zoroastrianism: radical, eschatological, procosmic;
- Orphics, Empedocles, Heraclitus: radical, dialectical;
- Hindu dualism (âtmân versus mâyâ): radical, dialectical;
- Plato: radical, dialectical, procosmic;
- Gnosticism: mitigated, eschatological, anticosmic;
- Manichaeism: radical, anticosmic;
- Neoplatonism: mitigated, eschatological, procosmic;
- Mandaeism: radical;
- Bogomilism: mitigated, eschatological, anticosmic;
- Cathars (radical): radical, anticosmic;
- Cathars (monarchianist): mitigated, anticosmic.

Some traits could not be completed either because of lack of information or lack of certainty.

18. The versions of the Zurvanite myth have been presented and analyzed in R. C. Zaehner's classic *Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1955). A repertoire of popular legends featuring an ignorant creator god was given in my article "A Dualistic Myth in Rumanian Folklore," *Dialogue* 4/5 (1980), 45-50.
19. The historicocultural (*Kulturhistorisch*) school or "Vienna School" led by Father Wilhelm Schmidt held the idea of the development of religion according to "culture-cycles" (*Kulturkreise*). Each phase of material civilization comes with its own religious contents.
20. This myth has been analyzed in my *Exp.*, 49-50.
21. W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (London, 1952).
22. See my "L' 'Ascension de l'âme' dans les mystères et hors des mystères," in U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren, eds., *La Soteriologia dei culti orientali nell'Impero romano* (Brill: Leiden, 1982), 276-302.
23. Bianchi uses the word *mysteriosophy*, coined by the Italian scholar Nicola Turchi, to define these peculiar speculations that flourish around the Greek mysteries.
24. As to why the human mind may be tempted to produce dualistic solutions, we advanced a hypothesis in the French edition of this book, based on the abundance of dual hierarchical classifications and on the bicamerality of the human brain, with an unbalanced diversification of functions, which also explains the preeminence of the right hand over the left, on which dual classifications are based; see Rodney Needham, ed., *Right and Left: Essay on Dual Symbolic Classification* (Univ. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1973); *Symbolic Classification* (Goodyear: Santa Monica, CA, 1979); and Julian Jaynes's highly controversial book *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1976).
25. The literature on Western dualism is not overwhelming. There is so far no comprehensive study of the connection between late antique (Gnostics, Marcionites, Manichaeans) and medieval (Paulicians, Bogomils, Cathars) trends. The first general work on medieval dualistic movements belongs to Ignaz von Döllinger, *Beiträge zur Sekten-geschichte des Mittelalters*, vol. 1: *Geschichte der gnostisch-manichäischen Sekten im frühen Mittelalter*; vol. 2: *Dokumente vornehmlich zur Geschichte der Valdensier und Katharer* (1890; reprint, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1968). Commonly read and still in print is the short *Medieval Manichees* (1949) by Steven Runciman.

Two other general presentations of medieval dualism exist, but they do not add much to research: Raoul Manselli, *L'Eresia del male* (Morano: Turin, 1963); and Milan Loos, *Dualist Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Academia-M. Nijhoff: Prague, 1974).

Excellent studies on the relation between Bogomilism and the other medieval trends are contained in Dmitri Obolensky's *Bogomils: A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism* (1948;

Hall: Twickenham, 1972); and in Henri-Charles Puech's conclusion to *Le Traité contre les Bogomiles de Cosmas le Prêtre*, trans. A. Vaillant with a study by H.-Ch. Puech (Imprimerie Nationale-Droz: Paris, 1945). Puech supplemented this study with an article, "Catharisme médiéval et bogomilisme," in his *Sur le Manichéisme et autres essais* (Flammarion: Paris, 1979), 395–427.

The latest biographical survey was performed by Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, "Sur l'histoire des influences du gnosticisme," in B. Aland, ed., *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1978), 316–50.

There is one attempt, incomplete and inconclusive, to mutually compare the mythologies of dualistic trends: Hans Söderberg, *La Religion des Cathares* (Uppsala, Sweden, 1949).

26. Hubert Cancik, "Gnostiker in Rom: Zur Religionsgeschichte der Stadt Rom im 2. Jahrhundert nach Christus," in Jacob Taubes, ed., *Gnosis und Politik* (Fink-Schöningh: Munich and Paderborn, 1984), 163–84, esp. 179.
27. See Cancik, "Gnostiker in Rom," 172.
28. See Henri Crouzel, in U. Bianchi and H. Crouzel, eds., *Arché e Telos: L'Antropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa* (Vita e Pensiero: Milan, 1981), 272.
29. *Enneads* II.9; see my *Gnosticismo e pensiero moderno: Hans Jonas* (L'Erma di Bretschneider: Rome, 1985), 112ff.
30. Gilles Quispel, "Gnosis," in M. J. Vermaseren, ed., *Die orientalischen Religionen in Römerreich* (Brill: Leiden, 1981), 416.
31. For Sabians see the learned article by Michel Tardieu, "Sabiens coraniques et 'Sabiens' de Harran," *Journal Asiatique* 274 (1986), 1–39.
32. *The Cologne Mani Codex* (P.Colon. inv. nr. 4780) "Concerning the Origin of His Body," ed. and trans. Ron Cameron and Arthur J. Dewey (Scholars Press: Missoula, MT, 1979), 13.2, p. 15f.
33. L. Koenen, "Das Datum der Offenbarung und Geburt Manis," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 8 (1971), 247–50.
34. M 47 in Parthian, trans. in L. J. R. Ort, *Mani: A Religio-Historical Description of His Personality* (Brill: Leiden, 1967), 145.
35. M 566 in Parthian, Ort, *Mani*, 50–52.
36. See Alexander Böhlig, *Gnosis III: Der Manichäismus* (Artemis: Zurich and Munich, 1980), 26.
37. Coptic Homilies 60.10ff.
38. The interpretations of this date vary: February 14, 276 (H. H. Schaeder); March 2, 274 (W. B. Henning); February 26, 277 (S. H. Taqizadeh). See Ort, *Mani*, 154–56.
39. Ort, *Mani*, 184–87.
40. See Prosper Alfarc, *Les Écritures manichéennes*, vol. 2: *Étude analytique* (Nourry: Paris, 1919), 56ff.
41. *Confessions* V.19.
42. Prosper Alfarc, *L'Évolution intellectuelle de Saint Augustin* (Nourry: Paris, 1918), 88–89.
43. Alfarc, *Écritures*, vol. 2, 66.
44. Tardieu, "Sabiens coraniques," 23–24, n. 105.
45. Peter Bryder, *The Chinese Transformation of Manichaeism: A Study of Chinese Manichaean Terminology* (Plus Ultra: Löberöd, 1985), 1–11.
46. See the excellent presentation by É.-Ch. Babut, *Priscillien et le Priscillianisme* (Champion: Paris, 1909).
47. See Antoine Guillaumont, "Messaliens," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 10, pt. 2 (1979), col. 1074–83.
48. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on the Heresies* 22.4 (between 363 and 373), and Epiphanius, *Pan.* 80 (376–77), mentioning their presence in Antioch and their Mesopotamian origin.
49. Guillaumont, "Messaliens," cols. 1074–79.
50. Guillaumont, "Messaliens," col. 1080.

51. Guillaumont, "Messaliens," col. 1081.
52. Reinhardt Staats, "Messalianism and Antimesalianism in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Virginitate*," *The Patristic and Byzantine Review* 2 (1983), 27-44, esp. 27.
53. Hermann Dörries, *Die Theologie des Makarios/Symeon* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1978). For further discussion see Werner Strothmann, ed., *Makarios-Symposium über das Böse* (Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1983).
54. Dörries, *Theologie des Makarios/Symeon*, 21-22.
55. Dörries, *Theologie des Makarios/Symeon*, 23.
56. Dörries, *Theologie des Makarios/Symeon*, 30-39.
57. Dörries, *Theologie des Makarios/Symeon*, 38.
58. Dörries, *Theologie des Makarios/Symeon*, 78-93.
59. Dörries, *Theologie des Makarios/Symeon*, 26-27.
60. See Babut, *Priscillien*, 44-51 and 253-90; his thesis was entirely confirmed by Henry Chadwick, *Priscillian of Ávila* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1976).
61. See the beautiful book of Antoine Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalalaia gnostika" d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'Origénisme chez les Grecs et les Syriens* (Seuil: Paris, 1962), 16-66.
62. It is not easy to establish to what extent Origen's own doctrine was meant in this debate. Choosing between those who make Origen into a dualist close to the gnostics and those who make him into a perfectly "orthodox" Father (orthodox, of course, by criteria set centuries after his death) is difficult simply because the fall of the Intellects in Origen, determined by the exercise of their own free will, seems no more "dualistic" than the fall of Lucifer in Augustine, likewise caused by free will.
63. Heinz Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis: Die extreme Schia und die 'Alawiten* (Artemis: Zurich, 1982), 14-15.
64. Heinz Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismâ'îliya: Eine Studie zur islamischen Gnosis* (Steiner: Wiesbaden, 1978), 18-138.
65. Halm, *Kosmologie*, 80.
66. Halm, *Kosmologie*, 146.
67. Halm, *Kosmologie*, 147-48.
68. Mohammed Mokri, "Introduction" to Nur Ali-Shah Elahi, *L'Ésotérisme kurde*, trans. M. Mokri (Albin Michel: Paris, 1966), 9.
69. Mokri, trans., *L'Ésotérisme kurde*, 19-20.
70. Mokri, trans., *L'Ésotérisme kurde*, 22.
71. For a different opinion, though, see the article "I miti cosmogonici degli Yezidi," in Giulia Sfamini Gasparro's *Gnostica et Hermetica* (Ateneo: Rome, 1982).
72. See Kurt Rudolph, *Die Mandäer I: Prolegomena. Das Mandäerproblem* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1960), 13. Rudolph's trilogy is still the best synthetic presentation of Mandaean beliefs, despite its very idiosyncratic interpretations. Its other two volumes are: *Die Mandäer II: Der Kult* (1961) and *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie in den mandäischen Schriften: Eine literarische und traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung* (1965).
73. Rudolph, *Mandäer I*, 47-55.
74. Rudolph, *Theogonie*, 78, mentions no less than eleven different theogonies.
75. XII.6, in Rudolph, *Theogonie*, 92.
76. Jean Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme: L'Histoire des Cathares* (Privat: Toulouse, 1979), 116ff.
77. The evidence has been contested by Robert I. Moore (*The Origins of European Dissent* [Lane: London, 1977], 67) on the grounds that Guibert was an utterly unreliable witness. But the alternative then would have it that Guibert made up Catharism all by himself, relying only on his knowledge of ancient heresies. In a certain sense this is what the Byzantine monks had done, but they were professionals.
78. Duvernoy, 216-17.
79. See Arno Borst, *Die Katharer* (Stuttgart: 1953).
80. Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme*, 245-54. •



81. See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (JTS: New York, 1970).
82. See my book *Out of This World: A History of Otherworldly Journeys and Out-of-Body Experiences, from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Shambhala: Boston, 1991).
83. G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, trans. A. Arkush (Jewish Publication Society-Princeton Univ. Press: Princeton, NJ, 1987), 67.
84. *The Early Kabbalah*, ed. and introduction by Joseph Dan, trans. Ronald C. Kiener, preface by Moshe Idel (Paulist Press: New York, 1986), 57-69.
85. For a short summary, see Gershom Scholem's excellent book *Sabbatai Swi: The Mystical Messiah 1626-1676* (Princeton Univ. Press: Princeton, NJ, 1973).
86. Hayyim Vital, *On the Revolutions of the Soul* (*Sha'ar ha-gilgulim*, trans. into Latin by Fr. Mercurius van Helmont, in Knorr von Rosenroth, *Cabbala denudata*, vol. 3; cf. Ernst Benz, in *Cahiers de l'Hermétisme: Kabbalistes chrétiens* (Albin Michel: Paris, 1979), 107 and n. 35. A French translation of this tractate, very poor, was published in 1903 by Edgar Jegut and reprinted by Les Éditions d'Aujourd'hui: Plan-de-la-Tour, 1984. François Secret published a corrected version of the same.
87. Pierre Deghaye, "La Sagesse dans l'oeuvre de Jacob Böhme," in *Cahiers de l'Hermétisme: Sophia ou l'Âme du Monde* (Albin Michel: Paris, 1983), 145-94, esp. 148.
88. Deghaye, "La Sagesse," 163.
89. Deghaye, "La Sagesse," 175.
90. Deghaye, "La Sagesse," 164.
91. Deghaye, "La Sagesse," 174.
92. Deghaye, "La Sagesse," 169-76.
93. Deghaye, "La Sagesse," 181.
94. Ernst Topitsch, "Marxismus und Gnosis," in *Sozialphilosophie zwischen Ideologie und Wissenschaft* (Luchterhand: Neuwied and Berlin, 1966<sup>2</sup>), 261-96.

# Chapter 2

## Myths About Gnosticism: An Introduction

Gnosticism was the inaugural and most powerful  
of Deconstructions.

—HAROLD BLOOM, *Agon*, 1982

It has been fashionable for thirty years to begin every presentation of Gnosticism with the suspenseful story of the discovery, in December 1945, in the middle of a blood feud, of the mysterious jar deposited in a cave near the village of Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt. The narrative, too many times told and retold, recedes now out of timeliness, expired from the short-term memory of humankind. Its best narrator remains James M. Robinson, the general editor of the English translation of the Codices,<sup>1</sup> who condensed it into a perfectly balanced script with black and white characters who seem to step out of a novella by Hemingway or a Humphrey Bogart movie.<sup>2</sup>

After the novelty of the discovery, and with the publication of every single bit of text by and about gnostics,<sup>3</sup> the euphoria faded away into preoccupation. But all of these materials are seriously in need of reassessment and new global interpretations that so far have failed to appear. Scholars seem not yet ready for synthesis. As the same James Robinson puts it, "In a sense the flood of new source material has so engrossed scholarly energy that our generation seems to be lost in the detail of translation and interpretation with the broader questions in part lost from view."<sup>4</sup>

What did the Nag Hammadi discovery teach us? I gave elsewhere an unintentionally entertaining survey of contradictory assessments of the find.<sup>5</sup> To summarize it briefly, one of the major opinions has it that the new Coptic Codices peremptorily demonstrate the existence of a pre-Christian Gnosticism of Near Eastern origin. The other holds that

the new material vindicates the heresiologists by showing that they had been very accurate in their reports, and shows without a shadow of a doubt that such a thing as a pre- or non-Christian Gnosticism is a German invention. If that much seems to be true, so is it true that a non-Christian Gnosticism, late as it may be (mid-IIIrd century?), certainly existed. As for a pre-Christian Gnosis, at the end of a painstaking analysis of the evidence, Edwin M. Yamauchi concluded: "Gnosticism with a fully articulated theology, cosmology, anthropology, and soteriology cannot be discerned clearly until the post-Christian era."<sup>6</sup> In other words, even if—as we will see—something like a Samaritan or Jewish "proto-Gnosticism" probably existed, full-blown Gnosticism comes, at its earliest, at the end of the I<sup>st</sup> or the beginning of the II<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. That much we knew long before Nag Hammadi, despite the systematic distortion of facts and chronologies in the legacy of the German school of history of religions.

Not unlike XVII<sup>th</sup>-century science, research on Gnosticism in the first half of our century (with the partial exception of Hans Jonas's beautiful existentialistic analysis in the first volume of *Gnosis and the Spirit of Late Antiquity*, 1934) was dominated by two concerns:

1. origins;
2. classification.

A history of research, undertaken elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> is beyond the scope of this book. Suffice it to say the German school of history of religions supplied complete theories concerning the "origins" of Gnosticism (and anything else) and painstaking classifications thereof, as monumental as useless, whose latest extrapolations are ungainly hypotheses concerning a "school" of Thomas the Apostle and the existence of a "Sethian" Gnosticism, still held with vigor in the works of a few idiosyncratic scholars.<sup>8</sup> Genetic claims have been deduced from classifications, and vice versa. Today it has become increasingly clear that such assumptions cannot be proven unless the scholar himself becomes a "gnostic"—that is, pretends to be in possession of secret knowledge that allows him or her to perceive the links between systems in such a way that they would yield information about actual gnostic groups. Such knowledge is by nature verifiable in no other way. A number of "gnostic" scholars of Gnosticism undoubtedly exist, as we noted elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> But their species seems to be declining under pressure from more rewarding directions of research.

In sketching here the main hypotheses concerning the origins of Gnosticism, we must observe from the outset that all of them are based

on a number of implicit, hidden assumptions that have nothing to do with Gnosticism in itself but with the world of the scholars of Gnosticism. The latter have their own "mythologies of history," to use here an expression applied by Quentin Skinner to political history. Whoever deals with them ought not trust unconditionally the illusion of objectivity they put forward but should exert to a reasonable extent the instrument of *Ideologiekritik* (criticism of ideology), uncovering the hidden assumptions *before* believing the overt ones, which are subordinated to the former and may in fact contradict them. Such an operation should never abandon the principle that *covert assumptions are prior and hierarchically superior to overt ones*. In other words, if the scholar claims that he is as impartial as the mechanic who takes apart the pieces of a motor and puts them together again yet at the same time makes an estimate as to the country of origin of the pieces and their age, his choice is by no means determined by his overt premise and promise of objectivity but by hidden assumptions of which he is as unaware as we are until we begin to be suspicious of them. A hermeneutics of suspicion may be reductive and perhaps unnecessary as far as religion itself is concerned, but it is certainly the only one that can responsibly be applied to scholars of religion in their historical setting.

A team of German historians has gone very far in uncovering the "mythologies of history" of their predecessors at the turn of the century and during the Weimar Republic. In plain words, we may ascertain that the secret desire of the German school of history of religion was to show the *Eastern origins of Western ideologies and institutions*, with Hellenistic Judaism, Gnosticism, and Christianity as late outcomes of the same. The candidate to play the "source" in the history of Western ideas was the most unlikely, but also the least understood, and therefore the easiest to manipulate in any direction: Iranian religion.

We could speculate endlessly upon the consequences of this hidden choice, energetically motivated by "objectivity"; in fact, it is possible if not probable that some scholars of the German school of history of religions already shared a number of premises made explicit by the *Völkische Bewegung* or Populist Movement at the beginning of the XXth century and later fully endorsed by the Nazis.<sup>10</sup> The German School of Religion was thus preparing the terrain for claims for an "Aryan Jesus," a Jesus who, in fact, was anti-Jewish. And some of the greatest scholars of the period—in first place Rudolf Bultmann himself, who by no means could be suspected of Nazi sympathies or anti-Semitism—were ensnared by the "objective" appearance of these lucubrations held by venerable colleagues and gave them authoritative support.

All might well have started as a genuine error of precursors in the history of dualism, such as Veselovskii, Dragomanov, and others, who, as shown in chapter 1, believed "Aryan" Iran to be the ultimate homeland of all dualism. This hypothesis first appealed to Wilhelm Anz<sup>11</sup> and was resumed by Wilhelm Bousset a few years later,<sup>12</sup> leading to the main theory of Gnosticism developed by Bousset in his consequential *Major Problems of Gnosis* (1907),<sup>13</sup> on which most of the documentation of Hans Jonas's beautiful *Gnostic Religion* was based.<sup>14</sup>

Bousset's idea that gnostic dualism is entirely of Iranian origin became scholarly dogma with the help of some of the greatest scholars of the early XXth century: Albert Dieterich, Richard Reitzenstein, Joseph Kroll, Franz Cumont, Rudolf Bultmann, and others. Understandably it affected, if not infected, all comparative research for a long time and is still reproduced in manuals or in papers put together by dilettantes in need of quickly processed information, who stumble upon monstrous products of the German school of history of religions in some public library that bought their 1970s reprints.

Piece by piece, all the arguments of the German School of Religion have been refuted, largely by other German scholars after World War II.<sup>15</sup> As far as dualism is concerned, it became increasingly clear that Zoroastrian dualism, which was favorable to the world (procosmic), could hardly explain the appearance of gnostic anticosmic dualism; and that Zurvanite dualism, which devalues the intelligence of the good god Ohrmazd, was far too late to be made the origin of gnostic dualism.<sup>16</sup> Genetic hypotheses abandoned Iran in favor of Greece, Samaria, or Judaism itself.

For a time, Robert M. Grant's theory was fashionable, sponsored by the French patristic scholar Cardinal Jean Daniélou, according to which the root of gnostic dualism must be sought for in the dissatisfaction generated in certain Jewish circles by the fall of the Second Temple of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Later on, R. M. Grant abandoned it in favor of a stronger emphasis on Middle Platonic philosophical elements as primary components of Gnosticism.<sup>17</sup>

Both Simone Pétrement and Ugo Bianchi saw in ancient Greece the roots of anticosmic dualism; for them Gnosticism became an outcome of Hellenism, yet not as enounced in the famous formula of Adolf von Harnack, which called Gnosticism "eine akute Hellenisierung des Christentums," an acute hellenization of Christianity, but rather the opposite: an acute christianization of Hellenism.<sup>18</sup> Obviously the relation between (allegedly) early, Iranian Gnosticism and Christianity that had obsessed the German School of Religion and had received such an

unequivocal response from Rudolf Bultmann (Christianity is a variant of Gnosticism) continued to occupy the center of the debate. It will be impossible to dwell here on even a few of the controversies that follow this theme. In the United States the rather simplified thesis of the German school penetrated through the translation of Walter Schmithals's book *Gnosticism in Corinth*;<sup>19</sup> today scholars like James M. Robinson entirely reject it.<sup>20</sup> In general, the ranks of students of Bultmannian persuasion have been thinned out by age and increase in knowledge. And the complementary thesis of the Fourth Gospel as a gnostic product has not added very much to the entire debate.<sup>21</sup>

If dualism remains largely unexplained by inductive procedures, research on the origins of Gnosticism has lately explored two other main hypotheses: the Jewish and/or Samaritan background of Gnosticism.

Many are the scholars who favor the Jewish background hypothesis. Perhaps their most equilibrated and influential spokesman today is Birger A. Pearson, who maintains that Gnosticism represents a rebellion within Judaism, and therefore in many cases it rests upon rabbinical exegeses of biblical texts and haggadoth; and even when its direct links with Judaism come loose, Gnosticism is still largely inclined, by a basic anti-Judaic attitude, to speculate upon Jewish Scripture.<sup>22</sup>

An evolutionary hypothesis that would set the roots of Gnosticism in Samaria has recently been developed by Jarl E. Fossum;<sup>23</sup> it was sympathetically reviewed by us elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> It largely draws upon the existence of Samaritan and Jewish binitarian or ditheistic tendencies, according to which the world was not created by God but by an angel or Power. Such tendencies had already been explored by Alan F. Segal in a consequential book.<sup>25</sup> They were present in the philosophies of Philo and Numenius; yet they do not account for the patent enmity that links, and at the same time separates, the two gods of Gnosticism.

The quest for the origins of Gnosticism was not the only game played by modern scholarship. No later than the 1920s, awareness grew that the true problems of Gnosis were neither origins nor classifications. In 1924/25, H. H. Schaeder could thus write, criticizing his predecessor Wilhelm Bousset: "Bousset's book on the *Major Problems of Gnosis* does not actually highlight any such 'problem'; it does not deal with 'problems' at all, but with some more or less fortuitous pieces of tradition and symbols that constitute the imaginary expression of those problems. It should be called not *Major Problems*, but something like *Major Style*

*Elements of Gnosis.*"<sup>26</sup> With Hans Jonas (1934), the first attempt was made to define the essence of Gnosticism by invariants.

In the early 1930s, invariants were not yet fashionable. The definition of the phoneme in linguistics as an "invariant" goes back to N. S. Trubetskoy (1939) and was further refined by another linguist, Roman Jakobson, who introduced the concept of "distinctive traits" or atomic components—the building blocks of the phoneme as invariant. The first to apply Jakobson's insight assiduously, although not quite correctly, to myth was Claude Lévi-Strauss in the late 1940s.<sup>27</sup> Although later on Lévi-Strauss developed a concept of "transformation" that hardly resembles phonology, surprisingly enough his early thesis was largely followed by scholars of Gnosticism, who tried to establish a set of "distinctive features" according to which Gnosticism, Christianity, Platonism, Judaism, and other religions would be phoneme-like "invariants."

Hans Jonas recognized that Gnosticism was dualistic and thereby different from nondualistic trends; he also established that it was anti-cosmic and not procosmic, and that it came in two variants: mitigated and radical. The mitigated type he called Syro-Egyptian, and the radical, that is, Manichaeism, he called Iranian. Another feature of Gnosticism established by Jonas concerned the so-called vertical system or Alexandrian system, which Gnosticism shares with Neoplatonism, consisting of a hierarchy of principles, the lower always deriving from the higher.<sup>28</sup> Characteristic of "mitigated" mythical scenarios was what Jonas called devolution—that is, a catastrophic event that at some point interrupted the smooth expansion of being. Yet, as Ugo Bianchi has shown, such a "devolutionary" event is also constitutive of Platonism at all times.

One more trait was added by the German scholar Hans-Martin Schenke, who noticed that Gnosticism contained the idea of consubstantiality between the spiritual part of human beings and the transcendent divinity. The anthropic principle is thereby denied: humans do not belong to this world, nor do they conform to it. Although a few other distinctive features have been devised by scholars like Carsten Colpe and Ugo Bianchi, the definition of Gnosticism as invariant is already complete when one states that "Gnosticism is a dualistic religion, characterized by anticomic dualism (either mitigated or radical; if mitigated, then it includes a vertical devolutionary system) and by the idea of consubstantiality of humankind with its noncosmic origins."

This definition is unfortunately too generic. One main problem stems from the concept of dualism itself: If a subordinated divine power

that runs amok creates an inferior world that nevertheless bears resemblance to the upper world, is this dualism? And if it is, what is the difference between it and Christian doctrine? Yet some gnostic doctrines, whether we define them as dualistic or not, are not "anticosmic": they limit themselves to ascribing low intelligence and power to the cause that created the human ecosystem (the universe). And, finally, Platonism also conceives of humans as literally rooted in divinity through their Intellect and are thus consubstantial with it. Then what is the usefulness of "distinctive traits" if they are unable to tell us the difference between Gnosticism, Platonism, and Christianity?

As shown above, such attempts at defining Gnosticism as an invariant have not been entirely fruitless, since they have enabled us eventually to develop a simple system of oppositions that permits a rapid survey of differences between Judaism, Platonism, and Christianity on the one hand and Gnosticism on the other. Judaism, Platonism, and Christianity embody the hidden assumptions of Hellenistic culture in so far as they subscribe to the principle of an intelligent and good cause that created the world and share the anthropic principle. Gnosticism, by contrast, is a phenomenon of counterculture in so far as it denies both the principle of ecosystemic intelligence and the anthropic principle.

The most assiduous partisan of the invariant methodology is undoubtedly the Italian scholar Ugo Bianchi, who ascribed a number of distinctive features to the entire system of Western dualism, from Gnosticism to Catharism: anticosmism, antisomatism, metensomatosis (reincarnation), encratism, docetism, often vegetarianism. In-depth analysis shows that these traits may indeed characterize some Western trends but do not characterize others. Bianchi's attempt to formulate a genetic hypothesis based on distinctive traits proved especially problematic, as will become increasingly clear in what follows. Indeed, Bianchi could trace back most traits of Western dualism to the ancient Greek Orphics, to whom Plato was much indebted, and conclude that, in some way, Gnosticism derives from Orphic speculations.<sup>29</sup>

We have shown in the preceding chapter that speculative systems are composed of certain "bricks." These may be either shuffled in fortuitous arrangements or combined according to certain hierarchical criteria. At the turn of the century, one of the greatest architects ever, Frank Lloyd Wright of Chicago, had the quite remarkable idea of building houses that would be the enlarged image of a colored cubes game with which he had played as a child. That game can still be purchased at the *Wright Home and Studio*, and it delivers indeed the secret of the unmistakable harmony of Wright's edifices and objects. If our doctrinal



"bricks" were Wright's colored cubes, we could see how they interlace in strange patterns. For they work much like a set of cubes, or a perforated ribbon in the ancestor of modern computers, called a Turing machine after its unhappy inventor, the great cybernetician Alan Turing.

How do such "bricks" appear? They are the outcome of simple mind processes. Let us take, for example, metempsychosis—the belief that the preexistent soul of humans would be reembodyed (this is the literal meaning of the word *metempsychosis*) in new bodies. A follower of the German school of history of religions, the Belgian scholar Franz Cumont, spent a long time trying to demonstrate that all belief in metempsychosis came from India, and the Greek Pythagoreans had received it, strangely enough, via Iran (where it had left no trace).<sup>30</sup> Had Cumont consulted any of the anthropological surveys available before his time, he would have found out that Indians and Pythagoreans were not the only ones to believe in reincarnation. They shared this idea with quite a few others: from Africa, with the Swas of Kenya, the Wanikas, the Akikiyus, the Bari of the White Nile, the Mandingo, the Edo, the Ibo, the Ewes, the Yorubas, the Kagoro, the Akan, the Twi, the Zulus, the Bantus, the Barotse, the Ba-ila, and the Marovi tribes of Madagascar; from Oceania and Malaysia, with the Tahitians, the Okinawans, the Papuans of New Guinea, the Melanesians, the Marquesans, Indonesian tribes, the Solomon Islanders, the Sandwich Islanders, the Fijians, the Dayaks and other Borneo tribes, the Balinese, the Poso-Alfures of Celebes, the tribes of New Caledonia, and the New Zealand Maoris; from Asia, with the Andaman Islanders, the Santals of Bengal, the Dravidians and Nayars of southern India, the Khonds of eastern India, the Anagami Nagas of Assam, the Changs of the Naga Hills, the Karens of Burma, the Semang of the Malay Peninsula, the Giliaks, Yenisei Ostyaks and Buriats, the Cheremiss of Central Russia, and a few others; from North America, with the Algonquins, the Dakotas, the Hurons, the Iroquois, the Mohave, the Moqui (Hopi), the Nachez, the Nutkas, the Tacullis, the Kiowas, the Creeks, the Winnebagos, the Ahts of Vancouver Island, the Denes, the Montagnais, the Tlingit, the Haidas, the Tsimshians, the Eskimos, the Aleuts, and the Athapaskans; from South America, the Caribs, Mayas, and Quiches, Patagonians, Peruvians, Sontals, Popayans, Powhattans, and Tlalacans of Mexico, the Icannes and Chiriquanes of Brazil, and undoubtedly more.<sup>31</sup>

Even if—as we will see shortly—views of reincarnation differ very widely, they all start from a common premise that is just one inevitable intellectual "brick" upon which any human mind, anywhere and at any time, would stumble, should it begin from the commonly shared

assumption that we have a body and a mind experienced as a three-dimensional screen that can by no means be identified with the body. This duality, which does not precisely reflect the opposition between "hardware" and "software" but rather that between machine (including software) and actual mind-performance, is inherent to all humans and may easily lead, as it actually did, to the idea that the mind-performance is separable from the body. In many traditions the mind-performance is known as "soul" or equivalents, and is supposed to exist independently from the body. This, of course, was perceived as a great discovery at a certain stage of introspection of humankind, perhaps tens of thousands of years ago, and as a great secret ever since.

As soon as human mind admits that beings (humans, animals, all sentient beings) consist of soul and body, then the problem of the soul/body relation arises immediately. Only a few solutions are available, stemming from two major dichotomies:

1. The soul preexists the body versus the soul does not preexist the body.
2. The soul is created versus the soul is uncreated.

That souls are created and preexistent is a very common view shared by Hindus, Platonists, some gnostics, Origenists, and many others. That souls are created and do not exist before their bodies is a combination of views held by orthodox Christians approximately since Augustine. That souls do not preexist their bodies and are not created is a doctrine called Traducianism, held by Tertullian of Carthage and quite orthodox in his time.<sup>32</sup> According to it, souls are generated from the psychic copulation of the parents in exactly the same way as bodies are generated from their physical copulation. The fourth hypothesis, that souls preexist bodies without being individually created, is held by many North American peoples, who believe in a permanent tank of soul stuff from which individual souls come and to which they revert, and by the XIIth-century Muslim Aristotelian of Spain, Averroës, who likewise believed that the Universal Intellect is one: individual intellects are reabsorbed into it after death.

Metempsychosis, creationism, and Traducianism are not only the three main doctrines the scholar stumbles upon all over late antiquity; they are *necessarily* three of the most common logical solutions to the question of the relation between mind and body. As such, they are atemporal and ubiquitous. They do not "originate" in India and "cross" Iran; they are present in all human minds that contemplate them by contemplating the problem. May this serve as a clear illustration of our view of

“genesis” and “cognitive transmission” of ideas, as opposed to the view of a certain elementary historicism.

Although it has already been shown that Gnosticism—like any idea or system of ideas—originated nowhere else than in human minds, it is the task of the historian to establish as precisely as possible *when* this happened and *what* human minds produced the gnostic configuration of thought.

Traditionally the paternity of all Christian heresies was attributed to Simon Magus of Samaria: “Simon autem Samaritanus ex quo universae haereses substituerunt,” as Irenaeus of Lyon put it.<sup>33</sup> In order to assess the validity of this opinion, often contested, it is imperative to examine here briefly the entire file on Simon and his successors.

Let us begin with the original writing attributed to him by Hippolytus,<sup>34</sup> the *Great Revelation* (*Apophysis Megalē*). It contains a nondualistic doctrine in which the supreme God is at the same time the good demiurge of the universe.<sup>35</sup> Additionally it contains an allegorical interpretation of the Pentateuch with no trace of anti-Judaism. Yet the heresiologists emphasize that Simon would ascribe the Law to the despotism of the heavenly angels who rule the world badly. It is therefore obvious that the author of the *Apophysis* could not be the same Simon portrayed by a good number of testimonies. It is likewise obvious that, as long as no decisive factor will intervene to solve the problem, four and only four solutions are possible, which only describe a range of possibilities but do not help us establish the truth: 1. The *Apophysis* is the true doctrine of Simon, the rest is invention (+ / -); 2. Simon cannot possibly have written the *Apophysis*, being the true father of Gnosticism (- / +); 3. Simon is neither a gnostic nor the author of the *Apophysis* (- / -); 4. Simon is both the first gnostic and the author of the *Apophysis*—first one and then the other (+ / +).

Scholars of all times have been fascinated with one of these hypotheses at a time. No wonder endless arguments ensued, for all of them are perfectly contradictory and unverifiable to the same extent. There is no objective solution to the problem, each one of the four hypotheses being equally “true” or “false.” Once researchers have, through painstaking efforts, filled up all four cases, they can only repeat themselves. Yet, as we will see, this elementary logic would hardly deter them from their endeavor.

For the sake of brevity, let us consider here only post-World War II research; as predictable, it faithfully reflects prewar scholarship.

J. M. A. Salles-Dabadie oscillates, if I figure him out correctly, between hypothesis 1 (+ / -) and hypothesis 4 (+ / +), but only through sheer absentmindedness, for he does not seem to notice the contradiction between Simon as depicted by heresiologists and the *Apophysis*. According to him, the *Apophysis* was authored by Simon and precedes Gnosticism. It was written under Stoic, Platonic, Hermetic, and Philonic influence.<sup>36</sup>

Before going any further, let us briefly examine Simon's gnostic file. The most important testimony belongs to Irenaeus, who is the main source for later heresiologists, probably next to Hippolytus's lost *Syntagma* (ca. 210) on which Pseudo-Tertullian (before 250), Filastrius of Brescia (380/90), and Theodoret of Cyrrhus (ca. 453) are based. Irenaeus does not ascribe to Simon the idea of an evil demiurge of the universe. The world has been produced by angels and powers stemming from Ennoia, the Thought of the primordial Father. These angels contest the rulership of the world among themselves (*unusquisque eorum concupiscere principatum*), and therefore the world is badly ruled (*cum enim male moderarentur angeli mundum*).<sup>37</sup> They seize their Mother (Ennoia) and hold her prisoner "out of jealousy, for they do not want to be taken for someone else's product" (*quoniam nollent progenus alterius cuiusdam putari esse*)—that is, they claim to be primordial and do not wish to be reminded that they have a Mother, and therefore they must have an unknown Father.

They prevent Ennoia from going back to heaven to the Father and in order to weigh her down, they placed her in a human body (*in corpore humano includeretur*).<sup>38</sup> She transmigrates from one woman's body to another. At one point she is the beautiful Helen of Troy, but eventually she lands as a prostitute in a brothel in Tyre. Simon, who is the hypostasis of the Father or the Great Power, comes to buy her off. As strange as it may sound, this story was a rather common allegory of the fate of the noble Intellect imprisoned in a body. Nor was the link between transmigration and prostitution extraordinary: Pythagoras was said to remember all his precedent embodiments, one of which had been the beautiful prostitute Alco.<sup>39</sup>

Simon and his partner Helena-Ennoia have the power to free humankind from the tyranny of the angels, the authors of the Law. The Law is arbitrary and was invented for the sole purpose of enslaving humankind. The world will be destroyed, and Simon's adepts will obtain freedom.<sup>40</sup> Besides this scenario, which has nothing Christian in it, Irenaeus asserts that Simon pretended to be Jesus Christ and interpreted the latter's body docetically, as a pure figment.<sup>41</sup> The development of

"Simon's novel" in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions* will not detain us here. Both of these writings, as well as later heresiologists, corroborate Irenaeus's information according to which Simon was the first gnostic.<sup>42</sup>

Most scholars who dwelt on Simon lately decided for the negative hypothesis (- / -): he was neither a gnostic nor the author of the *Apophysis*. Thus, for Karlmann Beyschlag the *Apophysis* has no relation whatsoever to Simon, being a product of IIInd-century Platonism.<sup>43</sup> But Simon's original doctrine was not gnostic either. All information about Simon is distorted by heresiologists, who try to make a gnostic of him by attributing to him the traits of a later Christian Gnosticism.<sup>44</sup>

With a few differences, this is also Gerd Lüdemann's thesis: Irenaeus would ascribe to Simon pieces of the doctrines of Basilides and the Carpocratians.<sup>45</sup>

Simone Pétrement follows Beyschlag, with a further emphasis on the Christian origin of the system commonly attributed to Simon.<sup>46</sup>

Jarl E. Fossum places Simon within a Samaritan setting.<sup>47</sup> According to him, the Samaritans Simon and Menander and the Jew Cerinthus were "Proto-Gnostics."<sup>48</sup> This is a variant of hypothesis 2 (- / +).

Irenaeus makes of Menander Simon's direct successor and ascribes to him the knowledge of magical means that ensure his disciples victory over the creators of the world and immortality through baptism.<sup>49</sup> The Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* speak about two angels dispatched by the Simonian Great Power, one to create the world and one to give the Law;<sup>50</sup> and a passage of the *Recognitions* mentions the creator of the world who claims to be God.<sup>51</sup> The two angels—the world creator and the angel of the Torah—are present in Jewish tradition.<sup>52</sup> Thus we may indeed surmise that a number of elements were added to the primitive doctrine of Simon by his successors, but it is difficult to state what of this was the work of Menander.

More is known about Saturninus or Satornilus, whom Irenaeus makes into Menander's successor.<sup>53</sup> According to him, the world was created by *seven* angels, one of whom was the God of the Jews.<sup>54</sup> Man had been made by the angels, who had imitated a luminous image of the Father. Like a worm, man would crawl without being able to stand. The Father sent him a spark of life to animate him. After death, "the spark will be safe, the rest of man will perish."<sup>55</sup> This is, *in nuce*, gnostic anthropology.

Irenaeus gives the impression that gnostic doctrine is the result of an evolution from the primitive simplicity of Simon's scenario, with its lack of precision as to the identity of the heavenly angels, toward an

embryonic system in which the Old Testament God is one of the seven planets who rule the world and are responsible for the body and lower soul of humanity. This is, in very broad outline, what Gnosticism has to say. It is clear that this evolutionary hypothesis advanced by heresiologists is but one among many. The gnostic emphasis on the negativity of the cosmic Rulers may be new, but its constituent elements had been there from the late IIIrd century B.C.E., the beginning of Hellenistic Pseudo-Hermetic astrology. That the heresiologists introduce Gnosticism as the outcome of an evolution seems to be contradicted by the full-blown gnostic systems of the IIrd century C.E., which appear rather as products of a revolution.

If the origins of Gnosticism are surrounded by mystery, unless we believe the Christian heresiologists who assume Gnosticism to be born between Simon and Saturninus, classifications from the heresiologists to date are no less hazardous, in fact, they become even more so with the German school of history of religions and its recent continuators. Although the heresiologists certainly made up many, impelled by a prophecy in Isaiah, we have reasons to believe that modern scholars invented more gnostic systems and clusters of systems than they did. If asked, the scholars themselves could probably not explain this obscure rage for order. From a systemic perspective, we are able to explain it for them.

Indeed, classifications may well be as many abortive attempts at understanding the mechanism that produces the system itself by rearranging sequentially and sometimes hierarchically all sorts of singular "bricks." Classifications ascertain the presence of bricks in more than one doctrine and try to link genetically doctrines in which similar bricks are present. Unfortunately the procedure may prove incorrect as soon as one ventures to apply it to products whose lineage is unknown, for bricks can be derived in many ways and can occur as a result of similar mental processes. And if the lineage is known, the procedure is useless. All reasons for which most classifications, to begin with the monumental ones devised by the German School of Religion, must be discarded and replaced by the dynamic concept of "transformation," with logical bricks replacing each other and forming ever-new sequences.

It should be noticed from the beginning that *all* gnostic systems, without exception, appear as transformations of one another and therefore can be said to be part of a larger "ideal object," whose possibilities are being explored by human minds at all times, regardless of time and

space. However, the doctrines of some gnostic texts are transformations of one another in a narrower sense—they can move into one another through a rather limited number of transformations. Some such doctrines are genetically connected, forming the large group of Valentinian Gnosticism, with its ramifications. Some others have been genetically connected, more by modern scholarship than by the heresiologists, but the most we can say is simply that they are close transformations of one another. One example is Sethian Gnosticism as defined by Hippolytus (not by modern scholars) and the systems of the Nag Hammadi tractates the *Paraphrase of Shem* and *Zostrianos*. Another example is formed by a number of writings and testimonies that are all transformations of the same basic text—the first chapters of Genesis: the *Apocryphon of John* (AJ), the tractate *On the Origin of the World* (SST), the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (HA), and Irenaeus's summary of the doctrine of the Ophites "and others." To these, one later (after mid-IIIrd century) and more complex text may be added: *Pistis Sophia* (PS). In the coming chapters we will follow the lead of these texts in order to establish how gnostic myth originates in the transformation of other myths, and how gnostic doctrines ultimately derive from one another not through direct transmission but through a cognitive process of transformation.

In splitting gnostic myth into two chapters, our intention was to show that it actually consists of two parts, which in other contexts would often function as complete myths: the myth of Sophia the Trickstress and the myth of the Demiurge, her son.

## Notes

1. James M. Robinson, gen. ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (rev. ed., Harper & Row: San Francisco, 1988).
2. James M. Robinson, "From the Cliff to Cairo: The Story of the Discovery and the Middlemen of the Nag Hammadi Codices," in *Colloque International sur les Textes de Nag Hammadi* (hereinafter NH) (Quebec, August 1978) (Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, 1—henceforth BCNH—published by the Univ. of Laval Press, Quebec, and Peeters, Louvain, Belgium), 1981, 21–58.
3. Here follows an extensive survey of primary sources and translations, together with the most important secondary literature. For the sake of brevity, idiosyncratic translations and studies have not been included. Titles follow *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Indispensable for a general presentation of this topic is the book written in French by Michel Tardieu and Jean-Daniel Dubois, *Introduction à la littérature gnostique I: Histoire du mot "gnostique."* *Instruments de travail. Collections retrouvées avant 1945* (Cerf-CNRS: Paris, 1986).

Unless otherwise stated, all translations included in the chapters on Gnosticism of this book are mine.

The following abbreviations have been used, mainly based on the siglae established by Michel Tardieu and J.-D. Dubois (*Introduction*, vol. 1, 141–43):

BG	Berlin Papyrus 8502	
	1: Gospel of Mary	EvMr
	2: Apocryphon of John	AJ
	3: Sophia of Jesus Christ	SJ
	4: Acts of Peter	AcPt
PS	Pistis Sophia	
J	The Books of Jeu (1 & 2)	
NH	Nag Hammadi Codices	
	I 1: The Prayer of the Apostle Paul	OrPl
	2: The Apocryphon of James	AJc
	3: The Gospel of Truth	EV
	4: The Treatise on Resurrection	R
	5: The Tripartite Tractate	TT
	II 1: AJ	
	2: The Gospel of Thomas	EvTh
	3: The Gospel of Philip	EvPh
	4: The Hypostasis of the Archons	HA
	5: On the Origin of the World	SST
	6: The Exegesis of the Soul	EA
	7: The Book of Thomas the Contender	Th
	III 1: AJ	
	2: The Gospel of the Egyptians	EE
	3: Eugnostos the Blessed	Eug
	4: SJ	
	5: The Dialogue of the Savior	DS
	IV 1: AJ	
	2: EE	
	V 1: Eug	
	2: The Apocalypse of Paul	ApPl
	3: The First Apocalypse of James	1 ApJc
	4: The Second Apocalypse of James	2 ApJc
	5: The Apocalypse of Adam	ApAd
	VI 1: The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles	AcPtD
	2: The Thunder, Perfect Mind (Brontê)	Br
	3: Authoritative Teaching (Authentikos Logos)	AL
	4: The Concept of Our Great Power (Noēma)	N
	5: (Fragment of the <i>Republic</i> of Plato)	
	6: The Discourse of the Eighth and the Ninth	Og
	7: The Prayer of Thanksgiving (Hermetic)	G
	8: Asclepius	Ascl
	VII 1: The Paraphrase of Shem	PSem
	2: The Second Treatise of the Great Seth	ST
	3: The Apocalypse of Peter	ApPt
	4: The Teachings of Silvanus	Sil
	5: The Three Stelae of Seth	TSS
	VIII 1: Zostrianos	Z
	2: The Letter of Peter to Philip	EpPt
	IX 1: Melchizedek	Me
	2: The Thought of Norea	Nor
	3: The Testimony of Truth	TVer
	X 1: Marsanes	Ma



XI	1: The Interpretation of Knowledge	AI
	2: A Valentinian Exposition	Pr
	3: Allogenes	Al
	4: Hypsiphronne	Hy
XII	1: The Sentences of Sextus	Se
	2: EvVer	
	3: Fragments	Fr
XIII	1: Trimorphic Protennoia	P
	2: SST	

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- PS,J: S.-T. *Koptisch-agnostische Schriften, Erster Band: Die Pistis Sophia. Die Beiden Bücher des Jeû. Unbekanntes altagnostisches Werk*, ed. and trans. Carl Schmidt, rev. ed. by Walter Till (Akademie: Berlin [East], 1954).
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5. See my *Gnosticismo e pensiero moderno: Hans Jonas* (L'Erma di Brettschneider: Rome, 1985).
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  47. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 162ff.
  48. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 337, n. 216.
  49. Iren. I.23.5.
  50. *Hom.* II.18.12.
  51. *Rec.* I.2.57.
  52. Fossum, 257ff.
  53. Iren. I.24.1-2.
  54. Ps.-Tert., p. 214,6-9; Fil. 16,2f; Epiph. 87.248.1f.
  55. *Scintillam salvam esse, cetera hominus perire*; Ps.-Tert., p. 214,12f.

# Chapter 3

## Gnostic Myth 1: Fallen Wisdom

### 1. Hypostases

Gnostic myth works with hypostases. As the authors of the article "Hypostatization" (*Hypostasierung*) in the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* have it, hypostases come about through "the deification/personification of abstract concepts, the elaboration of divine parts or powers into active entities, or the postulation and systematization of abstract, generative entities which function as *arkhai*, constituents, or governors for our cosmos and its ontology."<sup>1</sup>

The part of gnostic myth that Hans Jonas called transcendental genesis consists in the multiplication of hypostases or aeons, forming the so-called Pleroma or Fullness. Pleroma is opposed to Kenoma (Emptiness), the chaotic space "underneath"; Fullness is opposed to the Void.<sup>2</sup>

To give just one example, the Valentinian Pleroma is particularly rich in hypostases, usually in the number of thirty aeons forming an Ogdoad (The Eight), a Decad (The Ten), and a Dodecad (The Twelve). According to F. M. M. Sagnard, Irenaeus introduces no less than seven distinct types of Valentinian Ogdoads, one of which is ascribed to Valentinus himself:<sup>3</sup> Abyss or Unbegotten Father (Pater agennetos) or Ineffable (Arretos) in syzygy (that is, paired) with Silence (Sige), Father in syzygy with Truth, Logos in syzygy with Life, and Anthropos in syzygy with Ecclesia (Church). The system of the Western Valentinian Ptolemy is a variant of this original scheme, starting with a Tetrad composed of Forefather/Ennoia or Sige, who generate Nous (Father, Only-Begotten, Beginning) and Truth. Nous produces Logos and Life, who in turn produce the last syzygy of the Ogdoad, Anthropos and

Ecclesia. Now Logos and Life also produce the Decad, and Anthropos and Ecclesia the Dodecad, establishing the number of aeons at thirty.

The last aeon of the Dodecad is Sophia-Wisdom, who for a reason that—as we shall see—varies from system to system but can be defined both as autoerotic frenzy and transgression of the law of the Pleroma, undergoes a passion. Sophia is saved by the intervention of the aeon Limit (Horus) or Cross, who is the Savior, and thus she is reintegrated into the Pleroma. Her wicked counterpart, called Achamoth, remains outside of the Pleroma and gives birth to the Demiurge of this world, who is the god of the Old Testament.

The Demiurge, who is ignorant of his origin and of the existence of the Pleroma, and is therefore proud and arrogant about his uniqueness, calls into being another set of hypostases, this time cosmic ones: the Hebdomad of the theriomorphic planetary Rulers or Archons (most often he is one of them himself, identified with the planet Saturn). The characteristic of Western Valentinianism, as against the systems falsely called Sethian, is that the Demiurge is not particularly evil, and his active role during the final events will be entirely positive.

## 2. Sophia-Wisdom in the Tanakh

Taking the myth just described as a good sample of a gnostic script, we notice immediately that the hypostasis Sophia-Wisdom seems to be a pivotal character in it. It is very easy to recognize in her the Jewish hypostasis Wisdom (Hokmah, Sophia in the Septuagint), which occurs in many writings of the Tanakh, for example, in the Book of Job, where she is said to exist before the world. In Proverbs 1–9 she is given a prominent place as assistant Demiurge of the world and delight of God, “sporting before him continually, sporting on the round of his earth, [her] delight being with humankind.”<sup>4</sup>

The tradition according to which Wisdom collaborated in the creation of the world is recorded by the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*,<sup>5</sup> where Simon Magus interprets Gen. 1:26 (“Let us make man in our image”) as implying “two or more” creators, not just one, and Peter replies that the two were God and Sophia. Elsewhere in Proverbs she is said to have a negative counterpart called Foolish Woman, Ignorance, or Foreign Woman, who is a Wisdom of Death, whereas Wisdom herself is strongly associated with life and the Tree of Life.<sup>6</sup> In the Book of Sirach, Wisdom is again the first created of God, known to him alone: “On high did I fix my abode, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud. Alone I

encompassed the circuit of heaven, and in the depth of the abyss I walked. Over the waves of the sea, and over all the earth, and over every people and nation I held sway."<sup>7</sup>

As will soon become even more apparent, there is no doubt that the hypostasis Sophia in Gnosticism is the Jewish *Hokmah*; yet at the same time, she undergoes a powerful transformation that can be explained not by mere derivation but only by the theory of *cognitive* transmission. Let us proceed further and make an extensive inventory of the appearances of Sophia in Gnosticism.

### 3. Sophia's Choice

Sophia's name is not mentioned by heresiologists in connection with Simon Magus, but a primitive form of the myth is ascribed to him by Irenaeus.<sup>8</sup>

According to heresiological sources, the Sophia myth that takes such prominent place in Valentinian Gnosis equally occurs in Barbelo-Gnosis<sup>9</sup> and the system of the Ophites of Irenaeus.<sup>10</sup> In addition, an independent variant is furnished by the Book of Baruch of Justin the Gnostic.<sup>11</sup>

It has been known for a long time that the summary Irenaeus gives of the doctrine of the Barbelo-gnostics rests on a part of the *Apocryphon of John* (AJ).<sup>12</sup> There Sophia is emanated from the first angel of the Father and is called Prounicos, a name that has usually been interpreted as meaning "lewd." Anne Pasquier has recently shown that the correct meaning of the adjective *prouneikos* in Greek would, however, be "undisciplined, uneducated" (from *pro* + *neikos*). Pasquier also indicates that a second etymology is possible (*pro* + *eneikō*: "porter, one who carries out") that would emphasize Prounicos's mobility as opposed to the immovability of the aeons of the Pleroma. Since in this case the primary meaning of *prouneikos* would be "porter," Marvin W. Meyer is certainly right in noticing that the name is a pun, built on a double meaning, and could be translated as "an impulsive porter."<sup>13</sup> Since Sophia-Prounicos has no partner, she looks for one in the lower parts of the universe (*ad inferiores partes*), knowing, and therefore lamenting, that her action has not been approved by her Father (*sine bona voluntate patris*) and is therefore unlawful.

A parenthesis is necessary here. Sophia, no matter how peripheral in the Fullness of the aeons, is still a spiritual being; moreover, she is *exclusively* spiritual. It is a characteristic of what Jonas and others called vertical or Alexandrian systems that the origin of anything lower is to be sought for in a hierarchically higher rung of the ladder. Therefore, with



Sophia's anguish, Anguish that *did not exist before* comes into being, for nothing but pure spirit existed in the Pleroma. *Anything else*—that is, any passions of the soul and any physical realities (which come last)—must somehow be explained as *having come into being, yet not through Being itself—the Pleroma—but through a flaw of Being*. A passage from spirituality to psychicality has, for the mythically first time, taken place.

As Hans Jonas explained in a marvelous essay, in order to understand this we must first subvert all of our values, and not least of all our linguistic universe itself, which is based on the assumption that "being" is what we can see or otherwise experience and therefore that feelings and dreams are not "being," let alone abstractions like Wisdom or intelligence.<sup>14</sup> Quite the contrary applies to Gnosticism—and to Platonism in general, of which Gnosticism is a heretical, extremist variety: *The more corporeal something is, that is, the more it can be experienced by the senses, the less it is endowed with "being,"* for the physical world in itself is but a shadow theater of a higher reality.

It is characteristic of at least some gnostic systems, most prominent among them being Valentinianism, to operate with a tripartition of reality and humanity that is, in the last instance, typically Platonic. The gnostics would speak about Spirit, Soul, and Matter as present both in the universe, seen and unseen, and as components of human beings; Plato himself would speak about three souls in man, Rational, Irrational (or Animallike), and Vegetative (or Plantlike), and about a World of Ideas, World Soul, and World itself, which is a shadow of the World of Ideas.<sup>15</sup> What is absolutely and eternally, simply and wholly, is Spirit. Thus, returning to the gnostic perspective, the Soul—understood as the Platonic Irrational Soul, seat of emotions and passions—*must* derive from Being in order to exist at all yet, at the same time, *cannot* derive from Being, as it is so manifestly inferior and volatile. By introducing the hypostasis Sophia-Wisdom, the gnostics try to solve an unfathomable metaphysical problem: How is it possible that impermanence stems from permanence, lack and pain from Fullness and immovability?

Yet, obviously, one more problem remains to be solved: the Soul is still invisible. It is composed of qualities that, low as they may be, are still impalpable. How is it that a new step becomes possible—the transition from psychic to physical?

Again an intellectual effort is required from most of us to understand that one of the main dogmas of Platonism is that *the more a being is physical, the less it is essential*; accordingly, the physical world in so far as it is *physical* is close to sheer negativity: the body is even worse than the worst emotion experienced by the Soul.

Here we should pause and inquire, together with Hans Jonas, whether this worldview (which he ascribed to Gnosticism only but which is actually Platonic in general) has an "existential root"; does it derive from an "experience of the world"? Here our answer categorically differs from that of the great existentialist interpreter of Gnosis. *Platonism is a system of thought starting from simple premises. Once such premises are switched on, the system continues to produce solutions that require no prior "experience of the world" in order to be held and even defended to the death and beyond. It is the system that creates the worldview, not vice versa.* Out of an initial experience of duality in a world based on dualities (day-night, heat-cold, right-left, woman-man, etc.), the human mind can set up a limited number of rules to define a system. Run for sufficient time through other minds, these rules tend to produce more and more solutions included in the system; their potential quantity is virtually infinite.

Although running in an infinite number of dimensions (everything in the universe interacting with everything else), a system can be isolated as an "ideal object" formed through binary switches, as we showed in the Introduction of this book. In this sense, systems of thought are not unlike humankind itself: it starts from a low number of couples (and could, theoretically, start from just one), then multiplies continually *through binary partnership*, for if a child cannot obviously have more than one mother, he or she cannot have more than one father either. Each human being in turn would activate mental switches that continuously interpret his or her world.

Most of this activity remains unacknowledged, yet only in a very few cases does this mean that treasures are buried in someone's mind that may never become accessible to others. In general, the activity of our mind is repetitive, and our philosophies, no matter how elaborate, have to start from simple rules that produce predictable results. What is thought by one is necessarily thought by others as well, if not by most.

If all this is rather straightforward, still someone may object that there is a link between our feelings of comfort and discomfort in the world and the worldviews almost literally secreted by our mind through binary switches. This is the major premise of all theories that try to derive our ideas from societal or psychological premises that may remain totally unacknowledged by us yet produce results *precisely* in the sphere of expressive activities that by their nature are not "objective" (such as literature, philosophy, art). It was fashionable for a long time to connect doctrines that seem to devalue the world and worldly life with

situations of "crisis"; scholars are today more and more aware of the banality of this concept.<sup>16</sup>

A solution to our initial query is possible only if the basic question is reformulated. A system of thought necessarily interacts with innumerable other systems that form human history. This is not at issue. Rather, what we should ask is whether it is possible to abstract systems as ideal objects from what appears to be the inextricable conglomerate of history and understand them in their own "logical dimension." If this is possible—and there is no reason why it should not be—then it immediately appears that whatever the interaction between systems of thought and any given society, it is an interaction of uncanny complexity that goes both ways and does not produce any results that can be expressed, or analyzed, in simple terms.

Let us now revert to the second gnostic problem: How does the physical world stem from the psychical? Here a flaw even more terrible than the passage from spirituality to psychicality has to be accounted for. The Barbelo-gnostics would say that Sophia's psychic Anguish is accompanied by a miscarriage: a male abortive creature, the First Archon or Ruler (Proarchon), ignorant and foolhardy (*in quo erat ignorantia et audacia*). Sophia has conceived without a partner, her only possible partner being her own Anguish, which is also the partner of her miscarried son, the Archon, who builds the firmament at the bottom of the universe and begins producing Powers, angels, heavens, "and all things terrestrial" (*et terrena omnia*). Frightened by the disorderly activity of her frantic son, Sophia takes refuge in the Ogdoad.

Somewhat different is the scenario in the doctrine attributed by Irenaeus to the Ophites (from Gr. *ophis*, "snake") *et alii*. Sophia is there a "left power" whose existence is accounted for by an accident at the summit of the Pleroma. The Mother of the Living, third aeon from the top, is unable to contain in herself all the mass of fertile Light emanating from the universal Father and his Son.<sup>17</sup> Part of this luminous seed flows out from her left side, producing Sophia, a.k.a. Left, Pronicos, and Malefemale. Sophia descends to the immovable Waters, sets them in motion, and extracts from them a watery body that weighs her down to the point that she cannot discard it any more. In her effort to return to the heights of the Pleroma, she stretches out like a blanket, forming with her body the visible sky. For a while she dwells under the sky, yet eventually she is able to discard her material body, called Woman, and escape beyond the sky. She has a son, Ialdabaoth, who begets the six Archons; together the seven form the Hebdomad of the planets.<sup>18</sup>

Against the Rulers of the universe who tyrannize humankind, Sophia does not miss any occasion to cheat the former in order to help the latter.<sup>19</sup> Yet unable to make an end to her son's despotism, she calls for aid from the Mother of the Living, who dispatches Sophia's "right" brother Christ to join her. He becomes her partner (*syzygos*) and saves humankind under the guise of Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup>

An independent version of the myth of the deadly consequences of a female character's distress is contained in the summary that Hippolytus gives of the Book of Baruch of Justin the Gnostic.<sup>21</sup> Three principles, two male and one female, are here at the origin of everything: Good (*agathos*), who is omniscient; Elohim, the Father-Demiurge, invisible and unknown, yet not omniscient; and the duplicitous Eden-Israel, endowed with two reasons and two bodies, "woman to the hips and snake below."<sup>22</sup> Elohim and Eden, drawn to each other by mutual desire, have intercourse and generate two Dodecads of angels, one belonging to the Father and one to the Mother. The angels are the Trees of Paradise: the Tree of Life is Baruch, the third angel of the Father, and the Tree of Knowledge is the third angel of the Mother, Naas the Snake (Hebr. *naḥash*). The episode of the creation of the primordial human couple, whose body is made by the paternal angels around the soul of Eden and the spirit of Elohim, precedes in Hippolytus's summary<sup>23</sup> the creation of the world.<sup>24</sup> Thus human beings are the image of Elohim and Eden, and their bodies are not evil.

The world is administered by the angels of Eden, grouped in four classes, corresponding to the four biblical rivers (Gen. 2:10-14): Phison, Gehon, Tigris, and Euphrates. The government of the world takes place by rotation, and the Phison group is particularly responsible for famines and other curses that afflict the geographical zone over which they rule. Yet the other groups have their share too in the "stream of evils which, by Eden's will, move incessantly through the world."<sup>25</sup> Where does this "deadly calamity," this punishment, come from? It was provoked by Elohim's act of desertion: taking his angels with him, he fled upward to heaven, leaving Eden ("who is earth")<sup>26</sup> behind. Alone, he crossed the gate to the realm of Good, and Good installed him to his right. Having realized how mediocre was the world he had created, Elohim shared with Good his intention to destroy it, but Good dissuaded him. Thus Eden remained down there all alone, in charge of the government of the world.

Eden interprets Elohim's noble withdrawal as an abandonment and a rupture. She first seeks to seduce him and lure him back, using all sorts of ornaments to make herself attractive. When he does not return, she

avenges her humiliation against humankind, sending the angel Babel-Aphrodite to cause adultery and divorce among humans and thereby to punish the spirit of Elohim present in them and to afflict them with the same traumatic experience she herself had been through. At the same time, Eden expands the evil powers of the angel Naas-Snake.

Elohim dispatches the angel Baruch among the angels of Eden to tell humans not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge which is Naas, for Naas contains injustice, whereas the other angels of Eden contain only passions. But Naas seduces Eve and commits adultery with her. Not content therewith, he also seduces Adam and has homosexual intercourse with him: these two performances are the prototypes of every adultery and pederasty.<sup>27</sup>

Baruch attempts to address Moses and the Prophets, but Naas blurs his messages. Elohim therefore decides to proselytize among the uncircumcised and sends Herakles to fight the twelve angels of Eden: this is the allegorical explanation of the twelve labors of Herakles.<sup>28</sup> But at the very moment when the hero seemed to have triumphed over them, the angel Babel-Aphrodite posing as Omphale deprives Herakles of his power, thereby nullifying his precedent victories. Eventually Baruch finds a solid ally in Jesus of Nazareth, the only one whom Naas is unable to seduce and therefore must crucify in revenge.

The classic expression of the myth of Sophia belongs to its Valentinian variants.<sup>29</sup> Even if some repetition might ensue, we will examine them one by one. According to Irenaeus's version, Sophia is the last aeon of the Dodecad. Although having a partner, Theletos, she acts without him; that is why her sin and her passion, erotic in appearance, are rather the result of her foolhardiness.<sup>30</sup> Seized by a desire to know the enigmatic Father, Sophia tries to ascend to him and is detained by Horos-Limit, who separates the upper from the lower aeons. Sophia's Intention (*enthymēsis*) and Passion become a miserable product generated by her without a partner, a product whose unexpected coming into being further causes his mother's Affliction, Anguish, Stupor, and Doubt. This Tetrad of evils, whose more precise identity is elsewhere established as Ignorance, Pain, Anguish, and Stupor,<sup>31</sup> is the origin of the substance matter.

Through the intervention of the aeons, Sophia is purged of her Intention and Passion, who remain outside the Pleroma while Sophia herself is restored among her companions.<sup>32</sup> The Intention-Passion, called Achamoth, tries in vain to join the Pleroma, whose light she covets, for no matter how inferior she is she still possesses a certain "flavor of immortality."<sup>33</sup> Stopped by Limit, her sorrow becomes a Tetrad of

passions: Pain, Fear, Confusion, and Ignorance. Yet, beside them, her desire for improvement becomes a positive emotion: Conversion (*epistrophē*). From Conversion the World Soul and the soul of the Demiurge are born, whereas "all of the rest stems from her Anguish and Pain. Indeed, from her tears originates the wet substance; from her laughter the luminous [substance]; from her pain and consternation the physical elements of the world. For oftentimes she wept and suffered, they say, for having been abandoned all alone in the darkness and void; and some other times, thinking of the light that had abandoned her, she recovered and laughed, and again she suffered."<sup>34</sup>

Another version of the myth, more crude, is reported by Hippolytus:<sup>35</sup> Sophia is the youngest aeon of the Pleroma (the twenty-eighth). She ascends toward the Father and notices that he had generated without a partner. She wants to imitate him, ignoring that her own powers are far less than those of the Unbegotten. Therefore, the product of her endeavor is "a substance devoid of form and perfection,"<sup>36</sup> a miscarriage (*ektrōma*), whose sight afflicts his Mother and the whole Pleroma.<sup>37</sup> The aeon Limit-Cross (*Horos-Stauros*) is emitted by the Father to bar Sophia from the Pleroma.<sup>38</sup> Abandoned outside, Sophia knows a four-fold passion: Anguish, Pain, Confusion, and Supplication (*Deēsis*), which is positive and equals Conversion in Irenaeus's version. The aeon Fruit (*Karpos*), emitted by all the Pleroma together, comes to rescue Sophia from her passions, which are changed into substances: Anguish becomes psychic substance, of which the Demiurge consists, also called "of the left"; Pain becomes hylic or material substance; Confusion becomes demonical substance, and Supplication psychic substance "of the right."

In his study of the Valentinian variants of the Sophia myth, G. C. Stead came to the conclusion that all of them originate from two main sources, A and B. Irenaeus prefers A and seldom uses B; the contrary applies to Hippolytus.<sup>39</sup> Stead has equally noticed that in different Valentinian versions, Sophia is not one but no less than five different characters, from the perfect spouse of God to the lower Achamoth awaiting pardon and restoration.<sup>40</sup> Yet it is obvious that these transformations of myth do not stem from the use of different "sources" but simply from different "building bricks" that are obtained through logical switches in the minds of the users. It will soon become apparent how variants are but "deformations" of one another (to use D'Arcy Thompson's word), without presupposing different, lost sources.

Among Coptic gnostic texts, two seem to be particularly important in so far as the Sophia myth is concerned: AJ (the *Apocryphon of John*) and

PS (*Pistis Sophia*). In AJ, Sophia is guilty of thinking without a partner, and her thought first becomes an image and then a terrifying being, the lion-headed dragon Ialdabaoth,<sup>41</sup> chief Archon and Demiurge of the lower world. His meaningless actions bring about Sophia's confusion and finally her repentance.<sup>42</sup>

Sophia's repentance and conversion (*metanoia*) are the focus of the first two books of PS, which give a peculiar version of her fall. From the outset Pistis-Sophia is installed *outside* the Pleroma formed by twenty-four emanations (*probolai*) of Light, yet above the twelve aeons of the great tyrant Adamas, that is, the twelve signs of the Zodiac.<sup>43</sup> The Archons, however, are not the only ones here to hate Sophia: she is especially an object of envy for Authades, the Arrogant, a Triple Power (*tridynamos*) living in the same aeon where she lives. In order to deprive her of her Light, Authades emits a lion-headed power and from its matter (*hylē*) he dispatches other material (*hylikoi*) emanations (*probolai*) in different regions (*topoi*) of the chaos. Looking underneath, Pistis Sophia sees the light of the lion-headed power, whom she wrongly takes for a bright emissary of the Pleroma. Without asking her partner's permission, she flees in pursuit of the deceiving light, thinking that she may use it as a vehicle in order to ascend to the Pleroma. But the opposite occurs: the lion-headed monster swallows Sophia's luminous power, of which he subsequently excretes the matter (*hylē*), which becomes the lion-headed Archon Ialdabaoth, made of Fire and Darkness.<sup>44</sup> Deprived of her light, Pistis Sophia becomes very weak. She repents repeatedly and calls the Pleroma to her rescue. Eventually the aeon Christ will be dispatched to help her.

In the Nag Hammadi texts, with the exception of AJ II, Sophia's fault is described in rather generic terms. In the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (HA) she appears to wish to create something on her own, without her partner.<sup>45</sup> *On the Origin of the World* (SST) gives no further information.<sup>46</sup>

In the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (ST) Sophia is called Whore,<sup>47</sup> which may perhaps explain why the Nag Hammadi library contains the writing *Thunder*, which does not seem to be gnostic. Yet a gnostic or gnosticizing reader would have recognized Sophia in *Thunder*, who claims to be "whore and holy" at the same time.<sup>48</sup> ST does not give a clear explanation of Sophia's fall, mentioning only that she had acted without consulting the Pleroma, and therefore her product is perishable.<sup>49</sup>

Watching the feats of the Savior, a number of Archons are persuaded by Sophia to leave the lower world of the Cosmocrator (Ruler of the Universe). The motif of the repenting Archons is common in Gnosticism,

but ST furnishes an interesting variant: even these Archons are ignorant, for they confuse Sophia with the Supreme Power of the Pleroma.<sup>50</sup> Now, contends the text, the Supreme Power is male, not female; he is a Father, not a Mother. Other gnostic texts would insist as well on the supremacy of male over female: "Femaleness existed, but she was not in the beginning."<sup>51</sup> The *Letter of Peter to Philip* speaks of Sophia's "disobedience and foolishness" for her wish to create without the Father's command.<sup>52</sup> In all these testimonies Sophia appears as a fallen entity.

#### 4. Sophia the Holy

Yet whoever, following an inductive procedure, would conclude that all gnostic texts were describing her in the same ambivalent terms would be wrong. There is apparently one exception: the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (SJ), two Nag Hammadi versions of which bear the title *Eugnostos the Blessed* (Eug). In this writing Sophia is exclusively a higher aeon, *syzygos* of Man, the first emanation of the Propator, the inscrutable Father. Gnostics have often been said to be anarchic, and in a certain sense they were, for they had created a counterculture by negating the main principles of culture. Yet in this text gnostic anarchism receives a quite interesting metaphysical explanation: Gnostics are said to be only those who worship not the Father who is the *archē* (beginning) of the universe but the Forefather (Propator), who is *anarchos* (without beginning).<sup>53</sup> SJ contains a number of allusions to the fault of a woman,<sup>54</sup> but that might be Eve instead of Sophia. As far as Sophia is concerned, also called *agapē* or Love and elsewhere Silence, she is only a universal Mother, *protogeneteira* (first begetress),<sup>55</sup> multiplying herself as new entities split from her so that eventually no less than eight Sophias exist, in perfect syzygy with their male partners.<sup>56</sup> SJ also contains an allusion to the boasting Demiurge, but his appearance is not connected with Sophia. The authors of this text were obviously attempting to distinguish themselves from the bulk of gnostics; therefore it is extremely uncautious to jump to the conclusion that such minority literature would express the primordial viewpoint of Gnosticism, which would thus be a religion of the Mother.<sup>57</sup> This also seems to be Deirdre J. Good's final thesis at the conclusion of a work in which she had resumed Rose Horman Arthur's view, according to which the myth of Sophia had developed along Christian and non-Christian lines, its christianization being responsible for the appearance of Sophia's negative aspects. Moreover, Good argues that the non-Christian worship of Sophia the Mother should have preceded Chris-



tianity, thereby reverting to Wilhelm Bousset's interpretation of Sophia.<sup>58</sup> We will return shortly to these speculations and their predecessors, unfortunately ignored by present-day scholars.

In those gnostic treatises that belong to the kind of system attributed by Hippolytus to the Sethians, the universal Mother is an androgynous entity who fecundates herself: She must be concretely represented as a womb endowed with a phallus.<sup>59</sup> If *Trimorphic Protennoia* (P) seems to belong to those treatises in which Protennoia-Barbelo appears exclusively as a superior aeon of the Pleroma, another "Sethian" text, the *Paraphrase of Shem* (P<sub>Sem</sub>) speaks about an entity without a partner, manifestly androgynous, who copulates with herself, generating the phallic Wind-Demiurge "who possesses a Power from Fire and from Darkness and from the Spirit."<sup>60</sup>

Other texts promote feminine entities both as important pleromatic hypostases and as inferior principles that effect the "devolution" of Being and so cause this world to be. The distinction is clear in the *First Apocalypse of James* (1 ApJc), where Achamoth is an inferior and ignorant entity produced by Sophia.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, in the Valentinian *Gospel of Philip* (EvPh) Echamoth is Wisdom whereas Echmoth is "Wisdom of Death."<sup>62</sup> A distinction of the kind also occurs between Barbelo and Sophia in AJ,<sup>63</sup> not to mention the systematic doubling of feminine entities in SST and HA.<sup>64</sup>

## 5. Sophia and Logos

Whereas several early christologies would emphasize the equation between Logos-Christ and Sophia (see Introduction above), only one among the original gnostic texts would replace Sophia with Logos: the *Tripartite Tractate* (TT), a subtle and beautiful text commonly ascribed to the school of the Valentinian Heracleon, whose speculations on the Logos of the Gospel of John have been preserved by Origen.<sup>65</sup> TT certainly vindicates the thesis—rejected by Elaine H. Pagels in an early work—of the extremely close relation between Gnosticism and Christianity in general and between Origen and Gnosticism in particular. Indeed, TT comes as close as possible to the doctrine of the main Church, yet without altogether abandoning the fundamental myths of Gnosticism. The result comes so close to Origenism that it would be difficult to suppose TT anterior to Origen, unless one would prefer to argue that Origen took over his entire theory of free will from this branch of Valentinianism.

As a matter of fact, for Origen the Intellects fall because of their free will;<sup>66</sup> likewise the Logos of TT acts through free will.<sup>67</sup> TT is no less Christian than Origen was "gnostic."<sup>68</sup> "The intention of Logos was good," assures TT,<sup>69</sup> yet he lacked experience for being "young," that is, the last of the Pleroma. "Anyway, it is not fit to criticize Logos, for the world that originated through him *was meant to come into being.*"<sup>70</sup> Only one conclusion is possible: that although TT keeps up the Sophia myth, it gives up the main presupposition that usually goes with it, namely, that "*this world came into being by accident.*"<sup>71</sup> The Valentinian writer certainly does not lack subtlety: If Logos fails in his attempt to "seize the incomprehensibility" of the Father, this is not his fault; his failure was programmed *in advance* in order that the lower world would come into being. The Fall is explained through the well-known theme of Sophia-Logos taking a look underneath, out of which Forgetfulness and Ignorance ensue.<sup>72</sup>

Jan Zandee has argued that the replacement of Sophia by Logos is easily explicable in the light of the double Greek translation of the Hebrew  $\text{HKMH}$ , for example, in Philo.<sup>73</sup> The Dutch scholar seemed to ignore that Logos-Sophia christologies were common before and with Origen. Yet here the explanation is much simpler: The Logos of TT, like the Logos of Heracleon, is nothing but the Logos of the Gospel of John. The anonymous author of TT attempts to come as close as possible to mainstream Christianity. Therefore he does not hesitate to incur a contradiction upon which, it is true, not only he but also the best among the Christians and Neoplatonists would stumble: If Logos acts through free will, then he is the only one responsible for the coming into being of the lower world, which remains the defective and accidental product of his fall; but if the Logos's fall was foreknown and programmed by the Father, then the world is not an arbitrary product anymore, *but* Logos's free will becomes quite questionable.

Indeed, one cannot possibly save both the omniscience of God and the free will of his creatures. How could a world, which is both good and evil, appear through the free will of an entity that acts beyond the responsibility of his superiors yet not unbeknownst to them, for they knew all about it in advance and were even eager to see it coming; this remains a great conundrum. Confronted with the evidence, an unbiased judge would say that the Father was the instigator of the Logos's crime. Other gnostics seem to be more consistent when they assume that this world was not destined to exist but that Sophia's fault brought it about. Although in this case the gnostic Forefather cannot be said to be omniscient, one can still clear him of any complicity in the coming into being of this world.

## 6. The Quest for Origins

According to the German and Swedish *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, of which Wilhelm Bousset is in this case the spokesman, Sophia-Barbelo (in all likelihood a Semitic word, which Bousset takes, however, to be a deformation of the Greek *parthenos*, the title of the Virgin Goddess) would be none other than the gnostic equivalent of the Near Eastern Great Mother Goddess, one among her multiple manifestations: Ishtar, Atargatis, Kybele, Anaitis (Anahita), or Astarte.<sup>74</sup> Thus the German school of history of religions looms behind the hypothesis that originally Sophia was just a powerful Mother Goddess, not an ambiguous hypostatic entity at all. Bousset accounts for a lower, largely negative Sophia by invoking the usual "iranized astral Babylonian lore,"<sup>75</sup> which is tantamount to explaining *ignotum per ignotius*, an unknown quantity through one that is even less known.

After World War II another theory became dominant: the theory of the Jewish origin of Sophia. One of the pioneers of this interpretation, Gilles Quispel, equated the gnostic Sophia with the biblical Hokmah, Simon the Samaritan's Ennoia, endowed in Samaria with cosmogonic powers.<sup>76</sup> In a 1953 article Quispel tried to reconstruct the evolution of the Sophia myth starting from a "primitive" Jewish-gnostic form: "God creates from Chaos the seven Archons through the intermediary of his Hokmah, the *humectatio luminis* or Lightdew (Irenaeus I.30). The Hokmah dispatches her *eidolon*, her image or shadow, over the primordial waters of the *tôhû wabôhû* (Gen. 1:2). After this image, the archons build the world and the human body, which crawls over the earth like a worm. The Hokmah bestows the Spirit upon him."<sup>77</sup> Later on, Sophia the world creator is displaced by a masculine entity, an Anthropos. Gnostic theodicy, as expressed in the myth of Sophia's fall, is explained by Quispel as the result of interference with Orphic-Pythagorean speculations.<sup>78</sup>

Quispel's theory was followed up by Hans Martin Schenke, who likewise linked up the myth of Sophia with the passage in Gen. 1:26 where God (*plural!*) sets out to create man in his ("our") image.<sup>79</sup> We saw already that the interpretation that God and his Wisdom were meant by the plural in the biblical passage was current. A masculine Anthropos replaced Sophia later on.<sup>80</sup>

A more recent survey of the remarkable analogies between the biblical Wisdom and gnostic Sophia was drawn by George W. MacRae. They are both divine hypostases, they dwell in the clouds, they are identified with God because of their proximity to God, they communicate wisdom

and revelations to humankind, they descend to the earth, they ascend toward the heavenly mansions, they play a role in the creation of Adam, they are identified with Life and the Tree of Life.<sup>81</sup> To this may be added the aforementioned "Wisdom of Death," the negative Sophia who occurs in the Proverbs. However, G. W. MacRae was right in assessing that Jewish sources do not contain anything like the story of Sophia's fall.<sup>82</sup>

## 7. The Creative Hermeneutics of Sophia's Myth

In 1979, Rose Horman Arthur wrote a dissertation, and Elaine H. Pagels published the controversial best-seller *The Gnostic Gospels*, in which the same point was made: that the gnostics' was a religion of the Mother, in contrast with Christianity (and Judaism) as a religion of the Father, and that, accordingly, women would occupy positions of authority in a gnostic community that were denied them by mainstream Christianity.<sup>83</sup>

Pagels's thesis was intensely and sometimes ferociously criticized; I will skip the details here. The author acknowledged recently, in a superb essay, a shift of emphasis in her own investigation of gnostic texts, from the assumption that "texts would tell us something about a range of early Christian attitudes toward women" to the understanding of gnostic evidence as being primarily concerned with "the dynamics of religious experience" in itself.<sup>84</sup> In other words, Pagels agreed with her former opponents that nothing on the actual status of women in gnostic communities may be inferred from the narrative frameworks of a few Coptic treatises.

Pagels had by no means been the first to argue that the gnostic paradigm was feminist and opposed to the patriarchal Christian one. Such a contention had already been made in the visionary work of Eugen Heinrich Schmitt (in 1903-7)<sup>85</sup> and especially in the oeuvre of Otfried Eberz, who one day will be recognized not only as Pagels's precursor but also as a forerunner of Marija A. Gimbutas's reconstruction of Old European civilization.<sup>86</sup> Eberz contrasted our culture based on masculine values and aggressiveness, which he called agnostic, with an old gynecocratic "gnostic" civilization suppressed by the Aryan invasion. This is, *in nuce*, Gimbutas's thesis, substantiated by the Lithuanian scholar with archaeological evidence.<sup>87</sup> It was not the first time that serious hypotheses have been initially formulated by cranks, which Eberz seemed to be, despite the praiseworthy fact that his anti-Aryanism resulted under Hitler in an interdiction against the publication of his

work. Yet when he resumed publishing after the war, his books had little public impact. That Gimbutas and Pagels independently sponsored Schmitt's and Eberz's major theory decades later therefore deserves even more attention.

In 1962 a Marxist interpreter of Catharism, Gottfried Koch, maintained that dualistic movements would have some place in their hierarchies for women. It seemed to Koch—and so indeed it may seem to anyone who is only superficially acquainted with the phenomenon—that women were the essential adepts of Catharism. Koch induced that Catharism was feminist, whereas the Church was patriarchal, and interpreted Catharism as the religious expression of a social revolt of women.<sup>88</sup> The greatest scholar of Catharism today, Jean Duvernoy, has completely dismantled Koch's thesis through a thorough sociological investigation, which showed that even in Languedoc, where the proportion of women among the Cathars was extremely high, only 34 percent of the "Perfect" Cathars were women and only 30 percent of the simple Believers. Not only could women not have access to the hierarchy or preach, but they were granted a low status in general. Here is Duvernoy's conclusion: "Heresy as such does not have any particular message for women, other than an increase in diminishment."<sup>89</sup>

Does this apply to Gnosticism as well? This may indeed be the case, if the chronology defended by Schmitt, Eberz, Arthur, Pagels, Good, and others may be reversed to place first the negative Sophia and only afterward Sophia the Mother of All. And it certainly can be reversed, yet not to the extent that one may maintain that the "protognostics"—Simon and his followers—would ascribe Ennoia-Sophia more than circumstantial negativity. Statistically Sophia is ambivalent (negative and somewhat positive) in over 80 percent of cases.

Today the gender-related perspective is used far more cautiously, although viewpoints run the gamut from that of Michael A. Williams, who believes that Sophia's gender in gnostic texts is unrelated to any actual "pattern of socialization,"<sup>90</sup> to that of Karen L. King, who rather interprets the presence of the Sophia myth in Gnosticism as a sure indication of patriarchal ideology.<sup>91</sup> The hidden assumption of Gnosticism would thus be that femaleness is equated with weakness, error, and imperfection, which ought to be "strengthened/corrected by male intervention."<sup>92</sup> We have elsewhere emphasized King's position a number of times.<sup>93</sup> Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley came to the same conclusion when she established the main patterns in the treatment of the feminine in gnostic texts, which are rather negative and presuppose in most cases that femininity is inferior and has to be transcended.<sup>94</sup>

The problem, as we understand it, is not merely establishing whether the myth of Sophia fills in a social pattern of negative expectations toward women in general but whether we may indeed expect any social information at all from myth. Claude Lévi-Strauss answered this question several times,<sup>95</sup> lately perhaps more explicitly than ever: For him myth is important only as a narrative that undergoes transformations, and not as a symbolic conveyor of any social or psychological meaning. What myth mirrors is only the play of the mind itself.<sup>96</sup> The history of the interpretation of the Sophia myth seems to confirm his view, in the sense that at first several scholars defended the hypothesis of a pre-Christian (or pre-Aryan) Sophia as Great Mother, later to be spoiled by Christian (or Aryan) patriarchy; afterward some of the same scholars realized that literary texts do not unambiguously answer gender-related questions or any other social question at all. At the same time, other scholars have reversed the previous hypothesis, ascribing to Gnosticism in general a negative attitude toward women based on the statistical evidence of Sophia's own negativity.

## 8. Why the Fall?

In a number of essays, I tried to show that Sophia in gnostic myth occupies exactly the same position as a character that occurs in many dualistic myths of the world, the female Trickster.<sup>97</sup> I do not intend to present here the several variants of the myth of the Trickstress considered elsewhere. A number of scholars appeared to believe that my demonstration was intended to show that Gnosticism originates in popular dualism, and this misunderstanding followed me like a curse through a number of international conventions. I was trying to show—in addition to considerably enlarging the repertory of variants of the Sophia myth according to a procedure current in anthropology—that the Trickstress embodies a number of exaggerated negative traits sometimes attributed to femaleness. It seemed in all cases that there was something wrong with the Trickstress's eroticism—not that she was necessarily insatiable, as many patriarchal cultures believe,<sup>98</sup> but that she interfered with the male order of the world and sabotaged humankind. Somehow, in a complex way, this relates to the social regulation of sexuality. To the same extent, one may dispute with Claude Lévi-Strauss that the male Trickster is not a "mediator" of gender oppositions but the *negative* of an expected pattern of maleness.<sup>99</sup>

As far as the variants of the Sophia myth are concerned, they offer a number of transformations of the reason for her fall, transformations that may reflect the use of complementary "bricks," the use of apparently unrelated bricks, or the use of any combination of bricks.

She is called Whore,<sup>100</sup> which in testimonies of that period (and much later) indicates an excess of eroticism, not rapid profits from quick sex.<sup>101</sup> Sophia and Logos are said to be "young,"<sup>102</sup> that is, inexperienced and, above all, curious. Two testimonies say that she has no partner.<sup>103</sup> Anyway, she *thinks* without a partner,<sup>104</sup> she wishes to *create* without him,<sup>105</sup> or without the Father's command;<sup>106</sup> in any case she *acts* without consulting the Pleroma.<sup>107</sup> In the Valentinian versions she *ascends* toward the Father in the grip of erotic passion and foolhardiness.<sup>108</sup> In Irenaeus's version, this is the cause of her fall; in Hippolytus's, it is her imitating the Father in so far as she wants to generate without a partner. More often she *looks down*, which she is not supposed to do,<sup>109</sup> but she does anyway because of inexperience<sup>110</sup> or because of the machinations of an evil character who rapes her (deprives her of her Light).<sup>111</sup> Individual motivations may be combined in a sequence, as in the case of Irenaeus's Barbelo-gnostics, where Sophia has no partner, she looks down, *and* this action is illegal within the constituted order of the Pleroma. Pistis-Sophia is set up by the Triple Power Authades, the Arrogant, who makes her look down with the aid of a lure. To this point she is innocent; she becomes guilty as soon as she descends to see the lure without her partner's consent.

In the "Sethian" writings Sophia is androgynous. More precisely she is, as we already saw, a womb provided with a phallus and fecundates herself. In one text this seems to pass for normal,<sup>112</sup> but another time it appears to be against nature, for Sophia acts like this for want of a partner.<sup>113</sup>

Three narratives stand apart. For Irenaeus's Ophites, Sophia-Prounicos, Left Power and androgynous, is the outcome of an accident in the Pleroma. Her fall has nothing to do with her free will.<sup>114</sup> By contrast, TT insists on the Logos's freedom of choice, yet emphasizing at the same time the responsibility of his superiors, whose omniscience is thus safe but whose conscience is at jeopardy. The myth of Eden-Israel, spouse of the Demiurge Elohim in the Book of Baruch,<sup>115</sup> recombines the same elements with others to form a new narrative in which the crisis of a female entity—disappointed, frustrated, and unbalanced—causes the present sad and painful state of the world.

Does a certain negative image of the feminine form the hidden assumption of this story? To assess this we should determine which

comes first: erotic dissatisfaction or youth, unbalance or inexperience, curiosity or the evil intentions of Sophia's neighbors. But this is impossible, since none of these motivations has absolute priority, and none seems to be statistically more conspicuous than the others. Fear of separation, eroticism, and juvenile error form an inextricable complex with deleterious consequences. Yet to link this to specific societal patterns of debasement of women in general would be too much.

If this myth obviously does not transpose a social code into exemplary narrative, as the Durkheimian school would have it, it certainly *creates* a pattern of expectations concerning the world and humankind. To use here the words that a master, W. K. C. Guthrie, applied to ancient Greek Puritans, the Orphics, not everyone believes that this world is a valley of tears. We cannot say that the Orphics first believed it and then devised a mythical narrative to prove it, as an existentialist like Hans Jonas would have it. But we must certainly ascertain that the myth of the Orphics wishes to convince those who accept it that the world is a valley of tears.

The same way, we may say that the Sophia myth does not derive from a situation of "crisis" or "estrangement" (whatever this may mean), but it certainly propounds a worldview based on the crisis and estrangement of an ambiguous Goddess.

## Notes

1. H. S. Wiesner, introduction, "Hypostasierung," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*; the definition continues:  
Each of these usages precedes the term *hypostasis* and even philosophy itself, nor do these modern meanings exactly correspond to the understanding of any ancient author. Although some usages create divinities and others seem rather to break them down, the processes are not necessarily opposite but sometimes analogous. Personified divinities once hypostasized out of abstract forces (e.g., in the earliest Roman and Sumerian religions), might later be rationalized out of their mythological settings and into another sort of hypostases (e.g., the Homeric and Hesiodic gods in the hands of Plotinus [5.1.7 28–45; 3.5.2]). And these philosophical hypostases may in turn be embodied as was, for example, the immanent Logos: Jesus Christ or the eternally pre-existent Qur'an.
2. On the Platonic origin of this opposition, see esp. the noteworthy book by Hans Joachim Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Platonismus zwischen Platon und Plotin* (Schippers: Amsterdam, 1964), 223–64. Krämer deals with Gnosis as a phenomenon belonging to the history of Platonism, in which one can trace "abgesunkenes philosophisches Lehrgut altakademischer Herkunft in charakteristischer Gestaltverfremdung" (253). His thesis is sound. Unfortunately most of the documentation on Gnosticism used by Krämer comes from the German *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*.
3. Iren. I.11.1; cf. François M.-M. Sagnard, *La Gnose valentinienne et le témoignage de Saint Irénée* (Vrin: Paris, 1947), 355–57.



4. Prov. 8:29f; trans. Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East* (Ohlsson: Lund, Sweden, 1947), 99.
5. *Hom.* 16:11f; Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom*, 123.
6. Prov. 3:18; Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom*, 104f.
7. *Sir.* 24:4–6; trans. Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom*, 108.
8. *Iren.* I.30.3–4; see above, chap. 2.
9. *Iren.* I.29.4.
10. *Iren.* I.30.3–4.
11. *Hipp.* V.26.19–21.
12. See Søren Giversen, ed. and trans., *Apocryphon Johannis* (Prostant Apud Munksgard: Copenhagen, 1963), 284.
13. See Anne Pasquier, "Prouneikos: A Colorful Expression to Designate Wisdom in Gnostic Texts," in Karen L. King, ed., *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1988), 47–66, followed by Marvin W. Meyer's response.
14. See my *Gnosticismo e pensiero moderno: Hans Jonas* (L'Erma di Brettschneider: Rome, 1985).
15. See esp. F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato Translated with a Running Commentary* (Kegan Paul: London, 1937).
16. For example, Moshe Idel clearly demonstrated, against the theory of his predecessor Gershom Scholem, that Lurian Kabbalah is not the response to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492; it is along *systemic*, not along circumstantial, historical lines that Lurian Kabbalah is a transformation of precedent doctrines. See Micha Odenheimer, "Kabbalah as Experience: Moshe Idel's Critique of Gershom Scholem," *Jewish Action*, Summer 5750/1990, 27–30. Idel's objections to Scholem's theory have been recently reformulated in his article "Jewish Reactions to the Expulsion from Spain," in *The Expulsion from Spain and the Holocaust: The Jewish Community's Response* (Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture: New York, 1990), 18–25.
17. *Iren.* I.30.1–2.
18. *Iren.* I.30.3–9.
19. *Iren.* I.30.6–7; 9–10.
20. *Iren.* I.30. 12–13.
21. *Hipp.* V.24.2–27.5.
22. *Hipp.* V.25.1.
23. *Hipp.* V.25.7–9.
24. *Hipp.* V.25.11–13.
25. *Hipp.* V.25.13.
26. *Hipp.* V.25.14.
27. *Hipp.* V.25.23.
28. *Hipp.* V.25.28.
29. *Iren.* I.1.1–8.4 = *Epiph.* 31; *Hipp.* V.29–36; and Clement of Alexandria's *Excerpts from Theodotus*.
30. *Iren.* I.2.2.
31. *Iren.* I.2.3.
32. *Iren.* I.2.4.
33. *Iren.* I.4.1.
34. *Iren.* I.4.2; see 5.4.
35. *Hipp.* VI.30.6ff.
36. *Hipp.* VI.30.8.
37. *Hipp.* VI.31.2.
38. *Hipp.* VI.31.6.
39. G. C. Stead, "The Valentinian Myth of Sophia," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 20 (1969), 75–104.

40. Stead, "The Valentinian Myth," 93.
41. AJ II.57.25–58.7.
42. AJ II.61.14.
43. PS 29, p. 25 S.-T.
44. PS 31, p. 28 S.-T.
45. NH II 94.9.5–7.
46. II 100.8.
47. VII.2; 50.28.
48. VI.2; 13.19.
49. VII.50.26.
50. VII.52.34.
51. 1 ApJc V.24.29.
52. VIII.2; 135.12f.
53. BG p. 222–23 Till.
54. BG 118.15–16 p. 176–77 Till.
55. BG p. 238 Till.
56. See my article "Feminine versus Masculine: The Sophia Myth and the Origins of Feminism," in H. G. Kippenberg, ed., *Struggles of Gods* (Mouton-De Gruyter: Berlin-New York, 1984), 65–98.
57. See Rose Horman Arthur, *Feminine Motifs in Eight Nag Hammadi Documents* (University Microfilms International: Ann Arbor, MI, 1979). For a judicious assessment of SJ and Eug, see PHEME PERKINS, "Sophia as Goddess in the NH Codices," in King, ed., *Images of the Feminine*, 96–112.
58. Deirdre J. Good, *Reconstructing the Tradition of Sophia in Gnostic Literature* (Scholars Press: Atlanta, GA, 1987).
59. P XIII.45.
60. VII.21. The phallic character of the Sethian Demiurge has been documented by Giovanni Casadio, "Antropologia gnostica e antropologia orfica nella notizia di Ipolito sui sethiani," in F. Vattioni, *Sangue e antropologia nella teologia* (Rome, 1989), 1295–1350; see also my *Out of This World: A History of Otherworldly Journeys and Out-of-Body Experiences, from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Shambhala: Boston, 1991), chap. 8.
61. VII.35.
62. I.60.
63. BG 27,11–13 p. 94 Till.
64. See my "Feminine," 81–82.
65. Origen, *In Iohann.* II.14.21. See Elaine H. Pagels's *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon's Commentary on John* (Abingdon Press: Nashville and New York, 1973), intended in the first instance to reject Hans Jonas's thesis that Origen had been influenced by Gnosticism.
66. See U. Bianchi and H. Crouzel, eds., *Arché e Telos: L'Antropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa* (Vita e Pensiero: Milan, 1981), 47–48.
67. I.75.35.
68. See my "Feminine," 82–83.
69. I.76.3–4.
70. I.77.6; emphasis mine.
71. EvPh II.75.3; emphasis mine.
72. I.77.18ff.
73. J. Zandee, "Die Person der Sophia in der Vierten Schrift des Codex Jung," in U. Bianchi, ed., *The Origins of Gnosticism* (Brill: Leiden, 1967), 205–14.
74. Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (FRLANT 10) (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1907), 26.
75. Bousset, *Hauptprobleme*, 43.

76. Quispel, *Gnostic Studies I* (Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut in het Nabije Oosten: Istanbül, 1974), 163.
77. Quispel, "Der gnostische Anthropos und die jüdische Tradition," in *Gnostic Studies I*, 178.
78. Quispel, *Gnostic Studies I*, 191.
79. Hans Martin Schenke, *Der Gott "Mensch" in der Gnosis: Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zur Diskussion über die paulinische Anschauung von der Kirche als Leib Christi* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1962), 72ff.
80. Schenke, *Der Gott "Mensch,"* 32.
81. George MacRae, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970), 86–101.
82. MacRae, "Jewish Background," 99; see also Kurt Rudolph, "Sophia und Gnosis: Bemerkungen zum Problem 'Gnosis und Frühjudentum,'" in K. W. Tröger, ed., *Altes Testament—Frühjudentum—Gnosis* (Berlin, 1980), 221–37, esp. 227–28.
83. Elaine H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (Random House: New York, 1979), 42–61.
84. Elaine H. Pagels, "Pursuing the Spiritual Eve: Imagery and Hermeneutics in the HA and the Gospel of Philip," in King, ed., *Images of the Feminine*, 187–206, quotation from 187–88.
85. Eugen Heinrich Schmitt, *Die Gnosis: Grundlagen der Weltanschauung einer elderen Kultur I: Die Gnosis des Altertums; II: Die Gnosis des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit* (Diederichs: Leipzig and Jena, 1903–7).
86. Otfried Eberz (1878–1958), *Sophia und Logos oder die Philosophie der Wiederherstellung* (Reinhardt: Munich and Basel, 1967).
87. Marija A. Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500–3500 B.C.: Myths and Cult Images* (2d ed., Univ. of California Press: Berkeley, 1982).
88. Gottfried Koch, *Frauenfrage und Ketzertum im Mittelalter: Die Frauenbewegung im Rahmen des Katharismus und des Waldensertums und ihre sozialen Wurzeln (12.–14. Jahrhundert)* (Akademie: Berlin [East], 1962).
89. Jean Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme: La Religion des Cathares* (Privat: Toulouse, 1976), 264–65.
90. M. A. Williams, "Variety in Gnostic Perspective on Gender," in King, ed., *Images of the Feminine*, 2–22.
91. Karen L. King, "Sophia and Christ in the AJ," in King, ed., *Images of the Feminine*, 158–76.
92. King, "Sophia and Christ," 171.
93. See esp. my "Feminine," 92–96.
94. Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, *Female Fault and Fulfillment in Gnosticism* (Univ. of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1986), 126ff.
95. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropology and Myth: Lectures 1951–1981*, trans. R. Willis (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1987).
96. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, trans. B. Chorier (Univ. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1988).
97. Bibliography in my "Feminine," 96.
98. See my "A Corpus for the Body," *The Journal of Modern History*, March 1991.
99. See Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (1956; Schocken Books: New York, 1972), 147.
100. ST VII.50.28.
101. About the alleged erotic insatiability of prostitutes, see my "A Corpus for the Body," *Journal of Modern History*, March 1991.
102. Hipp. VI.30.6; TT I.77.18.
103. Iren. I.29.4; PSem VII.21.
104. AJ II.57.25ff.
105. HA II.94.4–8.

106. EpPt VIII.135.12.
107. ST VII.50.28.
108. Iren. I.2.2; Hipp. VI.30.6.
109. Iren. I.29.4.
110. TT I.77.18ff.
111. PS 31, p. 28 S.-T.
112. P XIII.45.
113. P Sem VII.21.
114. Iren. I.30.3-4.
115. Hipp. V.24.14ff.

# Chapter 4

## Gnostic Myth 2: The Ignorant Demiurge

Gnosticism was a theory of misprision, and so is a necessary model for any contemporary theory of influence as being a creative misunderstanding.

—HAROLD BLOOM

### 1. His Appearance, His Aspect, His Name

In most gnostic myths, the Demiurge of the world is ejected by a Mother in doubt, in an episode of unwilling maternity. There are exceptions: the "protognostics" (Simon, Menander, Saturninus, Carpocrates); the Book of Baruch of Justin the Gnostic; TT, in which Sophia is replaced by the male Logos, a "Father" who shows, nevertheless, a pattern of weakness that elsewhere seems to be reserved to femaleness; Hippolytus's Sethians and PSem, where hypostases are impersonal and "naturalistic"—a hermaphroditic sex copulating with itself and a phallic, serpent-like Wind; and, finally, all treatises in which Sophia is not mentioned, although most of the times allusions seem inevitable.

Because the double characteristic of the Demiurge is to be ignorant and boastful, his arrogance being the logical consequence of his feeling of uniqueness due to his ignorance of the Mother and thereby of the Pleroma, which she represents, one would expect most of the variants of the myth to specify that he is completely unaware of his origin. The classical example of demiurgic ignorance is evinced by Ialdabaoth, the Demiurge of the Ophites of Irenaeus,<sup>1</sup> whose shape is that of a lion (according to Celsus).<sup>2</sup>

There are some apparent exceptions to this rule. Thus, in *On the Origin of the World* the first Archon arises in the Darkness emanating from Sophia and notices the existence of something higher than himself;

at that moment, his Jealousy and his Wrath split from him, and a watery substance—Matter—flows down into the Chaos.<sup>3</sup> This episode is the strange duplicate of the Demiurge's own birth and is meant to give an explanation to Darkness and Matter, which is here not envisioned as a second principle but as an emanation whose origin goes back to Sophia herself. Such devices are often used by gnostics in direct polemic with Gen. 1:1–2, which suggests that God created heavens and earth but did not create Chaos (*tôhû wa-bôhû*), Darkness, and the Waters. The gnostics show remarkable consistency in interpreting Genesis 1 as a testimony of a certain dualism, according to which, in the beginning there would be God *and* other principles: Chaos, Darkness, Waters. The gnostic solution to this problem, which in gnostic eyes was not only nondualistic but clearly antidualistic, shows that in general the gnostics were Platonists, for they have no objection to the coexistence of God with Chaos (the Platonic void space, *chōra*), but they strenuously reject the possibility that Darkness and Waters would be coeternal with God. As we will see presently, "mitigated" gnostics saw in the biblical Genesis a Manichaeian text (*avant la lettre*, of course), and they would have condemned Manichaeism, as strange as this might sound, as a Judaic heresy.

Returning to the scenario of the Ophites, the Demiurge is later born from Pistis (of whom Sophia is here the *image*, that is, a lifeless copy) while she is visiting Chaos and is saddened by the aspect of Matter. Her Confusion becomes a creature toward which Pistis reverts and into whose face she blows some of her spirit (Pneuma). Ialdabaoth, the androgynous lion-headed Archon, appears in the watery Matter. He ignores his Mother, but not completely, for he has seen her reflection in the water and heard her pronounce the word *Ialdabaoth* (of which the text gives a fantastic etymology). Because of his lion shape, the Archon is equally called Arael, from the Hebrew 'Arî, "lion."<sup>4</sup>

In AJ,<sup>5</sup> Ialdabaoth detaches himself from Sophia at the same time as does the Ignorance (*Agnoia*) or Insanity (*Aponoia*), which generated him and which will remain his partner in the birth of the other inhabitants of the lower heavens, which proceed in twin pairs of opposite sexes. His aspect is that of "a lionfaced serpent with glittering eyes of fire."<sup>6</sup> As in other texts,<sup>7</sup> the Demiurge is here called Samael and Sakla(s).

HA<sup>8</sup> asserts that Samael, "God of the Blind"—from the Aramaic *samâ'*, "blind"<sup>9</sup>—is blind (*b<sup>a</sup>lle*), ignorant and arrogant. Elsewhere this hylic abortion created from the shadow cast by Pistis-Sophia-Incorruptibility (*t<sup>a</sup>m<sup>a</sup>ntattako*) is an androgynous animal, arrogant and lion-shaped.<sup>10</sup>

The Sethians of Hippolytus represent the Demiurge as a terrible, serpentlike Wind, which sets in motion the dark Waters.<sup>11</sup> The Docetes take him for the fiery god who spoke to Moses from the burning bush.<sup>12</sup> He is the image in Darkness of an aeon whose transcendence has been forever separated from the lower world by the firmament. His substance is Darkness, his activity consists in persecuting the divine souls, which transmigrate from body to body.

The Valentinians, whose system, transmitted by Hippolytus,<sup>13</sup> seems to be closer to pseudepigraphic and anonymous gnostic systems and, some would say, perhaps more ancient than the subtleties of Ptolemy, Heracleon, and Theodotus (although this is by no means safe), do not follow their example in attempting to spare their Demiurge, whom they bluntly define as Sophia's "abortion" (*ektrōma*),<sup>14</sup> "stupid and mad."<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, he is not the Opponent, the Devil, as in Carpocrates,<sup>16</sup> nor the Devil's Father, as among the Archontics of Epiphanius.<sup>17</sup>

The name of the world creator is, in most cases, Ialdabaoth. Certain gnostics, such as the Archontics and another anonymous group mentioned by Epiphanius,<sup>18</sup> prefer to call him Sabaoth, who is in some Coptic texts the repenting counterpart of the Demiurge (see below). Hippolytus's Perates<sup>19</sup> call him "assassin," according to John 8:44. In PS, the Great Archon, tyrant of all cosmic tyrants, is called Adamas.<sup>20</sup> But another heavenly Ruler, third among the Triple Powers (*tridynamoi*), bears the name Authades, the Arrogant,<sup>21</sup> which is elsewhere the epithet of the Demiurge Ialdabaoth.<sup>22</sup> Authades emanates a lion-headed force in order to catch Pistis-Sophia's spiritual energy.<sup>23</sup> After having swallowed her Light-*dynamis*, an ambiguous metaphor for rape, the lion-headed monster is able to duplicate himself, producing Ialdabaoth, another demon made of Fire and Darkness.<sup>24</sup>

In the eccentric Book of Baruch of Justin the Gnostic, the Demiurge, apparently unbegotten, is the biblical Elohim.<sup>25</sup> Sabaoth is one of the names of God in the Tanakh. And Adamas, close to Adam, was the object of etymological speculations among the Naassenes of Hippolytus,<sup>26</sup> where he is not the evil Archon but, on the contrary, the adamantine Heavenly Man, immovable and incorruptible (from Greek *a-damaō*). We have already seen that Samael derives from the Aramaic *samâ*, "blind." What are the etymologies of the other names encountered so far?

Sakla(s) stems from another Aramaic word (*sakla*'), meaning "mad": the Archon shows his family resemblance as Insanity's twin!<sup>27</sup>

As far as Ialdabaoth is concerned, we will spare the reader most hypotheses so far advanced about him.<sup>28</sup> By far the most convincing has

been offered by Matthew Black: Ialdabaoth derives from the Aramaic expression *yalda behût*, "Son of Shame."<sup>29</sup>

Ignorant, arrogant, conceited, disdainful, stupid, mad, assassin: this lionlike freak who will exert his ludicrous talents at the expense of humankind seems to be a perfect object for gnostic hatred and contempt. But the mythology of the Demiurge shows almost as many variants as gnostic doctrines. It is therefore quite naive to state that, *for gnostics in general*, the *evil* Demiurge of the world is identified with the Old Testament god. If such identification occurs indeed in most cases, only in a very few instances is the Demiurge simply or strictly *evil*.

## 2. The Boastfulness of the Archon

The boastfulness of the Archon is manifestly the outcome of his ignorance, but sometimes a second, subtler motivation is introduced. Like some mad dictator out of Eastern Europe's recent past, he brags so vigorously about his uniqueness *only* because he knows or guesses that above him there are far more important characters looking on.

According to Irenaeus's Ophites,<sup>30</sup> SST,<sup>31</sup> and AJ,<sup>32</sup> it is only after having created the Archons that the Demiurge brags, "I am a jealous God, and there is no one besides me." Several Old Testament passages converge here: Isa. 45:5 and 46:9, in which God proclaims himself unique, and Deut. 5:9, where he proclaims himself jealous (Gk. *zēlōtēs*). Yet, adds AJ, one of the champions of what could be called the reversed or "inverse exegesis" of the Old Testament, "thereby he was already indicating to the lesser angels that another god exists; for, if there were no other, of whom could he be jealous?"<sup>33</sup>

In HA,<sup>34</sup> Sophia's freakish abortion gets haughty right after opening his eyes, and he boasts, "I am God and no one exists besides me!" Then a voice came from above, from the supreme authority, saying: "You are wrong, Samael!"—i.e., God of the Blind. And he said: "If there is someone else here with me, let him show himself." And immediately Sophia stretched forth her finger, introducing light in Matter."

## 3. Creation of the Heavenly Powers

According to Irenaeus's Ophites,<sup>35</sup> Ialdabaoth emits a son, who in his turn emits another, and so on until the whole Hebdomad of planetary Archons comes into being. Their names have been transmitted both by



Irenaeus and by Origen (after Celsus), who also describes their shapes and tells about the planet each of them represents.<sup>36</sup> The power struggles among the heavenly Rulers fill Ialdabaoth with sorrow. He then looks down toward Matter. His desire takes on material shape in the form of a countercreation, the Ogdoad represented by the serpentlike Intellect (that is, the Devil as the Snake of the Garden of Eden), Spirit, Soul, Forgetfulness, Wickedness, Envy, Jealousy, Death.

This creation is structured according to the archetypal pattern of the higher Pleroma, for Ialdabaoth contains this pattern in himself by virtue of being Sophia's son. It is now Ialdabaoth's daydream that takes on the consistency of matter, emerging from the bottom of his unconscious, which guards in itself the buried treasure of his genetic memory. As TT—a late product of Valentinianism—has it, the free fantasy of the Demiurge continually stumbles upon transcendent models that are imprinted in his thought, which means that the world of the conceited creator still preserves a weak trace of the Pleroma; yet these archetypal phantoms are deprived of Reason and Light, "they are the product of nothing,"<sup>37</sup> and they will revert to nothingness. The Archons themselves are shadows of pleromatic entities, and if they fight one another all the time it is because each one of them has a faint memory of a distant and noble origin, and therefore each one is persuaded of his superiority over the others.<sup>38</sup>

In AJ, Sophia, ashamed of her misbegotten son Ialdabaoth, wants to hide him from the eyes of the Immortals and installs for him a throne—Yahweh's throne—in the middle of a luminous cloud, which is "Yahweh's mansion of glory." But Ialdabaoth goes away and makes for himself "a burning aeon of flaming fire." Having intercourse with him, his twin sister Ignorance or Insanity gives birth to "the twelve Angels, each one of them in his aeon like the imperishable aeons": the twelve signs of the Zodiac.<sup>39</sup> The creation of the seven planets follows; if they are again listed as twelve, it is because five of them have a double astrological domicile. Then come the 360 degrees of the zodiacal circle, which the copyist of Codex II, with little knowledge of astrology, corrects to 365 to give the number of days of the solar year.

A similar misunderstanding results in the identification of the archontic Hebdomad with the days of the planetary week, whereas it is beyond any doubt—as Wilhelm Bousset already knew<sup>40</sup>—that the Archons stand for the seven planets, listed in order of their distances from the earth, according to the order called Chaldaean.<sup>41</sup> The mad Ialdabaoth (Saklas) transfers part of his energy onto the seven heavenly Rulers but does not bestow upon them any of the pure Light he had

received from Sophia. Yet it is this hypercosmic glory that makes him rightful leader of the Archons: "This is why he called himself god, for he was arrogant about the place he came from."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, "he is sacrilegious in the Insanity which is in him, for he said: 'I am God and there is no other god besides me,' ignorant as he is of his origin, of the place he came from."<sup>43</sup>

After having created the planetary Hebdomad, Ialdabaoth gives the male planets female partners: Providence, Divinity, Lordship, Jealousy, Kingship, Intelligence, Wisdom. These are the traditional attributes of the Old Testament god, and here they are interpreted as many negatives.<sup>44</sup> These syzygies "have a firmament [*stereōma*] in every heaven and an aeon [*aiōn*] similar to the aeon that exists from the beginning in the plan of the Imperishable."<sup>45</sup> Looking down upon the multitude of the powers issued from him, Ialdabaoth proclaims his uniqueness.

Less specific as to the heavenly entities derived from Ialdabaoth, SST has the ignorant Archon emit his Thought through a Word that hovers over the Waters like the Spirit of Gen. 1:2. He separates dry from moist; from the former he makes the earth under his feet, from the latter he makes heaven. Through the Word, Ialdabaoth creates six Princes that complete the planetary Hebdomad, and he gives them as female partners the attributes of the biblical god taken here again to be vices.<sup>46</sup>

In the Valentinian system that Irenaeus expands on,<sup>47</sup> the Archon, who is by no means evil but temporarily ignorant, is the creator of seven intelligible heavens, for which reason he is called Hebdomad. His Mother, Sophia, exiled in the eighth heaven underneath the Limit of the Pleroma, acts constantly through him, and therefore this world is the image of the transcendent aeons.

Beyond the numerological speculations of the Valentinian Marcos,<sup>48</sup> one discovers the same mythical script: The Demiurge, ignorant of the plan of creation transmitted to him without his acknowledgment by his Mother, Sophia, makes use of the four Aristotelian elements and the four qualities that are to this world as the Ogdoad is to the Pleroma. In addition, he uses the eight theoretical spheres (which are presumably not the Fixed Heaven plus the seven planetary heavens; the planets are associated with the seven vowels of Greek and probably with the seven musical notes)<sup>49</sup> plus the Sun and the Moon, which are like the pleromatic Decad, and the signs of the Zodiac, which are like the Dodecad. The sum total makes for the image of the divine Triacontad. The cosmos has numerical ratios that correspond to those of the Pleroma, but it is not infinite and everlasting like the Pleroma.<sup>50</sup>

The creation of "this world [that] appeared by accident"<sup>51</sup> is not separated from the creation of the planetary heavens. Yet it is here below that evils accumulate and here that the devil ends up because of his gravity. The Valentinians devote a memorable sequence of their myth to the creation of the material world. According to EV,<sup>52</sup> the Ignorance of the Demiurge produces Anguish and Fright. Anguish hardens like a thick fog and fortifies Error. Error creates its own Matter and sets out to install in it a false substitute for Truth. The earth has been made by the quaternity Anguish-Fright-Error-Forgetfulness.

In the system expounded by Irenaeus, the four elements of matter are the hardened compounds of Sophia's passion: earth is her Anguish, water her Fright, air her Pain, and the devouring fire is Ignorance, begetress of the other three.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4. The Creation of Man

After the creation of the heavenly Powers, the narratives we have thus far followed introduce the creation of man. In AJ this episode is connected with Sophia's repentance; in the other narratives it follows the boastfulness of the Archon. The sequences are stereotyped: Ialdabaoth says "I am God" and so on (Isa. 45:5), but his Mother's Voice rebuts him. According to Irenaeus's summary,<sup>54</sup> the Archons are upset by the appearance of a power superior to them. They set out to make man in their own image (Gen. 1:26), but their Mother subtly inspires them toward the project of a man whose purpose would be to deprive Ialdabaoth of his spiritual force. Too weak to make him live, the Archons create the huge body of a crawling creature who is unable to stand. Ialdabaoth blows into his face the Living Spirit (Gen. 2:7) that he had received from his Mother, and henceforth man has Spirit, and the Archon does not. Man, provided with Intellect (Nous) and Intention (Enthymesis), glorifies the Pleroma and turns away from his makers.

In SST, when Ialdabaoth is boastful, Pistis-Sophia cries: "You are wrong, Samael!" and reveals herself to him as a reflection in the water, after which she withdraws into her own Light.<sup>55</sup> This episode is followed by the duplication of the Demiurge, which will be analyzed later. After having warred against his good son Sabaoth, Ialdabaoth wishes again to find out if there is anyone else above him, upon which Adam-Light, an anthropomorphic beam of light, springs from the Ogdoad. The successive episodes are clearly influenced by Manichaeism, of which they constitute a free adaptation. Pronoia, Ialdabaoth's partner,

becomes infatuated with Adam-Light, reaches solitary orgasm, and ejaculates female seed (= luminous menstrual blood), which falls to earth and, being filled with spirit, purifies earth. Out of her blood the androgynous Eros appears, with whom all lower Powers become infatuated. Appearing in their midst, he induces in them autoerotic orgasms followed by emissions that fall to the earth and form the roots of pleasure and sexual intercourse. After Eros, it is the vine that springs out of Pronoia's seed; those who drink its product are inclined toward sexuality. The other trees, preceded by the fig tree and the pomegranate (whose fruits are reminiscent of a vulva), grow from the male and female seed of the Archons.<sup>56</sup> Flowers are the products of the menstrual blood of several heavenly Powers: rose stems from the First Soul, scented flowers from the seven virgin daughters of Pronoia, and so forth. Subsequently the animals come out of water, from the seed that every species of Archon had ejaculated out of concupiscence toward Eros.

Here the First Man shows up, according to a duplication procedure frequently employed in this text, as well as in the related HA. Since Pistis-Sophia is a female entity, already duplicated twice in Pistis and her image Sophia<sup>57</sup> and then in Sophia and her daughter Zoe<sup>58</sup> she will intervene as a feminine character in the story of the creation of man. A drop of Light she puts on the Waters gives birth to Eve of Light, a.k.a. the Instructor and Hermaphrodite.<sup>59</sup>

To create man, the seven Archons ejaculate their seed at the middle of the earth and make a body whose structure is similar to theirs, but whose shape is that of Adam-Light, and they call him Adam like his prototype.<sup>60</sup> Adam is deprived of both soul and spirit. On the fortieth day after his making, Zoe sends her breath to him, rendering him capable of moving yet not capable of standing. The Archons put him in Paradise, where Sophia dispatches Eve of Light to raise him and give him sight. As soon as he notices the Instructor, Adam glorifies her.

The duplication of episodes and the doubling of divine beings answers to an obscure logic in the confused narrative of HA. The first anthropogonic and cosmogonic story of this writing resembles the narrative of SST.<sup>61</sup> After the boastful declaration of Ialdabaoth and the reply of Pistis Sophia-Incorruptibility (*t<sup>a</sup>m<sup>a</sup>nt'attako*, equivalent of Greek *aphtharsia*), the Mother chases the Archon into the Chaos and the Abyss, installing in his stead his son, who is made in the image of the transcendent aeons.<sup>62</sup> Then Incorruptibility looks upon the Waters, by which her image is reflected. The psychic Powers wish to catch her but are unable. They hold council and, in order to detain her in some way, decide to make a man out of dust (*chōus*) in her image, meant to be a lure for

Incorruptibility herself.<sup>63</sup> Initially the man is unable to stand, but Spirit comes from the Adamantine Earth (*p<sup>a</sup>kah <sup>a</sup>nadamantine*) and settles in him.<sup>64</sup>

The anthropogonic myth of AJ follows more or less a similar scenario, without intercalated episodes. In its two long versions, AJ is focused on technicalities concerning different kinds of melothesia (correspondence between parts of the soul or body and stars or other astrological entities).

If Sophia's repentance is originally meant to make her revert to the Pleroma, it likewise achieves a second result: It makes her responsible toward the universe created through her ignorance, a universe whose numerous forces, according to the formulaic Coptic, "do not remain inactive [*argos*]" but keep multiplying traps and pitfalls, making it exceedingly complex, especially after the playing out of that new episode that quite eludes the control of the aeons of Light: the creation of man.

First, Sophia acknowledges the evil (*kakia*) that ensues from Ialdabaoth's defection (*apostasia*). Ashamed, she hides in the Darkness of Ignorance, prey to a chaotic movement.<sup>65</sup> Upon this, Ialdabaoth-Authades (the Arrogant) takes notice of his Mother's existence yet continues to ignore what exists beyond her. Sophia begins to cry upon seeing the impious works of her son. Her *syzygos*, the divine consort, hears her and upon intercession from the other aeons and with the concession of the Invisible (*aoraton*) Spirit, he descends in order to clear up the messy situation. During this operation Sophia is not admitted back to the Pleroma but remains parked in the ninth heaven. A Voice reaches her there, announcing the descent of the aeons First Man and his Son, the latter prefigured by an image (*eikōn*) reflected by the Waters. The Archons catch sight of it and tell each other, "Let us make man in the image of God and in his [or *in our*]<sup>66</sup> resemblance." They fashion a creature (*plasma*) in imitation (*mimesis*) of the image reflected in water, which is, as we know, an imperfect imitation of Perfect (*teleios*) Man.<sup>67</sup> This creature's name is Adam, and each of the Seven Powers (*exousiai*) builds a soul (*psychē*) for him, leaving room for the angels to fabricate his heavenly body according to the data stored in the souls: Divinity builds the bony soul; Lordship, the fibrous or nervous soul; Jealousy (Fire), the soul of flesh (*sarx*); Providence (*pronoia*), the soul of marrow and the mold of the body; Kingship, the blood soul; Intelligence (*synesis*), the skin soul; and Wisdom (*sophia*), the hairy soul.<sup>68</sup> From this psychic plan established by the seven *exousiai*, the angels build the limbs (*melos, harmos*) of heavenly Adam, from the top of his head to the

tips of his toes, in a long episode of anatomic melothesia,<sup>69</sup> followed by the attribution of thirty demons to the parts of the body,<sup>70</sup> by a Stoic list of the five parts of the *hēgēmonikon*, or "inner sense" of the soul-spirit, and by a table of the four elementary qualities and four main passions of the soul.<sup>71</sup>

Yet this creature, equipped with all the devices that the Powers and the 360 angels were capable of bestowing upon him, remains inert and will not be able to stand until Sophia intercedes with the Supreme Father to send a messenger and teach Ialdabaoth the deceiving secret of the animation of the Golem: The Archon must blow in his face some of the Spirit (*pneuma*) inherited from his Mother. When this is done, Adam stands up. Through this Spirit from the Pleroma, he has become superior to the Powers that had fashioned him and to Ialdabaoth himself. Aware of this, the Archons want to get rid of him and therefore set him down below, in the region (*meros*) of matter (*hylē*), exiling him opposite the hypercosmic homeland from which his Spirit originated.

Out of pity for Adam's Spirit, the ungenerated Father dispatches an aid (*boēthos*): his own Breath, the Intelligence (*epinoia*)-Light called Zoe-Life.<sup>72</sup> Witnessing the spark of Light glowing in Adam, the Archons become fully aware of his superiority and decide to make him forever a prisoner of matter by building for him a physical body made of the four material elements (earth, water, fire, and wind) mixed with Darkness and Concupiscence (*epithymia*): "Behold the tomb of this latest of bodies! Behold what they made him put on, these crooks: the place of forgetfulness! Behold the primordial fall and the primordial rupture!"<sup>73</sup> Another element is added to this latest and most miserable of all acts of creation of the Archons, an element that takes on peculiar importance not only among gnostics but also among late Neoplatonists: the *antikeimenon pneuma* (evil spirit) or, more correctly, the *antimimon pneuma* or "counterfeit spirit."

## 5. The Counterfeit Spirit

Designated in several places in AJ (BG, II) and in other gnostic texts as *antimimon pneuma*, this fundamental notion of gnosticism, the counterfeit spirit, is defined as the quintessence of the evil astral powers, the epitome of Fate (*Heimarmenē*). The Demiurge Ialdabaoth "has a meeting with his Powers. They generate Fate and chain down heavenly gods, angels, demons and men to measures, moments and times, so that all of them should be tied with bonds by [Fate] who rules all things; what a perni-

cious and deadly plan!"<sup>74</sup> "Indeed from this Fate all iniquities, abominations and blasphemies have come, all the bonds of hatred and ignorance, and likewise the tyrannical commandments and the oppressive sins and the great fears. And thus all creation was blinded in order that she could not recognize the God who is above all."<sup>75</sup>

Elsewhere the counterfeit spirit is explained more precisely: it is astral genetic information that accompanies every soul coming into the world. The relation of a person to his or her *antimimon pneuma* determines the result of the soul's trial after physical death.<sup>76</sup>

Possibly more optimistic than other gnostic tractates, AJ rejects the theory of metempsychosis (reincarnation in new bodies):<sup>77</sup> All souls would partake of salvation, including those that have been led astray by their counterfeit spirit—the latter only after having been instructed by other souls who possess the Living Spirit.<sup>78</sup> Only sacrilegious blasphemy against the Spirit entails eternal punishment.

The counterfeit spirit is further presented as the Tree of Iniquity, the quintessence of the bonds of astral Fate, and at the same time as the most influential factor in determining personal destiny. In this sense one certainly recognizes it behind the "appendages" (*prosartēmata*) of the Christian gnostic Basilides, according to Clement of Alexandria.<sup>79</sup> These appendages are planetary accretions that lure and push the soul toward evil. Clement further quotes the title of a lost work by Isidorus, son or perhaps major disciple of Basilides,<sup>80</sup> called *Peri prosphyous psychēs*, or *On the Appended Soul*, in which the author opposes the (likewise gnostic) idea that astral Fate may hinder the free will of human reason. It is important to notice that this discussion on free will must have taken place before 150 C.E. In it Isidorus, whom we have all reasons to take for a Christian gnostic, polemicizes against other gnostics, perhaps of the kind illustrated by the *Apocryphon of John*, who made the counterfeit spirit into a serious obstacle to free will. Isidorus already takes the stance of Pelagius or Julian of Eclanum—the opponents of Augustine at the beginning of the Vth century; the *Apocryphon of John* is closer to what would be the positions of the Manichaeans and Augustine.<sup>81</sup>

The gnostic doctrine of the counterfeit spirit reflects a constant anti-astrological polemic, which is at the core of the gnostic and Manichaean message. The most elaborate result of such polemic is the late treatise *Pistis Sophia*, whose relation to Manichaeism awaits further study. In *Pistis Sophia* the theory of the counterfeit spirit is clearly the main link between cosmology, anthropology, and soteriology.

The *antimimon pneuma* shows up first in chapters 111–15 of the II<sup>nd</sup> Book of *Pistis Sophia*. It derives from the vices of the cosmic Archons, and

it pushes the soul toward the fulfillment of the same vicious impulses, which are for it like food (*trophai*): "The *antimimon pneuma* seeks out all the evils (*kakia*), the concupiscences (*epithymiai*) and the sins,"<sup>82</sup> thus compelling the soul to commit error. After physical death, the soul whose counterfeit spirit is strong will be dispatched again into the cycle of transmigration, thus perpetuating sin. The soul will not be able to move out of recurrent metempsychoses (*metabolai*) before having been through the last cycle (*kyklos*) that befalls her.<sup>83</sup> When the counterfeit spirit is weak, by contrast, the soul will get rid of it during the passage upward through the spheres of the Rulers of astral fatality. Thus liberated, the soul would be entrusted to the Good Sabaoth and would eventually reach the Treasure of Light. In order to free the soul from the bonds of the counterfeit spirit, *Pistis Sophia* proposes two methods: baptism, which, like a purifying fire, loosens the seals of the sins with which the soul is burdened and separates her from her *antimimon pneuma*;<sup>84</sup> and the prayer of intercession for the dead.<sup>85</sup>

The myth of the fabrication of the soul together with the counterfeit spirit is reported in detail in chapters 131 and following of that same text,<sup>86</sup> which are an impressive parody of Plato's *Timaeus* (41d ff). The five Archons of astral Fate (*heimarmenē*) send into the world the preexistent souls or create new souls. In the first case they give the descending soul drink from the seed (*sperma*) of evil (*kakia*) and from the covetousness (*epithymiai*) contained in the Cup of Forgetfulness. From other sources (which I discuss elsewhere) it appears that in some cases the Cup of Forgetfulness could simply be identified with the constellation of the Krater or Chalice. This deadly beverage becomes a sort of body (*sōma*) in which the soul (*psychē*) is wrapped and which is akin to the soul; this is why it is called counterfeit spirit (*antimimon pneuma*) and is like a vesture<sup>87</sup> for the soul.

In the second case, namely, when the Archons make new souls, the five Rulers of Heimarmene, or astral Fate, that is, the planets Saturn, Mars, Mercury, Venus, and Jupiter,<sup>88</sup> create a new soul from the sweat, the tears, and the bad breath of all their heavenly colleagues. This matter, which contains parts deriving from every planet plus many of the other celestial demons impersonating the concepts of astrology, is further combined, squeezed, and rolled like dough and is cut like bread into little pieces, which are the individual souls still to be wrapped up in their personal *antimimon pneuma*.

Like Adam in the anthropogonic myth of the *Apocryphon of John*, the new souls do not have enough strength to stand, which means that they cannot animate a body; therefore the five planetary Rulers, together with



their colleagues the Sun and Moon, blow their breath over the souls, and with their breath a spark of Spirit would penetrate the souls, enabling them to go in search of the eternal Light.<sup>89</sup>

The antimimon pneuma is attached to the soul with the seals (*sphragides*) of the Rulers. It compels (*anankazein*) the soul to immerse itself in all the passions (*pathē*) and iniquities (*anomia*) and holds her under its power during all her transmigrations (*metabolai*) in new bodies. When the souls have been thus prepared, they are transmitted by the Rulers to the 365 ministers (*leitourgoi*) of their aeons. Based on the structure of the soul (*typos*), the ministers build a bodily mold (*antitypos*), capable of receiving each individual "package."

A package, as will be seen shortly, consists of several things. It is first dispatched by the ministers to the Archons of the Middle, who put in it its destiny (*moira*), which is, more properly, the utter predestination of its actions on earth, including the hour of its death. Every package is composed of *moira*, *migma* or mixture, spirit, soul, and counterfeit spirit. Every package is cut in two, and the two halves are placed in a man and a woman: "They give one part to the man and another part to the woman, hiding it in food (*trophē*), in the breeze, in water or in something to drink."<sup>90</sup> Even if they are far away from each other, the man and the woman are supposed to look for each other in the world (*kosmos*) until they find each other, and thus they realize their basic accord (*symphonia*); but, obviously, this wandering in search of one's spouse is secretly predestined by the heavenly ministers.

The counterfeit spirit then flows into the male's sperm and from there into the woman's womb (*mētra*). At this point the 365 ministers penetrate into the womb, they reunite the two halves, feed them on the mother's blood for forty days, and during the following thirty days form the limbs (*melē*) of the infant to be. Then they distribute the counterfeit spirit, the soul, the *migma*, and the *moira* and finally close them all in a new body marked with their seals. They mark the conception day on the left palm of the hand; the day of the completion of the limbs on the right palm; other memorable dates are marked on the tip of the skull, the two temples, the nape of the neck, the brain, and the heart. Finally, the number of years the soul will be embodied is stamped on the forehead. Having thus exhausted their bureaucratic activity, the ministers entrust their seals to the Avenging Archons, who distribute punishments (*kola-seis*) and trials (*kriseis*). In their turn the Avengers pass them on to the *paralēptai*, or Collectors, whose role is to separate the soul from the body when the person meets his or her preestablished death according to her or his *moira*.<sup>91</sup>

## 6. Antiastrological Polemics

Starting from primitive doctrines of the (seven) angels who fight for power in heaven, numerous gnostic texts contain an antiastrological polemic expressed both in the concept of the counterfeit spirit and in myths with more complex structures. Among these, the most technical are the Manichaeic myth and the myth of the reversal of the movement of the heavenly sphere in the 1st Book of PS (chapters 15–28). That the myth in PS heavily relies on Manichaeism will become apparent later (see chapter 6 below).

According to PS, after his resurrection Jesus dwelt eleven more years among his disciples (*mathētai*), which is considerably longer than the forty days Acts 1:3 credits him with. At the end of his earthly stay, on the 15th of the month of Tybi, on a full moon, Jesus is abducted to heaven by a great luminous force (*dynamis*) that originated in the last Mystery (*mystērion*) of the Pleroma, called Treasure of Light. He comes back to the Mount of Olives the day after at 9:00 A.M. and gives the disciples a full account of what he has done in the realm of heavens.<sup>92</sup>

First, the *dynamis* appeared to be his pleromatic garment (*endyma*) of Light, containing in itself all the secret names of the levels above heaven. When he puts it on, Jesus easily passes across all the doors (*pylē*) of the firmament (*stereōma*), frightening the Archons, the Powers (*exousiai*), and the angels with his brightness.<sup>93</sup> Actually, when he reaches the first Sphere (*sphaira*), his brightness becomes forty-nine times stronger than in the firmament, and the same multiplication is repeated in the two subsequent Spheres: that of planetary Fate (*heimarmenē*) and that of the twelve aeons (signs of the Zodiac), where the text ascribes to him a light 8,700 myriads of times more powerful than in the physical world.<sup>94</sup> (According to elementary mathematics, though, it should not exceed 576.5 myriads.)

The great Tyrant (*tyrannos*) Adamas and his aeons (*aiōnes*) declare war on Jesus' Light. In order to deprive them of energy to carry out their evil deeds, Jesus takes away one third of their power then casts them down to the Sphere of Heimarmene and the first Sphere. The latter he sets to turning, six months to the left and six months to the right.<sup>95</sup> This bizarre and simple strategy represents Jesus' major achievement for the redemption of humankind. How does it work?

The Archons and the angels of the Zodiac and the planets exert terrible constraints on the world, thanks to their magic (*mageia*).<sup>96</sup> The word *magic* refers here to astrology: domiciles and planetary aspects, fall and exaltation, horoscope (ascendant), and *medium coelum*, signs, houses, the

*moîra* or "lot" of a planet, and so forth. This heavenly magic is conceived here as the work of the Archons, who know that certain relations among them bind human beings and predetermine their actions, thereby completely denying them any free will. Moreover, the wrong people benefit from this situation: astrologers and soothsayers. By periodically reversing the direction of the movement of the Sphere, Jesus nullifies any prediction, for, although during the six months when the Sphere moves to the left the astrologers' statements would be accurate, during the following six months, when the Sphere turns to the right, the astral influences (*apotelesmata*) do not work anymore, and Fate (*heimarmenē*) is thereby nullified. With this comes the fall of the astrologers, who stop telling the truth and lose their popularity. Only the disciples of Jesus would triumph, for they are the only ones who know the secret of the reversal of the Sphere's movement.

Another vast operation of human salvation was undertaken in the Zodiac and Heimarmene, under the auspices of the Great Paralēptōr (elsewhere *paralēptēs*, "tax collector") of Light, Melchizedek. Although basically evil, the heavenly Archons nevertheless contain particles of Light carried away from the Pleroma. Melchizedek's job is to collect them and send them back to the Treasure above. This is why, independently from Jesus, he had already interfered with astral movements by placing an Accelerator (*spoudastēs*) on the trajectories of the Archons, who thereby were constrained to move faster. The Accelerator is probably nothing more than a sort of whip, and the Archons, beasts of burden. The faster they have to move, the more liquid they lose, through the mouth (saliva), the eyes (tears), and the skin (sweat). These secretions contain Light and material waste. Melchizedek carefully separates Light from Matter (*hylē*), dispatching the former to the Treasure above and throwing the latter onto the archontic ministers (*leitourgoi*), who fashion from them the souls of humans and animals according to the procedure already described.<sup>97</sup> In turn, the two Collectors (*paralēptores* or, elsewhere, *paralēptai*) located in the Sun and the Moon observe the trajectories (*schēmata*) of the Archons and gather the Light residues, which are then stored in the Sun and carried away by Melchizedek's messengers.

Eventually the Archons notice the trick and, in order not to lose power anymore, conscientiously start to lick and swallow all their bodily refuse. It was at this point that Jesus intervened and reversed the movement of the Sphere, and the Archons were again tricked (*planasthai*), for they could not turn around to lick their secretions.<sup>98</sup> Consequently more Light will rise to the Treasure, and more souls will be dispatched into the world, thereby accelerating the process of salvation.<sup>99</sup>

This operation's aim is to recover the Light scattered through the world. Like Lurian Kabbalah, this late gnostic text heavily influenced by Manichaeism seems to defend the idea that souls should multiply and therefore that procreation is good. But the mechanism is not supposed to continue forever. When the number (*arithmos*) of perfect souls is reached, and all of them have attained the Treasure of Light, the gates of the Treasure will close, and the remaining souls will be dispatched to the Outer Darkness, the Great Dragon (*drakōn*), who bites his tail and surrounds the universe.<sup>100</sup> This Dragon can be seen in the night, when the Sun withdraws its beams (*aktines*) within itself; his presence permeates the world like a subtle smoke (*kapnos*).<sup>101</sup>

## 7. The Anthropic Principle

A debatable yet still influential interpretation has it that Gnosticism has a pessimistic conception of existence. Gnosticism does indeed have an ambiguous and revolutionary attitude toward the principle of ecosystemic intelligence and the anthropic principle. It is time to have a closer look at the differences between gnostic counterculture and Hellenistic culture.

The Tanakh vigorously proclaims the existence of a total and unfragmented ecosystemic intelligence, good and providential, called God. As far as the anthropic principle is concerned, it is equally affirmed in two contradictory stories of creation, the first of which (Gen. 1:26) tells us that the human being was created *for* this world, and the second (Gen. 2:5–20), that the world was created *for* humanity. The difference between the two redactions serves to highlight even better the circularity of the anthropic principle. In any case, the world is humanity's share (Gen. 1:28; 2:19), and the two of them participate in ecosystemic intelligence: the human for being created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26) and the world because God, the creative intelligence, deems it "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Because of the transgression (Gen. 3:6) of an interdiction (Gen. 2:17), the balance is broken: The human is exiled *in* the world (Gen. 3:23), and his supremacy *over* the world becomes relative (Gen. 3:17–19).

Platonic tradition seems to fragment ecosystemic intelligence from the outset by crediting intermediaries with the creation of world and humanity. The world of Ideas is opposed to this lower world dominated by Necessity (*anankē*),<sup>102</sup> planted in the immovable Place (*chōra*). This space is coeternal with the Logos, in which the image of the ideas works

like a seal, leaving behind prints as if on wax. Many Platonic texts refer to the poor quality of the cosmic copy in comparison with its ideal prototype; among the best known, the myth of the cave contains the fundamentals of Platonic gnoseology.<sup>103</sup> Yet the Platonic myth of world creation contained in the *Timaeus*<sup>104</sup> makes it clear that both the Craftsman (*dēmiourgos*) of the world and the world itself are good. Platonic dualism is not unfavorable to the cosmos, it is procosmic.

The good Craftsman of the *Timaeus*, intermediary between the world of Ideas and its created copy, "placed intelligence in the soul and the soul in the body, and built the universe so that it would naturally be the most beautiful and best possible work,"<sup>105</sup> leaving to his retinue of astral gods the fabrication of mortal races that would bring the universe to completion: "Were they not to exist, the world would be incomplete, for it would not contain in itself all species of animals, and it must contain them to be sufficiently perfect."<sup>106</sup> Made from a substance inferior to that of the World Soul, human souls nevertheless receive from the Father himself "the seed and principle" of immortality.<sup>107</sup> Trained by the astral "carts," these newborn souls are doomed to undergo reincarnation "by necessity" (*ex anankēs*)<sup>108</sup> should their two lower levels (located in the breast and divided by the diaphragm)<sup>109</sup> prevail. If the rational soul, located in the head, will not prove able to dominate the passions, then the soul will have to abide by the complicated rules of transmigration.

Through its heavy emphasis on the goodness of the world, Platonic thought seems to be exempt from anticosmism. Yet things always have a measure of ambivalence. The fall of the individual soul into the body, to which it remains attached like a clam to its shell,<sup>110</sup> is a deathly event vaguely motivated by "a certain accident"<sup>111</sup> or "a certain commerce" she had with injustice. In Platonism the body is evil, as many passages unambiguously state.<sup>112</sup> This attitude characterizes the entire Platonic tradition, no matter whether Philo or Plotinus is speaking.

For Plotinus the world is harmony between a higher and a lower level,<sup>113</sup> but at the same time there is rupture in this harmony, or "devo-lution" in the expansion of Being, because of the fall of the individual soul and the loss of her "wings."<sup>114</sup> In the same way that Plato, citing the doctrine of the "body-tomb" (*sōma-sēma*)<sup>115</sup> or punning on the double meaning of *sōma*, "body" and at the same time "jailor," gave concise expression to an antisomatism he shared, Plotinus likewise would define the human being as a "bejeweled corpse."<sup>116</sup> The fall of the individual soul was, according to him, a sin (*hamartia*) that occurred by both

necessity and free will (*hē te anankē to te ekousion*), as a consequence of an "audacity" (*tolma*) that generates evil (*archē tou kakou*)<sup>117</sup> in a way reminiscent of the arrogance of the Archon Ialdabaoth.

To revert now to *Timaeus*: One should notice that the anthropic principle is defined here not in biblical terms (human and world are created *for* each other) but in a specifically Platonic way; namely, human and world are created *like* each other, since they are both images of the ecosystemic intelligence. Because of a fault whose nature remains obscure, the soul is exiled *in* that part of the world which is of the same nature as the gross substance of the body.

Before Christianity, which inherited both traditions, would combine the Jewish and Platonic expressions of the anthropic principle, Philo of Alexandria had already established their equivalence, and this without much invention of his own; for, reduced to their essence, the biblical and the Platonic attitudes toward ecosystemic intelligence and the anthropic principle show more resemblances than differences. In both cases the ecosystemic intelligence remains unquestioned, the anthropic principle is vigorously affirmed, and humanity appears to be fallen from an original state of ecological balance to a state of exile *in* the world or part of the world that is lower than that which it occupied before.<sup>118</sup>

In comparison with these two traditions, the gnostic worldview is certainly revolutionary. First, to the extent that it exists at all, the ecosystemic intelligence is supposed to be of poor quality, and the world, if not explicitly evil, is nevertheless a rather useless product built by the Demiurge after an archetypal phantasm imprinted in his unconscious. A dream of a dream, it is an illusion destined to disappear into nothingness.

The same does not apply to humankind. The Demiurge, representing the absence or lack of ecosystemic intelligence, is clearly the dupe of his creature, who is superior to him. Humankind has not been made *for* this world, nor the world *for* humankind. Basically the special dignity of humanity stems not from its obedience but from its opposition to the world. And its being *against* the world goes together with the exaltation of human nature, which is *above* the world in which it is exiled. Thus the anthropic principle is denied, yet from a pessimistic perspective not of humanity but of the universe, which ends up in a metaphysical appraisal of humanity without equivalent in the ancient world.

The gnostics espouse not only the *consubstantiality* of humans with their precosmic origin, the Pleroma. Such consubstantiality is one of the constants of Platonism, and can find a parallel in the Jewish doctrine of the creation of man in God's image (Gen. 2:27). In the gnostic context, human beings are additionally exalted by the fact that such

consubstantiality *elevates them above their creators*, that is, above the ecosystemic intelligence. Gnosticism lays emphasis less on the radical strangeness of humanity in the world than on *the superiority of humanity over the ecosystem to which it belongs*. This ecosystem shelters innumerable beings who are certainly doomed: the flock of the Demiurge and the followers of the Opponent.

By reversing the anthropic principle and negating ecosystemic intelligence, gnostic doctrine achieves an excessive anthropological optimism. Likewise, the gnostic experience of the world does not entail radical denial of it. On the contrary, even those Manichaeans in whom scholarship was eager to see the champions of pessimism would submit the world to a constant testing process meant to discriminate between what in it belongs to Darkness and what to Light. All in all, their experience of the world was probably a happy one, for at every moment they saw sparks of superterrestrial Light in every little herb and bud. For the gnostic, as for the Platonist, the world is a chiaroscuro: there are enough traces and signs of a superior presence to make it bearable.

## 8. History of Humankind

According Irenaeus's summary of the doctrine of the Ophites,<sup>119</sup> Ialdabaoth, jealous of Adam's greatness, conceives of the project of tempting him through the woman, whom he fabricates from his Intention (or Reflection). But Sophia-Prounicos takes away the destructive power from beautiful Eve. Eve is coveted by the Archons and gives birth to angels.

To steal the first human couple from Ialdabaoth's grip, the Mother sends the Snake, who persuades Eve to convince Adam to eat from the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. After this is done, the two human beings learn about the existence of the acosmic Pleroma. Ialdabaoth chases them from Paradise and the Snake with them, who appears to be evil, for he settles in the Abyss and forms there a maleficent Hebdomad in the image of the seven Archons.

Meanwhile in the world, Adam and Eve, whose bodies had previously been "light and luminous," are installed in wrappings made of flesh, "dark, thick and opaque,"<sup>120</sup> the "garments of skin" of Gen. 3:21. Cain, their firstborn, is the victim of a deception set in motion by the Snake, whose names are Michael (the Archon of the Jewish people) and Samael (elsewhere the Archon of the Romans).<sup>121</sup> The Snake invents Jealousy and Death, and Abel is the first to die.

Because the humans do not worship him, Ialdabaoth plots their destruction in the deluge, but Sophia saves Noah and his kin. Among Noah's descendants, Ialdabaoth chooses Abraham and makes a covenant with him: In exchange for the divine honors that Abraham would render unto him, Ialdabaoth will give his descendants domination over the world. Through Moses the Demiurge leads the people of the covenant out of Egypt, gives them the Law, and makes them into Jews who worship him. The prophets are mainly inspired by the Archons, but Sophia uses them as well to deliver messages concerning the coming of the Christ to earth.<sup>122</sup>

The narrative of AJ follows a similar pattern.<sup>123</sup> To deceive Adam, Ialdabaoth takes him to Paradise, pretending to offer him delight (*tryphē*) but in reality giving them only archontic illusion: "For their nourishment is bitter and their beauty perversion, their delight deception and their tree iniquity."<sup>124</sup> The mystery of the so-called Tree of Life is that it is nothing but the antimimon pneuma (counterfeit spirit): "Its root is bitter and its boughs are extinction, its shadow is hatred and deception hides in its leaves; its sap is the balm of perversity, its fruit is death and its juice is covetousness sprouting in Darkness."<sup>125</sup> The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, by contrast, is the Intelligence (*epinoia*)-Light, and for this reason the Demiurge forbids Adam to taste its fruit, while an eagle dispatched by the Pleroma (instead of the more ambivalent Snake) will exhort him to eat. Here the Snake is patently evil; he is credited with the revelation of concupiscence and birth and appears therefore to be an instrument of the Archons.<sup>126</sup>

Jealous of Adam, Ialdabaoth wants to recover the Spirit with which he had endowed him. Sending a sluggishness (*anaisthēsia*) upon him, he attempts to extract the Intelligence-Light through his side, but this doesn't work. Then, taking part of Adam's power, he fashions a creature (*plasis*) in the shape (*morphē*) of a woman. Adam at once awakens and recognizes in Eve his partner of identical nature. At this point the two of them were nothing but "corpses of ignorance."<sup>127</sup> The Intelligence-Light in the shape of an eagle (*aetos*) teaches them to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, after which the human couple drifts away from Ialdabaoth, who duly curses them (Gen. 3:14ff), drives them away from Paradise, and clothes them in Darkness.<sup>128</sup>

This is not the end of their trouble. The virgin Eve works on Ialdabaoth's imagination, who fecundates her, and she bears two sons: the bear-faced Yahveh, who is unjust (*adikos*) and rules over water and earth, and the cat-faced Elohim, the fair (*dikaios*) ruler of fire and wind. Among humans the two are known as Cain and Abel. Ialdabaoth inaugurates



conjugal (*gamos*) union (*synousia*) in a rather depressing way, planting in Adam a concupiscence that pushes him toward reproduction (*spora*), which is meant to perpetuate the counterfeit spirit, that is, the evil genetic information of the parents. The accursed art of intercourse allows Adam and Eve to generate Seth, who will be blessed by the Spirit together with his "immovable race."

The loyal support received by humankind from above chagrins the spiteful Ialdabaoth, who decides to delete them by a deluge. But the Intelligence-Light warns Noah of his project. Surrounded by gnostics, "men from the immovable generation,"<sup>129</sup> Noah takes refuge in a luminous cloud. Unable to eliminate him, Ialdabaoth sends his angels to seduce the daughters of men, which they achieve by taking on the appearances of their husbands. The descendants of this mischievous union inherit archontic Darkness and counterfeit spirit, and their hearts are forever obscured.<sup>130</sup>

The narratives of SST and HA, in which hypostases are doubled and even doubly doubled *beyond necessity* (Pistis/Sophia/Zoe/Eve of Light), have a slightly different plot. When the Archons place Adam, crawling but unable to stand, in Paradise, Sophia dispatches the Instructor-Zoe-Eve of Light to raise him and open his eyes. Adam glorifies the resplendent woman at first sight, but the Archons see her as well and covet her. Planning to have intercourse with her, they put Adam to sleep, but Eve of Light eludes them by leaving a shadow that resembles her (the carnal Eve) beside Adam and transforming herself into the Tree of Knowledge. The Archons have intercourse with the shadow, and each of them makes her pregnant with a son (seven in all). Abel has Ialdabaoth himself for father.<sup>131</sup>

The Archons forbid Adam and his partner the carnal Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, but the Instructor-Eve of Light, who as mentioned *is that Tree*, appears to them in the shape of the Snake and persuades carnal Eve to taste it.<sup>132</sup> Jealous of the forebears of the human race, who are henceforth superior to them, the Archons chase them away from Paradise. Zoe retaliates by chasing the Archons themselves from heaven to earth. These fallen angels create demons, who teach humans all evil arts and religions.

The first narrative of HA<sup>133</sup> oscillates between the AJ and the SST variants. After having installed him in Paradise, the Archons enjoin Adam not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, but the Father on High wants him to taste it.<sup>134</sup> In order to deprive him of his Spirit, which had already been sent to him from the Adamantine Earth, the Archons put him to sleep, extract from him the Spirit, and fabricate a Spiritual Woman

from it.<sup>135</sup> Adam worships the Spiritual Woman, who, coveted by the Archons, flees and transforms herself into the Tree, leaving a shadow in her stead. The Archons defile the shadow.<sup>136</sup> The Spiritual Woman enters the Instructor (the Snake) and teaches the carnal woman (Eve) to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.<sup>137</sup> Samael curses the woman and the Snake, and the Archons chase the primordial couple out of Paradise.<sup>138</sup>

Pregnant from the Archons, Eve gives birth to Cain as their collective product. Abel, however, stems from her intercourse with Adam.<sup>139</sup> Finally, Eve gives birth to Seth and Norea,<sup>140</sup> who inaugurate the lineage of the gnostics, the "immovable race" of the Children of Light. Jealous of them, the Archons want to exterminate them by deluge. They assail Norea, who calls upon the Power on High.<sup>141</sup> In this episode "of subversion and promise," as Anne McGuire perceptively noticed, "two modes of power" confront each other, "each of which has a distinctly sexual and social force."<sup>142</sup> The narrative becomes circular: the angel Eleleth, one of the Great Luminaries, comes to help and instruct Norea, and he tells her the story of the creation of the world, the same story that opens the text, abridged yet less obscure.

Two summaries of gnostic doctrines in Epiphanius serve as counterparts to the history of humankind according to SST and HA.

The Sethians<sup>143</sup> worship Seth, source of all virtues, a.k.a. Christ and Jesus. The world was created by the angels, who got into a fight with one another because of their favoring either Abel or Cain as progenitor of the human race, on which they could reach no agreement. The Mother, who is superior to the angels, predetermined Seth's birth by placing in him a spark of transcendent Power with the purpose of setting humanity up against the tyranny of the heavenly Archons and making an end to it. Meanwhile the non-Sethians proliferate, increasing iniquity. To eliminate them the Mother sends a deluge, intended to spare only Seth's descendants. Unfortunately, the angels sneak their own man Ham into the ark, and Ham's posterity would perpetuate disorder on the earth. To put an end to it, Seth himself reverts to the world, through immaculate conception, as Jesus Christ. Epiphanius's note seems to be an improved version of the information given by Pseudo-Tertullian on the *Sethoites*<sup>144</sup> and is largely dependent on it.<sup>145</sup>

According to the Archontics from Palestine (according to Epiphanius), the Devil is the son of the Archon Sabaoth. He had intercourse with Eve, who gave birth to Cain and Abel. The fight between the latter two arose because both of them were infatuated with their sister,<sup>146</sup> a character attested by other sources, which give her different names.<sup>147</sup> One of these is Norea, the wife-sister of Seth, whose origin has been recently explained in an excellent article by Birger A. Pearson.<sup>148</sup>

Seth-Allogenes is the son of Adam and Eve. He is called Stranger (*allogenēs*) because he was abducted by and dwelt with the heavenly Strangers, whose interests he subsequently fostered in the world. He had seven sons, called the Allogenes.<sup>149</sup>

The Syriac heresiologists Theodore bar Kōnāi (late VIIIth century), Agapius of Menbidj (Xth century), and Bar Hebraeus (XIIIth century) attributed to the heretic Audi ('Odi) stories according to which God or the Dominators (Archons) had had intercourse with Eve. According to Bar Hebraeus, Audi taught that "God told Eve: 'Conceive from me, lest the Dominators come and have intercourse with you,'" and again: "Conceive from me lest Adam's creators come here with me."<sup>150</sup> Jewish sources mention a story according to which Cain was generated by Eve with Samael,<sup>151</sup> and G. A. G. Stroumsa has gathered evidence for the interpretation of Gen. 3:13 ("The serpent beguiled me") as Eve's avowal that the Snake raped her.<sup>152</sup>

## 9. The Repentant Demiurge

The repentance of the Demiurge and his installation in the service of the Pleroma are common traits of the conciliating Valentinian tradition. The common scholarly opinion has it that Valentinianism would be a form of "intellectual" Gnosis as opposed to "vulgar" Gnosis, and that "vulgar" Gnosis comes first because it shows radical contempt of the Demiurge, identified with the inferior Old Testament god. There is actually no such thing as "vulgar Gnosis," but there is much vulgar scholarship. Nothing in the chronologies drawn by heresiologists—which are, unfortunately, the only ones in our possession—implies that the moderate Valentinian position would be posterior to an "acute phase" of radical anti-Judaic Gnosis and derivative of it. The historian who intends to stay away from unverifiable answers to insoluble problems is compelled to ascertain that there are many transformations of Gnosis that may be dealt with as simultaneous phenomena.

The duplication of the Demiurge into a "right" power and a "left" power is another device used by texts of different sorts (Valentinian and otherwise) in order to clear him of evil. Repentance and duplication may occur in the same doctrine, thus widening the gap between the good Demiurge and Matter.

In SST, when Sabaoth, Ialdabaoth's younger son, hears the voice of Pistis disproving his father's claim to uniqueness, he repents and converts to Good. Pistis stretches a finger toward him and fills him with Light.<sup>153</sup> The other residents of Chaos are jealous of Sabaoth and start a war against

him. Sophia dispatches seven archangels to rescue him, who take him to the seventh heaven. There he is supposed to install a court that would be a counterpart to his father's, containing the same number of Powers (twelve). To achieve this, Sophia gives him as *syzygos* her own daughter Zoe-Life, stemming from the Ogdoad, as well as three archangels. Sabaoth's court, hidden by a luminous cloud, contains the seventy-two angels of the nations of the earth.<sup>154</sup> Zoe sits at his left, Jesus Christ at his right, and Sophia herself is with him in the cloud of Gnosis, located in such a way that Sabaoth is at her right and Ialdabaoth at her left. Again jealous of Sabaoth, Ialdabaoth generates the androgynous Death, which in turn generates seven sons: Envy, Anger, Weeping, Sighs, Mourning, Lamentations, and Moans, with their female partners. The seven couples produce seven sons each, the sum total of the syzygies of Death being now forty-nine. To counteract them, Zoe creates seven pairs of good Powers.

The first narrative of HA<sup>155</sup> summarily states that Pistis-Sophia chases away Ialdabaoth to the Chaos and the Abyss and installs in his place his son, who is shaped according to the structure of the transcendent aeons. The second narrative is less parsimonious:<sup>156</sup> A fiery angel derived from Zoe's breath flings Ialdabaoth into Tartaros. Sabaoth, Ialdabaoth's firstborn, acknowledges the strength of the angel and repents sincerely. He is installed by Sophia and Zoe in the seventh heaven. Sabaoth causes a magnificent chariot of four-faced cherubim to be built, surrounded by angelic servants. At his right is Zoe and at his left the Angel of Wrath (*piangelos ente torgē*), at his right is Life (*zoē*), at his left Injustice (*adikia*). As F. T. Fallon pointed out, Sabaoth is here the Old Testament god, once again a positive power and saved from the contempt that befits Ialdabaoth.<sup>157</sup>

In the fourth book of PS, Sabaoth is the object of a double doubling: once into Little Sabaoth-Zeus (the planet Jupiter) and Great Sabaoth the Good (*agathos*), a "right" Power watching from on high.<sup>158</sup> At another time Sabaoth is the equivalent of Adamas, Archon of half the signs of the Zodiac. In contrast with his brother Iabraoth, who rules honorably over the other half, Sabaoth proves to be a sinner, for he has had sexual intercourse (*synousia*). This is why Ieu, the manager of Light, installed Iabraoth in a higher place, whereas Sabaoth and his angels were tied onto the Sphere.<sup>159</sup>

Both Valentinians and Basilideans make significant efforts to justify the Old Testament god.

The attitude of Valentinians toward the Demiurge seems fairly stable, but his virtues are variously qualified. In any case, he is never evil. He is an intermediary who usually occupies an ontological position similar to

that of Soul and the "psychics" in Valentinian anthropology, whereas the evil principle is the Opponent, the Devil, representing Matter and "hylic" or "choic" people. Ignorant, even "stupid and mad," the god of the Law is usually eager to receive the message announced by the Savior, showing sincere repentance and making honorable reparations. He is not the irreducible enemy, who, even in his position of radical inferiority, holds on to the ever-glorious traces of a perverted Spirit (*pneuma*). He is a poor, sick character in need of healing, who would immediately change allegiance and march with the Pleroma as soon as that happens. Obviously, there is room for many nuances.

In the system exposed by Irenaeus,<sup>160</sup> which in part may belong to the Valentinian Ptolemy, the soul of the Demiurge derives from the Conversion (*epistrophē*) of Achamoth-Sophia. He is a "right" Power made of "psychic" substance. He is called Father (but also Mother-Father—*Mētropatōr*—for his Mother acted through him, and Fatherless—*Apatōr*—for Achamoth conceived him without a male partner) of the "right" beings (psychic) and Demiurge of the "left" beings (hylic).<sup>161</sup> Creator of the seven intelligible heavens, he is also called Hebdomad.<sup>162</sup> Ignoring that his Mother, in exile in the eighth heaven beyond the Limit of the Pleroma, acts through him,<sup>163</sup> he boasts of being the sole God (after Isa. 45:5 and 46:9). Yet this fabricator of souls, who never comes in direct contact with Matter, is by no means the Opponent, the Devil, the Ruler of the lower world (*kosmokratōr*). The latter derives from the petrified pain of Achamoth and clings to the glorious residuals of the "spiritual elements of wickedness," the *ta pneumatika tēs ponērias* of the deutero-Pauline Epistle to the Ephesians,<sup>164</sup> allowing him to know of the existence of the Pleroma, which is ignored by the Demiurge.<sup>165</sup> At the coming of the Savior, the Demiurge, who had acted thus far as an unconscious agent of the Pleroma, is initiated into the secret and hastens to join, consciously and conscientiously, his revealed superiors.<sup>166</sup>

Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora*<sup>167</sup> confirms that the Demiurge who proclaimed the Law is the just intermediary between the good God and the Opponent. The Eastern Valentinian Theodotus equally recognizes that the Demiurge is the image of the supreme Father, his reflection as well as his lower, perishable counterpart,<sup>168</sup> for his Mother generated him in the shape of the aeon Christ and in accordance with the latter's wish.<sup>169</sup> Like Ptolemy, the Western Valentinian Heracleon recognizes three principles (Father, Demiurge, and Opponent),<sup>170</sup> makes the Demiurge into an intermediary of psychic nature corresponding to the psychic Anthropos and to psychic people, and praises him for having received the message proclaimed by the Savior and for having followed it.<sup>171</sup>

The Valentinians of Hippolytus<sup>172</sup> show less concern with the Demiurge's dignity and define him as Sophia's "abortion" (*ektrōma*),<sup>173</sup> "stupid and mad,"<sup>174</sup> yet place this fiery intermediary (like the Stoic "demiurgic fire")<sup>175</sup> in the middle between the pneumatic Pleroma and the Opponent Beelzebul.<sup>176</sup> Converted by Sophia, his ignorance comes to an end.<sup>177</sup> The same happy ending takes place according to Hippolytus's Basilideans,<sup>178</sup> for whom the Demiurge is duplicated into a Great Archon of the Ogdoad, perfect in comparison with the world but ignorant of the hypercosmic region (*hyperkosmia*)<sup>179</sup> hidden beyond the firmament (*stereōma*), and into an Archon of the Hebdomad, who is the god of the Torah.<sup>180</sup> Both of them have sons who are superior to their fathers in the same way as the soul is superior to the body.<sup>181</sup> The Great Archon rules over the planetary heavens, the god of the Jews over the sublunar zone.<sup>182</sup> Neither of them is evil. Their sons will have no difficulty in convincing them of the existence of the Pleroma, after which both of them will sincerely repent and deplore their ignorance.<sup>183</sup> R. M. Grant thinks that this is a late evolution of the Basilidean doctrine under heavy Valentinian influence. Irenaeus's notice,<sup>184</sup> by contrast, may go back to Basilides himself.<sup>185</sup> It does not say much: The visible sky is only the 365th from above, and its angels have divided all lands and nations among themselves. Their Archon (*princeps*) is the god of the Jews, who tried to subjugate the other Archons but met with their strong opposition.

The *Tripartite Tractate* is most favorable to the Demiurge and his producer, the Logos. Logos is a male aeon who does not derive from the Father or the Son but is generated through the common effort of the Pleroma and is endowed with free will.<sup>186</sup> His intention to glorify the Father, motivated by an excess of love,<sup>187</sup> is not, properly speaking, wicked but has disproportionate creative effects and is not legal according to the laws of the Pleroma.<sup>188</sup> A Limit is then set, and Logos stays outside the Pleroma.<sup>189</sup> Yet his creation is good: "One should not criticize the process which is Logos, but should say that he is the cause of a system that was going to be."<sup>190</sup> This system contains in itself the shadow, the image, of the Pleroma but is at the same time the product of the doubt, forgetfulness, and ignorance of Logos, who looked down into the Abyss.<sup>191</sup> Such is the Demiurge of the world, from whom Logos separates himself, ascending to the Pleroma.<sup>192</sup>

The Archons produce creatures that sow discord on earth, afflicting the Logos. Logos repents, converts from evil to good, and in so doing he generates other Powers, bathed in auroral Light,<sup>193</sup> superior to the Archons, and living in peace with one another. With the Savior's help, Logos will return to the Pleroma.<sup>194</sup>

The Savior is a quintessence of all the aeons of the Pleroma, to which the Father adds his own Will. The Savior takes charge of the universe, in which he reveals himself. To the Archons he appears as a threatening and majestic lightning.<sup>195</sup> Blinded and frightened, the Archons fall into Hades, Chaos, the Abyss, or Outer Darkness, where they will be put at the service of the order to come.<sup>196</sup> A new creation follows through the Logos, and this time it conforms to the image of the Pleroma.<sup>197</sup> Its overseer is a Father called Aion, Place, Synagogue of Salvation, among other names,<sup>198</sup> superior to the (hylic) Archons and the (psychic) Powers,<sup>199</sup> thus establishing a new universal economy in which the two lower orders are constituted in the same hierarchy as before: All princes are in charge of the administration of a sector of the terrestrial or infernal world, and above them is an Archon called Father, God, Demiurge, King, Judge, Law, and the like, who is the instrument and voice of Logos in the world.<sup>200</sup> The Archon is just and honorable, but he is also ignorant. He is manipulated by the Invisible Spirit to produce pneumatic beings who surpass his own essence.<sup>201</sup> I am inclined to see Aion as identical with the Archon, and Logos's third creation not as spiritual but as "right psychic" as opposed to the second creation, which was "left psychic." The text is exceedingly complicated, but its basic pattern is simple: a typically Valentinian triadic opposition (pneumatic versus psychic versus hylic) resumed repeatedly and at many levels.

## 10. Research on the Origin of the Ignorant Demiurge

In his article "The Origins of the Gnostic Demiurge,"<sup>202</sup> Gilles Quispel relates the occurrence of the Demiurge to the notice of the Xth-century Muslim writer al-Qirqisānī, who ascribes to the Jewish, pre-Christian sect of the Palestinian Magharians the idea that the world was created by an angel of God. The Magharians appear to be Jewish fundamentalists, who arrive at this solution in order to reconcile God's nonanthropomorphism with the many instances in the Tanakh in which God as Creator is endowed with human features (speech, craftsmanship, and so forth). The Magharians transfer all these instances to the angel, thus clearing God of humanness.

Quispel believes that the Magharians influenced Simon Magus, who believed in one God and in inferior deities who created humans.<sup>203</sup> The god of the Jews was one of them, and he was dispatched to create the world.<sup>204</sup> Cerinthus would hold a similar view, and other gnostics would identify the Demiurge with an angel.<sup>205</sup>

More recently Jarl E. Fossum sought the origin of the gnostic Demiurge in Samaritan traditions, especially among the antinomian fringe groups of the sect of Dositheus.<sup>206</sup> Fossum singled out a number of ideas that seem in his opinion to lead progressively to the appearance of a lower and frequently evil Creator of this world. The reconstruction is unnecessarily evolutionistic. It ends with the transformation of the Word of God into an independent hypostasis, the Angel-Word.<sup>207</sup> Simon and his followers, whom Fossum calls protognostics, are the inheritors of this evolutionary tradition, which starts with the Word and the Name of God and ends with the Angel of the Lord and the formidable Name endowed with magical properties.<sup>208</sup> They do not consider the Angel-Creator evil but insist that he is not the supreme God.<sup>209</sup> The same Angel is seen as the creator, or one of the creators, of Adam's body.<sup>210</sup>

Fossum's impressive erudition succeeds in adding a footnote to the history of Jewish *ditheism*, signaled by H. Graetz since 1846. Unfortunately, Samaritan evidence displays nothing that would explain why an angel subordinated to God may grow into an ignorant and sometimes evil Demiurge. Alan F. Segal's compelling research, showing the amplitude of the phenomenon of ditheism in Hellenistic and rabbinic Judaism, does not present the key to the gnostic riddle.<sup>211</sup>

## 11. Epitome of the Demiurge Myth

Analyzing the same gnostic commentaries on Genesis that we have focused on so far (HA, SST, AJ, EvEg, Irenaeus's Ophites), Nils A. Dahl concluded that it would be possible to reconstruct the "archetype" of the Demiurge myth. Such an archetype would consist of ten sequences: the *appearance* of the Demiurge; his *description*; his *boastfulness*; *commentary* on his boastfulness; *rebuttal* from the Voice on High; *explanation* of the rebuttal; *provocation* launched by the Demiurge to his Mother to reveal what is above; *appearance of the image* or Light; *proposal* to create humanity; *fabrication* of humanity.<sup>212</sup> The order of these episodes does not exactly follow that of the Book of Genesis. Bernard Barc thinks that the intention of the authors of HA was to reconstruct a "true Genesis," as opposed to the "false" one included in the Old Testament.<sup>213</sup> Both scholars go in search of an "original text," and Bernard Barc goes so far as to think that such an archetype must have existed; more cautious, Dahl considers it a simple heuristic fiction.

Their research is particularly important because it has shown that *the sequences of gnostic myth are transformations of another myth*, that is, the



myth of creation according to the Book of Genesis. Indeed, the gnostics wish to establish a *revised Genesis*, one in which the Archons create man (Gen. 1:26; 2:7), install him in Paradise (2:8), forbid him to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge (2:18), create woman (2:21–23); and then, because the Snake intervenes (3:1–5) and the interdiction is ignored (3:6), the Demiurge chases the human couple away from Paradise (3:23), and so on.

## 12. The Principle of “Inverse Exegesis”

If the starting point of gnostic myth is the exegesis of the Book of Genesis, it is not an innocent exegesis. On the contrary, this exegesis *reverses*, constantly and systematically, the received and accepted interpretations of the Bible. “Inverse exegesis” may be singled out as the main hermeneutical principle of the gnostics.

It appears to us as reversed. In reality, gnostics would see it as “restored.” They proceed toward this operation of restoration from a single rule that produces an illimitable number of solutions: *The god of Genesis is not the supreme God of the Platonic tradition*. This conclusion was revolutionary yet perhaps not surprising; Middle Platonists like Numenius had occasionally contemplated a similar distinction between God and Demiurge.<sup>214</sup> Philo had exorcised such radical interpretation in his doctrine of the Logos, yet at the same time he had opened the door to it by calling the Logos Second God. A short presentation of Philo’s Logos-Sophia theology is indispensable at this point.

## 13. Second God, Second Goddess

Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.E.–40 C.E.), with Plutarch of Chaeronea one of the two major Platonic thinkers between Plato and Plotinus, explored Jewish texts and traditions in a new way. Despite the fact that he, like the Middle Platonists, did not use the word *hypostasis* in his work, Philo took a further step in elaborating on Platonic hypostases. Being an Alexandrian Jew, and well acquainted with the Greek Septuagint (there are doubts over his knowledge of Hebrew), Philo had to reconcile Plato with the Pentateuch, the *Timaeus* with the Book of Genesis. Obviously the first problem was that Plato’s demiurge-god, who creates the world with a subservient eye on the world of eternal and immovable Ideas, could hardly match the description of the biblical God, primordial and sovereign, who creates everything *ex nihilo*. Philo had his God create the

Ideas, instead of being brought about by them. Consequently the qualification of *ontos on* (that which really is), which Plato<sup>215</sup> bestows on the Ideas, is used by Philo to characterize God.<sup>216</sup> God is Being (*on*), Intellect (*nous*), Father (*patēr*), Planter (*phytourgos*), Parent (*gennētēs*), Cause (*aitios*), Spring (*pēgē*), Light (*phōs*), Lightgiver (*phōsphoros*), Intelligible Sun, Lord of the Powers (*kyrios tōn dynameōn*), King of Glory, among others. When God wished to create the world, he first created the *kosmos noētos*, or "Intelligible World." This expression, first coined by Philo himself, designates the Platonic world of imperishable, incorporeal, and paradigmatic Ideas, according to which the world itself was created and hence older (*presbyteros*) than the world, which is in turn younger (*neōteros*) than it. As H. A. Wolfson notes, the world is thought (*noēton*) by God, it is the product of his thinking (*noēsis*), which is possible only for someone who possesses a *nous*, or intellect, to think. Philo calls the Intellect of God Logos, in accordance with Plato<sup>217</sup> and in reference to the Septuagint, which speaks of Logos the Word (*ha-dabar*) of God. However, Philo is not consistent in this terminology and would end up calling Logos the Intelligible World—that is, the ideal prototype of the world, which was created outside God's own Mind.

The Philonic Logos is a full-blown hypostasis, called the eldest of all things, older than all created things, Firstborn Son of God, Man of God, Image of God, Second God, Second to God. Philo also notices that those who have an imperfect knowledge of the real God would call the Logos God.<sup>218</sup> The differences between God and Logos are those between eternal, ungenerated, and incorruptible on the one hand, and simply "deathless" (*athanatos*), generated, and incorruptible on the other. God is Creator of the Logos, Logos is the Mind that thinks the Intelligible World, and Ideas are parts of the whole called the Intelligible World. God is most generic (*genikon*) absolutely, he is the *genus* of everything; Logos is most generic (*genikon*) of all created things, and Ideas are simply generic, in so far as they are the *genera* of everything: one idea includes innumerable actualizations.

The term *Logos* is also used by Philo to mean Wisdom (*Sophia*), in this case the Old Testament Hokmah. But, as usual, he is inconsistent with this terminology as well, and in a few places he distinguishes between Logos and *Sophia*.

Logos is also called "instrument," which reflects the use of Aristotelian terminology.<sup>219</sup> In Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (V:2), the *organa* are the two intermediate causes (that is, formal and material) between efficient and final. The material cause is the "instrument" of the final cause, and the formal cause is the "instrument" of the efficient cause.

The plural *logoi* is used by Philo to designate the individual Platonic Ideas, also called *ideai*, *archetypoi ideai*, *typoi*, *metra*, *sphragides*, *logoi spermatikoi*, *spermata kai rhizai dynameis*, *asōmatoī dynameis*, *doryphoroi dynameis*, *angeloi*, *charites*. All of these are sometimes identified with one another and at other times are kept apart. Even if Ideas are innumerable, in one case they are said to be subsumed under six Powers,<sup>220</sup> corresponding to the six Cities of refuge: 1. *theios logos*; 2. *hē poiētikē dynamis*; 3. *hē basilikē*; 4. *hē hileōs*; 5. *hē nomothetikē*; 6. *ho kosmos noētos*. Powers 2 and 4 are said to depend on God's chief attribute of Goodness; Powers 3 and 5 depend on the chief attribute of Justice. These two attributes are equally hypostatized. Whereas God himself is called *ho theos*, Goodness receives the name of *theos*, as well as *hē poiētikē*, *agathotēs*, *charistikē*, *euergetis*. Justice in turn is called Lord (*kyrios*), *hē basilikē*, *archē*, *exousia*, *hē nomothetikē*, *hē kolastikē*. Goodness and Justice are the two archangels of God, identified with the two cherubim who keep the gates of Paradise<sup>221</sup> and with the two angels who entered Sodom. Being God's attributes, the two Powers do not exist aside from him.<sup>222</sup>

It has often been noticed that Philo indiscriminately uses the words *Logos* and *Sophia* in the same contexts. C. Bigg recommended taking Philo's own allegorical explanation for this (in *De Profugis*, 9). In Gen. 24:15, the father of Rebecca is said to be Bethu'el, whose name means "Daughter of God." Philo interprets this as meaning Sophia (Hokmah), who can be further split into a feminine and a masculine hypostasis: In relation to God, she (Sophia) is feminine, in relation to us, he (Logos) is masculine. Hence it is possible to say that Sophia, God's Daughter, is a man and a father.

Philo's influence on early Christian Logos theories was overwhelming.<sup>223</sup> Did he influence gnostic mythology as well?

From our perspective, the question as formulated is not relevant. What should be emphasized is that Philonic exegesis is a transformation of the myth of Genesis according to a set of rules deriving from Platonism. Obviously these rules are not the only possible ones, nor is Philonic exegesis the only possible exegesis of the Tanakh, according to the same or to other rules that can be defined as Platonic.

Gnostic exegesis of Genesis admits a definition strikingly similar to Philonic exegesis: It is an interpretation of a Jewish text according to a set of rules derived from Platonism. Yet we may add: If *all* rules may indeed derive from Platonism, *not* all of them would be subscribed to by Platonists. This distinction is fundamental.

We already noticed that Philonic biblical exegesis showed occasionally more concern with Judaism than with Platonism. Philo's biblical

God is identified with the world of Ideas, not with the (lower) Platonic demiurge. What would occur if an interpreter instead identified the Creator God of Genesis with the Platonic demiurge? A transformation of Philo would ensue, in which the Philonic Logos would become the God of the Tanakh. *The immediate consequence of such a simple operation would be a God superior to the Old Testament god.*

A Platonist who moved along this transformative line would stumble upon a problem that Philo scarcely had to face: the repeated declarations of the Tanakh God that he is the only God. This would be quite justifiable in a setting in which other gods made similar claims, but it would certainly be more than suspicious in a situation in which *the god who brags about being supreme is known not to be.*

An interpreter of the Bible who was basically more Platonic than Jewish would immediately stumble upon this contradiction, which would set in motion the principle of inverse exegesis, in which the content of the Bible is taken not at face value but in the light of previous information that contributes to the escalation of a "hermeneutic of suspicion." Yet the characteristic of this hermeneutic, of which gnostics seem to be the earliest systematic representatives, is that it is performed not in the name of any reductive principle but in the name of metaphysical antireductionism. In other words, the gnostics would not only criticize Judaism for being a reductive form of Platonism (which is inevitable if Judaism is taken to be a form of Platonism!) but would not hesitate to judge Platonism itself as a reductive form of metaphysics.

By stating that the gnostics were simply the champions of metaphysics in the late Hellenistic world, do we claim an understanding of the rules that produce the different gnostic doctrines as transformations of a Platonizing Jewish myth and of each other? We should proceed along the lines of the system generated from this premise in order to assess whether a Platonic exegesis of Genesis would indeed have a gnostic appearance.

#### 14. Anti-Judaism or Generative Platonism?

The inverse exegesis of the Bible may well be the consequence of a precedent rule, but it soon becomes a rule in itself that generates many transformations of biblical myth and could generate many more, indeed an illimitable array. One possible path is that anything that the Bible calls good is taken to be evil, and vice versa. Some of the most conspicuous

cases—concerning Cain, the Snake, and others—will be analyzed below. Another example could be drawn from the *Paraphrase of Shem*,<sup>224</sup> where the Sodomites appear to be righteous members of the “immovable race” of Seth and therefore the objects of envy and vengeance coming from the Demiurge. Applications of the rule of inverse exegesis extend beyond the Old Testament. The Cainites of Irenaeus<sup>225</sup> make Cain and Judas into the only true representatives of the Pleroma, those who plant the seed of gnostic revolution into a world dominated by the laws of the evil Demiurge. Judas, according to an interpretation in which Jorge Luis Borges would have delighted, “was the only one among the apostles to know the truth and fulfill the mystery of treason”; no wonder that a gospel, unfortunately no longer extant, circulated in his name.<sup>226</sup>

Yet even if this shows the extremes that the system can produce, most gnostics were not as completely revolutionary as these. Without endless hesitations as to possible solutions, which form as many building bricks of gnostic myth, we would not have the impressive array of transformations produced by the gnostic mind and characteristic of its extraordinary freedom. It is interesting to note that a historian and theorist of literature like Harold Bloom understood better than any other scholar the generative processes of Gnosticism when he perceptively defined the latter as a “theory of misprision” and its outcomes “a creative misunderstanding.”<sup>227</sup> Indeed, Gnosticism is Platonic hermeneutics so suspicious of tradition that it is willing to break through the borders of tradition, any tradition, including its own. Conversely, regarded through the lens of tradition, any tradition, it appears as “misprision.”

Let us revert to our Platonist who became suspicious of the biblical god. Where will suspicion end? We may assume that a Platonic exegesis of Genesis according to the distinction of Numenius of Apamea, which would make the biblical god into the Platonic demiurge, would call little attention to itself if it were not accompanied by textual analysis. Otherwise the Bible would reject it or it would reject the Bible! Gnosticism can thus be viewed as a continual process in which suspicion tentatively extends over many significant episodes of the Old and New Testaments and would treat them many times, realizing that not one but many “true” answers are possible.

Can this process be characterized as “anti-Judaic”?

Recently several scholars still defined Gnosticism as a case of “acute antisemitism” during the first centuries of the common era. Even considering that many scholars still do not acknowledge the wide spectrum of gnostic attitudes toward Judaism, the term *antisemitism* is rather

misplaced. According to the distinction made by F. Lovsky and Jules Isaac, one should refrain from exchanging theological anti-Judaism with that incendiary set of personal emotions, feelings, and attitudes that characterize antisemitism.<sup>228</sup> There is no such thing as a gnostic anti-semitic text (but there are several early Christian ones), and we may add, there is no gnostic writing that could be qualified as anti-Judaic in its totality. As Karl-Wolfgang Tröger pertinently noticed, gnostic writings sometimes show anti-Judaic "attitudes," "concepts," "tendencies," "topoi" and perhaps "trends."<sup>229</sup> Tröger is certainly right in maintaining that Gnosticism is *not* a historical movement that professes anti-Judaism as one of its main slogans.

One can readily list a good number of anti-Judaic *topoi* in gnostic literature.<sup>230</sup> Yet, from the same "hermeneutic of suspicion," gnostic creative misprision would equally generate a good number of anti-Christian *topoi*.<sup>231</sup>

We also cannot say that gnostic biblical criticism is dispassionate. On the contrary, misprision guarantees gnostics the tragic role of rebels caught and ground between the wheels of traditions. Such exegetes well turn nasty. Yet their revolt, no matter how it may degenerate through direct contact with their opponents (especially Christian), originated as Platonic metaphysics.

A legitimate question to ask here is, Why did gnostics, if they were Platonists, have to get so intimately involved with the Bible? The obvious answer is that they would not have done so unless they were Jews—in which case they would rather produce a type of Philonic exegesis, unless they were rebellious toward their tradition—or belonged to some other group that would make regular use of the Bible. "Samaritans" provided an easy answer, but it is not obvious why Samaritans should be Platonists, and in fact it is doubtful that they were. "Christians" is an answer that scholarship, under the influence of the German school of history of religions, tried to avoid for a long time, but in many circumstances it may prove correct. Salvation from the world *through a Savior* was during that period a rather prominent trait that Gnosticism shares with Christianity. We also know that in the IIIrd century it was fashionable for some Platonists of dubious orthodoxy to produce gnostic texts, and indeed some of them might have found their way into the late Nag Hammadi collection. It should surprise no one that such Platonists, contemptuous of that spurious variety of Pharisaic Platonism that Christianity appeared to be, would eliminate all traces of Christianity from the gnostic myths they invented and in many cases would adopt a variety of Gnosticism (like Sethian Gnosticism) that does not pay much attention to the Bible either. Strangely

enough, even they would keep up a Savior, although, for obvious reasons, they would avoid calling him Jesus Christ, as most gnostics do.

Does this mean that Gnosticism was simply a form of Christianity? Certainly not. It shares with the mainstream of Christianity (at least from Ignatius of Antioch onward) the characteristic of being a form of Platonism making use of Jewish texts.<sup>232</sup> Jewish Christians were certainly more ready to step into a gnostic type of exegesis than Jews steeped in the hermeneutical subtleties of their own tradition. Christians who were not Jewish at all would continue to misinterpret Judaism creatively, and Neoplatonists would find their reasonings compelling enough to play in the same key, de-Judaizing and de-Christianizing it.<sup>233</sup>

### 15. "Creative Misprision" and the Old Testament

With all possible nuances, from his radical demonization to his vague exaltation as a necessary intermediary between the Pleroma and Matter, the gnostic Demiurge is explicitly identified by an overwhelming bulk of evidence as the Old Testament god.<sup>234</sup> Given that the Law is an emanation of the Demiurge, a relationship exists between his evaluation and the Old Testament's evaluation. The Valentinian Ptolemy, for example, argues with other gnostics who hold the view that the Law derives from the Devil.<sup>235</sup> The *Gospel of Philip* asserts that the Law is the Tree of Knowledge that kills those who eat from it.<sup>236</sup> Epiphanius's gnostics reject the Old Testament, although they make polemical use of it.<sup>237</sup>

Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora* is an excellent example of that elusive Valentinian doctrine which, still gnostic in its use of myth, comes very close to Platonism and Christianity in its evaluation of the Demiurge.<sup>238</sup> The origin of the Law is a difficult question, asserts Ptolemy somewhat in agreement with modern philology, for it is composed not of one but of five different layers: One is the sentences of the individual Moses; another is the sentences of the ancients of Israel; and three parts stem from the Demiurge. These are divided as follows: One is the Decalogue, which is a perfect expression of Justice; another one is the law of "an eye for an eye," which is a perfect expression of Injustice, in so far as it contradicts the Decalogue, with its commandment not to kill (Exod. 20:13); a third one, figurative and symbolic, was channeled through the Demiurge by the transcendent Pleroma itself. It was always misunderstood, for its proper meaning is spiritual, whereas its interpretations have been material.

What is the situation of the Law under the new order instated by the Savior? The Savior did not abolish *all* of the Law, only the eye-for-an-eye part of it; he *completed* the Decalogue and *explicated* the spiritual meaning of rites and symbols.<sup>239</sup> In other words, like Christianity, Valentinianism wishes to have some continuity with Judaism, and in any case would not recommend, like Marcion, that the Old Testament be disposed of.

Once started on the route of "creative misprision," the gnostics would go very far, indeed farther than anyone else in the ancient world. For once the biblical Demiurge was caught boasting of his uniqueness and became suspect of ignorance of a higher God, the entire Bible, starting obviously from Genesis, had to be reassessed and reinterpreted. But each episode of Genesis admits a plurality of interpretations or building bricks. Gnostics (and it should be recalled that by "gnostics" we mean a group not defined by any institutional, social, or even doctrinal unity but rather those minds working on Genesis with two shared biases—against the principle of the ecosystemic intelligence and against the anthropic principle of the fitness of world to human being) excelled in using as many such bricks as possible, thus coming to a very large number of transformations of myth. Let us examine a few cases.

Cain, for example, is the representative of the good Pleroma according to the Cainites,<sup>240</sup> but he is held as an evil character by the Ophites.<sup>241</sup> Even more instructive is the evaluation of the Snake. Paradoxically those groups whose names refer to the Snake, such as the Ophites or the Naassenes, take him to be evil: he is the Angel of Iniquity for the Naassenes,<sup>242</sup> and the Devil for the Ophites, although Sophia uses him to pass her message to the first human pair. In TT<sup>243</sup> he is likewise the Devil, and he is Moluchtas, the evil ophidian Wind in PSem.<sup>244</sup>

Yet other gnostics believe that the Snake is Sophia herself,<sup>245</sup> whereas Epiphanius's gnostics in their no longer extant *Gospel of Eve* believe that the Snake imparted knowledge to first woman,<sup>246</sup> and HA<sup>247</sup> and SST<sup>248</sup> assert that the Snake is the Instructor, the Spiritual Woman, Eve of Light, a double of Sophia. For the Perates the Snake is the Savior,<sup>249</sup> and for the Sethians both the Demiurge and Logos are serpentlike.<sup>250</sup>

A similar procedure of "creative misprision" is applied to all other episodes of Genesis that are significant from the viewpoint of the gnostic interpreter. Yet the frequent use of Harold Bloom's expression (merely for its suggestive power) may create the false impression that gnostic procedures are illegitimate. They are quite illegitimate from the viewpoint of tradition, but they are not so from a logical viewpoint, in so far as they try to make reasonable sense of a mythical narrative that, taken at face value, is full of contradictions. Tradition smooths away these contradictions by having recourse to a number of methods: literalism,



suspension of disbelief, historicocultural conditioning of human capacities ("in those days things were very different"), and so on. Gnostics are antitraditional in so far as they do not resort to these illogical tricks. In their attempt at candor (and their lack of unity or orthodoxy), they would not hesitate to multiply the number of transformations to fit the logical range of potentialities offered by any episode. When gnostic Genesis interpretation comes as far as the Snake, the main lines of gnostic narrative are already clear. The Snake may only cover a few logical possibilities: He is good, evil, or neutral. If good, then the Tree of Knowledge has to be good, and for the sake of economy the Snake may only be one of the available good characters of the narrative in disguise, unless an uneconomical solution is chosen and the Snake becomes a new character. Thus he can *only* be Sophia (or a duplicate thereof), the Savior, or a third representative of the Pleroma. If the Snake is evil, then the Tree of Knowledge must be evil as well, unless a solution of compromise is chosen and the Snake, although evil, would act for a while like a channel for the Pleroma. As evil, the Snake can only be the Devil or the Demiurge or a duplicate (angel) of one of them. As neutral, "the Snake is the Snake" (to paraphrase Lord Byron)—he is just a temporary mouthpiece for someone else's message. Yet this would be an uneconomical solution that gnostics tend to avoid.

Taken altogether, gnostic hermeneutical candor is total. No limit is imposed on the number of transformations of myth. In the case of the Snake, as well as in other cases, we may say that the number of logical bricks that could be inserted at that point in the narrative sequence has been exhausted. Any other brick would be fanciful or, worse, redundant. Then why does tradition, which appears to be on the wrong side of logic, seem so austere and the antitraditional gnostics, whose logic is almost impeccable, so fantastical? Because a mythical narrative is a multiple-choice sequence, and gnostic thinkers (those who shared the two premises, or rather rejections, mentioned above) were able, at least for a while, to fill in not one but all cases.

Toward the beginning of Islam, gnostics were exhausted, wrung out from history by the relentless pressure of traditional powers and especially the Christians, who had switched from a persecuted religion at the beginning of the IVth century into a totalitarian, persecuting state religion by the end of the same century. Christians were motivated in suppressing gnosticism by that peculiar feeling of guilt one gets from the existence of a brash, heedless, and decidedly troublesome close relative. Yet the system set in motion by the gnostics was not exhausted. Therefore new, so-called dualistic trends sprang up to manifest it, realizing more of its potentialities.

## 16. Docetistic Variations

Not only does the Old Testament have a complex status in gnostic exegesis but the New Testament too, generally viewed as the result of a low-quality bricolage performed by unqualified, impenetrable, and inferior followers of a Jesus Christ whom they failed to understand. It is surprising how closely this view coincides with that of modern philology since Reimarus, which is the product of a type of rationalism that, starting from premises opposite to those of the gnostics, attains results superficially similar to theirs. This apparent paradox will be explored in the last chapter of this book.

When dualistic trends are analyzed according to the distinctive-features method, they are usually found to have in common a peculiar interpretation of Jesus Christ's existence called docetism, from the Greek *dokēsis*, "apparition."<sup>251</sup> In reality, docetism comes in a number of varieties simply because it has a certain range of logical potentialities. Recently scholars have proposed to give up the label docetism altogether, based on the existence of such variants, which they failed to understand as bricks connected by the simplest of logics. Whether we keep it or not, the word *docetism* designates the logical efforts of Christians (gnostic and otherwise) to make sense of the puzzling appearance of the divine Logos in this world and, even more scandalously, in a human body. Here the reader should be referred to the Introduction of this book, where the system of early christologies has been analyzed.

To the extent that it deals with christological problems, Gnosticism has been correctly interpreted by Christian heresiologists as an internal threat to their tradition, that is, a "heresy." Yet the concept of "heresy" is debatable. If we intend by Christianity the whole range of logical possibilities contained in a number of contradictory mythical narratives (collectively known as the New Testament) in reference to other contradictory mythical narratives (the Old Testament), then gnostics were separated from mainstream Christians only by their intense mental activity. If, on the contrary, we define Christianity only as "mainstream"—as a variant that tends to be stabilized near the middle of the system's spectrum of possibilities—then gnostics still should be praised for having provided Christians with those inevitable variants of their faith that they were supposed to discard yet could not before they would be "run" by some human minds. It is perhaps literally correct to say that, in their hermeneutical candor, gnostics produced a "map of misprision" without which mainstream Christianity could not have existed, the same way as, say, a chess computer could not devise a solution without first discarding a few

hundred of them. We will analyze the common features of, and the differences between, games and religions in the final chapter of this book. Yet one thing should be emphasized right away: Whereas a chess computer performs its operation in order to win a complex logical battle, religion wins not through logic but through other, more effective skills, which often are intensely repellent to the human mind. Nevertheless, a certain rule seems to dominate the formation of "orthodoxy," which is that, given a long period during which a certain program is "run" through many human minds, the more pervasive the source of authority, the more belief will tend to stabilize right in the middle of the system, at equal distance from the extremes. This happens at the expense of creativity. (This may give a reasonable clue as to why even Catholic scholars would ascertain that "Catholic culture" in Italy seems to be a contradiction in terms.)<sup>252</sup>

Docetists are sometimes all imagined to be what only a few of them were actually and almost never unconditionally: *phantasiasts*—believing that Jesus Christ's body was a sheer *phantasma*, a ghost with no physical substance. The irony here is that the group called Docetists by Hippolytus<sup>253</sup> held that the Savior had a physical body, which he abandoned on the cross. (Mainstream Christianity, as we already saw, beat back the frontier of absurdity—or at least ignored it—by asserting that the Logos took his human body with him to heaven.) That it was impossible for a body made of matter to ascend to heaven, let alone beyond the sublunar sphere, was a firm tenet of Aristotelian and Stoic science. Gnostics did not dare to contradict it, and if Christians did, this may not go to their credit. Given the philosophical or scientific impossibility of bodies meeting the Lord, and the separability of any soul from any body, it should surprise no one that gnostics would so often maintain that only the physical (*sarkinon*) part of Jesus Christ could be crucified, whereas the divine Logos was not.<sup>254</sup> For anyone with some philosophical or medical knowledge, it was obvious that the Savior could only be made of fiery spirit (*pneuma noeron*), and whether he had a physical body or not, he would anyway have an "incorporeal body" (*sōma natsōma*), which someone who was endowed with a "spiritual eye," like the apostle Peter, could see smiling next to the cross.<sup>255</sup> Cerinthus equally asserted that the impassible Christ withdrew from the man Jesus, who died on the cross.<sup>256</sup> The "laughing Savior" is seen more than once next to the cross, mocking the persecutors of the person who took his place on the cross, who could be, for example, Simon of Cyrene.<sup>257</sup> Obviously there is nothing particularly "gnostic" about these beliefs, as there is nothing "gnostic" about *phantasiasm*, already attributed to Saturninus, who held the

Savior for *incorporalis, innatus, putativus visus homo* and his body for a sheer *phantasma*, an apparition made of dreamstuff.<sup>258</sup>

Klaus Koschorke has analyzed gnostic testimonies about the Savior's body, suffering, and death, coming to the conclusion that they belong to three categories: One is denial of the reality of the cross, another is the attribution to Christ of several separable bodies, and the third is the positive evaluation of the death on the cross.<sup>259</sup> This introduces another element to the system: the cross. Many dualists like to distinguish themselves from mainstream Christians by refusing to worship an instrument of torture on which the Demiurge or the Devil intended to punish and kill the Savior. Mainstream Christians, however, performed a symbolic operation commonly noted in anthropology, which consists in turning symbols of oppression into symbols of freedom.<sup>260</sup> The cross of infamy that was supposed to mark and destroy Christ as a criminal was defeated by Christ through his resurrection and turned into the symbol of his freedom from death and thereby of cosmic freedom.

That many Christians did not accept the existence of Christ's physical body entailed another problem: What was the role of Mary in Jesus' birth? The "orthodox" solution was of course one among many, expressed in the IIrd-century apocryphal *Protogospel of James*: Jesus was conceived "through the Spirit," grew in the womb for nine months, and exited "doors closed," that is, without affecting Mary's virginity, which therefore stayed such *ante partum, in partu, et post partum*. Practically, this meant that at birth Jesus dematerialized in the womb and materialized again outside it. Apparently this solution satisfies popular demand: Mary stays virginal forever, and Jesus is a regular child, although unbegotten by man and capable of a few unusual tricks. Yet logically it is probably the most absurd of all, in the sense that it entails miraculous agency both at conception and at birth.

Yet, as should have become clear by now, the divine essence of Christ poses a further problem, in so far as many of those who accept that Mary, *vas mundum* (clean vessel), is the greenhouse in which Jesus' physical body grows would still be reluctant to assign his *divinity* a nine-month gestation in the body of a woman. Thus it is a misunderstanding to believe that all those "heretics," from Valentinus to Marcion, Mani, and Eutyches, who were credited with the belief that Jesus went through Mary "as if through a pipe,"<sup>261</sup> were denying the existence of his physical body. The Valentinians were trying to convey not necessarily that Jesus had no soul or physical body from Mary but that the *spiritual* Jesus would not receive anything from Mary. An adoptionistic solution was sometimes chosen, according to which the spiritual entity Christ entered the psycho-physical man Jesus upon baptism.<sup>262</sup>

The idea that Jesus passed through Mary as through a tube was taken quite seriously by a number of theologians, with the addition that they were faced with a choice of tubes and sometimes preferred the ear canal to the more compromised womb. Why the ear? The answer is quite obvious: Jesus Christ was the Logos, the Word of God. Where should he enter Mary if not through her ear?<sup>263</sup> And Proclus, bishop of Cyzicus, finds that since Christ was conceived through such an innocent orifice as the ear, he should also exit through it.<sup>264</sup> Noting that this ought to be the theological origin of the popular expression "It went in one ear and out the other," we should likewise observe that, however rational, Proclus's solution was suspect. Even if, so to speak, it went through one ear of orthodoxy without being condemned in his own time (it was later), it should have been, for it entails obvious docetism: A Jesus born through the ear could not have a regular physical body. (The same applies less to the idea, mentioned by Michel Tardieu, of Jesus' birth through Mary's "side," because of the obvious analogy with a caesarian birth.)

Michel Tardieu is perfectly right in assuming that all of these doctrines are synchronic, in the sense that they form a "logical object" of the kind that was described in the Introduction to this book. They are part of the system of christology (to call it Christian christology would be tautological) and have nothing to do with Gnosticism in particular. The dogma of virgin birth was a matter for debate for quite a long time. The solution proposed by the Christian Valentinus was no less dignified than the one contained in the *Protogospel of James*. Why one was chosen above the other is a mystery that has nothing to do with logic but with the extremely complex interaction of social systems.

## 17. The Logic of Gnostic Narrative

If the identification of the god of the Torah with the Platonic Demiurge, and a reading of Genesis with this identification in mind, can be accepted as a plausible explanation for part of gnostic myth, an explanation that is also economical in so far as it does not entail any external agency or historical doctrine from which Gnosticism was "borrowed" or "inherited," it is less clear how other parts of gnostic myth can be explained by the same procedure. In particular, even if there is abundant evidence for indiscriminate use of the words *Sophia* and *Logos* to mean the same thing, it is still difficult to understand why *Sophia* became the mother of the Demiurge. Only by eliminating this stumbling block could we test the validity of our generative model, which

should be able to explain Gnosticism *in toto* without resorting to exotic historical derivation.

For this we should start a reading of Genesis from the premise that the god of Genesis is a Demiurge who does not know that above him there is the true God. The result of such a reading is quite surprising, for it offers an explanation *sui generis* of the fact that the Abyss, Darkness, and the Waters in Genesis 1 do not seem to have been created by the Demiurge. If the Demiurge is only a second god, then whatever is prior to him can be ascribed to the other God.

In principle there could be no serious objection to a Platonist who would assert that the god of Genesis is actually the Logos of the supreme God. (Not his Sophia, however; the biblical god is manifestly male.) But a hermeneutic of suspicion like the gnostic one would not look for accommodation. In it there would be no room for the patently contradictory attempt at merging a Logos/Sophia aware of being subordinated to God and a Demiurge who brags about being unique. Once the identification of Logos with Demiurge is discarded, then *Logos must be someone else*. And it could as well be Sophia, for it does not have to be male. Thus we come to three principles: God, Logos/Sophia, and the Demiurge. These three principles should be linked in such a way as to explain a number of things. One is that Logos/Sophia creates the world, yet the Demiurge also creates the world, according to the Book of Genesis. Another one is that God, Logos/Sophia, and the Demiurge should be connected, yet in such a way as to leave room for the highest God's utter inculpability for the faults of this world *and* the surprising fact that the Demiurge does not know about what is above him. This presupposes an obvious discontinuity (yet not a complete break), and precisely *between Logos/Sophia and the Demiurge*. At the same time, the Demiurge must remain the product of Logos/Sophia, for otherwise the premises of the system would be completely shattered. Since the idea the Platonic interpreters of Genesis would try to convey at this point is that of miscarriage, premature or irregular birth, abortion, and the like, their most reasonable choice would have been to take Sophia instead of Logos and to make her into the mother of an unwanted creature, the Demiurge. (Yet we saw that there are instances when Logos was chosen instead of Sophia.) The rest of gnostic myth was the easy play of imagination but also had to explain how the three things—Abyss, Darkness, and Waters—existed before the Demiurge. As good Platonists, the gnostics had no objection to the Abyss, the Platonic space (*chōra*), but derived Darkness and watery Matter either from Sophia herself or from the Demiurge.

Upon rigorous analysis, it appears that the sensational trademark of Gnosticism, namely, gnostic myth, is but an accessory and a figment without solidity or independence, meant to enable or convey hard philosophy and entirely determined by philosophical premises and by the necessity of making sense of the many contradictions of a precedent mythical narrative, the Book of Genesis. Again it remains a mystery why our Platonists were so keen on commenting on the Book of Genesis instead of anything else, unless they were Jewish Platonists not bound to Jewish tradition, in which case we should look for them in Jewish-Christian circles from the turn of the 1st century C.E. or perhaps among Christians from the beginning of the 2nd. The part played by Simon Magus in all this cannot be assessed. His doctrine featuring a female Thought of God might have worked as further catalyst toward the gnostic preference for Sophia instead of Logos. As to where Gnosticism might have begun, it is an unverifiable though not unlikely speculation to recall that the Christians of Alexandria, showing strong inclinations toward Platonism, could certainly benefit from the challenging presence of a massive and intellectually significant Jewish community. In such a setting, a Christian Platonist is compelled to measure himself or herself by the Jewish Scriptures and is likely to know more about them than other Christians elsewhere. Both Basilides and Valentinus were Alexandrians; and so were the Christian Gnostic Clement and the great Platonist Origen a century later, who was still calling the Logos Sophia, like Philo of Alexandria two centuries before. As for the existence of a "vulgar Gnosis," let us again leave it to vulgar scholarship to prove or disprove it. All Gnosis that meets the eye, even when seriously deformed by vulgar heresiologists or, perhaps even worse, by Egyptian translators, is highly intellectual.

### 18. Gnostic "Dualism"?

To what extent does the generative hypothesis explain that gnostics were rationalist Platonic exegetes of the Bible? Do we not eventually stumble upon some irreducible gnostic dualism that should be dealt with in a different perspective? And how is it possible to explain two basic tenets of Gnosticism that go hand in hand: the strong affirmation of free will and the hatred of astrology?

Let us deal with the first question first. Once systematically applied to the Book of Genesis, the principle of reversed interpretation, which

derives both from the initial premise of the inferiority of the Demiurge and from the effective contradictions of the text, goes very far.

Interestingly enough, in the first chapter of Genesis the gnostics equate Water with Matter and seek to establish the origin of the latter. This means that, to them, unlike most Middle Platonists, Matter is not an irreducible principle; the only other terrestrial *archē* except for the Demiurge is space, the Platonic *chōra*. In SST the First Archon emanated by Sophia appears in Darkness, and from him split Jealousy, Wrath, and the watery Matter.<sup>265</sup> In EV the Ignorance of the Demiurge produces a Tetrads of evils that form the substance of matter.<sup>266</sup> The Valentinians seem to insist on this spiritual Tetrads from which originate the four material elements, but they derive it from Sophia, not from the Demiurge.

We have already shown that the intention of this interpretation was to avoid dualism by explaining the origin of all the inexplicable principles in Genesis 1 as results of the same breach in the divine that caused the existence of the Demiurge, whose partner is Ignorance. Gnostics took Genesis 1 to be an expression of dualism and acted against it by establishing that Matter is not a principle. Only the Ophites, to my knowledge, were not troubled by the existence of the Waters in Gen. 1:2.<sup>267</sup>

As for the Demiurge, we have already shown that not all gnostics felt comfortable about making him evil or even inferior, and they devised two basic procedures—duplication and repentance—in order to clear him from most if not all fault. Yet, beyond any variation in his evaluation, the Demiurge always remains what he constitutively is according to gnostic hermeneutics: ignorant and boastful. This insistence on just two fundamental traits is not fortuitous. The biblical god scored so low with the gnostics for one fundamental reason: that according to their exegesis he *must* have been ignorant of the true God and his Logos/Sophia. One of the famous loci of Genesis upon which gnostics like to speculate is 3:9–11, which takes place after Adam and Eve have eaten the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. God walks peacefully through Paradise “in the cool of day,” and the two humans hide from him out of shame for their nakedness rather than guilt for having violated his taboo. Not seeing them, God asks, “Adam, where are you?” Only by listening to Adam’s reply does God find out that he had eaten from the forbidden fruit.<sup>268</sup>

This episode was cause for plenty of embarrassment even for some early Christians like Bishop Theophilus of Antioch, who sought to interpret Genesis literally. Interestingly enough, Theophilus did not think that God himself, the Father of the universe, who “is unconfined and is not present in a place,” could walk in Paradise. The one who conversed



with Adam was God's Logos (whom Theophilus alternatively calls Sophia).<sup>269</sup>

For gnostics the episode could only mean that the Demiurge was not omniscient and omnipotent. He was walking peacefully through Paradise and was ignorant not only of Adam's whereabouts but also of the fact that he had eaten from the forbidden Tree.<sup>270</sup> If the Demiurge was indeed ignorant, then even if he might have thought that the Tree of Knowledge was bad for humans, that is, even if he was not the deceiver that many gnostics make him into, the Tree of Knowledge might have been good, and the Snake likewise. We already saw that most gnostics do think that the Tree of Knowledge represents the Pleroma, with the exception of EvPh, which holds it for the Law that kills whoever seeks nourishment in it.<sup>271</sup>

This gnostic bricolage with the text of Genesis is circular in the sense that it first serves to establish that the Demiurge is ignorant and then proves it through exegetical method. Yet no matter how much this procedure explains, other reasons must be sought for the gnostic multiplication of divine entities and for the fierce defense of free will in combination with polemic against astrology. Hans Joachim Krämer analyzes the formation of the gnostic Pleroma as a process internal to the Platonic "metaphysics of Spirit."<sup>272</sup> New research on Middle Platonism in the directions so fruitfully opened by John Dillon and Robert Berchman may hold further surprises. As far as gnostic polemic against astrology is concerned, which is at the same time a strong affirmation of human free will, the explanation is again simple if we look for gnostics in Christian circles, a hypothesis lately contemplated by Elaine H. Pagels as well.<sup>273</sup> Gnostics would categorically exaggerate the Pauline aversion toward astrological influences that limit free will, the "elemental spirits of the universe" (*stoicheia tou kosmou*) of Gal. 4:3, whose astrological character is more precisely defined in Gal. 4:10. Struggle against astrology is as constitutive of early Christianity as it is of Gnosticism.

## Notes

1. Iren. I.30.4.
2. Origen, *Contra Celsum* VI.31.
3. NH II.98.11ff.
4. II.99.23ff.
5. BG 37.18–38.10 p. 118 Till = II.10.7–28 p. 58 G. = p. 108–9 T.
6. BG p. 107–8 T.
7. Samael: HA 94–95 p. 39.15ff and SST 103; Sakla: EE 56.23ff.

8. HA 86.27ff.
9. See Matthew Black, "An Aramaic Etymology of Ialdabaoth?" in A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn, eds., *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honor of R. McL. Wilson* (T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1983), 69–72.
10. HA 94.4f.
11. Hipp. V.19.1–22.1.
12. Hipp. VIII.8.2–10.11.
13. Hipp. VI.29.1–36.4.
14. Hipp. VI.31.2.
15. Hipp. VI.33.1; 35.1.
16. Iren. I.25.4 = Hipp. VII.32.4.
17. Epiph. 40.5.4.
18. Epiph. 40.2.6; 15.2.2–4.
19. Hipp. V.17.7.
20. PS I.15; 27 p. 15; 23 S.-T., etc.
21. PS I.29 p. 25.
22. AJ BG 46.1 p. 132 Till.
23. PS I.30 p. 27.
24. PS I.31 p. 28.
25. Hipp. V.24.2ff.
26. Hipp. V.7.35.
27. AJ II.10.25; see Bernard Barc, "Samael-Saklas-Yaldabaoth: Recherche sur la genèse d'un mythe gnostique," in *Colloque international*, 123–50, cit. 123.
28. See F. T. Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth: Jewish Elements in Gnostic Creation Myths* (NHS 10), 1978, 31.
29. Matthew Black, "An Aramaic Etymology."
30. Iren. I.30.4ff.
31. II.103.10.
32. BG 44.14ff = II.13.7ff.
33. BG p. 117 T.
34. II.94.21ff.
35. Iren. I.30.4ff.
36. Orig., *C. Cels.* VI.31.
37. TT 78.39.
38. TT 79.20–32.
39. BG p. 108–9 T.; cf. Tardieu's commentary, 275–84.
40. Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (FRLANT 10) (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Göttingen, 1907), 9.
41. See my *Expériences de l'extase, d'Hellénisme au Moyen Age* (Payot: Paris, 1984), 122.
42. II p. 113–14 T.
43. II p. 111 T.
44. Tardieu, 290–91.
45. BG p. 128 Till.
46. II.101.1–102.25; HA II.94.34–95.4.
47. Iren. I.1.1–8.4.
48. Iren. I.13.1–25.5 = Epiph. 34.2.1–20.12.
49. Iren. I.17.2.
50. Iren. I.17.1.
51. EvPh II.75.3.
52. I.17.5–21.
53. Iren. I.5.4; a different version in 4.2.
54. I.30.6.
55. SST II.103.10ff.

56. SST II.111.8ff.
57. SST II.98.11.
58. SST II.104.13ff.
59. SST II.113.22ff.
60. SST II.115.1f.
61. HA II.86.27ff.
62. HA II.87.1–11.
63. HA II.87.13–88.3.
64. HA II.88.3–17.
65. BG p. 130 Till.
66. BG p. 137 Till; II.15.1–4.
67. BG p. 138 Till.
68. BG p. 139 Till.
69. I and V p. 125–27 T.
70. I and V p. 128–29 T.
71. Tardieu, 311–14.
72. BG p. 146 Till.
73. I p. 137 T.
74. BG p. 157f Tardieu = p. 184 Till.
75. AJ II p. 157f Tardieu.
76. BG p. 174 Till.
77. Tardieu, 33f.
78. BG p. 178 Till = p. 154 Tardieu.
79. *Stromata* II.112.
80. *Stromata* II.113.3–114.1
81. I analyzed in three books and a series of articles the diffusion of the Neoplatonic doctrine of the astral vehicle (*ochēma*) of the soul. With Basilides we certainly are at its inception. However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s the origin of the whole theory was the object of an amicable polemic between me and the learned author of the book *Macrobe et le Néoplatonisme latin*, Jacques Flamant (Brill: Leiden, 1976). The several phases of this polemic are summarized in the articles both of us contributed to the volume on concepts of salvation in late-antique mystery religions, edited by Ugo Bianchi and Maarten J. Vermaseren (Brill: Leiden, 1983). The disagreement was whether the Middle Platonist Numenius of Apamea was the father of the influential doctrine of the passage of the human soul through the planetary spheres, during which passage the soul acquires certain qualities or, in another version, certain vices from the planets. All testimonies have in the meantime been gathered and discussed in my book *Expériences de l'extase*. The negative version is especially present in the Hermetic treatise *Poimandres* (chap. 25) and in a few enigmatic passages of the grammarian Servius (*Commentary on the Aeneid*), a younger contemporary of Macrobius. In the late phase of the debate, Flamant and I agreed that, although Numenius was not the father of the doctrine, which was already known to Basilides of Alexandria, there is no serious reason to doubt that he shared its positive variant.

This leaves us with the gnostics as authors of the doctrine of the passage of the soul through the spheres. However, this seems improbable for the reason that gnostics would commonly react through semantic inversion to some Platonic theory originally presented in a positive key. In other words, it is easier to understand why such a theory would be first produced in Middle Platonic circles steeped in Hermetic astrology, out of the desire to understand how the planets communicate their qualities to human souls. It could then have been reinterpreted by gnostics in a negative key rather than the opposite. We know for sure that gnostics dealt with the passage of the soul through the spheres before Numenius, which means that an early II<sup>nd</sup>-century or even a late I<sup>st</sup>-century origin of the theory is more probable.

82. *Pistis Sophia*, p. 183 Schmidt-Till = p. 283f MacDermot.
83. Chap. 113, p. 191 Schmidt-Till.
84. Chap. 115, p. 193f Schmidt-Till.
85. Chap. 111, p. 183–89.
86. *Pistis Sophia*, p. 217f Schmidt-Till = p. 331–46 MacDermot.
87. *endyma*: chap. 131, p. 219 Schmidt-Till.
88. Chap. 136f, p. 234f Schmidt-Till.
89. Chap. 131, p. 219f Schmidt-Till.
90. Chap. 132, p. 223 Schmidt-Till.
91. Chap. 132, p. 224–26 Schmidt-Till = p. 342–45 MacDermot.
92. PS 1–3 p. 1–4 S.-T.
93. PS 11 p. 12.
94. PS 14 p. 14.
95. PS 15 p. 15.
96. PS 18 p. 16; 20 p. 17.
97. PS 25 p. 20; 131 p. 218.
98. PS 27 p. 23.
99. Page 24.
100. PS 126 p. 207.
101. PS 131 p. 217.
102. *Timaeus* 47e.
103. *Republic* VII.514a.
104. *Tim.* 41a–e.
105. *Tim.* 30b.
106. *Tim.* 41b.
107. *Tim.* 41c.
108. *Tim.* 42a.
109. *Tim.* 69ff.
110. *Phaedrus* 249e.
111. *Tini suntuchia*: *Phaedrus* 248c.
112. *Gorgias* 493a; *Cratylus* 400b–c, etc.
113. *Enneads* IV.8.2.
114. *Enn.* II.9.3.18–4.12, alluding to *Phaedrus* 246c.
115. *Cratylus* 400c.
116. *Nekron kekosmēmenon*: *Enn.* II.4.5.18.
117. *Enn.* V.1.1.
118. Gen. 3:21 and *Tim.* 42a.
119. *Iren.* I.30.7ff.
120. *Iren.* I.30.9.
121. See my *Expériences*, 68–69.
122. *Iren.* I.30.11.
123. BG 58.1ff = II.22.9ff.
124. BG p. 138 T.
125. II p. 138–39 T.
126. BG p. 140 T.
127. BG p. 144 T.
128. BG p. 145 T.
129. BG p. 159 T.
130. Tardieu, 160–62.
131. SST II.115.29ff.
132. SST II.118.18ff.
133. I.88.24ff; the second story is concluded by the enthronement of Sabaoth and the new world order that ensues. •

134. HA I.88.24–89.3.
135. HA I.89.3–11.
136. HA I.89.24–31.
137. HA I.89.31–90.19.
138. HA I.90.19–91.7.
139. HA I.91.11–15.
140. HA I.91.30–92.3.
141. HA I.92.33–93.2.
142. Anne McGuire, "Virginity and Subversion: Norea Against the Powers in the HA," in Karen L. King, ed., *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1988), 239–58, quotation from 241.
143. *Pan.* 38.1.1–5.3.
144. *Adversus omnes haereses* 2, p. 218 Kroymann.
145. See A. F. J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature* (Brill: Leiden, 1977), 82–90. All other sources depend on Epiphanius and the *Anacephalaeoses*, summaries of heresies added to the *Panarion*; Klijn, 88.
146. *Pan.* 40.5.4.
147. See Gedaliahu A. G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (NHS 24), 1984, 57–58.
148. Birger A. Pearson, "Revisiting Norea," in King, ed., *Images of the Feminine*, 265–75, esp. 265–66; Norea derives from Jewish haggadoth on Noamah (Gen. 4:22).
149. *Pan.* 40.7.
150. Henri-Charles Puech, "Fragments retrouvés de l'Apocalypse d'Allogène," in *Enquête de la Gnose I: La Gnose et le Temps* (Gallimard: Paris, 1978), 271–94, quotation from 276.
151. Klijn, *Seth*, 3–8.
152. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 48.
153. SST II.103.33ff.
154. SST II.105.15f.
155. II.87.1–11.
156. II.95.7ff.
157. Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, 134.
158. PS IV.139 p. 238 S.-T.
159. PS 136 p. 234.
160. *Iren.* I.1.1–8.4.
161. *Iren.* I.5.1.
162. *Iren.* I.5.2.
163. *Iren.* I.5.3.
164. Eph. 6:12.
165. *Iren.* I.5.4.
166. *Iren.* I.7.4.
167. Epiph., *Pan.* 33.7.3–7.
168. Clem., *Exc. ex Theod.* 7:5.
169. Clem., *Exc. ex Theod.* 33:3–4.
170. Orig., in *Ioh.* 20:20.
171. Orig., in *Ioh.* 13:60.
172. Hipp. VI.29.1–36.4.
173. Hipp. VI.31.2.
174. Hipp. VI.33.1; 35.1.
175. Hipp. VI.32.7.
176. Hipp. VI.36.2.
177. Hipp. VI.36.2.
178. Hipp. VI.23.

179. Hipp. VI.23.3–5; 25.3.  
 180. Hipp. VI.25.4.  
 181. Hipp. VI.24.1–3.  
 182. Hipp. VI.24.3–4.  
 183. Hipp. VI.26.1–6.  
 184. Iren. I.24.3.  
 185. Robert M. Grant, "Place de Basilide dans la théologie chrétienne ancienne," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 25 (1979), 201–16.  
 186. TT 75.20–76.1.  
 187. TT 76.20.  
 188. TT 76.4–13.  
 189. TT 76.33.  
 190. TT 77.6f.  
 191. TT 77.18–25.  
 192. TT 78.4–22.  
 193. TT 82.35.  
 194. TT 86.25ff.  
 195. TT 88.33.  
 196. TT 89.25ff.  
 197. TT 90.31–91.1.  
 198. TT 91.34–91.13.  
 199. TT 92.15ff; 98.12–21.  
 200. TT 100.1ff.  
 201. TT 101.15–19.  
 202. Gilles Quispel, "The Origins of the Gnostic Demiurge," in *Gnostic Studies I*, 213–19.  
 203. Ps.-Clem., *Recognitiones* 2:39.  
 204. *Ipse missit creatorem deum, ut conderet mundum*: Ps.-Clem., *Recognitiones* 2:57; Quispel, *Gnostic Studies I*, 216.  
 205. Quispel, *Gnostic Studies I*, 217–19.  
 206. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 44–75, esp. 64ff.  
 207. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 86ff.  
 208. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 112ff.  
 209. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 216ff.  
 210. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 237.  
 211. See A. F. Segal's excellent work *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Brill: Leiden, 1977); see also by the same author the articles "Ruler of This World: Attitudes About Mediator Figures and the Importance of Sociology for Self-Definition," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 2: *Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman World* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1981), 245–68; and (with N. A. Dahl) "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 9, 1–28.  
 212. Nils A. Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia: Jewish Traditions in Gnostic Revolt," in *The Rediscovery, 2: Sethian Gnosticism*, 689–712.  
 213. Bernard Barc, "Introduction," *L'Hypostase des Archontes: Traité gnostique sur l'origine de l'homme, du monde et des archontes*, ed. and trans. B. Barc, followed by Norea, ed. and trans. M. Roberge (BCNH 5), 1980, 19–27.  
 214. About Middle-Platonic influence on Gnosticism, see Robert M. Grant, *Gods and the One God* (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1986).  
 215. *Phaedrus* 247e.  
 216. Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Harvard Univ. Press: Cambridge, MA, 1947), vol. 1, 210.  
 217. *Timaeus* 38c, *Sophistes* 265c.  
 218. *De Legum Allegoria* III 73, in *Philo*, with an English translation by F. H. Colson and

- G. H. Whitaker, 10 vols. (Heinemann and Putnam: London and New York, 1929); vol. 1, 207.
219. *Organon; De cherubim et flammeo gladio* 35, pp. 125–27.
220. *De profugis*, 18.
221. *De cherubim*, 9.
222. Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1886), 12–16.
223. For a reassessment of Philo's role in Middle Platonism, see now John M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (Cornell Univ. Press: Ithaca and London, 1977); Robert Berchman, *From Philo to Origen* (Scholars Press: Chico, CA, 1984).
224. VII.1.29.
225. Iren. I.31.1.
226. Ps.-Tert. 2; Epiph., *Pan.* 38.2.4.
227. Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (Continuum: New York, 1983), 62.
228. Jules Isaac, *Genèse de l'antisémitisme: Essai historique* (Calmann-Lévy: Paris, 1956), 24.
229. Karl-Wolfgang Tröger, "The Attitude of the Gnostic Religion Towards Judaism as Viewed in a Variety of Perspectives," in *Colloque international*, 86–98.
230. EvPh 74.5; ApAd 74.1f; PSem 29; ST 62.28f; Iren. I.25.1 = Hipp. VII.32.1 (Carpocrates); Iren. I.30.9–10 (Ophites); Hipp. VI.35.1–2 (Valentinians); Orig., *In Iohann.* 19.19 (Heracleon); Iren. I.24.5 (Basilideans); Epiph. 40.5.1–6 (Archontics); Epiph. 16.6.1 (Gnostics), etc.
231. See Klaus Koschorke, *Die Polemik der Gnostiker gegen das kirchliche Christentum* (NHS 12), 1978, 11–15; 21–22; 37–42; 64ff; Elaine H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (Random House: New York, 1979), 3ff, 38, etc.
232. These characteristics were emphasized in the classic work of Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 2 vols. (Harvard Univ. Press: Cambridge, MA, 1956). The combination was often disputed, and continues to be, by scholars like Peter Brown, who emphasize the originality of Christianity as *tertium genus* and its dependence on Roman inheritance. The problem is too vast to be dealt with in this context.
233. Whoever would object that Simon Magus saw himself as a Savior, yet not a Christian Savior, should be reminded that Simon remains a candidate for the unlikely position of "first gnostic." We are by no means looking for the roots of Gnosticism in Christianity. We simply ascertain that Christianity, like Gnosticism, *was* based on Platonic biblical exegesis. It was thus easier to jump from Christianity to Gnosticism than from Judaism or simple Platonism to Gnosticism. Philo remained an isolated case in Jewish thought; Judaism in general was not Platonic. Platonists interested principally in Judaism after Philo were few, including Numenius.
234. Carpocrates: Iren. I.25.4 = Hipp. VI.32.4; Ophites: Iren. I.30; Valentinians: Hipp. VI.33; Theodotus: Clem. Exc. 49:1; Archontics: Epiph. 40.5.1; Docetists: Hipp. IX.6, etc.
235. Epiph., *Pan.* 33.3.2.
236. EvPh 74.5.
237. *Pan.* 16.6.1.
238. Epiph., *Pan.* 33.4.14–5.15; see G. Quispel, "La Lettre de Ptolémée à Flora," in *Gnostic Studies I*, 70–102.
239. Epiph., *Pan.* 6.1–6.
240. Iren. I.31.1; Ps.-Tert. 2; Epiph., *Pan.* 38.2.4.
241. Iren. I.30.9.
242. Hipp. V.25.23.
243. TT 107.10ff.
244. PSem 34.9ff.
245. Iren. I.30.15.
246. Epiph., *Pan.* 16.2.6.

247. HA 89.31–32.  
 248. SST 118.25ff.  
 249. Hipp. V.17.2–8.  
 250. Hipp. V.19.18–20.  
 251. Ignatius of Tralles, 10; see Koschorke, *Die Polemik*, 44.  
 252. See Gianpaolo Romanato and Franco Molinari, *Cultura cattolica in Italia, ieri e oggi* (Marietti: Turin, 1980).  
 253. Hipp. VIII.10.6–7.  
 254. ApPt VII.3 (81.18); see Koschorke, *Die Polemik*, 20–24.  
 255. ApPt 83.6ff.  
 256. Iren. I.26.1.  
 257. Basilideans: Iren. I.24.4.  
 258. Iren. I.24.1; Ps.-Tert. 3.  
 259. Koschorke, *Die Polemik*, 44–48.  
 260. See my “A Corpus for the Body,” in *Journal of Modern History*, March 1991.  
 261. *Quasi aqua per tubum*: Iren. I.7.2 (Valentinians) = *dia sōlēnos* in Epiph., *Pan.* 31.22.1; Iren. III.11.3; *per fistulam*: Ps.-Tert. 4.5; *per riuum*: Filastrius 38.5–6. These expressions have been adequately analyzed in an excellent article by Michel Tardieu, “Comme à travers un tuyau: Quelques remarques sur le mythe valentinien de la chair céleste du Christ,” in *Colloque international* 151–77.  
 262. Tardieu, “Comme à travers,” 174–75, who believes that the riddle of incarnation admits only five logical solutions, all of them used by different early Christian trends. The solution of auricular conception and birth was not “popular” at all, for it had been preferred by a number of theologians.  
 263. John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* IV:14, cited by Edina Bozóki, *Le Livre secret des Cathares: Interrogatio Iohannis, apocryphe d’origine bogomile* (Beauchesne: Paris, 1980), 153.  
 264. Text in Bozóki, *Le Livre secret*, 154.  
 265. SST 98.11ff.  
 266. EV 17.5–21.  
 267. Iren. I.30.3.  
 268. The gnostic and Christian exegeses of this episode are condensed in Elaine H. Pagels’s beautiful book *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (Random House, New York, 1988); see my review in *Incognita* 1 (1990).  
 269. Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum* 22, pp. 62–63 Grant.  
 270. TVer (IX.3) 47.20.  
 271. EvPh 74.5.  
 272. H. J. Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Platonismus zwischen Platon und Plotin* (Schippers: Amsterdam, 1964), 263.  
 273. Elaine H. Pagels, “Exegesis and Exposition of the Genesis Creation Accounts in Selected Texts from NH,” in Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson, Jr., eds., *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (Hendrickson: Peabody, MA, 1986), 257–85.



# Chapter 5

## The Abolition of the Law and of the Actual Father: Marcion of Sinope

In his book *Moses and Monotheism*, Sigmund Freud remarked on the frequent recurrence of the motif of double paternity in religion and fairy tale. As one would expect, he interpreted the suppression of the actual father and the emphasis on the divine Father as a form of the Oedipus complex. Examples of people who struggle with their actual father abound, as well as with the divine Father. Famous among the former was Franz Kafka; among the latter is Elie Wiesel. The early Christian theologian Marcion found a rather strange way to struggle with both, by establishing a difference between the Demiurge, actual father of humankind, and the supreme and unknown God, Father to nothing.

### 1. Sources

The discussion here will not focus on the problem of the sources—always indirect—concerning Marcion and his movement. The bulk of the Marcionite file was collected by Adolf von Harnack in the 444 pages (marked with asterisks) of the appendix (*Beilagen*) to his basic work *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott*.<sup>1</sup> Even those scholars who, like Barbara Aland, tried to explore new paths in the interpretation of Marcion have to admit that Harnack collected an exhaustive file on Marcionism.<sup>2</sup> Decisive new evidence has not so far been discovered.

Marcion was aged and influential around 150, when Justin Martyr mentioned him in his *Apology*.<sup>3</sup> The great heresiologists of the second half of the II<sup>nd</sup> century and the first half of the III<sup>rd</sup> (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus of Rome, or the author of the *Refutation of All Heresies*, Origen of Alexandria) provide further information. From the

IVth century Marcionism disappeared in the West and became the target of attacks by Eastern Christian apologists, mainly Syrians like Adamantius, Aphraates, Ephraem, Maruta, Isidore of Pelusium, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, but also Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis on Cyprus, and the Armenian Eznik of Kolb. However, the capital work on Marcion remains the long polemical tractate in five books *Against Marcion* redacted by the Montanist apologist Tertullian of Carthage over the course of a few years after 207–8.<sup>4</sup>

As was shown by Jean-Claude Fredouille,<sup>5</sup> Tertullian was a rhetor in the classical tradition. The largest part of his work consists of clichés and denunciations of the abominable Marcion, this heretic “more repellent than the Scythian, more erratic than the Hamaxobian, more inhuman than the Massagete, more outrageous than the Amazon, darker than the cloud, colder than winter, flimsier than ice, more perfid than the Hister, more precipitous than the Caucasus.”<sup>6</sup> We should not expect from Tertullian a refutation like the one written during the same period by Hippolytus, a conscientious collector of heretical doctrines oftentimes reported verbatim. Relevant information is scant and, although probably reliable, deformed by a heavy polemical bias that goes so far as to contradict Tertullian’s own opinions maintained elsewhere, whenever they might show a suspiciously Marcionite flavor.

## 2. Tertullian’s Marcion

Marcion’s starting point is theodicy. The basic question he asks is “where does evil come from”—*unde malum?*<sup>7</sup> He finds the answer in Luke 6:43, the parable of the two trees: No good tree bears bad fruit, and no bad tree bears good fruit. *Good and evil do not have a common origin.*

In Isa. 45:7 God claims to be creator of Light *and* Darkness, Good *and* Evil. Such a god, thinks Marcion, could only be the *bad tree*.<sup>8</sup> He is known by us through the Bible, and he is known to be just but not good.<sup>9</sup> The good God is unknowable and *naturaliter ignotus*; unknown by natural means.<sup>10</sup>

The biblical god is not actually evil. But his creation, this world and humanity, is indeed such because of the low quality of Matter and of the Opponent that dwells in it. In effect, asserts Tertullian, Marcion does not preach *two* principles, as one might believe, but *nine*. One is the good God whose residence is the third heaven. But, in order to have a residence, he needs Space to dwell in and heavenly Matter to build his mansion. These are three principles. The fourth is the Savior, Christ, who

proclaims in the lower world the existence of the good God. The fifth is the Demiurge; the sixth, the Space of his residence; the seventh, worldly Matter; the eighth, the malignant Opponent; and the ninth is the Messiah of the Jews announced by the Demiurge. This Messiah has nothing to do with Christ; the latter became manifest, the former is still to come (and will).

Logically Tertullian seems to be right. If by any chance some essential point of Marcion's doctrine still escapes notice, his thinking still seems to be flawed by contradictions. But this doesn't quite fit with another polemical passage in Tertullian: "Is there on the Pontus a more voracious rodent than the one who eroded the Gospels? Surely, Euxinus, you produced a wild beast *more delightful to philosophers than to Christians.*"<sup>11</sup> Marcion appears to be a thinker yet not a philosopher in the sense that he would belong to any school or would attempt to be systematic.

Evidence shows that Marcion indeed envisaged Matter as a principle, thereby incurring a contradiction that was corrected by his disciples (as we shall see) and also, as we saw in the preceding chapter, by Valentinian and other gnostics. Another problem stems from the admission that Evil is separate from Matter, which would make it into a further principle. Anonymous disciples became aware of the multiplication of entities beyond necessity as effected by their master, and they criticized it.<sup>12</sup> To a certain extent Marcion is certainly close to Middle Platonism in his distinction between the two gods, as noticed by R. M. Grant,<sup>13</sup> yet, despite Tertullian's assertion, he remains a formidable rationalistic exegete of the Bible, not a philosopher. His interest lies in establishing the correct tradition, not in the internal coherence of his system.

Rationalism leads Marcion to a hermeneutic of suspicion that extracts arguments against the creator god from the innumerable logical contradictions of the Bible. Obviously since God asks in Gen. 3:9, "Adam, where art thou?" he cannot be omniscient. Tertullian here interjects a painful explanation:<sup>14</sup> The Bible being deprived of punctuation, what we interpret as a question mark must be read as an exclamation mark, expressing God's disappointment. "Adam, where art thou?" becomes "Where art thou, Adam!" Tertullian is not the least bit embarrassed by Gen. 3:11, the admission that God did not know that Adam had sinned and therefore did not know he would sin (or if he did, he was a *deceptor potentissimus*, as Descartes put it).<sup>15</sup>

Another argument of Marcion against the Demiurge consists in the fact that the latter *swears an oath*, the famous Covenant. According to

Marcion, an oath can be sworn only if there is a higher instance that guarantees its validity. If there is nothing above the Demiurge, then he could only be his own warrant.<sup>16</sup> Tertullian, with his juridical education, is by no means embarrassed by this either. Yet it is unclear whether Marcion meant that the Demiurge had some knowledge of the higher God or simply intended to suggest that his procedures were dubious. It seems improbable that the Demiurge could have been acquainted with the existence of the higher realm, for elsewhere Tertullian asserts that before the coming of Jesus Christ the good God was not known to anyone. Christ manifested himself in the fifteenth year of Tiberius's reign—that is, sixty-five years six months and two weeks before Marcion, whose activity peaked under the reign of Antoninus Pius (138–61).<sup>17</sup>

Christ did not have a body made up of material elements (*haec paupertina elementa*),<sup>18</sup> for he could not assume a "flesh stuffed with excrements" (*caro stercoribus infersa*).<sup>19</sup> Marcion appeared to be a docetist of the phantasiastic kind: He maintained that Christ's body was a deceiving apparition.<sup>20</sup> For Tertullian this means that Christ did not die and, worse, that he did not rise from the dead. Yet elsewhere he declares that Marcion admits the real suffering of Christ. For Tertullian the emphasis lay on the redemptive effect of Christ's resurrection, whereas for Marcion it obviously lay in Christ's message that *suffering* opens undeserved access to the upper realm for the apostles and all those true believers who, marked on their foreheads with the letter *tau* (symbol of the cross), would individually resume the Passion undergone by Christ for the sake of the good God.<sup>21</sup>

Whereas Christ came to reveal the hidden God, the Messiah will come from the known god, the Demiurge, and will be a warrior<sup>22</sup> who will save exclusively the people of the Covenant.<sup>23</sup>

How is it possible to escape from the world, the "prison cell of the Demiurge" (*haec cellula creatoris*)?<sup>24</sup> Only rigorous asceticism, including encratism (rejection of marriage), might help achieve such a breakout,<sup>25</sup> reason for which Tertullian, who was not keen on marriage,<sup>26</sup> would here defend holy matrimony.<sup>27</sup> The polemicist even suggests that the Marcionites would kill themselves by starvation (*apocarteresis*) in order to show their contempt for the Demiurge.<sup>28</sup>

This, according to Tertullian, is the very essence of Marcion's doctrine as exposed in his work aptly called *Antitheses*, which endeavors "to show the discordance between the New Testament and the Old Testament, *discordia euangelii cum lege*."<sup>29</sup> By what procedures is this accomplished? On the one hand, as already shown, by a hermeneutic of suspicion applied to the Old Testament; on the other, through repudia-

tion of the New Testament canon.<sup>30</sup> Among the Gospels, Marcion accepts only Luke, which he retains for being based on the Gospel mentioned by Paul in Gal. 2:2ff, though adulterated by ignorant Jewish Christians, people led astray by the twelve apostles, who "remained unaware of the truth" (*non cognoverunt veritatem*),<sup>31</sup> and especially by Peter, "the man of the Law," *legis homo*.<sup>32</sup> The Marcionite canon further includes ten out of the fourteen orthodox epistles of Paul (Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Laodiceans = Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon).<sup>33</sup> A number of reconstructions of Marcion's philological procedures, by which he modified the text of his New Testament canon, exist, none so thorough as Harnack's.<sup>34</sup> Yet this thorny problem will not detain us here.<sup>35</sup>

### 3. Harnack's Marcion

Contemporary research on Marcion is still overshadowed by the imposing work (1921–23) of the Lutheran scholar Adolf von Harnack, who sees in the navigator of Sinope a radical biblical theologian and a reformer (indeed, a precursor of Luther himself) who does not shrink from the most revolutionary consequences of the Christian message.

According to Harnack, Marcionite exegesis starts from the principle of the "discord between the New and Old Testament," founded first on an intentional reading of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, which opens Marcion's canon. According to the *incipit* of the letter, Marcion deduces that the thirteenth apostle, elected directly by Jesus Christ and by God and not *per hominem*, that is, by the man Jesus, is superior to the twelve "superapostles," as they are often called.<sup>36</sup> Paul complains that the Galatians had adopted a gospel different from that which he himself had preached (Gal. 1:6–8). In Greek, *to euangelion* means "good news" and only derivatively "written gospel." Paul means probably that the revealed content of his preaching (*to euangelion*) has been found sound by the ancients in Jerusalem. In Latin *to euangelium* is translated simply by the same Greek word *euangelium*, which may lead to further misunderstanding. A candid reading of the passage would yield that Paul submitted a *written gospel* to the approval of the elders in Jerusalem, and this is how Marcion obviously interprets it. That gospel could only be an earlier form of the one attributed to Paul's disciple Luke.

Yet the Epistle to the Galatians holds in store more embarrassment for a candid reader. Paul asserts that the leaders of Jerusalem recognized his apostleship to the gentiles, as opposed to Peter's apostleship to the

Jews.<sup>37</sup> In Jerusalem "false brothers" wanted to circumcise Paul's companion the gentile Titus; yet, with the approval of the elders, Titus has not been "taken into the slavery" of circumcision, of which Jesus Christ had freed him.<sup>38</sup> And yet on other occasions the attitude of the brethren from Jerusalem was, to say the least, ambivalent. Visiting Paul in Antioch, Cephas first ate next to the gentiles but left them as soon as messengers from James arrived, who could have objected to that. Barnabas's behavior was no less equivocal.<sup>39</sup> Paul's reaction was quick: He explained to Cephas and the whole world that Faith in Jesus Christ abolished the Law, and to fall again under the slavery of the Law would mean giving up the new Law of the gospel.<sup>40</sup> "For I, through the [new] Law, died to the Law [in order] to live with God."<sup>41</sup> And "if justification is obtained by the Law [only], then Christ died in vain."<sup>42</sup>

In a crescendo, Paul further emphasizes the abyss that separates Faith from the Law. Oppositions are extremely sharp: The Law is defined as a "curse,"<sup>43</sup> whereas Faith is a "blessing."<sup>44</sup> Christ has freed his followers from the slavery of the Law, paying the high price of crucifixion.<sup>45</sup> The Law was not useless; yet after the coming of the Mediator, the promise of truth contained in it has been fulfilled.<sup>46</sup> Therefore in Jesus Christ Faith has abolished the Law,<sup>47</sup> in such a way that Christian baptism takes away all distinctions of race or sex and collapses social barriers, for any baptized individual is indiscriminately promoted to child of God.<sup>48</sup> The slavery of the Law is the slavery of the earthly Jerusalem (under Roman occupation); the freedom of Faith is the freedom of the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup>

Paul's message is unequivocal. Should anyone, argued Harnack, base Christianity on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, that Christianity would inevitably look like Marcionism. Or, Harnack contended, like Lutheranism.

The Pauline antithesis of Faith and Law becomes the basis for Marcion's biblical interpretation. Yet there is more. In the conflict of authority that opposed Paul to the Mother Church of Jerusalem, Marcion sees the opposition between the true apostle and the false apostles (*pseudapostoloi*),<sup>50</sup> whom he holds in very low esteem, especially Peter.<sup>51</sup> The twelve ostensibly ignored the Truth. Paul was the only apostle of Jesus Christ, and his message the only true gospel. Yet false Christians had concocted the other gospels and had adulterated Paul's own until it became unrecognizable as the "gospel of Luke."

Why was Marcion so certain that he had solved the riddle of the falsification of the true gospel of Jesus Christ? Contrary to the common practice of his period, Marcion did not claim any direct revelation that would infallibly point out to him what was true and what was false in the New Testament. He simply performed a painstaking logical and philological operation on the texts he had inherited, attempting to smooth away all contradictions according to the principle that the God preached by the New Testament was different from the god of the Old Testament. Consequently, not only did the Old Testament become the deceiving product of the Demiurge and his servants through history but also the largest part of what we call the New Testament.<sup>52</sup> Marcion's *Antitheses*, which were part of the Marcionite biblical canon, were probably intended to supply the reasons for the omission of the entire Old Testament and most of the New in the form of a system of sharp oppositions between Faith and Law, which leads to the opposition of two Gods and two Worlds. Marcion does not hesitate to turn Paul's arguments against Paul himself, for, where the apostle had recommended allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, Marcion denies that the Old Testament could have been a systematic forecast of the coming of Christ. (The Old Testament contains prophecies about the Jewish Messiah which, not corresponding with the description of Jesus Christ, will be fulfilled only through the future coming of that Messiah. This hermeneutical literalism has since Harnack been read as evidence of Marcion's Jewish background.)

For Marcion the Old Testament is a perfectly *historical* document about this shabby world and its shabby creator god, an inferior tyrant who promulgates the law of vengeance and hatred (an eye for an eye). He accumulates all the attributes of an inferior, yet not evil, being: boastfulness, lack of omniscience or omnipotence, love for publicity, and bravado. Obviously the god of Israel, delineated by many generations of seminomadic shepherds of a remote past, was not made to be measured by Marcion's cold rationalism or his lack of philosophical refinements. For, had he been subtler, Marcion would naturally have come upon the idea, common among gnostics, that once the characteristics of a logical object exist in the consciousness, that object must exist in its dimension; and thus, since humankind is able to puzzle out the good God, his existence could not have been either entirely separate from this world or entirely hidden to it.

Marcion is a Kafka of biblical theology. He revolts against the actual father of the world, its Demiurge, and criticizes him for his vulgarity, selfishness, and whims. It seems reasonable that he should discredit this

irrational father. The invention of *double fatherhood* allows Marcion to be reborn a free man. Harnack shows that the most frequent word in Marcion's (and Martin Luther's) work seems to be *novum*, "new." The revelation of the new God brings about a "new alliance," revealing a "new life," a "new bounty," a "new lavishness."<sup>53</sup> The good news (*euan-gelium*) consists in reversing the perverted values of an old world and replacing them with the new values of a new world, recently discovered through Christ's revelation. No new alliance is possible with an old god, the phantasm of the actual father. The alliance is new in so far as it has been established between humankind and a new partner. For something to be new, it must have been unknown forever before. The divine, unreal Father bursts suddenly out of his eternal anonymity through the good news announced by Christ.

The most infamous act of the cosmic tragedy in Marcion's view was not the creation of this world but the creation of humankind, made by the Demiurge *in his image*, out of low-quality materials—that "flesh stuffed with excrements" that makes humanity the slave of procreation. In so far as multiplication perpetuates enslavement to the Demiurge, there is no excuse for it, whether it takes place within or without that "shameful commerce" (*negotium impudicitiae*) which is marriage. The tragedy of humankind, whose conditions were set by the clumsy Demiurge and worsened by Matter, comes to an unexpected low with the fall of the Devil, the angel of the Demiurge who, expelled from heaven, settles down in Matter and lures humankind into his own slavery. The irony is that once this is accomplished, the low Demiurge himself becomes angry with humankind, and thus all three principles of this world—the Devil, Matter, and the creator god—compete in torturing humans according to their particular ways. Yet through this bias Marcion comes to accept the necessity of the Law, promulgated by the Demiurge against the Devil and his intervention with humankind. Contrary to the gnostic view, which maintains that humanity is superior to the world and its creators for being consubstantial with the higher God, *Marcion's human being is the lowest and most unhappy creature that mind can conceive of.* Marcion's anthropology is indeed profoundly pessimistic.

The revelation of the good God is not deserved by humans in any way, either as a result of relation or of any particular merit. The good God is totally alien to the world and has not been announced by anyone before Christ. Whereas the inferior Demiurge dwells in the first heaven, the good God, defined as *superior* and *sublimior*, dwells in the third. He deserves the title "Father" not because he is the Father of humankind



but because he is the Father (Creator) of an immaterial and inaccessible World. An infinite distance separates this God, who reigns at the top of the universe, from the lower Demiurge, the god of this time period, *deus saeculi huius*. Whereas the Demiurge is primarily *just*, the superior God is *good*. He does not judge. Only pity moves him to reveal himself through Christ and make an end to the terrible Law. Although deprived of a physical body, Christ suffered and died on the cross, after which he went to hell, a place divided into a compartment where sinners are tormented, and a purgatory (*refrigerium*) for the righteous according to the Demiurge's conception of justice. In the first he saved a few people who underwent cruel and unnecessary punishment.<sup>54</sup> Marcionite biblical interpretation embraces the principle of inverse exegesis that gnostics were using liberally. Thus the righteous according to the Old Testament—Abel, Abraham, and Moses—were not saved by Christ, for they had endorsed the merciless law of vengeance (an eye for an eye) of the Demiurge. But Christ did save all those who, according to the Demiurge's code, had deserved terrible torments. The place of torture was emptied of its inhabitants by Christ, whereas the *refrigerium* remained filled with those who had met the approval and posthumous favors of the Demiurge: the patriarchs, Moses, the prophets, and their followers.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Christ's death on the cross freed humankind (*liberavit genus humanum*),<sup>56</sup> who had been a perennial target for the Demiurge's persecutions. But Christ's message met with a feeble reception among Jews and Jewish Christians, most of whom will remain banned from salvation ("non omnes salvi fiunt, sed pauciores omnibus et Judaeis et Christianis creatoris").<sup>57</sup>

The patent antinomianism of the Marcionite good God could generate, according to a logic that the heresiologists did not fail to observe, complete libertinism. Confronted with such a hypothesis, Marcion gives an answer that, although not very philosophical, is however very clear: *Absit, absit*, "Far from this, far from this." Marcionism is not libertine but, on the contrary, encratite. For the message of redemption brought by Christ refers not to the present but to the future: *de futuro, non de praesenti*.<sup>58</sup> The present of Marcion's community is vowed to persecution and denigration. The Marcionites find their authenticity through an uncompromising attitude toward the Demiurge. They not only accept but seek out martyrdom. Their freedom will be definitive only with the final judgment of the Demiurge (whose world has an end), upon which the subjects of the good Father will be promoted to the eternal life of the upper angels, while sinners will be delivered to the Demiurge, who will chase them into the fire of destruction. In this eschatological conflagration the Demiurge

will self-destruct, for his existence is not conceivable outside his world. Over this nothingness will extend the world without end of the alien and merciful God.

The Marcionite church was no community of prophets. It was endowed with a functional hierarchy submitted to the same rigorous discipline as the rest of the faithful. Given that the sexuality of those who had been redeemed was supposed to be extinguished, women had access to the magisterium of the church. Members of the community practiced strict asceticism and were bound to give up marriage. Meat and wine were banned from their diet, but fish was accepted. Strict weekly fasts included the sabbath. Marcionite ethics were heroic in all respects.

This missionary church, which during the second half of the II<sup>nd</sup> century was the only serious competitor to the Catholic, did not differ externally from it. One century later the Marcionite movement was in complete decline in the West. Later on, the remainders of the Western Marcionite communities would be absorbed into Manichaeism. In the East the situation was different. Marcionism continued to exist to the mid-IV<sup>th</sup> century, and even when persecutions would uproot urban communities, rural ones would survive. In the V<sup>th</sup> century Theodoret of Cyrrhus converted eight Marcionite villages of his diocese to orthodoxy. After this the traces of Marcionism disappeared for two centuries.

#### 4. Interpretations

To this day Harnack's passionate interpretation of Marcion as rationalistic reformer has found many supporters.<sup>59</sup> Recently R. Joseph Hoffmann radicalized Harnack's position even further:<sup>60</sup> Marcion would come to the conclusion that the Old and the New Testaments are incompatible and would preach two distinct gods by the strict use of two hermeneutical principles—rationalism and literalism.<sup>61</sup> The intervention of any external factor in explaining Marcion thus becomes unnecessary.

A second scholarly tradition, represented by E. C. Blackman,<sup>62</sup> F. M. Braun,<sup>63</sup> Ugo Bianchi,<sup>64</sup> Barbara Aland,<sup>65</sup> E. Muehlenberg,<sup>66</sup> and others, prefers to see in Marcion a gnostic. The arguments of these scholars are of different kinds. The only one that seems to have some weight concerns not Marcion himself but V<sup>th</sup>-century Marcionism in Armenia as

described by the heresiologist Eznik of Kolb; it might have incorporated some gnostic elements.<sup>67</sup>

A third direction gives weight to Tertullian's allegation that Marcion was a philosopher. We have already seen that R. M. Grant emphasizes Middle Platonic influence, whereas J. G. Gager shows the presence of some elements of Epicurus's philosophy in Marcion's thought.<sup>68</sup>

## 5. Marcion's Dualism

Marcion's system is founded upon the opposition between the good God and the inferior Demiurge, just but not good. A first contradiction shows as soon as Matter appears on the stage. This low-quality substance must be interpreted as a third principle. The good God and Matter are thus radically opposed; the Demiurge is only an intermediary. So far Marcion is close to Middle Platonism and Gnosticism, although he denies any relation between the Father and the Demiurge.

On the other hand, Marcion applies to the lower world the perfectly "orthodox" story of the fall of Lucifer, a third inferior hypostasis, who defies the Demiurge and becomes the ally of Matter, conferring upon the latter the dangerous qualities of his craft. While the fall of the Devil could occur without resorting to a multiplication of entities, Matter had a primordial character and no origin at all. We know that gnostics strove to explain the origin of Matter. Marcion's heedless insertion of Matter as a principle shows that he did not care much for the systematicity of his thought, being primarily a rationalistic philologist and theologian.

Marcion's doctrine can be defined by "distinctive traits" as dualistic, anti-Judaic, encratite, docetist, and even vegetarian. But his dualism is very complex. Two systems—the upper world of the good God and the lower world of the Demiurge—are opposed to each other yet have no connection to each other. In terms of space, a radical opposition exists between the upper God, who reigns at the top of the third heaven, and Matter, with the Devil, which abides in the lowest regions of the Demiurge, under the first heaven. Evil appears according to a "mitigated" formula (he is an angel of the Demiurge) but settles down within Matter.

Despite the opposition between the upper God and the duo Matter-Devil, the tension between the extremes is feeble. Explosive tension internally divides the lower world, in which the Demiurge is strongly opposed by and strongly opposes the Devil.

Marcion makes use of the inverse exegesis of the Bible like the gnostics, yet he accepts the historical truth, integral and literal, of the Old

Testament. Gnostics, by contrast, apply it at first circularly to find arguments for the Demiurge's inferiority and then to use this inferiority as a hermeneutical tool in the interpretation of other episodes of the Bible. Confronted with what seems to be the gnostic free play of imagination (but what is, as we saw, a multiple-choice game of logic), Marcion's system appears stern and somewhat unsophisticated. His inability to narrate is expressed in the abrupt gap between the two worlds, for gnostic myth would proliferate *precisely* in order to explain the relation of the two worlds.

Yet what separates Marcion from the gnostics is not only his poor performance as a narrator. It is primarily the fact that, unlike them, he *does not deny the anthropic principle*. The result is something to be reckoned with: Humankind is created in totality by the Demiurge from Matter and thus belongs in totality to the Demiurge and suffers the consequences of the low quality of Matter. *Humankind is made for this world, and this world is made for it*, precisely according to the words of Genesis, which is a historical document. No consubstantiality exists between humanity and the upper God, and therefore the latter's gift to humanity is perfectly gratuitous and undeserved. Soteriological optimism does not negate the circumstances of human origins and rightful expectations.

Whereas the denial of the intelligence of the creator of the ecosystem combined with the denial of the anthropic principle led gnostics to an *anthropological optimism* that remains unequalled in Western metaphysics, Marcion's combination—the denial of the ecosystemic intelligence and the acceptance of the anthropic principle—leads to one of the most pessimistic concoctions of Western metaphysics.

The starting point for both the gnostics and Marcion was the inferiority of the Demiurge, but they deduced it from different principles. The gnostics were unwilling to believe that the Platonic Logos/Sophia could have been ignorant of the Supreme God, as the biblical god seems to be. Marcion borrowed his argument from what seemed to be Paul's radical opposition between Law and Faith and used biblical arguments to enforce it. The gnostics were born from reasoning, Marcion from tradition.

After having ascertained the inferiority of the Demiurge, Marcion and the gnostics went two different ways. Marcion was too much a literalist and too little a philosopher to build a coherent system. He preferred to incur contradiction rather than to expand hypothetical interpretations.

Gnostics would perhaps have recognized in Marcion a brother with limited mental resources; Marcion would certainly have denounced the gnostics as fablemakers.

## 6. Marcion's Disciples

Due to Marcion's incoherence and contradictions, his system has multiple possibilities for expansion. His disciples would exploit a number of them.

Tertullian already objected to Marcion that his doctrine had not two but nine principles.<sup>69</sup> While Marcion had not given this problem sufficient attention, his disciples tried to find new solutions. All of them seem to betray Marcion to the extent that they qualify the good God as *archē*, "first principle," whereas in Marcion's intention he was principle of nothing, at least of nothing in this world.

Megetius posits the existence of three *archai* instead of two: the good God, the intermediary Demiurge, and the Devil or the evil god. They correspond respectively to Christians, Jews, and pagans.<sup>70</sup> This rationalization of the Marcionite system was predictable and was meant to eliminate one of its most patent contradictions. Some heresiologists more candid than sophisticated already attributed to Marcion himself *three* principles.<sup>71</sup> Hippolytus<sup>72</sup> mentions Marcionites who profess four principles: the good God, the Demiurge, Matter, and Evil, which is another way of eliminating contradictions from Marcion's doctrine.

Another problem is raised by the existence of two Messiahs, representing the good God and the Demiurge. The Assyrian Marcionite Prepon<sup>73</sup> conflates them into one Christ, "mediator between good and evil" (*mesos tis ōn kakou kai agathou*), who is neither good nor evil.<sup>74</sup>

Among Marcion's disciples the most important was Apelles, who had his own doctrine and preached it in Alexandria.<sup>75</sup> The reports of the heresiologists have deformed it. The Christian Rhodon, who denounced Apelles' lack of coherent argumentation, was apparently unprepared to deal with a subtler opponent.

Apelles wrote a work in thirty-eight books called *Syllogisms*, whose purpose was to refute, through obstinate rationalism, all the fables of the Old Testament. Against Marcion, Apelles denied the existence of two principles and emphasized God's monarchy. Reverting to the prognostic party, he ascribed the creation of the world to an angel called Lord. This angel was not Marcion's Demiurge. In an anti-Judaic rage, Apelles made the Angel of Evil himself, *praeses mali*, into the deceptive Spirit who is the god of the Old Testament and of the Jewish Christians.

In conformity with the current doctrine of the astral vehicle of the soul,<sup>76</sup> Apelles made Christ's body consist of pure stellar elements.

Apelles sent on a mission to Rome his prophetess Philoumene, whose revelations he appreciated to the point that he wrote them down in a work called *Phanerōseis*.<sup>77</sup>

Apelles continued Marcionite preaching in a spirit that was both more radically anti-Judaic and less anticosmic, for this world was not the creation of Evil. From Paul to Marcion to Apelles, the Law was judged in increasingly harsh terms.

## Notes

1. Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom Fremden Gott. Eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlagen der katholischen Kirche* (1921, 1924<sup>2</sup>) and *Neue Studien zu Marcion* (1923), available together in reprint (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1985). Despite the fact that this is perhaps Harnack's only book whose documentation is almost definitive and whose conclusions are still compelling, it is among his few works that, to my knowledge, have not been translated into English.
2. Barbara Aland, "Marcion: Versuch einer neuen Interpretation," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 70 (1973), 420–27.
3. Just. Mart., *Apol.* I 26–58.
4. For the dating, see Harnack, 329\*. The modern edition used here is Tertullianis, *Adversus Marcionem*, cura et studio Aem. Kroymann (CCL 1: *Tertulliani Opera*, Pars I) (Brepols: Turnhout, Belgium, 1954), 437–726.
5. J.-Cl. Fredouille, *Tertullien et la conversion de la culture antique* (Études Augustiniennes: Paris, 1972).
6. Tert., *Adv. Marc.* I.1.4, translation mine.
7. Tert. I.2.
8. Tert. I.2.
9. Tert. I.6.9.
10. Tert. V.16.
11. I.36.5, translation and emphasis mine.
12. Hipp. X.19.
13. R. M. Grant, *Gods and the One God* (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1986), 86, 113, 131, 139, 167.
14. I.25; IV.20.
15. Descartes, *Meditations* III.4.
16. Tert. II.26.
17. Tert. I.19; IV.7.
18. Tert. I.14.
19. Tert. III.10.
20. Tert. III.8.
21. Tert. III.22.
22. Tert. III.13; IV.6.
23. Tert. III.21.
24. Tert. I.14.
25. Tert. I.28.
26. See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Columbia Univ. Press: New York, 1988). More details in my "A Corpus for the Body," *Journal of Modern History*, March 1991.
27. Tert. I.29.

28. Tert. I.14.
29. Tert. I.19.
30. Tert. IV.2.
31. Iren. III.13.2.
32. Tert. IV.11.
33. Tert. V.2–21.
34. Harnack, 40\*–255\*.
35. Recently R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Marcion: On the Restitution of Christianity. An Essay on the Development of Radical Paulinist Theology in the Second Century* (AAR 46) (Scholars Press: Chico, CA, 1982), has attempted to show that Marcion was not modifying the *textus receptus* of the NT (as there was no such text during his time), but the *textus receptus* was modified by orthodoxy to meet Marcion's challenge.
36. On the system of oppositions between New and Old Testaments used by Paul, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1983).
37. Gal. 2.8.
38. Gal. 2.4.
39. Gal. 2.11–13.
40. Gal. 2.18.
41. Gal. 2.19.
42. Gal. 2.21.
43. Gal. 3.10; "curse" refers to legal precepts.
44. Gal. 3.9; Faith leads to salvation.
45. Gal. 3.13.
46. Gal. 3.19–21.
47. Gal. 3.23–25.
48. Gal. 3.27–4.7.
49. Gal. 4.24–6.
50. 2 Cor. 11.13.
51. Tert. IV.11.
52. On the formation of the New Testament canon, see esp. Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity (Introduction to the New Testament, 2)* (Fortress and De Gruyter: Philadelphia, Berlin, New York, 1982), 1–70. On Paul, see Koester, 97–146.
53. Harnack, 126.
54. Tert. IV.34.
55. Harnack, 131.
56. Tert. V.11.
57. Tert. I.24.
58. Tert. I.24.
59. Robert Smith Wilson, *Marcion: A Study of a Second Century Heretic* (James Clarke & Co.: London, 1933).
60. Hoffmann, *Marcion*, 287–90.
61. Hoffmann, like Harnack (*Marcion*, 22; *Neue Studien*, 15) and Wilson (*Marcion*, 45–46), believes in Marcion's Jewish background.
62. E. C. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* (SPCK: London, 1948; reprint, AMS Press: New York, 1978).
63. F. M. Braun, "Marcion et la gnose simonienne," *Byzantion* 25–27 (1955–57), 632–48.
64. U. Bianchi, "Marcion, théologien biblique ou docteur gnostique?" in *Selected Essays on Gnosticism, Dualism and Mysteriesophy* (Brill: Leiden, 1978), 320–27.
65. B. Aland, "Versuch."
66. E. Muehlenberg, "Marcion's Jealous God," in D. F. Winslow, ed., *Disciplina nostra: Essays in Memory of Robert F. Evans* (Philadelphia Patristic Foundation: Cambridge, MA, 1979), 93–113 and 203–5.
67. Harnack, 374\*–80\*.

68. J. G. Gager, "Marcion and Philosophy," *Vigiliae Christianae* 26 (1972), 53–59.
69. Tert. I.15.
70. Harnack, 165.
71. Harnack, 166–67.
72. Hipp. X.19.
73. Hipp. VII.31; X.19.
74. Harnack, 167, 333.
75. Harnack, 177–96.
76. See my *Expériences de l'extase, de l'Hellénisme au Moyen Age* (Payot: Paris, 1984), 119–44.
77. Harnack, 190–94.



# Chapter 6

## Manichæan Myth

Nous tremblons au-dessus de vous, livide armée,  
Et de votre feu noir nous sommes la fumée.

—VICTOR HUGO

### 1. Cosmogony

In the beginning were two substances divided from each other [*in exordio fuerunt duae substantiae a sese divisae*]. First God the Father, dwelling in the Kingdom of Light, eternal as to his origin, magnificent in his power, true in his nature, always exulting in his eternity, possessing wisdom and the attributes of life, by which are meant the twelve members of his Light, that is, the overflowing riches of his Kingdom. And in each of the members, innumerable treasures of great immensity are contained. Now the Father, first in his glory and incomprehensible in his grandness, possesses, united with him, the happy and glorious aeons whose number and length in time cannot be assessed. With them the very Father and Creator lives, and in his illustrious Kingdoms there is neither indigent nor infirm. His resplendent Kingdoms have been so well built on a luminous and happy earth [*supra lucidam et beatam terram*] that no one can ever shake or overturn them.

Bordering on one part or side with this holy and luminous earth, there was an earth of Darkness, deep and huge in size [*tenebrarum terra profunda et immensa magnitudine*], where fiery bodies, that is, all kinds of pestiferous beings dwelt. There endless Darknesses range, stemming from the same nature, with their innumerable misfits, and beyond them muddy and angry Waters with their inhabitants, shuddered by winds of awesome fury raised by their Archon and their Fathers. Then follows the region of Fire and destruction with its leaders and nations. And

likewise, in the middle of this region, there was a race of Fog and Smoke, with its awesome Archon and leader, surrounded by innumerable archons of whom he was the source and the origin. These were the five natures of the pestiferous earth [*terrae pestiferae*]. . . .

. . . The Father of the happy Light knew of the threat of a great and devastating defilement lurching over from Darkness to his holy aeons [*saecula*], should he not oppose to it some extraordinary and illustrious deity, strong in his power, which would submit and destroy the plot of Darkness, thereby bringing everlasting peace to the inhabitants of Light.<sup>1</sup>

This passages come from a Latin translation of the Manichaean Genesis used by Augustine, Mani's *Epistula Fundamenti*, or *Letter on the Foundation of the World*. Among the many treatments of this Manichaean myth, the narrative of the XIth Book of *Scholies* of Theodore bar Kōnāi, Nestorian bishop of Kashkar in the VIth–VIIth centuries, makes use of the same source:<sup>2</sup> "Before the heaven and the earth and all that is in them existed, there were two principles, one Good and the other one Evil. The Good principle dwells in the Kingdom of Light [*athrā de nuhrā*] and is called Father of Greatness."<sup>3</sup> Severus of Antioch adds that Light occupies the regions situated in the east, west, and north, whereas Darkness, the Tree of Death, occupies the southern regions. It is usually represented as a black triangle whose tip penetrates the infinite extension of Light from beneath it and whose mass continues southward. "The difference between the two principles," says Severus's source, "is as big as that between a king and a pig. One dwells in the place that fits him as in a palace, the other like a pig wallows in mud, feeds upon rotteness and delights in it, or like a snake coils in its hole."<sup>4</sup> The nature of Light is wisdom, the nature of Darkness is madness, says a Manichaean text translated into Chinese.<sup>5</sup>

"Substances" or "principles" (*arkhai*), Light and Darkness are uncreated and without beginning<sup>6</sup> and are not "roots" (*rhiza*) of each other.<sup>7</sup> Augustine and Ibn al-Nadīm<sup>8</sup> do not speak of any barrier between the two Kingdoms, but Severus<sup>9</sup> asserts that the southern side of the Tree of Life is separated from the Tree of Death by a wall, "in order not to give any occasion for covetousness to the Evil Tree which is in the south" and to avoid the Tree of Evil being tormented and "exposed to danger."<sup>10</sup> Severus means here that the Kingdom of Light does not conceal itself for defensive purposes but in order not to arouse the covetousness of the Kingdom of Darkness, thereby leading the latter into temptation. Titus of Bostra speaks likewise of an iron wall.<sup>11</sup>

The *terra lucida* (*athrā de nuhrā*) of the Father, a.k.a. King of the Garden (or World) of Light (*maliku janāni* [*‘ālamī*] *’n-nūr*), has five compartments or “dwellings” (*shekinātā*): Intelligence, Reason, Thought, Reflection, and Will, which Epiphanius renders in Greek with *nous*, *ennoia*, *phrōnēsis enthymēsis*, *logismos*, and the Latin translation of the *Acts of Archelaus* with *mens*, *sensus*, *prudentia*, *intellectus*, *cogitatio*.<sup>12</sup> A slightly different list occurs in Ibn al-Nadīm’s *Fihrist*.<sup>13</sup>

These Pentads, which, as Michel Tardieu astutely noticed,<sup>14</sup> internally organize the whole Manichaean system, do not seem to fit into the twelve aeons of which the *Epistula Fundamenti* speaks. These form a Tetrad of aeons grouped by threes,<sup>15</sup> which explains why the Father is elsewhere called *tetraprosōpos* (Four-faced) or is ascribed four attributes by a Parthian source: Divinity, Light, Power, and Wisdom.<sup>16</sup> Yet there is no such thing as a Dyad Father–Great Spirit or a Triad of aeons or a second Pentad of elements (*stoicheia*);<sup>17</sup> all of this comes later, after the Father emanates (*proballein*, *produxit*) the Mother of the Living (*ēmmā de hayyē*).<sup>18</sup>

The Kingdom of Darkness is a symmetrical antithesis of the Luminous Earth. Called Matter,<sup>19</sup> it has five Members, Worlds, “Five compartments of Evil,”<sup>20</sup> or *antra elementorum* (elemental recesses): Smoke, Fire, Wind, Waters, Darkness. As Augustine puts it,<sup>21</sup> “aliud tenebris, aliud aquis, aliud ventis, aliud igni, aliud fumo plenum, malum esse animalia in illis singulis nata elementis, serpentina in tenebris, natantia in aquis, volatilia in ventis, quadrupedia in igne, bipedia in fumo” (reptiles are born in Darkness, fish in Water, birds in Wind, quadrupeds in Fire, bipeds in Smoke).<sup>22</sup>

As for the King of Darkness in his Kingdom, object of an excellent study by Henri-Charles Puech,<sup>23</sup> this is how the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm describes him: “His head is the head of a lion and his body like the body of a dragon (great serpent). His wing is like the wing of a bird, his tail like the tail of a great fish, and his feet like the feet of a beast of burden.”<sup>24</sup>

He is obviously the same Ialdabaoth that the *Apocryphon of John* introduced as a “lion-faced serpent with sparkling eyes of fire,” adapted to the Pentad of elements of which he is the Lord: “His head is like that of a lion from the World of Fire; his wings and his shoulders look like those of an eagle, according to the image of the children of Wind; his hands and feet are like those of demons, according to the image of the children of Smoke; his belly, like a serpent’s, according to the image of the children of Darkness; his tail, like a fish’s belonging to the World of the children of Water.”<sup>25</sup>

Each of the five Worlds of Darkness has its own Archon, its own metal, its own taste, and its own religious error, according to the following table:<sup>26</sup>

<i>World</i>	<i>Archon</i>	<i>Metal</i>	<i>Taste</i>	<i>Error</i>
1. Smoke	?	gold	salty	astrolatry
2. Fire	lion	tin	sour	fire-worshippers
3. Wind	eagle	iron	hot	idolatry
4. Water	fish	silver	sweet	baptists
5. Darkness	serpent	lead/tin	bitter	soothsaying

The five Archons are like the worms of the Five Trees of Evil,<sup>27</sup> each according to his own element. The supreme Archon is the quintessence of all five types of animals, elements, and provincial Archons who rule over each element. Yet sometimes he is supposed to be the bipedal Archon of the World of Smoke.<sup>28</sup>

The inhabitants of the Kingdom of Darkness are like our basest instincts. They are evil and stupid. They barely know one another, and, being "filled with perfect wickedness,"<sup>29</sup> they are divided against one another<sup>30</sup> and in perpetual war among themselves.<sup>31</sup> Thus fighting, the powers of Darkness reached the border of the Kingdom of Light, and their covetousness for Light proved even stronger than their mutual hatred. Reconciled with one another, they joined forces in an assault against the resplendent Earth:

All the limbs of the Tree of Darkness, which is Matter that perverts, arose and went up with powers so numerous that it is impossible to tell their numbers. All were clad in fiery matter.<sup>32</sup> And these limbs were different. Some had hard bodies and endless length; some others, incorporeal and intangible, had nevertheless a slight tangibility like demons and ghosts. After arising, all Matter rose with its winds, storms, waters, demons, ghosts, archons, and powers, all seeking carefully how to penetrate Light.<sup>33</sup>

Whether or not he was worried, as both Theodoret and Simplicius insinuate,<sup>34</sup> the Father of Greatness was faced with a choice: either to send his five aeons of Light into battle or to create new warriors. Theodore bar Kōnāi believes that the five aeons, being made for times of peace, could not have intervened; Ibn al-Nadīm, on the contrary, that "these warriors of his were able to defeat him [the King of Darkness], but he wished to gain mastery in this affair by himself."<sup>35</sup> Eventually he decides to fight the enemy on his own and therefore proceeds to the First of three successive Creations, calling into being the Mother of the Living (*ēmmā de hayyē*) who in turn calls into being First Man (*'nashā qadmāyā*),

who calls his five Sons, the pure elements opposed to the impure elements of the King of Darkness: "Clear Air opposed to Smoke, refreshing Wind to burning Wind, Light to Darkness, invigorating Water to stagnant Water, heating Fire to devouring Fire."<sup>36</sup> According to Ibn al-Nadīm (trans. Dodge),

The Primal Man clad himself with five principles, which are the five deities: the ether (zephyr), wind, light, water, and fire. He took them as armament. The first thing that he put on was the ether, then he harnessed over the vast ether (zephyr) the courageous light, grinding over the light the water-possessing dust, and covering it with blowing wind. Then, taking the fire in his hand as a shield and spear, he descended rapidly until he stopped at the brink, close to the belligerents.

Thereupon the Ancient Devil (Iblīs al-Qadīm) repaired to his five principles, which are smoke, flame, obscurity, pestilential wind, and clouds, arming himself with them and making them a protection for him.<sup>37</sup>

The King of Darkness gets the better of the messengers of Light and swallows them without realizing that such food is highly toxic for one like himself. In turn the five Sons of God black out as if they had been bitten by a rabid dog or a poisonous snake. When he recovers, First Man addresses the Father of Greatness seven times. The Father proceeds therefore to a Second Creation, calling into being the Friend of Lights (*habbīb nahirē*), who calls the Great Architect (*bān rabbā*),<sup>38</sup> who calls Living Spirit (*ruhā hayyā*).<sup>39</sup> Living Spirit, who like the Father is endowed with five limbs (Intelligence, Reason, and so forth), extracts a Son from each of his limbs as follows:

- from Intelligence the Splenditenens;<sup>40</sup>
- from Reason the Great King of Honor (*malkā rabbā d' igārā*);
- from Thought Adamas of Light (*Adamas nuhrā*);
- from Reflection the King of Glory (*melēkh shubhā*);
- from Will the Porter (*sāblā*), a.k.a. Homophorus<sup>41</sup> and, commonly, as the kneeling Atlas who holds the earth on his shoulders.<sup>42</sup>

The five warriors of the Second Creation reach the Land of Darkness and find there First Man and his five Sons, who had been swallowed by the powers of Evil. Living Spirit emits a cry or Call; his voice becomes like a sharp sword when he talks to First Man. First Man hears and gives him Answer. The deities' Call and Answer rise up to Living Spirit and the Mother of the Living.<sup>43</sup> The *Acts of Archelaus*, though more succinct

than Theodore bar Kōnāi, adds here that Living Spirit drew First Man out of Darkness by stretching his right hand toward him, "and this is why when Manichaeans meet they give each other their right hand by virtue of this sign [*sēmeiou charin*], [to show] that they had been freed from Darkness; for in Darkness are all heresies, *in tenebris omnis haeresis esse.*"<sup>44</sup>

Having killed the Archons of Darkness, the Sons of the Living Spirit brought their corpses to the Mother of the Living, who flayed them and built eleven (or ten)<sup>45</sup> heavens out of their skins, flinging their bodies down into Darkness, where they formed eight earths. Whereas Theodore attributes to the Mother of the Living the role of the World Creator, the *Acts of Archelaus*<sup>46</sup> and other sources<sup>47</sup> ascribe it to the Living Spirit, who splits in three the substance of Light that had been in Darkness with First Man: one part, not contaminated by any mixture with Darkness, serves him to create the Sun and the Moon; another part, only slightly mixed with Darkness, to make the stars; and a third part, heavily affected by mixture, cannot be drawn out of the World (the dead Archons) and the living Archons active in it if not by a complex and lengthy process.<sup>48</sup>

According to John of Damascus,<sup>49</sup> the element earth derives from the flesh of the dead Archons, whereas mountains and rocks are their bones. This Manichaean World made Franz Cumont sigh, "Thus all parts of the nature surrounding us originate from the unclean corpses of the powers of evil. Pessimism has only seldom found a more appropriate image."<sup>50</sup> Hans Jonas ups the ante: "Manichaean pessimism has here devised the extreme imaginative expression of a negative view of the world: all the parts of nature that surround us come from the impure cadavers of the powers of evil."<sup>51</sup> This judgment is certainly too hasty; we will see why shortly (see sec. 5 below).

After Living Spirit has completed his demiurgic mission and the World has come into being, each of the five Sons of Spirit is allotted a function in the system. The Great King of Honor becomes its heavenly overseer. Splenditenens holds the reins of the "five resplendent gods," which are the five pure elements or the five Sons of First Man still imprisoned in the corpses of the Archons that now constitute the World and in the astral Archons that hold our earth in their grip.<sup>52</sup> Kneeling Atlas holds the earths on his shoulders.

The structure of the Manichaean cosmos is complex and must have been "scientifically" convincing for its adherents. Manichaeism indeed enhances the scientological tendency present in Gnosticism. Details of the cosmic mechanism intended to recover the particles of Light imprisoned in Darkness will be offered later.

According to Theodore bar Kōnaī, the Light from which the Sun and Moon are made is recovered by Living Spirit, who shows himself to the Archons, thus anticipating the episode of the "seduction of the Archons" described by other sources (see sec. 2 below). Be this as it may, from good Fire (*ex igne bono*) Living Spirit makes the Sun, from good Water (*ex bona aqua*),<sup>53</sup> the Moon, "Ship of Living Waters," *navis vitalium aquarum*.<sup>54</sup> Besides these two glowing cosmic Ships, *lucidae naves*, he builds the three Wheels of Wind, Water, and Fire, set in motion by the King of Glory: "Gloriosum regem tres rotas impellentem ignis aquae et venti."<sup>55</sup> The function of these Wheels, together forming a sort of water mill, is to recover the Light scattered in the World and bring it up to the Ships and at the same time to cast down into the lowest parts of the universe the litter of the heavenly Archons. A similar process, based on Manichaeism, was described in the gnostic (end of the IIIrd century or IVth century) treatise *Pistis Sophia*.

The system, whose goal is to recover the third part of Light still held in Darkness, is entrusted to the beings of the Third Creation, who know how to exploit the lowest propensities of the Archons and manipulate their unleashed, disorderly sexuality. The Third Creation is produced by the Supreme Father upon request from the Mother of Living, First Man, and Living Spirit and begins with the calling into being of the Third Messenger,<sup>56</sup> a.k.a. Virgin of Light,<sup>57</sup> Androgyne,<sup>58</sup> Malefemale.<sup>59</sup> The Third Messenger calls into being the Twelve Virgins or Virtues:<sup>60</sup> Kingship, Wisdom, Victory, Persuasion, Purity, Truth, Faith, Patience, Uprightness, Bounty, Justice, Light. The Messenger's residence is the Sun, and the Twelve Virgins are the pilots of his heavenly Ship.<sup>61</sup> The first thing the Messenger does, according to Theodore bar Kōnaī, is to order the Great Architect to build a new earth and to raise there the three Wheels, which are now set in motion, while the Ships sail along. The momentous process of recovery of the Light scattered in the World has thereby begun.

## 2. The Seduction of the Archons

The following myth, whose gnostic counterparts (in SST and PS) derive from Manichaeism, is reported by several sources.<sup>62</sup>

In the most common version, in order to drive the living Archons to expel part of the Light they swallowed, the Messenger appears in the middle of the sky. To the male Archons he appears as a naked Virgin of Light of extraordinary beauty; and to the female Archons, as a seduc-

tive, naked young man. Augustine and his disciple Evodius know a version according to which this function is fulfilled by the Twelve Virtues.<sup>63</sup> In both cases the outcome is similar: the Archons' lustful propensities are heightened. The males, who would like to possess immediately the Virgin of Light, "scream out of lasciviousness and sweat runs from their gigantic bodies: this is the rain falling to the earth during thunderstorms."<sup>64</sup> Augustine's description gives further details of the aim of the whole operation:

Confronted with this attractive vision, the evil Powers' fervor and concupiscence redouble. The bonds of their loathsome reason are loosened, and suddenly all living soul that was still enclosed in their limbs breaks free and mixes with pure air. She gets completely purified, then rises to the luminous ships prepared to take her aboard and lead her to her homeland. The refuse containing the waste of the enemies falls in bits with the fire and the heat and mix with the trees, the plants and all the seeds, getting tinted in various colors.<sup>65</sup>

Evodius's version, which specifies that the Light substance is ejaculated by the Archons *per genitalia*, does not contradict the sources that insist on the Archons' sweat.<sup>66</sup> After all, *all* archontic emissions contain a part of Light, along with a part of Sin. The Messenger, who withdraws from the sky, separates Light from Sin and drops the Sin over the Archons, who reject it. Sin splits up into a part that falls onto dry ground, transforming itself into the Five Trees, ancestors of all plants, and a part that falls in water and gives birth to a monster, earthly embodiment of the King of Darkness.<sup>67</sup> Adamas kills the monster.

In terms of crudeness, vegetal life comes first. It is the worst part of the seed of the five male Archons and their male troops, ejaculated in the heat of concupiscence and even without a partner.

Animal life follows: It is the result of the aberrant exercise of sexuality on the part of the female Archons chained to the wheel of the Zodiac. These are fertilized by the luminous vision of the Messenger in the middle of the sky and find themselves pregnant with fatherless, monstrous children. Feeling unwell because of the spinning of the zodiacal wheel to which they are chained, the female Archons miscarry, and their progeny fall to the earth, eat the fruits of the Five Trees, copulate, and give birth to all animals. "This is the origin of all flesh that moves over the earth, in water and in the air" ("hinc est dicunt originem carnum omnium, quae moventur in terra, in aqua, in aere").<sup>68</sup> Having eaten from the Sin of concupiscence enclosed in the Trees, the abortive offspring of the archontesses become monsters and Asrēshtārs, a class of unidentified female ghouls.<sup>69</sup> At this point, the King of Darkness involves all of this



infernal fauna in a plot whose goal is the creation of man, which comes after a gigantic orgy and is the product of endless defilements.

### 3. The Creation of Man

"In his perverse plottings," the Great Archon Saklas (Syriac Ashaqlun, Pahlavi Az like the Zoroastrian primordial monster Azi Dahaka) "told those around him: What do you think of this great, rising Light? Do you see how it shakes heaven, how it overthrows most of the Powers! Under these circumstances it is better if you entrust me with the part of Light that you have in your custody. With it, I will produce an image of that great being [that is, the Messenger] that appeared to us in the full of his glory. In this way kingship will be ours, and we will eventually be freed from the life of Darkness."<sup>70</sup> Similarly in two Pahlavi fragments,<sup>71</sup> the angry Az sets out to create beings according to the male and female shapes of the Messenger, called Narisah or, more frequently in other texts, Rōshnshahr, "the God whose Kingdom is Light." Suffering and misery will be the lot of these creatures.

To gain possession of a concentration of their Light, Az teaches the male monsters and the Asrēshtārs to copulate. Rapidly learning the art of intercourse, the monsters generate offspring, which are immediately swallowed by Az, who thus incorporates most of the Light from their parents. Inciting to intercourse two particularly hateful lion-shaped demons of which he had made his own "garment," Az takes the product of their union and gives it the shape of man.<sup>72</sup>

Because of the Light stored in him, the first man, Gēhmurd, is related to the Kingdom of Light; yet because of the obscene ways in which he has been brought about, he is filled with all wickedness. Gēhmurd, who takes on the name of the Zoroastrian Primordial Man (Gayōmard),<sup>73</sup> is followed by his partner, Murdiyānag, "Woman of Glories."<sup>74</sup> Repeating the biblical blessings over the first human pair (Gen. 1:28–29), Az, like a consummate politician, delivers a deceiving speech before the two: "For you I made the earth and the heaven, Sun and Moon, Water and Fire, the Trees and plants, wild and tame animals, that they might bring you joy in the world, that you may become happy and joyful and follow my will."

The installment of the primordial pair on the earth takes place under the sign of ecological destruction. Springs are sullied, plants and animals are slain, for the humans had no idea of the existence of the Gods of Light.

When the five godly world rulers see the tragedy of Adam and Eve—for this is how they are called in Western testimonies—divine

substance imprisoned in flesh, they pity them and ask the Mother of the Living to send someone to their rescue.<sup>75</sup> This mission is entrusted to Jesus the Splendor, the God dwelling in the Ship of Living Waters (the Moon), whose function is to oversee the mechanism of recovery of the Light. Jesus (Arabic 'Isā), whom the Pahlavi texts designate as Xradēshahr, "God whose Kingdom is Reason,"<sup>76</sup> wakes Adam from his deathly sleep, confers upon him the ability to walk, and keeps the Archon and his female partner away from him. Telling him the history of creation, he teaches the man his own origin: "Jesus showed Adam the Fathers in the [heavenly] heights and his own [Jesus'] person exposed to everything, to the panther's teeth and to the elephant's tusks, devoured by the voracious, swallowed by the gluttons, mixed and imprisoned in all that exists, tied to the stench of Darkness."<sup>77</sup>

The revelation made by Jesus, who is the Tree of Knowledge,<sup>78</sup> allows Adam to acknowledge his pitiful state. The story is continued by Ibn al-Nadīm according to a pattern we already encountered in gnostic writings.

The Archon, who is the father of Eve, lusts after his own daughter and has intercourse with her. She gives birth to Cain, who in his turn has intercourse with his mother Eve, and the product of this circular incest is Abel, followed by two twin daughters, Wise of the Ages, who becomes Abel's wife, and Daughter of Corruption, who becomes Cain's wife. Wise of the Ages, seduced by an Archon, gives birth to Lamentation (Faryād) and Laden with Lamentation (Pur-Faryād). Her husband, Abel, suspecting Cain of being the father of his wife's offspring, leaves Wise of the Ages and complains before Eve. Offended (and for once legitimately so), Cain breaks Abel's skull with a boulder and takes Wise of the Ages for his wife. The Archon Sindīd teaches Eve magic so that she can seduce Adam, who upon 'Isā's commandment had not approached her anymore. From their conjugal union the Stranger, Shātil-Seth, is born, whom Adam protects with three circles, upon which he pronounces the sacred Name of the King of the Gardens, of First Man, and of Living Spirit. He receives a crown from heaven as a sign that Seth has been recognized as sinless. When Eve lures Adam again into intercourse, Seth takes his father away eastward, to prevent other defilements. After his death, Adam goes to Paradise, whereas "Shātil, with Lamentation and Laden with Lamentation and their mother, Wise of the Ages, accomplished good works with one idea of right and one way of life until the time of their deaths, but Eve, Cain, and the Daughter of Corruption went to Hell."<sup>79</sup>

Sethel, son of Adam, is mentioned in the Coptic *Kephalaia*,<sup>80</sup> in the list of prophets according to al-Shahrastānī (Adam, Seth, Noah, Abraham,

Buddha, Zarathustra, Christ, Paul, and Mani) and in other Manichaean sources.<sup>81</sup> Parthian and Pahlavi fragments confirm the authenticity of Ibn al-Nadīm's source.<sup>82</sup> Among the apocrypha used by Mani<sup>83</sup> must have been the no longer extant<sup>84</sup> *Apocalypse of Seth* mentioned by the Cologne Mani Codex.<sup>85</sup>

Mani's system, as it appears now, is connected in more than one way to the form of Gnosticism professed by Hippolytus's Sethians. In it the history of humankind containing the "immovable race" of the Stranger Seth (*sperma heteron*: Gen. 4:25) must have played a prominent role.

In the Manichaean narrative of creation, horrendous episodes of unheard-of debauchery are multiplied according to the overall logic of Manichaeism, which consists of rejecting sexuality as the archontic activity par excellence. Thus sexuality derives from our share of Darkness and shows our strong relation with Darkness. The repetition of tremendous obscenities is made to display the extent to which humankind is fallen and the sin accumulated upon it mighty. The hypothesis that humankind evolved from a single pair necessarily points to incest as the only possibility for the multiplication of the species. Yet in Mani incest becomes system, in so far as the Archon Yahveh has intercourse with his own daughter Eve, Cain has intercourse with his mother, he weds his own daughter who is at the same time his sister, and so on, in such a way that Manichaean primordial parenthood is deliberately difficult to grasp: Abel is Cain's brother but also his son, Eve being his mother and his sister-in-law; in *Wise of the Ages* Abel weds his own sister, his cousin (daughter of his *aunt* Eve) and his niece! This says it all: To the extent that humankind originates from a series of incredible abominations and multiplies in lamentable ignorance of the most elementary taboos of incest, its situation must be truly desperate.

#### 4. Eschatology

The Manichaean system, as we already saw, was in its author's intention a *scientology*, whose purpose was to offer exhaustive answers to all questions concerning the origin and destiny of the world and humankind. At the very core of this scientology is *gnostic anti-astrological polemic*. This explains why Manichaeism, like Gnosticism, was a form of *counterculture*, and it sheds some light on Mani's personal disaster. In the eyes of the Sassanian ruler Bahrām I, Mani was a dangerous antinomian. Having

him wait at the door until he finished his meal, Bahrām eventually addressed Mani with the following words: "You are not welcome. . . . What are you good for, since you are neither a wrestler nor a hunter? Maybe you are useful as a physician or a healer? But how, since you do not practice?"<sup>86</sup>

It will be impossible to describe here all of the astrological subtleties of Mani's system. Only a few of them will be examined here, in order to understand the functioning of the "Pillar of Glory" set in motion by Jesus.

Mānī said, "The King of the World of Light commanded one of his angels to create this world and to build it from those mixed particles, so as to rescue the particles of Light from those of darkness. So they built ten heavens and eight earths. He made one angel responsible for bearing the heavens and another for raising up the earths. For each heaven he made twelve gates and vestibules, large and broad. Each one of the gates was similar to its companion and facing it, with two doors for each one of the vestibules. For each one of the doors of these vestibules he made six thresholds, with thirty lanes (ways) for each threshold and twelve rows for each lane. . . ."

He said, "He caused the sky on the lowest of the earths to reach the heavens, and he made a trench around this world into which to throw the Darkness which was sifted out from the Light. Behind that trench he formed a wall, so that none of the Darkness separated from the Light could get out."

Mānī said, "Then he created the sun and the moon for sifting out whatever there was of Light in the world. The sun sifted out the Light which was mixed with the devils (i.e., archons) of heat, while the moon sifted out the Light which was mixed with the devils of cold. This [Light] rises up on a Column of Praise [Arabic *subuh*, probably from Syr. *shubhā*, corresponding to the Greek *doxa*, "Glory"; it is actually a "Pillar of Glory," *stylos tēs doxēs*], together with what there are of prayers, good words and good works."

He said, "This is thrust into the sun, then the sun thrusts it to the Light above it, in the world of praise (or Glory), in which world it proceeds to the highest unsullied Light. This action continues until what remains of the Light which is bound [to Darkness] is only what the sun and the moon have been able to extract. At this point the angel who is bearing up the earths [Atlas] rises up, while the other angel [Splendenens] relaxes his hold on the heavens, so that the highest mixes with the lowest and a fire flares up, which blazes among these things (i.e., remaining Light), continuing to burn until what is left among them of the Light is set free."

Mānī said, "This conflagration will last for a period of one thousand, four hundred and sixty-eight years." He said, "If the state of

affairs comes to an end and the bold chieftainess, the Spirit of Darkness, sees the rescue of Light and the exaltation of the angels while the warriors and the guards [of Darkness] are surrendering, and if she sees the battle and the warriors about her accusing her, she will retreat to a tomb prepared for her and this tomb will be blocked with a rock the size of the world, which will barricade her in it."<sup>87</sup>

The gates, vestibules, doors, thresholds, and lanes, confirmed by a Sogdian fragment,<sup>88</sup> seem to refer to the solar year.<sup>89</sup> The reference is used elsewhere as well, for example, in the Coptic *Kephalaion* 57, *On Adam's Conception*:

There are five kinds of Rulers and Leaders in the Sphere of the Zodiac and beneath it. The first is Year, the second Month, the third Day, the fourth Hour, the fifth Minute. These five places and five houses are in the Sphere and in the heavens, and these places have five Powers who are their Lords. There is the Lord of the Year, the Lord of the Month, the Lord of the Day, the Lord of the Hour, and the Lord of the Minute. Each one of them commands over those who are like him, and the superiors command over the inferiors [for instance, Hour over Minute]. Humans and mammals are generated by these Powers. And these Powers are in charge from the beginning of creation to the end of the world.<sup>90</sup>

The text further specifies that during the period of Adam and his son Sethel, time was administered by the Lord of the Year. Then the turn of the Lord of the Month came, and "by the same ratio that the Month is shorter than the Year, the lifespan of those born [during the administration of the Lord of the Month] became shorter than the lifespan of those born during the administration of the Lord of the Year."

According to the same mechanism of progressively decreasing rulers of time, human life has recently become quite precarious under the administration of the shortest of all Lords, the Lord of the Minute. People are ever uglier and shorter, "their doctrines and their thoughts are full of wickedness." And it is fitting that it should be so, for the Light imprisoned in the world is now close to the minimum that will soon trigger the end of it all.

Al-Shahrastānī, who wrote in 521 H./1143 C.E., reports the calculations performed by the Manichaean leader Abū Sa'īd in 217 H./839 C.E., according to which the total timespan of the world would be 12,000 years. By his time, 11,700 years had already gone by, and Abū Sa'īd concluded that the final conflagration would take place in 300 years.<sup>91</sup> Shahrastānī should therefore have been witness to the eschatological judgment.

All sources confirm that the conflagration, the *Frashegird*, would last 1,468 years, during which the remaining imprisoned Light should reach the Moon and the Sun and then the Kingdom of Light. From the balcony of Paradise, the Gods will contemplate the Black Fire that consummates Matter.<sup>92</sup> Another fragment in Pahlavi specifies that Rōshnshahr orders the Creator-of-the-New-World to build in the far south a prison where all demons will be jailed forever after *Frashegird*.<sup>93</sup> The Coptic Manichaean *Psalm 233* gives further details of the scene: "Beside the whole world, which will exist for a while, there is a great building built outside of this world. When the Builder will be ready, the whole world will be dissolved, will be set on fire so that flame may consume it."<sup>94</sup>

The Light leftovers will be assembled into the last Statue, *andrias*, whereas Darkness and its Archons will mass into a Ball, *Bōlos, globus* in Augustine,<sup>95</sup> swallowed forever behind the gate of the eternal Prison.<sup>96</sup>

## 5. Manichaean Astrology

The history of humankind now, during the "intermediate period" that will last to the conflagration, which will neutralize the aggressive Powers of Darkness, is dominated by the great machinery, the water mill (that is, the Zodiac) with twelve buckets (the twelve astrological signs) set in motion by the Third Messenger. The first fifteen days of every month, the Light freed from Darkness in the form of souls of the dead rises along the Pillar of Glory (a.k.a. Perfect Man), which is the Milky Way, to the Ship of the Moon, which gradually fills up and becomes the full Moon. During the last fifteen days of the month the Ship of the Moon gradually pours all its cargo of Light into the Ship of the Sun, which transmits it to the Kingdom of Light. The Moon is emptied until it disappears, then fills again.<sup>97</sup>

Mani probably thought of the planets as moving on a plane, the *zōnē* or zodiacal belt, among the twelve signs.<sup>98</sup> This means that the first seven among the ten heavens are *not* the planetary heavens. Mani singles out the Sun and Moon, which are manifestly good, but significantly resumes an idea that had already been expressed by the "protognostics," Simon and his successors: that the planets (Leaders) are responsible for all evil in the world: "All that occurs in the world, above and below, wars, confusion, deportation, famine, avarice, and property, all this increases and decreases according to the action of the Leaders. They set in motion all creation."<sup>99</sup>

Like Gnosticism of which it is a late outcome, Manichaeism never tires of polemicizing against astrology, which thwarts human free will.

The five planets and the twelve signs of the Zodiac are Archons of Darkness.<sup>100</sup>

According to *Kephalaion 47, On the Four Great Things*,<sup>101</sup> there are four classes of Archons: One consists of the Powers that dwell in the ten heavens under the starry Wheel of the Zodiac; another one is made up of the Archons of the eight earths, four mixed and four frankly evil, beneath the human earth; a third one consists of the walls—four mountains and three Vehicles—that surround the world; and the last one, of the firstborns and the leaders of the former three classes of Archons, who are chained to the Wheel of the Zodiac.

*Kephalaion 69, On the Twelve Signs of the Zodiac and the Five Stars*,<sup>102</sup> puts the twelve zodiacal signs and the five Leaders of the Archons tied to the Zodiac (which are nothing but the five planets, that is, seven minus the Sun and Moon) under supervision of an *apaitētēs* (an overseer, lit. tax collector—the word is synonymous with *paralēptēs*, used in the gnostic tractate *Pistis Sophia*, which underwent heavy influence from Manichaeism).

The five Archons are the Dark Rulers of the five elements: Jupiter rules over Smoke, Venus over Fire (this is ironical from the viewpoint of traditional astrology),<sup>103</sup> Mars over Wind, Mercury over Water, Saturn over Darkness. Two other elements are added to the list, which are not the Sun and the Moon (the good Ships that collect light) but are probably the constellations Caput and Cauda Draconis, here generically called *Katabibazontes*.

The five Archons are the Rulers of the twelve signs of the Zodiac according to an order of distribution that is again quite singular, no doubt made up by Mani himself. Smoke rules over Gemini and Sagittarius; Fire over Aries and Leo; Wind over Taurus, Aquarius, and Libra; Water over Cancer, Virgo, and Pisces; Darkness over Capricorn and Scorpio. The Sun and Moon, as already stated, are entirely beneficent.

Now that we know who the five and the twelve are, we can return to the Manichaean Genesis and analyze its profound astrological implications. We remember that the Twelve Virtues or the bisexual Messenger appeared in the middle of heaven in order to instill desire in the Archons. When their purpose was achieved, the male Archons went amok. Evodius further specifies that this state of sexual arousal ends up in ejaculation *per genitalia*. This seed (or soul) of the archons contained Light, which was picked up by the Third Messenger, who separated Light from Darkness and dropped the residual substance over the earth. There the substance was further divided up into a part that fell on dry land and gave birth to the Five Trees, which are nothing but *antimimon pneuma*, defined in gnostic texts as the Tree of Iniquity—that

is, the negative influences of the five evil planets, of the twelve evil signs of the Zodiac, and of all troops of heavenly Archons. Being a quintessence of the worst of vegetal and animal life, human beings are also a quintessence of the *counterfeit spirit*.

As we well know, the number five serves as a constant basis for classification in Manichaeism: we have five Trees, five Archons, five Elements, five planets, and so on. This is the systematic expression of what the gnostics called antimimon pneuma, the negative aspects derived from the planets. Thus the five planets become central in the Manichaean system and force their number upon other realms of reality that were not commonly classified according to a pentadic scheme, such as the four elements (which, obviously, in Manichaeism became five).

Thus the number five was first the number of Darkness, of the evil planetary rulers. It was further extended to the World of Light, which is seen as a *typos* to which Darkness is the *antitypos* or mold.

If in the Manichaean system Light and Darkness were coeternal, in Mani's mind, we can tell with certainty, Darkness came first.

## 6. Anthropology and Ethics

It will be impossible to examine here anything but a very few of the subtleties of Manichaean anthropology and of the ethical consequences that derive from it. Manichaeism fills the checklist of "distinctive traits" associated with dualism: anticosmism, antisomatism, antinomianism, encratism, vegetarianism, and docetism. Scholars chose it, therefore, to represent the ideal type of all dualisms and pessimisms. Needless to say, Manichaeism is hardly pessimistic. The theory of the double nature of humanity and cosmos can lead to various attitudes, including the perfectly optimistic one according to which the world reveals itself *every day* as an epiphany of the Kingdom of Light.

"When we came to know the true God and the pure Law," says the Uigur *Xuāstvānift*, "we knew the Two Roots and the Three Moments."<sup>104</sup> The Three Moments—prior, middle, and posterior—refer to the primordial state in which Light and Darkness were distinct, to their mixture, and to their final separation.<sup>105</sup> The Two Roots are the two principles, also present in human nature and in the nature that surrounds us, in which the Manichaean "awakened" is supposed to discern them uninterruptedly. As a matter of fact, human-microcosmos is the faithful image of the macrocosmos. Sin occupies in them exactly the same place that the Archons of the Zodiac, those who cause earthquakes and all



wickedness, occupy in the universe. The human body was built with the five material elements of the Archons of Darkness, whereas the human soul was fashioned from the five limbs of Light. It is endowed with a skeleton made by Intelligence, a nervous system made by Reason, a circulatory system made by Thought, a "flesh" made by Reflection, and a "skin" made by Will.<sup>106</sup> Besides, the soul possesses Intelligence, Reason, and so forth from the luminous aeons.

Imprisoned in the body of Darkness, the soul is delivered unto sin, which exposes her to all errors and makes her forget her origin. The Intelligence-Light frees the soul from the jail of the body, chaining the five limbs of sin. A "New Man," "Son of Justice," replaces the former fallen man, and the five components of his soul are thenceforth Love (Intelligence), Faith (Reason), Perfection (Thought), Patience (Reflection), and Wisdom (Will). This state of tranquility must be accompanied by total submission to the rules of the Manichaean community, otherwise a brother may incur sin anew.<sup>107</sup>

Obviously this does not at all imply the conception of "two souls"—a good and an evil one—invented by Augustine in one of his innumerable attempts to slander his former coreligionists.<sup>108</sup> The game is played between soul and body. The soul (*anima viva*) is awakened, strengthened, and enlivened by Jesus, whose brother the "New Man" thus becomes.<sup>109</sup> Jesus himself, besides his cosmic aspect as Moon God, has another hypostasis, which is the *Jesus patibilis*, or suffering Jesus, "crucified on every piece of wood" (*omni suspensus a ligno*),<sup>110</sup> who displays the wounds of the Passion suffered by every soul that splits successfully from Darkness.<sup>111</sup> Thus the whole world is the "Cross of Light" on which Jesus is crucified.<sup>112</sup>

Besides these two aspects—cosmic and soteriological—Jesus is also the great prophet who precedes Mani as he will precede Mohammed, a historical apparition of which the Moon is the epiphany of Light. Mani was a docetist of the phantasiastic kind, thus holding that Jesus' flesh was not real.<sup>113</sup> Contrary to Marcion, he denied any reality to the Savior's Passion and death:

The enemy who hoped to have crucified the very Savior, Father of the Righteous, found himself crucified in his stead. For it was the Archon of Darkness who was tied on to the cross, he who wore the crown of thorns with his companions, he who was clad in a purple mantle. He alone drank the vinegar and the bile that the Lord was supposed to have drunk. All that the Lord seemed to undergo was (actually) undergone by the Powers of Darkness. And it was them whom the nails and the spear perforated.<sup>114</sup>

When, living the cosmic Passion of Jesus *omni suspensus a ligno*, the Old Man would change into a New Man, his soul becoming "alive" and united in brotherhood with the aeon Jesus, the adept was bound to exercise a continual process of discrimination toward both himself and the surrounding world, separating the actions of Light from the actions of Darkness. This became an ethical "golden rule" enounced by a Sogdian fragment: *the body must always be sacrificed in the interest of the soul.*<sup>115</sup> More generally, the "thought of death," the dark thought that clings to physicality, must be avoided, for it is that which produces all sin: greed, desire, vengeance, anger, wrath, furor, hatred.<sup>116</sup>

The Manichaeans were encratite. They rejected marriage, which according to them went back to Saklas's project for Adam and Eve,<sup>117</sup> and execrated sexuality and procreation. Yet these rules only extended to the elect (*electi*):

He who would enter the cult must examine his soul. If he finds that he can subdue lust and covetousness, refrain from eating meats, drinking wine, as well as from marriage, and if he can also avoid [causing] injury to water, fire, trees, and living things, then let him enter the cult. But if he is unable to do all of these things, he shall not enter the cult. If, however, he loves the cult, but is unable to subdue lust and craving, let him seize upon guarding the cult and the Elect, that there may be an offsetting of his unworthy actions, and times in which he devotes himself to work and righteousness, nighttime prayer, intercession, and pious humility (supplication). That will defend him during his transitory life and at his appointed time, so that his status will be the second status in the life to come.<sup>118</sup>

Does this mean that the *auditores* will become *electi* in their last life, before reaching the Paradise of Light, as Augustine suggests?<sup>119</sup> Is it true, as Augustine asserts, that the Manichaean doctrine of reincarnation states that everyone will return in the guise of a plant or an animal, with the exception of the Manichaean auditors and elect? This would indeed furnish an explanation for the deep Manichaean respect for life: "They believe that the herbs and the trees are alive and the life that is in them is endowed with sensibility and able to suffer when hurt. This is why no one can sever or pluck anything without inflicting suffering upon it. For this reason they believe that it is not permissible to prune cultivated ground. In their stupidity, they accuse agriculture, the most innocent of all techniques, of multiple crimes."<sup>120</sup>

Elsewhere Augustine indicates that the Manichaeans rejected the idea that a human soul could be reincarnated in a being smaller than a

fox.<sup>121</sup> Whether or not it was based on a reincarnation theory, Manichaeism was a fact: "They believe that the substance of God is mixed with food as it is mixed with the whole world. This substance, they believe, is purified by their elect through their own lifestyle, which is holier and better than that of the auditors."<sup>122</sup>

Interspersed with frequent fasts,<sup>123</sup> the diet of the elect (one of the important parts of the "Seal of the Mouth") is meant to free the Light contained in those plants that are richer in divine substance, such as melon.<sup>124</sup>

Whereas the catechumens are supposed to fast every Sunday for fifty weeks of every year, the elect also fast on Mondays.<sup>125</sup> Fast punishes the Archons dwelling in the human body, purifies the soul from Darkness, prevents the Light contained in food from being harmed, and contributes to the construction of the Cross of Light.<sup>126</sup> The great collective fast took place during the Bēma (Gk. *bēma*, "throne") celebration, when Mani's empty throne was displayed in commemoration of his death.<sup>127</sup>

While the elect were supposed to practice the Three Seals—of the bosom (perpetual celibacy), of the hand (avoiding contact with matter), and of the mouth (speech and food discipline)<sup>128</sup>—the auditors had to fast every Sunday, recite prayers to the Sun and Moon, give alms, dedicate to the church a member of their family or a slave to become elect, and contribute to the building of monasteries.<sup>129</sup> Augustine's tendentious assertion that the Manichaeans "would not give bread to a beggar" must apply to the elect, not to the auditors.<sup>130</sup> Likewise, Manichaean labor ethics do not seem to be as revolutionary as Augustine would imply, saying that it is better to be a usurer than a farmer, for "whoever lends money does not hurt the Cross of Light." In reality, as Prosper Alfarcic noticed, although better than agriculture, money lending is anyway a sort of theft absolutely contrary to the "Seal of the Hand."<sup>131</sup> The same Seal leads to antinomian attitudes such as the rejection of war, hunting, and agriculture:

Before passing over into plants and trees, the divine substance abducted by the demons lies all over the ground. It is also spread in the air and even in the depth of the earth. Even stones have the faculty of feeling and thinking. Thus a perfect Manichaean would strive to live in peace with the whole nature. He knows that everything in it leads to the triumph of the good. Therefore he will refrain from upsetting its harmony. He will not plow, for he could not do it without torturing God's limbs. He would not even take a bath, out of fear of bursting water.<sup>132</sup>

## 7. Manichaeism

Manichaeism is an original re-elaboration of the type of Gnosticism called Sethian by Hippolytus, entailing radical dualism of Light and Darkness, attenuated by the presence of the Spirit (*pneuma*) in the midst of all this. Mani equally gave credit to the gnostic stories concerning the "immovable race" of Seth the Stranger.

At the core of Mani's system we find the gnostic conception of the antimimon *pneuma* (counterfeit spirit), an expression of complete rejection of the curtailment of free will entailed by astrology. This explains the abundance of Pentads used by Mani, which derive from the five planets of astrology (minus the Sun and the Moon) submitted to a singular interpretation.

It seems more than probable, as several scholars believe, that Mani had a special reverence for Marcion. Like Marcion, he shows remarkable fondness for the parable of the two trees in Luke 6:43 (and Matt. 7:18), which opens the exposition of the Manichaeism doctrine according to the *Acts of Archelaus*:<sup>133</sup> God could not be the creator of Satan. Likewise, Manichaeism docetism, which asserts that Christ was born from the bosom of the Father (John 1:18) and not from "the blood and flesh and the other miseries of a woman" (*ex sanguine et carne ac reliquis mulierum spurcitiis*),<sup>134</sup> bears Marcion's imprint even in the choice of words. Without being named, Marcion seems to be the righteous one after Paul, of whom *Kephalaion* 1 speaks.<sup>135</sup> And without being listed among the prophets who advance the true religion until the coming of Mani himself,<sup>136</sup> Marcion is the object of particular respect.

Resuming Marcionite arguments, Manichaeism shows a strong anti-Judaic tendency. The main theme of the rather monotonous Manichaeism Bishop Faustus of Milevum, refuted by Augustine in a large treatise in thirty-three books (400 C.E.), is simply the Marcionite antithesis between the Old and New Testaments. Augustine himself<sup>137</sup> was forced to recognize in him "a penetrating intelligence and elegance of style," as well as the unstained reputation for exemplary living.<sup>138</sup>

Whereas Gnosticism covers a very wide spectrum of options and attitudes about the Old and the New Testament, Manichaeism is unambiguous: The biblical god is the Great Archon Saklas, who produces man together with his female partner, Nebrōel. He is a hypostasis of the King of Darkness and has no part in the creation of the world. Mainstream Christianity, accused of Judaism and vulgarity, is not spared either. In particular, the Manichaeism go even further than Marcion in denying Christ any sort of physicality or suffering; the true Christ is, according to

them, a cosmic and salvific entity dwelling in the Moon and at the same time present as *Jesus patibilis* everywhere in the form of scattered, suffering Light. To allege the death of this God on the cross is blasphemy.

The constant discrimination exerted by the Manichaean elect consists in the separation of actions and thoughts belonging to Light from those belonging to Darkness. This entails abstention from the darkest of all among human acts, fornication (encratism), and from the darkest of all foods, the flesh of animals (vegetarianism).

Manichaean dualism is radical and will be resolved by the final victory of Light over Darkness. Nevertheless, Darkness in itself is indestructible and irreducible: It will be imprisoned not eliminated, evicted not suppressed.

Contrary to Gnosticism, Manichaeism does not deny the principle of ecosystemic intelligence, in so far as the Demiurge of this world is the Living Spirit. The biblical god has only shaped the first human couple. The structure of the universe reveals the wisdom of the aeons of Light. The world's body is made of Darkness, but its Light soul is indissolubly mixed with it. Suffering as it may be in the embrace of Matter, Light nevertheless shows in every blade of grass. Moreover, the Sun and Moon are a constant, beneficent presence that reveals in this world the coming Paradise of Light.

This notwithstanding, the Manichaean universe cannot be said to be "good" in the Platonic sense of the word. Its disappearance, which will mark the completion of the recovery of Light, is viewed as a liberating event. Thus Manichaeism is anticosmic yet all the contrary of pessimism.

This absence of pessimism follows not only from the final eviction of Darkness but also and especially from the immediate experience of the world, which is far from traumatic despite the many interdictions and abstentions. The Manichaean does not cultivate that absence of reverence before creation that some gnostics do. That part of nature which is an epiphany of Light constitutes a mystery to the Manichaean, the object of endless astonishment.

This Manichaean awareness of the miracle of nature is magnificently described in a Pahlavi text: "The sages and the righteous are able to recognize the pure goodness of Paradise, infinite in space and time, in the mixed, limited and transient goodness of this world. And, likewise, in the itemized and limited evil of this world, the global and unlimited evil of hell."<sup>139</sup>

As far as the anthropic principle is concerned, Manichaeism is a form of Gnosticism. Human beings are endowed with body and soul

only, not with body, soul, *and* spirit. Like the gnostic human being, the Manichaeian is superior to his producers. Gnostic anthropological optimism seems to reach its most democratic and triumphant expression in Manichaeism: Every human being is endowed with a soul that will eventually partake of salvation. However, Mani admits that after the final judgment there will be damned souls, who will be compressed in the dark and poisonous Ball and imprisoned for all eternity.<sup>140</sup>

The use of Marcionite anti-Judaic arguments in Manichaeism should not mask the great differences between Mani and Marcion. For the latter, the two Realms are by definition separated; for the former, they are by definition mixed.

To the extent that Mani had recourse to biblical materials, he used gnostic inverse exegesis, sometimes, perhaps, with a certain originality. He shares with gnostics the ideas that Saklas is the Old Testament god, that he is the father of Adam and Eve, that he has intercourse with his daughter, that Jesus is the Snake and the Tree of Knowledge. Yet the history of the human race after Cain, full of disgusting surprises, is not borrowed from any extant gnostic source.

With Manichaeism, the history of ancient dualistic trends is concluded. Next we will move to the Middle Ages, first in the Byzantine Empire, then in Europe.

So far we have been able to ascertain a number of differences among Gnosticism, Marcionism, and Manichaeism. These distinctions can easily be summarized in a table that shows how each assesses ecosystemic intelligence, the anthropic principle, and the superiority of humankind to the world and its creators.

	Ecosystemic Intelligence	Anthropic Principle	Superiority of Humankind
Gnosticism	-	-	+
Marcionism	-	+	-
Manichaeism	+	-	+

## Notes

1. Augustine, *Contra Epistulam Fundamenti* XIII.182-83, pp. 423-25; XV.184, pp. 429-30; *Contra Fel.* XIX.533, p. 695 (Eng. trans. mine), from *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*, vol. 17: *Six traités anti-manichéens*, ed. and trans. R. Jolivet and M. Jourjon (Desclée de Brouwer: Paris, 1961). This edition does not contain the bulkiest anti-Manichaeian tract by

Augustine (*Contra Faustum Manichaeum libri XXXIII*, ed. J. Zycha, CSEL 25, 249–797) or *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum lib. II*, PL 32 col. 1309–78. English translations of several anti-Manichaean writings of Augustine are available in Philip Shaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7: *Saint Augustine: The Writings Against the Manichaeans and Against the Donatists* (reprint of the 1887 edition, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 1979). The best introduction to Augustine's relation to Manichaeism is still Prosper Alfaric's *L'Évolution intellectuelle de Saint Augustin* (Nourry: Paris, 1918).

2. A French translation of this text by H. Pognon is available in Franz Cumont, *Recherches sur le Manichéisme I: La Cosmogonie manichéenne d'après Théodore bar Khônî* (Lamertin: Brussels, 1908). M. A. Kugener and F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le Manichéisme II: Extrait de la CXXIII<sup>e</sup> Homélie de Sévère d'Antioche; III: L'Inscription de Salone* (Lamertin: Brussels, 1912), made a number of other anti-Manichaean writings available in translation.

Homily CXXIII of Severus, monophysite patriarch of Antioch (512–18) condemned by the 536 Synod of Constantinople, was based on another version of the Manichaean Genesis (the *Book of Giants?*), also used by Titus of Bostra in his anti-Manichaean tract written after 370, copied by Epiphanius, *Pan.* 66.14 (text in Kugener, *Recherches II*, 154–56) and by Theodoret of Cyrrhus (*Haeticarum fabularum compendium* I.26; text in Kugener, 152–53). As Kugener notices (p. 172), "Severus received a singular reward for the trouble" he had taken in refuting Mani: In 536 he was anathematized as a *Manichaean!* His Homilies were preserved by the Syrian Jacobites in two versions. Homily CXXIII was translated from Syriac into Greek and retranslated from Greek into Syriac in the VIth century. James of Edessa revised the translation in 700–701, probably using the Greek text.

3. Cumont, *Recherches I*, 7–8.
4. Kugener, *Recherches II*, 97.
5. *Traité* 1913, 114–16. Three Manichaean texts in Chinese were discovered in the "Cave of the Thousand Buddhas" close to Dûnhuang in Xînjiâng by Sir Aurel Stein. Two of the documents were later bought by Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot, whereas the third was taken to Peking and published in 1909 by Luo Zhenyn under the title *Bôsîjiao canjîng* ("Incomplete Scripture of a Persian Religion"). This text was translated in 1911–13 by Édouard Chavannes and Paul Pelliot, "Un Traité manichéen retrouvé en Chine," *Journal Asiatique*, November–December 1911, 499–617; January–February 1913, 99–199; and March–April 1913, 261–394.

The manuscript of A. Stein is deposited in the British Library. It contains hymns, translated by Waldschmidt and Lentz in 1926 (*Die Stellung Jesu im Manichäismus*) and 1933 (*Manichäische Dogmatik*) and translated again by Tsui Chi in 1943, with annotations by W. Henning.

The third text, translated into Chinese in 731 from an Iranian (probably Parthian) original, is divided between the British Library and Paris (the "Pelliot Fragment," published together with the *Traité*). The two parts were published together in Chinese in 1928. The first part was translated by Haloun and Henning in 1952.

The recent edition and German translation of these texts belongs to H. Schmidt-Glntzer, *Chinesische Manichaica* (Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1987).

6. Titus of Bostra *Adv. Man.* I.16.
7. Severus, p. 90 Kugener.
8. Ibn Abî Ya'qûb al-Nadîm is the most important Muslim doxographer and heresiologist. He devotes to Manichaeism a chapter (IX:1) of his *Fihrist* (ca. 989), ed. and trans. Gustav Flügel, *Mani, seine Lehre und seine Schriften: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Manichäismus* (Brockhaus: Leipzig, 1862). An English translation is available in Bayard Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadîm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture* (Columbia Univ. Press: New York, 1970), vol. 2, 773–806.

Another Arabic doxographer who gives important information on Manichaeism is al-Shahrastānī, *Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects*, ed. W. Cureton (London, 1846; reprint, Leipzig, 1923). The best recent translation of this work belongs to Jean-Claude Vadet: M. b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal: Les Dissidences de l'Islam* (P. Geuthner: Paris, 1984).

9. Severus, p. 103 Kugener.
10. Severus, p. 104 Kugener.
11. Titus of Bostra I.7, quoted in Prosper Alfaric, *Les Écritures manichéennes, II: Étude analytique* (Nourry: Paris, 1919), 24. The first volume of Alfaric's fundamental work (*Vue générale*) appeared in 1918.
12. *Acts of Archelaus* X.1 p. 15.10–11.24. The *Acts of Archelaus* was composed before 377 by an unknown writer called (H)Egemonius and contains a fictitious report of two encounters between Mani himself and the fierce Bishop Archelaus of the city of Carchas (or Kashkar, in Mesopotamia). Only a complete Latin translation made before 400 is extant, *Acta Archelai*, ed. Charles Henry Beeson (GCS 16) (Hinrichs: Leipzig, 1906). Epiphanius (*Pan.* 66.6–7 and 25–31) preserved Greek fragments concerning Manichaean cosmology, edited by Beeson with the Latin version, 5–22.  
Ironically enough, Archelaus was no less a heretic than Mani himself, being afflicted with a crude form of adoptionism (see Introduction above). Fortunately for the preservation of the manuscript, the learned Catholic readers of the *Acts* never seemed to notice this.
13. *Fihrist* IX.1 p. 777 Dodge.
14. Michel Tardieu, *Le Manichéisme* (PUF: Paris, 1981).
15. And not a Triad of aeons grouped by four, as believes S. N. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (Manchester Univ. Press: Manchester, 1985), 9. See Augustine, *C. Faust.* XV:5.
16. Lieu, *Manichaeism*, 9–10.
17. As believes Lieu, *Manichaeism*, 9–10.
18. *Acta Archelai* VII p. 10 Beeson.
19. *Hylē*: Severus, p. 90 Kugener; Theodoret, PG 83 col. 377b.
20. *Ta pente tou kakou tamieia* according to the late Neoplatonist Simplicius (*In Enchiridion Epicteti* 27), who wrote a *Commentary on the Manual of Epictetus* in Harran (northern Mesopotamia) after 533, probably basing his refutation of Manichaeism on local sources, as believes Michel Tardieu, "Sabiens coraniques, et 'Sabiens' de Harran," *Journal Asiatique* 274 (1986), 24, n. 105. Simplicius's refutation has been analyzed by Ilsetraut Hadot, "Die Wiederlegung des Manichäismus im Epiktetkommentar des Simplikios," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 51 (1969), 31–57.
21. Aug, *De mor. Man.* II.9.14.
22. Two different lists are given by al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* p. 777 Dodge.
23. H.-Ch. Puech, *Sur le Manichéisme et autres essais* (Flammarion: Paris, 1979), 103–51. This book continues and corrects Puech's short presentation of Manichaeism *Le Manichéisme: Son fondateur, sa doctrine* (Civilisations du Sud: Paris, 1949).
24. *Fihrist* p. 778 Dodge.
25. Coptic *Kephalaion* 27, vol. I 77.25ff. See, for a shorter but substantially identical description, *Kephalaion* 6, vol. I 39.12f, and Puech, *Sur le Manichéisme*, 105–7.

The Coptic testimonies in Subakhmimic (Assiutic) dialect were discovered in 1930 at Medinet Madi in the Faiyūm (Egypt) and acquired by the Irish collector A. Chester Beatty of Dublin and by the Berlin State Museum. So far 620 pages of Coptic Manichaean fragments have been restored. The unrestored pages of the Berlin Museum were lost in 1945. The principal collections of Coptic testimonies have been published as follows:

*Manichäische Handschriften der staatlichen Museen Berlin*, vol. I: *Kephalaia*, first half (Lieferung 1–10), ed. Hans Jacob Polotsky (p. 1–103) and Alexander Böhlig (p. 103ff) with a contribution by Hugo Ibscher (W. Kohlhammer: Stuttgart, 1935–40).



*Manichaean Manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Collection*, vol. I: *Manichäische Homilien*, ed. Hans Jacob Polotsky with a contribution by Hugo Ibscher (W. Kohlhammer: Stuttgart, 1934).

*A Manichaean Psalm-Book*, ed. C. R. C. Allberry with a contribution by Hugo Ibscher (W. Kohlhammer: Stuttgart, 1938).

A facsimile edition of the manuscripts in the Chester Beatty collection has been recently completed by Søren Giversen, *The Manichaean Coptic Papyri in the Chester Beatty Library: Facsimile Edition*, 4 vols. (Patrick Cramer: Geneva, 1986–88). See A. Guillaumont's review in *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 207 (1990), 82–85.

An excellent German translation of the most important Manichaean texts, with a good introduction, has been published by Alexander Böhlig (with the assistance of Jes Peter Asmussen) as a third volume of Foerster's anthology of gnostic texts: *Gnosis III: Der Manichäismus* (Artemis: Zurich and Munich, 1980) (with extensive bibliography, 354–62).

26. After Puech, *Sur le Manichéisme*, 108–9. The forms of the Archons fit into Augustine's classification, repeated by him in *De haeresibus* 46; cf. Puech, *Sur le Manichéisme*, 127.
27. Aug., *C. Faust.* VI.8.
28. Puech, *Sur le Manichéisme*, 138–39.
29. Severus, p. 121–23 Kugener.
30. Severus, p. 117–18.
31. Theodoret, PG 83 col. 377b.
32. Or "matter and fire" (*puri kai skotō*) in Titus of Bostra I.22.
33. Severus, p. 125–26 Kugener.
34. Simpl., *In Enchirid. Epict.* 27.
35. *Fihrist*, p. 778–79 Dodge.
36. Cumont, *Recherches I*, 172; variant in *Acta Arch.* VII p. 10 Beeson.
37. *Fihrist* p. 779 Dodge.
38. Sogdian B'myzd, "God Splendor"—*b'm* probably mistaken for *bān*, Pahlavi *nwgshr'pwryzd*, "The God who creates new aeons," Parthian *nwg[s] [hr'fwryzdyg]*, Chinese *zao xīn xiāng*, "Builder of the New Glory"; see Peter Bryder, *The Chinese Transformation of Manichaeism: A Study of Chinese Manichaean Terminology* (Plus Ultra: Löberöd, 1985), 99.
39. Epiphanius: *zōn pneuma*, *Acta Archelai: Spiritus vivens*; Pahlavi *Mihr Yazd*, Chinese *jīng fēng*, Pure Wind.
40. Aug., *C. Faust.* XV.5–6; Syr. *sēfath ziwā*.
41. *Acta Arch.* VIII p. 13 Beeson; Cumont, *Recherches I*, 69–75.
42. Augustine summarizes thus (*C. Faust.* XV.6; cf. XX.10): "*Splenditenentem magnum sex vultus et ora ferentem micantemque lumine, et alterum regem honoris angelorum exercitibus circumdatum, et alterum Adamantem heroam belligerum, dextra hasta tenentem et sinistra clipeum, et alterum gloriosum regem tres rotas impellentem ignis aquae et venti, et maximum Atlantem mundum ferentem humeris, et eum, genu flexo, brachiis utrimque secum fulcientem.*"
43. Puech, *Sur le Manichéisme*, 38.
44. *Acta Arch.* VII.4–5 p. 10–11 Beeson (Latin citation p. 11.3.15).
45. Al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* p. 781 Dodge.
46. *Acta Arch.* VIII.1 p. 11 Beeson.
47. Puech, *Sur le Manichéisme*, 43.
48. Puech, *Sur le Manichéisme*, 43, based on Alexander of Lycopolis.
49. *Contra Man.* 29.
50. Cumont, *Recherches I*, 27.
51. Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1963<sup>2</sup>), 224.
52. "*Splenditenentem ponderatorem dicis capita elementorum tenere mundumque suspendere*" (Aug., *C. Faust.* XV.5; cf. XX.9). See Cumont, *Recherches I*, 28.

53. Aug., *De haer.* 46.
54. Aug., *De nat. boni* 44.
55. Aug., *C. Faust.* XV.6.
56. Lat. *Tertius Legatus* (Evodius, *De fide* 17); Syr. *izgaddâ*; Gk. *presbytēs ho tritos*.
57. The Abjuration Formula calls him/her *ho parthenos tou phōtos*.
58. *Tēn arrhenikēn parthenon, hē tōn phxtos legomenē thygatēr*: Theodoret of Cyrrhus I.26.
59. *Masculofemina*: Filastrius, *De haer.* 61.
60. *Virtutes* in Augustine; Greek *aretai*; Syriac 'yâdê.
61. *Acta Arch.* XIII p. 21.11 Beeson.
62. *Acta Arch.* IX p. 13 Beeson, with Epiph., *Pan.* 66.32; Theodoret V.10; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* VI.34; Titus of Bostra I.17; II.56; Abjuration Formula; Ephrem Syrus; Orosius's *Commonitorium* 2 about the Spanish Priscillanists, actually based on Augustine; and esp. Augustine, *C. Faust.* XX.6 and his disciple Evodius, *De fide* 14–17. The myth is analyzed by Cumont, *Recherches I*, 54–68.
63. Alfarc, *Écritures II*, 45f.
64. Cumont, *Recherches I*, 54.
65. Alfarc, *Écritures II*, 45f.
66. *De fide* 14–16.
67. This account of creation is confirmed by a Pahlavi fragment, M7981, which deals further with the destiny of the monster. Between 1902 and 1914, researchers of the Anthropology Museum of Berlin dug up many texts in the oasis Turfan in eastern Turkistan, which were redacted in Uigur Turk, Sogdian, Parthian, Pahlavi, and even in New Persian.

The most important Uigur text has been edited and translated by Jes P. Asmussen, *Xuâstvânîft: Studies in Manichaeism* (Prostant Apud Munksgaard: Copenhagen, 1965). It contains a formula of collective confession for Manichaean auditors.

The texts in different Iranian languages are described by Mary Boyce in *A Catalogue of the Iranian Manuscripts in Manichaean Script in the German Turfan Collection* (Berlin, 1960) and published by Boyce in *A Reader in Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian* (Brill: Leiden, 1975). They are translated by Jes P. Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature: Representative Texts Chiefly from Middle Persian and Parthian Writings* (Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints: Delmar, NY, 1975).

Texts in Middle Persian have been edited and translated by Werner Sündermann, *Mitteliranische manichäische Texte kirchengeschichtlichen Inhalts* (Akademie: Berlin [East], 1981).

The Pahlavi fragment M7981 I = T III 260bI is translated in Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature*, 124–25.

68. Aug., *C. Faust.* VI.8; see *De mor. Man.* II.9.14; 18; 61.
69. Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature*, 125.
70. Aug., *De nat. boni* 46.
71. M7984 = T III 260eI and M7981 cit.; Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature*, 127.
72. This process is different in Theodore bar Kōnaī, Augustine, and Michael Syrus (Cumont, *Recherches I*, 42): the chief Archon Saklas feeds upon the male monsters and his wife Nebrōel on the female ones, after which they have intercourse and Nebrōel bears Adam and then Eve.
73. Reason for which, of course, the German-Swedish school of history of religions was firmly convinced that Manichaeism was the finest example of an "Iranian salvation mystery"! Some scholars still maintain that Manichaeism is Iranian, although it is manifestly an original form of Gnosticism, very close at the same time to those gnostic sources that Mani certainly knew and assumed as premise before he devised his own system. Even though certain texts were translated into Iranian languages, Manichaeism is no more Iranian than it is, say, Chinese; the Chinese translations are so filled with Buddhist terminology that Manichaeism could be interpreted as a transformation of

Buddhism. Vice versa, it appears now that Manichaean influence on Buddhism was not negligible, and the same applies to late Zoroastrian Pahlavi texts.

74. M7983 = T III 260dI in Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature*, 130–31.
75. *Fihrist* p. 783 Dodge.
76. See Alexander Böhlig, *Gnosis III*, 108–9.
77. Theodore bar Kōnai; Cumont, *Recherches I*, 48.
78. *Acta Arch.* XI.1 p. 18.18 Beeson.
79. *Fihrist*, 784–86, trans. Dodge.
80. *Kephalaia* I p. 12.9 Polotsky and 57, p. 144.13–47.20 Böhlig.
81. See Gedaliahu A. G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (NHS 24), 1984, 147ff.
82. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 148.
83. See Aug., *De haer.* 46, PL 42 col. 37–38.
84. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 146.
85. CMC 50.8–52.7. The Cologne Mani Codex is a tiny but thick codex of 99 pages owned by the University of Cologne, whose existence was announced in 1970 by A. Henrichs and L. Koenen, who published and translated it in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 19 (1975), 1–85, and 32 (1978), 87–200. Another edition with English translation became available in 1979: *The Cologne Mani Codex (P.Colon. inv. nr. 4780) "Concerning the Origin of His Body,"* trans. Ron Cameron and Arthur J. Dewey (Scholars Press: Missoula, MT, 1979). A recent facsimile and diplomatic edition, edited by L. Koenen and Cornelia Römer, *Der Kölner Mani-Codex: Abbildungen und diplomatischer Text* (Habelt: Bonn, 1985), allows scholars to make their own textual conjectures.
86. M3 Pahl., after L. J. R. Ort, *Mani A Religio-Historical Description of His Personality* (Brill: Leiden, 1967), 52–54 (Eng. adaptation mine).
87. *Fihrist* 781–83 Dodge, with my interpolations.
88. M178r.66–129, after Böhlig, *Gnosis III*, 327, n. 140.
89. See Dodge, *Fihrist* 782 n. 184.
90. *Kephalaia* I p. 144.13–47.20 Böhlig.
91. Shahrastānī I.192.
92. Alexander of Lycopolis, *C. Man. opin.* 6.15–16 and Pahl. fragment in Boyce, *Reader*, 80–81, trans. in Böhlig, *Gnosis III*, 239.
93. M7981 I = T III 260bI, in Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature*, 125.
94. *Psalm* 233 p. 9.2–11.32 Allberry (Eng. adaptation mine).
95. *De haer.* 38.
96. On the restoration that will follow Frashgird, see Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature*, 125–27.
97. Puech, *Sur le Manichéisme*, 43–44. This operation is performed against the background of the known cosmology, with its eight earths, ten heavens, two cosmic Ships and the Wheel of the Zodiac; cf. M7984 II = T III 260eII Pahl., in Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature*, 122–24.
98. *Kephalaion* 69, p. 167 Böhlig.
99. *Kephalaion* 69.
100. *Kephalaion* 69 p. 166.31–169.22 Böhlig.
101. P. 118.13–120.20 Böhlig.
102. P. 166.31–169.22 Böhlig. See also Victor Stegemann, "Zu Kapitel 69 der Kephalaia des Mani" (1939), now in Geo Widengren, ed., *Der Manichäismus* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1977), 214–24.
103. See my article "Astrology," in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Macmillan: New York, 1987).
104. Trans in Chavannes and Pelliot, *Journal Asiatique* 1913, 139.
105. Chavannes and Pelliot, *Journal Asiatique* 1913, 114–16.
106. *Kephalaion* 38, p. 94–95 Polotsky. Compare this text with the melothesia in AJ.

107. *Kephalaion* 38, p. 89.18–102.12 Polotsky.
108. Alfarić, *L'Évolution intellectuelle*, 117; Puech, *Sur le Manichéisme*, 53.
109. Puech, *Sur le Manichéisme* 53–56.
110. Aug., *C. Faust.* XX.4.
111. Aug., *C. Faust.* XXXII.7.
112. Aug., *Enarr. in Ps.* CXL:12.
113. Aug., *De haer.* 46, PL 42 col. 37–38.
114. Aug., *De fide contra Man.* 27; Alfarić, *Écritures II*, 64 (my translation).
115. M 1391, after Böhlig, *Gnosis III*, 197–98.
116. M 131 IA, Böhlig, *Gnosis III*, 197.
117. Aug., *De haer.* 46, PL 42 col. 37.
118. *Fihrist*, 788, trans. Dodge.
119. Aug., *De haer.* 46.
120. Aug., *De haer.* 46.
121. Aug., *C. Adimant.* XII.2.
122. Aug., *De haer.* 46, PL 42 col. 35.
123. See Asmussen, *Xuâstvânîft*, 224–27.
124. Aug., *De mor. Man.* 39; Alfarić, *L'Évolution intellectuelle*, 126–31.
125. *Kephalaion* 109, p. 262.10–264.19 Böhlig.
126. *Kephalaion* 79, p. 191.9–192.3 Böhlig.
127. See Asmussen, *Xuâstvânîft*, 198ff.
128. See François Decret, *Mani et la tradition manichéenne* (Seuil: Paris, 1974), 109–10.
129. *Kephalaion* 80, p. 192.3–193.22 Böhlig.
130. Aug., *Enarr. in Ps.* CCL 12.
131. Alfarić, *L'Évolution intellectuelle*, 138.
132. Alfarić, *L'Évolution intellectuelle*, 136.
133. VI.4 p. 7 Beeson.
134. *Acta Arch.* VII.5.
135. P. 13.21–14.1 Polotsky; see Ort, *Mani*, 121.
136. Böhlig, *Gnosis III*, 80–81.
137. *C. Faust.* I.1.
138. Alfarić, *L'Évolution intellectuelle*, 83.
139. M 91, after Ort, *Mani*, 141 (Eng. adaptation mine).
140. Aug., *De haer.* 38; cf. *Fihrist* p. 796 Dodge.

# Chapter 7

## Paulicianism or Popular Marcionism

The real joy of God is to be defeated by man.

—ELIE WIESEL

### 1. Sources

Only one source for the Paulician doctrine exists: the *Useful History, Refutation and Overthrowing of the Void and Idle Heresy of the Manichaeans a.k.a. Paulicians*, redacted in 870–71 by an otherwise unknown Byzantine writer, Peter of Sicily,<sup>1</sup> and followed by three *Sermons* by the same author, whose purpose is to refute the three principal theses of the Paulicians: dualism, docetism, and the denial of transubstantiation. The *Sermons* add nothing significant to the data already furnished by the *History*.

Peter of Sicily wrote an epitome of his *History* in 871–72, most manuscripts of which feature Peter the Higoumenos as author.<sup>2</sup> Obviously the solution to this riddle, as shown by Paul Lemerle, is very simple: Peter of Sicily was a monk *and* higoumenos.<sup>3</sup> About 871–72,<sup>4</sup> Patriarch Photius of Constantinople wrote down a *Summary Exposure of the Recent Reappearance of the Manichaeans*,<sup>5</sup> based exclusively on Peter the Higoumenos of Sicily's *Epitome* and *History*. Other information is contained in the four Formulas of Recantation used by the Byzantine church to convert Paulicians, more frequently yet erroneously called Manichaeans for being dualists.<sup>6</sup>

### 2. Paulician Doctrine

"There is only one thing that separates us from the Romans," confessed the Paulicians to Peter of Sicily: "We say that there is a god who is a heavenly father and has no power in this world, but in the world to

come, and there is another god, the world creator, who has power over the present world; whereas the Romans recognize the existence of one sole god, who is both heavenly father and creator of the whole universe." The Paulicians called themselves Christians; they called the common Christians Romans.<sup>7</sup>

After having defined Paulician dualism in the same terms, Peter's *History* specifies five more basic points of Paulician doctrine: They do not recognize the virginity of Mary, who, after having given birth to Jesus (whose body, though, was celestial), "still gave other sons to Joseph"; they do not recognize the mystery of transubstantiation; they reject the symbol of the cross; they reject the Old Testament entirely, accusing the Prophets of being "liars and thieves" (*plani kai lēstai*), and possess a New Testament canon (whose structure will be analyzed shortly); and, finally, they reject the priests of the Church.<sup>8</sup> The *Epitome* adds nothing significant to these accusations, whereas the first Recantation Formula<sup>9</sup> mentions a familiar belief, according to which the Lord "used the womb of the Mother of God as a purse [*balantion*]," meaning that he had gone through Mary as if through a pipe, without touching her or being touched by her body. Concerning Christ's virginal birth, Photius comments: "Having brought his body with him from on high too, he went through her (i.e., the Virgin) as if through a pipe (*hōs dia sōlēnos*), and [they say] that this pure and immaculate Virgin after the birth of the Savior gave birth to other sons from Joseph."<sup>10</sup>

Concise and apparently correct, the second Formula anathematizes:

1. Whoever says and believes that there are two principles, good and evil, one the author of Light the other of Night, one author of humans the other of angels and other living beings . . .
2. Those who enounce this absurdity, that is, that the perverse Devil is the author and Archon of Matter and of all the visible world and of our bodies . . .
3. Those who denigrate the Mosaic Law and say that the Prophets do not derive from the good [principle] . . .
4. Those who reject legitimate marriage and have this scandalous thing to say about it, that the multiplication and propagation of our species comes from the Demon . . .
5. Those who proffer this blasphemy, that is, that the one [member] of the Holy Trinity, namely, the Son and Word consubstantial with God the Father, became man [only] apparently and illusorily (*kata phantasian kai dokēsin*), and not man in reality although sinless . . .

6. Those who present the cross and the death of Christ and his resurrection as an appearance . . .

7. Those who do not actually believe that what Christ gave to the Apostles while saying "Take and eat" is not his body and blood actually, but instead proffer this enormity, namely, that it is the Gospel and the Apostle.<sup>11</sup>

Interesting likewise is the fourth Formula,<sup>12</sup> although it is late and may refer to Bogomils instead.<sup>13</sup> They call Satan the creator God, "confess that our Lord suffered, yet profess that he is not actually born from the holy, ever-virgin, and immaculate Mother of God, but only in appearance, *dokēsei*."<sup>14</sup>

Following an episode of Peter's *History*, all other sources speak of the *reservatio mentalis* of the heretics, capable of confessing overtly the orthodox faith yet privately giving a symbolic meaning to the words of the credo; and about their concealment and public simulation of the faith and cult of the orthodox. The *Epitome* also attributes to them promiscuous fellowships;<sup>15</sup> in the Recantation Formulas<sup>16</sup> this readily became the stereotypical unlit New Year's Eve orgy, hardly plausible.

The structure of the Paulician New Testament canon is described by Peter of Sicily in chapters 42–44 of his *History*:

They accept only the fourfold of the Holy Gospels and the fourteen Epistles of the Apostle Paul and the catholic of James and the three of John and the catholic of Saint Jude and the Acts of the Apostles, the text being the same as ours, word for word. They also have epistles, accursed by God, of their teacher Sergius, filled with pride and impiety. Thus they do not accept the two catholic [epistles] of Peter, the prince of the apostles, whom they hold in dislike and cover with innumerable insults and offenses, with what thoughts in mind I do not know.<sup>17</sup>

A scholia to chapter 42 of the *History* adds that later Paulicians "recognize only the four Gospels, Luke's by preference, and the fifteen epistles of Saint Paul, for they also have an Epistle to the Laodiceans."<sup>18</sup>

These are all the data concerning the doctrine of the Paulicians. The dualism they profess is the Marcionite opposition of the two gods (*de futuro* versus *de praesenti*), stripped of all complication and contradiction: the Demiurge and Archon of this world, who is publicly known and reigns over the present age, and the hidden God of the coming age. Between the two ages, present and coming, is the end of the world. The Demiurge is the god of the Old Testament, a text rejected by the Paulicians in its entirety. All this looks like popular Marcionism, cultivated under difficult circumstances and with meager means, using an

orthodox New Testament canon deprived of the letters of Peter, the same one whom Marcion held for a false apostle.<sup>19</sup>

Paulician dualism is a regression of Marcionite dualism to its primary components: the two gods. All the distinctive attitudes of the Paulicians—their anti-Judaic tendency, docetism, rejection of the sacraments and the cross—derive from this simple premise, which endows them with an infallible *principle for biblical exegesis*.

### 3. Armenian Hypothesis

The name of the Paulicians obviously refers to someone—the founder of the sect or an important leader—called Paul. Yet the regular Greek derivative in such a case would be *paulianoï* not *paulikianoi*. And indeed the followers of the IIIrd-century adoptionist Paul of Samosata, once bishop of Antioch, are called *paulianoï*.

*Paulikianoi* seems to be a construct with the Armenian deprecativ suffix *ik*; as Runciman has it,<sup>20</sup> they must therefore be the adepts of a contemptible Paul or the contemptible adepts of Paul. Which Paul? This is only one of the (wrong) questions that for a while maintained the illusion that the particularly transparent sect of the Paulicians may hold some mystery *in petto*.

Paulicianism used to be extremely important in the history of Western dualistic trends, for according to the common diffusionistic hypothesis, it was the only link in the chain that could have explained how Gnosticism was later resumed by Ismailism, Bogomilism, and Catharism. This was the classical thesis of Ignaz von Döllinger, further resumed and developed by Steven Runciman, Raoul Manselli, Milan Loos, Henri-Charles Puech, Heinz Halm, and others yet fiercely opposed by certain scholars of Armenian literature such as F. C. Conybeare (1898) and more recently Nina G. Garsoian.<sup>21</sup> The reason for this Armenian intermezzo was the discovery during the first half of the XIXth century of the Scripture of an Armenian sect that seemed to go back to an ancient group sometimes identified with the Messalians, whose name appeared to be close to that of *paulikianoi*. All of this, as Paul Lemerle has emphasized,<sup>22</sup> rests on an unfortunate misunderstanding. The data of the problem are briefly outlined below only in the hope that this may contribute toward eliminating further confusion.

Armenian documents completely ignore the Paulicians yet mention a heresy phonetically close to their name: the *payl-i-keank*. This expression does not seem to refer to any Paul:<sup>23</sup> *payl* means "filth," and the



*payl-i-keank* mentioned for the first time in 555<sup>24</sup> are simply "the filthy ones" or "those who are filthy in their lives."<sup>25</sup> These sectarians were more seriously refuted at the Dvin Council of 719 by the katholikos John of Ojun,<sup>26</sup> after which their name vanishes. Yet N. G. Garsoian believes that the *payl-i-keank* must be the same as the *mclnēut'iun* (from *mclnē*, "filth") condemned in 447 by the Great Synod of Shahapivan.<sup>27</sup> These *mclnēut'iun* had always been taken for Messalians (Syr. *metsalleyānē*; the Armenian *c* is likewise pronounced *ts*), the "dirtiest" heretics known by ancient sources, which went so far as to say that they spent all their time in depravity, revels, and exchange of partners.<sup>28</sup> Since Armenian adaptations might very well have been based on puns expressing the ironical intention of the honorable Fathers, the *mclēut'iun* might very well have been Messalians. Anyway, they could not have been Paulicians even if they were indeed, as N. G. Garsoian believes, *payl-i-keank*.

The latter have nothing to do with the Messalians, nor with the Paulicians for that matter, although they *are* the adepts of a contemptible Paul—the adoptionist Paul of Samosata. Under a different name, this heresy continued to exist well after John of Ojun's refutation. At the beginning of the XIth century, Gregory Magistros, governor of the Vaspuragan and Taron, persecuted the followers of a sect established between 836 and 855 in the region of T'ondrak, north of Lake Van and known as T'ondrakeci. In the mid-XIth century the T'ondrakeci fled to Syria and are not mentioned by Armenian sources after 1166. It is interesting for the history of all persecuted groups, including our Western dualists, to find out that T'ondrakeci still existed between 1833 and 1847 at Ark'weli and were amenable to furnishing scholarship with an important document: a 1782 manuscript copy of an ancient writing called *Key of Truth*. The analysis of this text proves beyond a doubt that the T'ondrakeci were adoptionists and equally disproves beyond a doubt that they might have been Paulicians. They believed that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God, that his conception had not been immaculate, his birth had not been virginal, and God had adopted him as Son at the age of thirty during his baptism in the Jordan. Consequently the orthodox infant baptism was to be abolished and only adults were to be baptized.<sup>29</sup> This doctrine is a simplified version of the sophisticated form of adoptionism that Paul of Samosata might have preached in the IIIrd century and was identical with the beliefs of the *payl-i-keank* in the VIIIth century.

The conclusion is clear: The *payl-i-keank*, adepts of the contemptible Paul of Samosata, have nothing to do with the Byzantine *paulikianoi*, "contemptible adepts of Paul." This latter Paul is simply Paul the apostle, worshiped by Marcion and by the Paulicians themselves (see chapter

1 above). Any further speculation concerning the evolution of the Paulicians based on the false premise that at some point they might have been identical with the *payl-i-keank* must be likewise dismissed as idle.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, both the adoptionists and the dualistic Paulicians held a few things in common, such as the denial of the virginal birth of Jesus Christ and the rejection of the cross and sacraments. We may assume that, despite strong analogies between a number of antinomian tenets of the two sects, they had come to these beliefs walking on completely separate ways.

An adoptionist of the simple kind (which, needless to say, the Antiochene theologians, and certainly Paul of Samosata, never were) would certainly dismiss the fable of the virgin birth for being completely useless to the picture: Until the age of thirty, Jesus was just a human being, born from a woman like any other.

It is also quite clear why docetists would hold the symbol of the cross in contempt, for it entails the belief that Christ died on the cross, which they reject. It is far less clear why an adoptionist would do the same, but it is anyway excluded that a docetist would borrow it from an adoptionist, as N. G. Garsoian suggests.

Sacraments may be equally scorned by both docetists and adoptionists for different reasons. Docetists would doubt their efficacy, which is based on what they take to be the wrong scenario of Christ's death held by vulgar Christians (the "Romans"). Adoptionists may reject all sacraments as a consequence of their quite logical rejection of infant baptism, especially if constant persecution drives them into the usual antinomian mood.

Both adoptionism and dualism are *systems*. Possible communications between them cannot explain the historical occurrences of dualism as deriving from adoptionism or vice versa. Dualism continues to cross history only because it continues to exist *as a system* in the minds of people who cultivate its principle and transform and multiply its outcomes.

#### 4. Paulician Dualism

More cautious than his predecessors, who took the Paulicians for actual Marcionites, Adolf von Harnack considered them as *halbschlächlige Marcioniten*—only halfway so.<sup>31</sup> Dmitri Obolensky notices that there is no mention of encratism and vegetarianism among the Paulicians.<sup>32</sup> However, one of the Recantation Formulas ascribes to them the (improbable)

rejection of marriage.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, the strong Paulician rejection of the Church sacraments has no parallel among the Marcionites. The latter practiced baptism, the eucharist (with water instead of wine), and unction, and their liturgy was similar to that of the ancient Church.<sup>34</sup>

However, the fact that all these elements of Paulicianism did not exist in Marcionism, which is supposed to be the "origin" of Paulicianism, does *not mean that the Paulicians had to "borrow" them from somewhere.*

The present-day theory of historical transmission is wrong in so far as it hypothesizes that anything must have a historical precedent from which it derives. On the contrary, cognitive transmission simply means that *principles* are communicated, even in the elusive or allusive modes,<sup>35</sup> from human mind to human mind, where they continue to work according to the specific patterns of the human mind. It is *historically plausible to believe that the contact of the Paulicians with Marcionism was reduced to the few oral lessons in Marcionite Bible exegesis (on an orthodox yet reduced canon) received by Constantine of Mananali from some Syriac monk still deeply convinced of the inanity of the Old Testament and of the opposition of the two gods. Thus Mananali possessed some of the Marcionite outcomes of this hypothesis, but his mind had to devise, according to the logical paths accessible to all of us and still unchanged for perhaps sixty thousand years, other solutions for those questions his teacher did not have time to answer.*

The Paulicians did not have the heroic, superhuman option of the Marcionites, who had practically helped their persecutors exterminate them. They lived under the vigilant eye of a powerful Church. Their only choice was to activate the antinomian option and fight the Church in such a way that they would not become victims.

Their docetism, entailing the passage of Christ through Mary *sicut per fistulam* and the actual suffering of his ghostly body although not his death on the cross, derives directly from Marcionism.

Their rejection of the eucharist is obviously a consequence of the same denial of Christ's physical body. A phantasiast who does not ascribe to Christ's body any physical reality would naturally deny the presence of this body in a piece of bread. Complete rejection may however be avoided by some further interpretation of the eucharist in symbolic terms (as commemoration of Christ's last supper with the apostles, of Christ's presence in the Christian community, or something else). Yet the Paulicians take the stand of repudiating the eucharist, interpreting symbolically the words *hoc est corpus meum* as referring to the Word of Christ that inspires his disciples.<sup>36</sup>

Confronted with the cross, phantasiasts do not have many choices: They either spurn it because of the impossibility of Christ's death or accept it under pretext that it has a symbolic, commemorative function. The Paulicians assert "that this piece of wood and cursed instrument" must not be worshiped, for the true cross is Christ himself.<sup>37</sup> They were nevertheless able to pay reverence to the cross with *reservatio mentalis*,<sup>38</sup> but they did not attach any positive function to it, for they did not conceive of Christ's death as having a salvific function.

It is not clear why the Paulicians repudiated baptism, which they interpreted symbolically.<sup>39</sup> P. Lemerle believes that they shunned baptism with water because Christ, as the Gospels say (Matt. 3:11 = Luke 3:16; John 1:26, 33), baptizes "with the Holy Spirit and with fire."<sup>40</sup>

Denying so many facets of orthodox dogma, it should come as no surprise that Paulicians detested priests and did not recognize orthodox saints.<sup>41</sup> After all, it wasn't for nothing that they held the "Romans" to be on the wrong path.

All of this indicates that the Paulicians were late, popular Marcionites, who from very simple dualistic principles were able to draw their own antinomian conclusions concerning the authority of the orthodox Church.

## Notes

1. Most sources for the history of Paulicianism are now collected, edited, and translated in *Les Sources grecques pour l'histoire des pauliciens d'Asie Mineure: Texte critique et traduction*, by Ch. Astruc, W. Conus-Wolska, J. Gouillard, P. Lemerle, D. Papachrysantou, J. Paramelle, in *Travaux et Mémoires 4* (Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation Byzantines) (De Boccard: Paris, 1970), 1-227.

The three *Sermons* (the last one incomplete) of Peter of Sicily follow after the *Historia* in the edition of Migne, PG 104: Photii, *Opera Omnia*, followed by the works of Petri Agrorum Episcopi, Bartholomaei Edesseni Opuscula. Edited by J.-P. Migne. Tomus 4 (*Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca*, edited by J.-P. Migne, Tomus 54), col. 1305/6-1349/50.

The basic scholarly study on Paulicianism is Paul Lemerle's *L'Histoire des pauliciens d'Asie Mineure d'après les sources grecques*, in *Travaux et Mémoires 5* (1973), 1-144, with an annotated bibliography containing twenty-eight titles (2-15).

Notices on the Paulicians are also included in the classic works of Ignaz von Döllinger (*Beiträge I*, 1-33), Dmitri Obolensky (*The Bogomils*, 46-48), Steven Runciman (*Medieval Manichee*), Raoul Manselli (*L'Eresia*, 65ff), and Milan Loos (*Dualist Heresy*, 32-40). They reflect a state of knowledge that has been radically surpassed and modified by Paul Lemerle and the work of the French team.

2. *Sources grecques*, 8-97.

3. Lemerle, *Histoire*, 31.

4. Lemerle, *Histoire*, 47.

5. *Sources*, 99-183.

6. *Sources*, 185–207.
7. *Précis* 9, p. 85; *Historia*, 36–37, p. 19–20.
8. *Historia* 39–45, p. 20–22.
9. Form. abj. I.4, p. 191.
10. Photius 20 p. 126–27.
11. Form. abj. II.1–7, p. 194–97.
12. *Sources*, 202–7.
13. *Sources*, 189–90.
14. Form. abj. IV.2, p. 203.
15. *Epitome* 24 p. 92.
16. Form. abj. III.9, p. 201; IV.7, p. 205.
17. *Sources*, 20–23.
18. Lemerle, *Histoire*, 132. This is not the same as the Marcionite Epistle to the Laodiceans (which corresponds to Ephesians in the orthodox canon) but a forgery published by A. von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium von Fremden Gott* (reprint, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1985), 137\*ff.
19. Harnack, *Marcion*, 45.
20. Runciman, *Medieval Manichee*, 48.
21. The Armenian thesis is condensed in the work, full of logical contradictions yet endowed with a good bibliography (241–55), of Nina G. Garsoian, *The Paulician Heresy: A Study of the Origin and Development of Paulicianism in Armenia and the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire* (Mouton: The Hague and Paris, 1967).
22. Lemerle, *Histoire*, 12–14.
23. Unless it contains a pun, which may be the case; yet N. G. Garsoian fails to detect it. Her demonstration is even more flawed by this omission.
24. Garsoian, *Paulician Heresy*, 89; text in her second appendix, 236–38.
25. Garsoian, *Paulician Heresy*, 210.
26. Garsoian, *Paulician Heresy*, 94.
27. Garsoian, *Paulician Heresy*, 207–8.
28. Maximus, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* 6, col. CCXXX Kmosko.
29. Garsoian, *Paulician Heresy*, 151–57.
30. See, e.g., Garsoian, *Paulician Heresy*, 184.
31. Harnack, *Marcion*, 383\*.
32. Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, 47.
33. Form. abj. II.4.
34. Harnack, *Marcion*, 144–45.
35. “Translepsis,” to use Harold Bloom’s word, is the usual mode of communication between human beings, which is only seldom based on direct and unequivocal statements, and even when it is may still not illuminate the hidden motivations of such statements.
36. Lemerle, *Histoire*, 130.
37. *Précis* 13; Lemerle, *Histoire*, 129.
38. Peter of Sicily, *Historia* 116; Photius 22; 76.
39. Lemerle, *Histoire*, 130.
40. Lemerle, *Histoire*, 129, n. 43.
41. Lemerle, *Histoire*, 130.

# Chapter 8

## Bogomilism: A Pseudodualism

If we believe that Satan is the ruler of the world . . . then  
. . . there can be no such thing as free choice.

—MARTIN LUTHER, *De servo arbitrio*

### 1. Sources

Only one direct source on Bogomilism exists, the *Questions of John* (*Interrogatio Iohannis*), an apocryphal text brought from Bulgaria about 1190, during the period when Nazarius of Concorezzo was Cathar bishop in Lombardy, and translated into Latin. Three manuscripts and one printed text are extant, belonging to two redactions: one called the Vienna redaction or V (Vienna, ms. BN Lat. 1137 fol. 158 v–160), the other called the Carcassonne redaction from a lost original belonging to the Inquisition of Carcassonne (earliest manuscript: D, in Dôle).<sup>1</sup>

The first indirect sources refer to Bulgarian Bogomilism: the second letter of Theophylactus, patriarch of Constantinople, to Peter, tsar of Bulgaria (940–50), and the *Treatise Against the Bogomils* by Cosmas the Priest, written shortly after 972.<sup>2</sup>

Byzantine sources are comparatively richer in information concerning Bogomil mythology, the most ancient of them being the letter of the monk Euthymius of the Monastery of Our Most Venerable Lady ([*Theotokou*] *tēs Peribleptou*) of Constantinople. Euthymius came from Asia Minor, from the Theme of Opsikion (*tou opsikiou*), diocese of Acmonia in Phrygia, where the Bogomils were known under the name of *phoundagiagites* or *phoundaites*, from the Latin word *funda*, “bag,” adopted into Greek and referring to the object in which these “bag-rags” gathered alms. In Bulgarian they were known as *torbeshi* from *torba*, likewise meaning “bag.”<sup>3</sup> Euthymius of Our Lady wrote around 1050,<sup>4</sup> dur-

ing the same period in which Michael Psellus composed his *Dialogus de daemonum operatione* containing perhaps questionable information on some "Euchites" (Messalians), who appeared similar to the Bogomils.

One century later the entrapment of Basil, the impenitent leader of the Constantinople Bogomils, is told with all its picturesque details in Anna Comnena's *Alexiad* (1148). Emperor Alexius used deceit to obtain from Basil a full account of Bogomil beliefs. Written down by a hidden secretary, the Church historian Euthymius Zigabenus, the confession became part of his *Panoplia dogmatica*, a variant of which was edited by Gerhard Ficker (1908) under the title *De haeresi Bogomilorum narratio* (hereinafter *Narratio*) and published together with Euthymus of Our Lady's *Epistula invectiva*.<sup>5</sup> For the study of myth, the other extant sources are less important.<sup>6</sup> Bogomil mythology interfered with popular dualistic legends all over Eastern Europe,<sup>7</sup> yet although those popular materials have undergone a visible Bogomil influence at a certain stage, they may be much earlier than Bogomilism itself.

## 2. Prologue in Heaven

Two sources agree on the existence of seven heavens,<sup>8</sup> eight if one counts the visible sky produced by Satan.<sup>9</sup> Euthymius Zigabenus mentions only one heaven and one earth created by God and one heaven and earth created by Satanael (Samael) in imitation of God, which suggests radical dualism.<sup>10</sup>

Sathanas, identified with the dishonest steward from Christ's parable (Luke 16:1-8),<sup>11</sup> is the administrator of the whole universe and can freely come and go from the throne of the invisible Father down into Hell.<sup>12</sup> The universe, according to the *Interrogatio*, consists of seven heavens and, underneath, of the zones of Air, Upper Waters, Lower Waters, Earth (resting on two Fishes), Clouds "that restrain the Ocean" (*tenentes pelagum maris*),<sup>13</sup> and a last zone occupied by Hell, *geenna ignis*. The total is of seven upper stories (heavens) and seven lower.

Pride is the cause of Satan's fall. He apes the creative power of the Father and wants to reign over a kingdom like his. Therefore he looks for a space in which to build it and visits the seven lower layers, moving first through the Gate of Air and then through the Gate of Water, which are opened to him by the angels who oversee the elements Air and Water.<sup>14</sup> Underneath the Upper Waters, the world is somewhat organized yet lacks angels, which means that the Father's control does not reach that far down. This is why Sathanas, going back to the upper

angels in heaven, proclaims himself chief of the lower preexistent yet unclaimed kingdom and tries to persuade the angels to follow him. His arguments are directly drawn from Luke (16:1ff): as dishonest steward, he misuses his power and reduces the angels' debts toward God, thus gaining an angelic retinue "seducing the angels of the invisible Father" up to the fifth heaven.<sup>15</sup> At this point God, annoyed, orders his faithful angels to strip the rebels of all tokens of their celestial ranks and dignities (garments, thrones, crowns). Sathanas is severely punished, for the light of his divine glory (*lumen glorie sue*) is taken away from him, "and his face became like glowing iron, and his traits became completely similar to man's, and he had seven tails<sup>16</sup> with which he dragged [down with him] a third of God's angels."<sup>17</sup> Chased away from his post of command and from his celestial residences, Sathanas settles with his mutinous angels in the firmament and asks God to have mercy on him. "And the Father showed mercy and gave them respite for seven days to do whatever they wished."<sup>18</sup>

Obviously the episode is meant not only to show that the ex-dishonest steward is no better now and will keep exploiting God's weakness (which is God's goodness) but also to emphasize the parallelism between the creation of the world in seven days (Gen. 2:2) and the mock creation of Sathanas, also in seven days. For Sathanas uses this truce to build the world he had dreamed of, a world of which he is the architect, not creator. The angels of Air and Waters take two thirds of the water covering the earth up to heaven, and what remains of the water forms the seas. And although Sathanas is in command, the partition of the waters takes place at the direct order of the Father (*sed precepto patris*),<sup>19</sup> who thereby gets his say in the creation of the lower world. Is it not then by misunderstanding that the heresiologists attribute to the Devil the *creation* of the lower world? The *Interrogatio* is formally correct: The Devil *believes* himself to be creating, yet God intervenes. Understood in these terms, Bogomil antic cosmism is quite relative.

Standing on the two Fishes (the sign of Pisces?), the angel of Waters raised the earth, "and dry land appeared."<sup>20</sup> Then, taking the crown of the angel of the Air, Sathanas fabricates his throne from half of it and the light of the Sun from the other half. The crown of the angel of Waters serves him likewise in making the light of the Moon and that of day (or stars), whereas he makes the crown jewels of both crowns into the "militia of the stars" (*omnes militias stellarum*).<sup>21</sup> From these he further fashions the angels who oversee meteorological phenomena: wind, thunder, rain, hail, and snow.<sup>22</sup> "And he ordered the earth to produce all living beings, animals, trees and herbs, and he ordered the sea to produce fishes and



[*probably*: <he ordered> the air <to produce>] the birds of the sky."<sup>23</sup> The anonymous gloss adds: "Birds and fish do not have soul, neither do animals have human souls, but birds and fish receive what they have from water and air, animals from earth and air."<sup>24</sup>

The other sources are less precise: Cosmas ascribes to the Devil's *creation* "the sky, the sun, the stars, the earth, man";<sup>25</sup> Euthymius of Our Lady makes the Devil into the *creator* of the visible world except for the Sun and the human soul;<sup>26</sup> Psellus assigns to the Father government of the zone above the universe (*ta hyperkosmia*), to the younger Son (= Christ) the heavenly zone (*ta ourania*), and to the older Son (= Satanael) the world (*ta enkosmia*).<sup>27</sup> Euthymius Zigabenus identifies the Devil with the Old Testament god, who makes for himself a second heaven and a second earth, separated from the Kingdom of God; yet all sources seem to imply this identification.<sup>28</sup>

The tripartition of the universe in Psellus corresponds to a myth mentioned in other sources: The Father has two Sons, Satanael the firstborn (*prōtotokos*), who governs over the earth, and Jesus the youngest (*neōteros*), who governs over heaven.<sup>29</sup> Euthymius Zigabenus specifies that the firstborn Samael-Satanael is superior to the younger Jesus-Logos,<sup>30</sup> elsewhere identified with the archangel Michael.<sup>31</sup> Cosmas contradicts these data by asserting that Jesus is the firstborn and the Devil is the younger.<sup>32</sup> Psellus separates the Euchites into three groups: one that worships both Sons of God, one that worships Jesus, and one that worships Satanael, "creator (*dēmiourgos*) of the plants, the animals, and of all composite bodies," while ascribing to Jesus the heavenly brother unfavorable meteorological phenomena produced out of jealousy of the good order of Satanael.<sup>33</sup>

Finally the Bogomil Trinity becomes the object of Zigabenus's narrative, and he detects in it Sabellian influences: The Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct hypostases *only* during the thirty-three years of Jesus' life (5500 to 5533 from the creation of the world), after which they conflate again. The image of this Trinity was that of a human-faced Father with the Son to his right and the Spirit to his left represented as beams emanated through his eyes.<sup>34</sup>

### 3. Anthropogony

In several variants anthropogony is certainly the core of Bogomil mythology. According to the *Interrogatio*, Sathanas fabricates man in his own image from mud and orders the angel of the third or second heaven to

enter the new body; he does the same with woman, using the angel of the first (or second) heaven instead.<sup>35</sup> The two angels, regardless of their previous fall, are quite confused and shed bitter tears over having been imprisoned in frames that are not only mortal but even sexually differentiated (*in divisis formis; dissimiles forma*). They, who were not acquainted with such awkward distinctions, attempt in vain to have sexual intercourse at Sathanas's order, for they obviously "did not know how to do [such] sin," *nesciebant facere peccatum*.<sup>36</sup>

Then Sathanas resorts to an interesting trick, for it adds to our already large repertory of interpretations of Genesis: He makes Paradise, he places the human couple there, and he plants in the middle a straw (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil) in which he hides the fluid Snake, which is nothing but Sathanas's own spit.<sup>37</sup> The Bogomils were not content with whatever gnostic solutions they may have been acquainted with from heresiological literature. They devised a new scenario in which the Tree of Knowledge *and* the Snake are nothing but the Demiurge himself! Showing an excess of subtlety, the Devil's trick consists of driving the humans to violate the interdiction against eating from the Tree of Knowledge which he had formulated himself. He makes the rule and at the same time pushes the incarnated angels to break it.

Entering the Snake, the Evil One seduces Eve and impregnates her with his tail: "This is why humans are not called sons of God, but sons of the Devil and the Snake, accomplishing the diabolical plans of their father to the end of the centuries."<sup>38</sup> Becoming slaves to diabolical concupiscence, Adam and Eve give birth to a satanic race that propagates according to the ancient doctrine of Traducianism: New souls derive from the psychic copulation of the parents. In our case, the fallen spirits multiply in heaven and enter the clayish bodies of women, *corpora feminea lutosa*.<sup>39</sup>

Euthymius of Our Lady knows a different version of the myth:<sup>40</sup> the Archon of this world fashions Adam's body and wants to set in it the soul stolen from God (together with the Sun). As soon as the soul enters through the mouth, it comes out through the anus, and the reversed operation leads to a reverse, yet no less disappointing, result. For three hundred years Adam's body remains soulless, until the Ruler has the brilliant idea of eating unclean animals, such as the serpent, the scorpion, the dog, the cat, and the frog, and spitting this awful mixture over the soul. Then, plugging up Adam's anus, he blows the soul into his mouth. Due to its disgusting wrapping, the soul stays in the body.

One is rather puzzled by this crude myth, until one recognizes in it a garbled version of the ancient doctrine of the antimimon pneuma. We

have here a popular and negative version of the clean, intellectual, Neoplatonic *ochēma*, or vehicle of the soul, and ultimately of the Aristotelian *prōton organon*, the astral body that wraps the soul before it can be introduced into the body.<sup>41</sup>

Zigabenus's version is simpler:<sup>42</sup> Samael-Satanael attempts to animate Adam's moist body with his own spirit (*pneuma*), but the spirit immediately escapes through his right big toe, dragging moisture along with it, which becomes the Snake. Only after begging God to send him some of his Spirit could Satanael make Adam stand. Here too, as in the version of the other Euthymius, where the human soul was *stolen* from God, the soul derives directly from God. And likewise in the *Interrogatio* the soul is an innocent angel, free of any wickedness.

#### 4. History of Humankind

Euthymius Zigabenus is the only author who expands on the posterity of the Archon and Adam. God had agreed to send Samael the human soul because Samael had promised that the purpose of the new race was to fill up the places left vacant in heaven by the fall of the angels. It is clear then that the human soul is angelic as well. Yet, jealous of God, Samael does not keep his promise and has intercourse with Eve, thus spoiling all future human generations. The product of this crime is Cain and his sister Calomēnē.<sup>43</sup> From Adam, Eve gives birth to Abel, who is killed by Cain.

To punish Satanael, God strips him of his divine particle *-el*, depriving him of any creative power. Satan thus becomes a dark and deformed being (*skoteinos kai dyseidēs*), yet God in his goodness allows him to continue to reign over the world.<sup>44</sup>

Further on, the angels have intercourse with the daughters of men; and their sons, the Giants, oppose the Archon, who destroys them through the deluge, sparing only Noah, his sincere worshiper.<sup>45</sup>

The *Interrogatio* does not follow up on the intercourse of the Devil with Eve. The world is governed by Sathanas from his residence above the clouds, and through his servants. To fabricate a deceiving world history, the Archon abducts Enoch to his heaven. Enoch writes down seventy-six books containing the description of this lower heavenly realm, and thus humans forget the seven upper heavens of the Father. Moreover, Enoch teaches his sons "the order of sacrifices and impious rituals."<sup>46</sup> Therefore the Father decides to send Jesus, his Son who sits beside him, to reveal the truth. Sathanas gets wind of his intention and delivers to Moses

pieces of three trees from which to make Jesus' cross. At the same time, he gives Moses the Law and helps him cross the Red Sea. Nevertheless, the Father does not give up his plan. To prepare Jesus' way, he first dispatches the angel Mary to the world. Jesus enters and exits through her ear (the right one, specifies Zigabenus), a sequence attested among ancient orthodox Fathers. Zigabenus adds that Mary was not conscious of Jesus' passage: he crossed her like water through a pipe.<sup>47</sup>

Jesus does not have a physical (that is, clayish) body. He puts on only an immaterial body, which he abandons in the zone of Air when he reverts to the fatherly realm. He does not need food; his death and resurrection are not real.<sup>48</sup>

Having heard about Christ's descent to the world but not knowing his whereabouts, the Archon sends his own angel Elias, alias John the Baptist, who baptizes in water and is able to identify Christ because of the dove that lands on him. Only Jesus' baptism with Spirit can save. The expressions "my body" and "my blood" refer metaphorically to the Lord's Prayer. The Bogomils reject the Church sacraments, which they associate with bad Christians, disciples of John the Baptist who "wed and are wed," whereas Jesus' disciples are encratite: "they are like the angels of God in heaven, in the Kingdom of heaven, they are *eunuchi propter regnum celorum*" (Matt. 19:10–12).<sup>49</sup>

The world will last as long as the number of Righteous admitted to heaven remains lower than the number of seats left vacant by the fallen angels. Eschatology is based on the Revelation of John. Christ will come with the apostles to judge the universe; the demons and their followers will be dispatched to the eternal fire, the Righteous will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. "And then, with the Father's permission, an obscure Darkness and a Gehenna of fire [*obscuritas tenebrosa et geenna ignis*] will burst from the depth of the earth to the air of the firmament."<sup>50</sup> Sathanas and his demonic militia will be cast into a lake of fire so deep that a rock thrown down by a thirty-year-old man would reach the bottom only after three years. There the Devil will be tied with "indestructible chains," whereas "the Righteous will glow like the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father" and the Son of God will sit at his Father's right.<sup>51</sup>

## 5. Doctrinal and Ethical Consequences of the Bogomil Myth

Living in an encratite fashion in order to emulate the life of angels, and abstemious of all things that derive *ex coitu* or from things that, like wine, have been invented by the Devil to stimulate procreation,<sup>52</sup> the

Bogomils also have a very clearly antinomian stand in relation to the doctrine, sacraments, and ethics of the Church.

Cosmas the Priest ascribes to them the belief that the author of Jesus' miracles was the Devil himself.<sup>53</sup> According to H.-Ch. Puech, this means that they interpret the miracles symbolically, not literally.

The other data expounded by Cosmas are confirmed by other sources. The Bogomils repudiate baptism, the eucharist, the cult of the cross, the cult of the Virgin and saints, icons and relics, the Church hierarchy, orthodox liturgy and prayers. The only prayer they accept is the Our Father. They believe that the material edifices of the churches are Satan's resorts. They hold riches and authority in contempt and incite to civil disobedience. Despite all this, they feign being exemplary Christians.<sup>54</sup> Euthymius of Our Lady adds to this already impressive repertory of antinomianism the rejection of the dogmas of the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment.<sup>55</sup> Zigabenus, our most complete source on Byzantine Bogomilism, adds further information on the practices and rites of the Bogomil community, which have no place in this chapter.<sup>56</sup>

According to Cosmas, Bulgarian Bogomils dismiss the Law and the Prophets,<sup>57</sup> while Byzantine Bogomils, according to Zigabenus, accept an orthodox New Testament canon plus the sixteen books of the Prophets and the Psalms.<sup>58</sup> Their interpretation of the Scriptures is allegorical. Zigabenus gives a few interesting examples.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps the most salient of them concerns the description of John the Baptist's summary clothing in the desert—the loincloth made of camel hair and the leather belt—and of his diet (locusts and wild honey, according to Matt. 3:14): the hair of the camel stands for the numerous commandments of the Mosaic Law (*tas entolas tou mosaikou nomou*), unclean like the camel, for it allows a meat diet (*kreōphagya*), oaths, sacrifice, murder, and so on; the leather belt, by contrast, stands for the Holy Gospel, which was written down on sheepskin; the locusts are again the Law's commandments, unable to distinguish good from evil, whereas wild honey is once more the Holy Gospel, sweet like honey for those who receive it.<sup>60</sup> This kind of exegesis, the result of considerable hermeneutical effort, shows that Bogomilism grew out of a climate of intellectual sophistication that very well fits the Byzantine monks of the period.

## 6. The Christians of Bosnia

This heresy deriving from Byzantium was attested for the first time in Bosnia in 1199. Yet already in 1167 the priest Niketas/Niquinta, present at the Cathar Council of Saint-Félix-du-Lauragais, mentioned a Cathar

Dalmatian church, and *De haeresi catharorum in Lombardia* (about 1200) refers to the direct relation between the Cathar communities of Mantua and Vicenza and "Sclavenia" or "Sclavania," identified by Anselm of Alexandria as *terra (quae) dicitur Bossona* (Bosnia, part of Croatia, called "Slavonia" in medieval documents).<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, evidence concerning these Bosnian heretics, who, like the Bogomils, call themselves Christians by excluding all others from that name, is very scant. According to a XIVth-century Glagolitic manuscript, their faith would be similar to the Bogomils': "They say that our Lord Jesus Christ did not have an actual human body, that the Virgin Mary was an angel and many other errors against the Catholic faith. . . . They condemn marriage, certain foods, and many other things."<sup>62</sup>

A letter of June 1223, by the papal legate in Burgundia, Cardinal Conrad of Urach, reports the existence of a Cathar "antipope" residing "in Bulgarian territory, in Croatia and Dalmatia, bordering on the Hungarian nation," who allegedly bestowed investiture upon Barthélemy of Carcassonne so that the latter himself could confirm Cathar bishops in the region of Agen. Could this mysterious Slavic "antipope" be, as Christine Thouzellier and F. Sanjek both believe, the *djed*, "Elder," *Magister*, or *Abbas* of the Bosnian Patarene church? Difficult to say, the more so that there is no evidence that the Christians of Bosnia were dualists.<sup>63</sup>

The only positive facts known about these "Christians who repudiate sin," probably a religious order,<sup>64</sup> are the dismissal of the Romans' baptism with water (replaced by a "baptism of the Book"), the denial of the value of charity, and (according to a 1454 source) the refusal to make any oath.<sup>65</sup> The *Dubia ecclesiastica* (after 1373) of the Franciscan Barthélemy d'Auvergne, vicar of the Order in Bosnia (1366-75), confirms the rejection of baptism, adding that the Bosnians neglect the sacrament of matrimony and take a spouse on the condition that she be faithful to her husband. All this sounds similar to the ethnic laws of the Germans, for example, and does not entail any dualistic negation of this world.

With the exception of the Glagolitic manuscript, which could take inspiration from some Byzantine source on the Bogomils, the testimonies concerning the dualism or pseudodualism of the Patarenes, as they were called,<sup>66</sup> are very late. One of them comes from James of Marchia, vicar of the Bosnian Franciscans (1435-38), after a summary of his *Dialogue Against the Manichaeans of Bosnia* redacted in 1697 for his canonization.<sup>67</sup> Confirming their rejection of the sacraments and eucharist, the summary adds:•

*De creatione visibilium et de animalibus iugulat haeresim Patarenorum, qui visibilium creatorem putabant esse diabolum, stultaque persuasione docebant, hominum animas esse daemones, qui olim de caelo ceciderunt et illuc tandem erant reversuri. (On the creation of the visible world and of the animals the heresy of the Patarenes raves, saying that the creator of the visible world was the Devil and taught a stupid doctrine according to which the souls of human beings were demons who once fell from heaven and would return there.)<sup>68</sup>*

They would likewise refuse to make any oath, and would assert that the Law was given by the Devil.

What did their Bible canon look like? The most complete Bible codex of the Bosnian Christians, copied in 1404 by a certain Hval during the period of *djed* Radomer for Hrvoje, duke of Spalato, is very close to the canon of the Byzantine Bogomils. It contains an unabridged New Testament, four apocrypha, the Decalogue (Exod. 20:1–7), 151 Psalms (the last one apocryphal), eight Odes of the Old Testament, and the Magnificat.<sup>69</sup> This indeed means that at the beginning of the XVth century the Christians of Bosnia dismissed most of the Old Testament, and their reason for this must have been akin to the Bogomils'. It seems, therefore, that we may admit the testimony of the XIVth-century Glagolitic manuscript as authentic. Nevertheless, the dualist doctrine of the Bosnians is known only from a few Latin documents, the last one from 1461, which show quite disturbing contradictions. F. Sanjek and other authors could explain them only by dismissing the testimony of Cardinal Juan de Torquemada, which will be analyzed shortly.

A XIVth-century list of errors (prior to James of Marchia) shows besides other Bogomil practices the following beliefs of the Patarenes:

They say that there are two Gods and the higher of them created things spiritual and invisible whereas the lower, Lucifer, all things corporeal and visible. . . . They deny Christ's humanness and say he had a phantastic and aerial body. . . . They say that Holy Mary was an angel, not a human being. . . . That Christ did not actually die, resurrect, and ascend to heaven with his true body. Likewise, they reject the Old Testament, with the exception of the Psalms, and assert that all the Fathers of the Old Testament, Patriarchs and Prophets, are cursed, as are all those who came before Christ. . . . They condemn John the Baptist and say he is cursed. . . . They say that the Law of Moses was given by the Devil, and it was the latter who showed before Moses in the burning [bush]. . . . They say that Lucifer went to heaven and seduced God's angels, who descended to the earth where Lucifer encased them in human bodies. . . . That the souls of men are demons

who fell from heaven and will return to heaven after making penitence in one or more bodies.<sup>70</sup>

One point in which this early text differs from Bogomilism is in the idea of reincarnation, which only one Byzantine, John Italos, had previously held.<sup>71</sup> It is difficult to understand what the Patarenes meant by penitence *in corporibus uno vel pluribus*. As we will see in the next chapter, it was probably the Origenist doctrine of the assumption of different bodies. One thing seems clear: that the Patarenes had abandoned Bogomil Traducianism for the preexistence of the soul.

This testimony is corroborated by Juan de Torquemada (1461), usually considered spurious:

There are two gods, the good Lord and the Lord of evil. There are two principles, one of things spiritual and incorporeal, the other one of things corruptible, corporeal, and visible. The first is the God of Light, the second the God of Darkness. The angels were evil by nature and could not have not sinned. Lucifer rose to heaven, fought God, and caused many angels to fall. Souls are demons encased in bodies. The evil angels, encased in bodies, will revert to heaven through baptism, purification (*purgationem*) and penitence. Rejecting and reproving the Old Testament, they say it belongs to the Prince of Darkness.<sup>72</sup>

This seems to be a rather awkward form of Origenism combined with Manichaeism and holding onto the ethical and practical consequences of a revised Bogomilism. All in all, this fits rather well with the pattern of *radical* Catharism (see next chapter). Traces of the radical doctrines in Dalmatia may thus explain the westward spread of this second movement from Byzantium.

There is only one problem with this interpretation: *Radical Catharism existed much earlier (1167 in Provence) than the testimonies that ascribe it to the Bosnian Patarenes*, and therefore, if the latter ever held it, it may very well be derived from a late Provençal source.

## 7. Bogomil Dualism

The question of Bogomil dualism is among the most difficult to confront us so far. In fact, we not only have to describe a manifestly dualistic doctrine but must first decide *whether the Bogomils were dualist* or not. We defined dualism as the opposition of two principles. Bogomilism acknowledges the opposition God the Father versus Satan. Yet can we be certain that Satan is here the principle of anything?



The *creation* of the world is ascribed to him by rather unscrupulous heresiologists. Several versions of the Bogomil Genesis, on the contrary, emphasize the fact that Satan, a very high angel chased from heaven for having wanted to imitate God the Father, is not the *author* of the lower world but only the Craftsman (*dēmiourgos*), the artisan who fashions it from preexisting elements. Moreover, the Father himself intervenes. In one variant the diabolic universe is a copy of the godly one, but the elements of the former were created by God. In another variant there are seven upper stories of the universe and seven lower, devoid of angels. But the lower had equally been created by God, and so, probably, was the lowest, Hell.

At first sight we may as well admit to "mitigated dualism"; yet, when we take a closer look, the position of the Bogomils does not seem dualistic at all and does not differ much from that of the Church, which makes of Lucifer a real opponent, yet subordinated to God. Like the Church, the Bogomils take care to emphasize God's monarchy and omnipotence. Through sheer goodness God allows Satan to rule over the world he had taken so much trouble to organize and to spoil it. Thus, given that the Devil is the architect of the world but principle of nothing, that he is subordinated to God and does evil only with God's permission (God in no way being the author of evil), then we may conclude that *Bogomilism is not dualistic*.

It would be so if we could trust Zigabenus,<sup>73</sup> who asserts that the Devil is the creator of animals and plants. Yet again their only original and authentic text, the *Interrogatio*, intervenes to specify that all living beings are produced by earth and water (and probably air), the gloss adding that animals do not possess soul but have an essence from the elements. Now, as we well know, *the elements have been created by God*, not by the Devil. It is thus quite probable that the heresiologists do not understand the subtlety of the Bogomil doctrine and wrongly call the Devil "creator" of something of which he is only a steward.

In Gnosticism in general the matter of the world has no divine origin, or if it does, it is some refuse or negative emotion. For Marcion matter is likewise negative and ungodly. Manichaeism Darkness is an evil principle coeternal with God. Despite its colorful creation myth, Bogomilism is very far from these ancient forms of dualism.

Could Bogomilism derive from Paulicianism? This again seems impossible. Paulicianism professes the radical dualism of two gods and two worlds, like Marcion; ironically enough, it does not entail manifest contempt for the body.

In conclusion, Bogomilism appears to be original and not dualistic. Yet when it comes to the human body, Satan displays effective creative

powers. Although clay is not *created* by the Devil, the body is entirely fabricated by him and in his image, from a moist matter containing much water (the most inferior element) and related to the fluid shape of the Snake—quite an original expression of antisomatism. This notwithstanding, the Bogomils show less horror for matter than many early Church Fathers.

Are Bogomils anticosmic? This seems to be excluded. Even if the Devil has organized the world, the Father has intervened as well. Living beings sprang from the elements themselves. Animals are contemptible only for their coital procreation, but plants are not, not even the vine. According to a gloss of the Vienna manuscript, the vine was among the twenty species that the Devil planted in Paradise, which is an evil place. Yet the plants themselves are not intrinsically evil; the vine in particular is accursed only because "the Devil secretly put (*latenter*) his savor in it."<sup>74</sup>

The only thing that in all safety can be defined as evil in the Bogomil worldview is *concupiscence*, of which the Devil is the quintessence. The Bogomils abstain from meat and sex in order to abate sinful desire. Concupiscence comes with the body fabricated by the Devil. Only Mary and Jesus were able to avoid it *because they did not possess a physical body*; they were angels as our souls are, only not trapped in bodies. And what is more appropriate for angelic conception and birth than the ear?

The identification of the Devil with the Old Testament god has a definite gnostic flavor. Yet the Bogomils prove that it is not a simple bookish reminiscence by the fact that they apply the principle of inverse exegesis very creatively to the Book of Genesis, activating logical possibilities that had not been contemplated by the gnostics. Thus Satan is both the Tree of Knowledge and the Snake; he impregnates Eve with his tail, engendering the archontic race of Cain, the only extant race, since Cain immediately kills Abel, and there is no mention among Bogomils of the "immovable race" of Seth. The only better race that ever existed, the Nephilim, or Giants, who oppose the Archon of the world, are all destroyed by the deluge. Noah, Enoch, Elias, Moses, and John the Baptist are all the Archon's men. Jesus Christ is the Son of the good God, dispatched by his Father to reveal truth. The Archon crucifies him, but his passion and death are not real. When the Righteous will occupy all the thrones made vacant by the fall of the angels, the world will be consumed by fire, and the Devil will be chained in the deepest recess of the Gehenna. The doctrine that the number of seats in heaven is equal to the number of fallen angels derives from Augustine and is perfectly orthodox. Luther revived it at the beginning of the XVIth century.

The Bogomil attitude toward ecosystemic intelligence is ambiguous. The architect of the ecosystem is the Devil, but the creator of its material is God. However, the Bogomil Devil seems to have more creative power than Lucifer in Origen or Milton.

Since the essence of the human being is an angelic soul that is divine although fallen, Bogomilism denies the anthropic principle that requires the world to be for humans and humans for the world. Only the body is of this world, the soul is not. Yet the Bogomil denial is not the same as the gnostic or Manichaeic denial: Humanity is not superior to the Demiurge, the Devil, for the Devil is likewise an angel.

Contrary to Gnosticism and Manichaeism, but for another reason than in Marcionism, Bogomilism is pessimistic. The innocent angel has been the dupe of the cunning one and cannot evade the accursed condition of his race other than by renouncing concupiscence and the other works of the Archon, that is, the beliefs and practices of the evil Romans.

## Notes

1. The best edition of the *Interrogatio*, with a French translation and commentary, belongs to Edina Bozóki, *Le Livre secret des Cathares: Interrogatio Iohannis, apocryphe d'origine bogomile*, preface by Émile Turdeanu (Beauchesne: Paris, 1980).
2. *Le Traité contre les Bogomiles de Cosmas le Prêtre*, trans. André Vaillant, with an excellent study by H.-Ch. Puech. (Travaux Inst. Ét. Slaves. 21) (Imprimerie Nationale-Droz: Paris, 1945).
3. For other names, see Dmitri Obolensky, *The Bogomils: A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism* (1948; Hall: Twickenham, 1972), 166–67.
4. Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, 174.
5. Gerhard Ficker, *Die Phundagiagiten: Ein Beitrag zur Ketzergeschichte des byzantinischen Mittelalters* (J. A. Barth: Leipzig, 1908). Euthymius Zigabenus's *Panoplia dogmatica* is published in PG 130 col. 1289–1322a.
6. The anathemata against Bogomils are contained in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, a special ritual for the first Sunday of Lent, a celebration reinstated by the Council of Constantinople in 843 at the end of the iconoclastic controversy. The ritual commemorates the end of persecution against icons and their supporters. The 843 text was successively revised by Alexis I Comnenus (emperor 1081–1118), Manuel I Comnenus (emperor 1143–80), and in the XVth century. It was published and translated by Jean Guillard, *Le Synodikon de l'orthodoxie: Édition et commentaire*, in *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967), 1–316. Anathemata against the Bogomils: 228–37.
7. See esp. the very outdated book by Jordan Ivanov, *Livres et légendes bogomiles*, trans. M. Ribeyrol, preface by René Nelli (Maisonneuve-Larose: Paris, 1976), 255ff.
8. *I.Ioh* 173 V = 157 D, p. 72 Boz.
9. *Epist.* 33 and Ficker's comm., 162.
10. *Pan.* col. 1296 = *Narr.* 92,11 Ficker.
11. Cosmas 74 Vaillant; *Narr.* 91 = *Pan.* col. 1296.
12. *I.Ioh* 45 Boz.
13. *I.Ioh* 45 Boz.
14. *I.Ioh* 46–47 Boz.

15. *I.Ioh* 51 Boz.
16. One tail in D.
17. *I.Ioh* 60–63 V, p. 52 Boz. A gloss of the Vienna ms. adds: "The seven tails are the seven sins or vices by which he [Sathanas] still seduces humans, i.e., lie, adultery, avarice, theft, blasphemy, hatred and discord" (p. 88–89 Boz.).
18. *I.Ioh* 61–63 D, p. 54–55 Boz. "Seven days" is interpreted as seven divine days, i.e., seven centuries; *ib.*, 64.
19. *I.Ioh* 67 D.
20. *I.Ioh* 54 Boz.
21. *I.Ioh* 72 D.
22. About the origin of the meteorological angels, see my *Expériences de l'extase, de l'Hellénisme au Moyen Age* (Payot: Paris, 1984), 158.
23. Neither V nor D (p. 56–57) mentions the air.
24. V gloss, p. 90–91 Boz.
25. Cosmas 26,4 Vaillant.
26. *Narr.* 33–34 Ficker.
27. Puech, in Puech and Vaillant, *Traité*, 183–84.
28. Puech, *Traité*, 202.
29. *Op. daem.*, PG 122 col. 824a.
30. *Narr.* 95,21ff = *Pan.* col. 1293–95.
31. *Pan.* col. 1301b.
32. Puech, *Traité*, 190–92; see also Giulia Sfamini-Gasparro, "Il Mito bogomilo dei due figli di Dio: Osservazioni storico-religiose," in *Umanità e storia: Scritti in onore di Adelchi Attisani* (F. Giannini: Naples, n.d.), 3, or in *Gnostica et Hermetica* (Ateneo: Rome, 1982).
33. PG 122 col. 825.
34. *Narr.* 94ff = *Pan.* col. 1292–93; Puech, *Traité*, 178–81.
35. *I.Ioh* 58 Boz.
36. *I.Ioh* 93 V.
37. *I.Ioh* 58–60 Boz.
38. *I.Ioh* 104–6 V p. 60–61 Boz.
39. *I.Ioh* 125 V p. 64 Boz.
40. *Epist.* 35f Ficker.
41. See my *Out of This World: A History of Otherworldly Journeys and Out-of-Body Experiences, from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Shambhala: Boston, 1991).
42. *Narr.* 92 = *Pan.* col. 1297.
43. *Narr.* 93.3 Ficker.
44. On the loss of the divine particle -*ā*, see Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, 200.
45. *Narr.* 98–99 Ficker = *Pan.* col. 1305.
46. *I.Ioh* 131 D p. 66–67 Boz.
47. *Narr.* 93 = *Pan.* col. 1301.
48. *Narr.* 93 = *Pan.* col. 1301.
49. *I.Ioh* 186–88 V, p. 74–75 Boz.
50. *I.Ioh* 240–42 V, p. 82–83 Boz.; Puech, *Traité* 211, compares this *obscuritas tenebrosa* with the Black Fire of Manichaean eschatology.
51. *I.Ioh* 84–85 Boz.
52. Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, 127–29.
53. Cosmas 32.12–18 V; Puech, *Traité*, 209f; Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, 131f.
54. Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, 130–38; Puech, *Traité*, 213–37, 260–77.
55. *Epist.* 38; see Ficker, 167–70.
56. See Puech, *Traité*, 237–60.
57. Puech, *Traité*, 168–77.
58. *Narr.* 98.10–20 = *Pan.* col. 1292–93; Ficker, 265; Puech, *Traité*, 168–77; Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, 212.

59. *Narr.* 103ff Ficker.
60. *Narr.* 104.4–18 Ficker = *Pan.* col. 1321–22.
61. Franjo Sanjek, *Les Chrétiens bosniaques et le mouvement cathare XII–XV siècle* (Nauwelaerts-Vander-Oyez: Brussels, Paris, Louvain, 1976), 19–43.
62. Sanjek, *Chrétiens bosniaques*, 28–29.
63. Against Sanjek's rather weak arguments, *Chrétiens bosniaques*, 95ff.
64. Sanjek, *Chrétiens bosniaques*, 88–90.
65. Sanjek, *Chrétiens bosniaques*, 97–124.
66. According to Christine Thouzellier, the origin of this word is Milanese.
67. Sanjek, *Chrétiens bosniaques*, 145.
68. Fol. 242v.
69. Sanjek, *Chrétiens bosniaques*, 172.
70. Döllinger, vol. 1, 242–43, n. 1, from Venice, Bibl. Marciana, fund Nanni.
71. According to Anna Comnenos's *Alexiad*; see Jean Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme: La Religion des cathares* (Privat: Toulouse, 1976), 345.
72. The following summary derives from Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme*, 353, who accepts the testimony as authentic.
73. *Narr.* 92.13–16 = *Pan.* col. 1296–97.
74. *I.Ioh* 90–91 Boz.

# Chapter 9

## The Two Religions of the Cathars

### 1. Two Forms of Catharism

The western expansion of Bogomilism raises a number of questions. It appears that at the beginning of the XIIth century it was already rooted in northern Italy, Provence (which then did not belong to the crown of France), and central France. By 1167 there had been a major split in Byzantine Bogomilism. One church, that of "Sclavonia," remained faithful to the ancient, mitigated, or pseudodualistic, doctrine; but another one arose, powerful enough to impose its dogma on Provençal and part of Lombard Catharism, which professed radical dualism. The center of the new church was a place probably called Dragovitsa, not located on the map of the Balkans.<sup>1</sup> By 1190 the mitigated Bogomils had resumed their offensive in Lombardy, but Provence remained lost to them altogether until the Crusade and the war that led to the fall of Montségur (1244) created complete confusion among the extant Albigenses. It seems fairly certain that radical dualism was exported to Provence from the Byzantine Empire, where its origin was purely intellectual (it was probably concocted in a monastic setting by monks with an intense nostalgia for Origenism). Yet it is by no means sure whether the radical heresy existed in Bosnia before the XIVth–XVth century.

About 1190 Nazarius, Cathar bishop of Concorezzo in Lombardy, had received from Bulgaria, as confirmation of temperate faith, the text of the *Interrogatio Iohannis*, to which he was to remain faithful all his life long. In 1250, although supplanted by his *filius maior* Desiderius, who was now setting the tone, Nazarius still professed phantasiasm according to the "orthodox" Bogomil doctrine.<sup>2</sup> Reformed by Desiderius, the Concorezzo school would come even closer to Catholic doctrine than Bogomilism did, thereby widening the gap between it and the other

school, of the radical "Albanenses" (probably for Albigenses) of Desenzano on Lake Garda.

Some distinction between "moderates" and "radicals" was already mentioned in the earliest anti-Cathar writing, the *Manifestatio haeresis catharorum* (1176–90) of Bonacursus: "Some say that God created all the elements, others that the Devil created the elements; but their common opinion is that the Devil divided the elements."<sup>3</sup> Yet this seems to refer to two interpretive trends within Bogomilism, one close to Catholicism and the other dualistic.

More data are contained in *De heresi catharorum in Lombardia*, redacted between 1190 and 1200, for it mentions Nazarius as *filius maior* of Bishop Garattus of Concorezzo, and the same Nazarius, still alive in 1250, could not have been born before 1165–70. The *De heresi* mentions three Cathar churches in Italy; one in Desenzano on Lake Garda (near Verona), professing the radical dualism of the church of Drugunthia; a second one of Bishop Caloiannes of Mantua, deriving from the church of Sclavonia (Dalmatia); and a third one of Bishop Garattus of Concorezzo, deriving from the church of Bulgaria. Under Nazarius, Garattus's successor, the Concorezzo church professed Bogomil pseudodualism in agreement with the *Interrogatio Iohannis*.

Salvo Burci of Piacenza, whose writing *Supra stella (sic)* was begun on May 6, 1235,<sup>4</sup> differentiates the Albanenses (radical) from the Concorricii (moderate) and from a third order, *qui Calojani et etiam rancigenae nuncupatur* (those called of [Bishop] Caloiannes or French), who are a mixture of the former two ("ex toto non sunt ex fide Albanensium, nec ex fide Concorricium").<sup>5</sup> Later on (ca. 1250–60), the *Brevis summula contra herrores notatos hereticorum* furnishes a detailed, comparative list of the dogmas professed by the three Cathar groups in northern Italy, marked as A ("Albanian"), B (from Bagnolo), and C (Concorezzo).<sup>6</sup> The list, which contradicts earlier authorities on more than one point, should be consulted with caution.

The unsystematic description by James de Capellis (ca. 1240)<sup>7</sup> does not add anything to these data. Moneta of Cremona, a Dominican who composed, between 1241 and 1244, a vast treatise against the Cathars and the Waldensians, deals separately with the "radical" and the "mitigated." Firsthand information is furnished by Raniero Sacconi of Piacenza in his 1250 *Summa de catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno*. A Cathar of a certain standing, Sacconi converted in 1245 to Catholicism, joined the Dominicans, assisted in the inquisitorial activities of Peter of Verona, escaped the assassination attempt that took the latter's life on April 6, 1252, and became chief inquisitor for Lombardy between 1254 and 1259.<sup>8</sup>

Sacconi likewise distinguishes between the radical "Albanians" of Desenzano and the mitigated of Concorezzo and Bagnolo.<sup>9</sup> The church of Concorezzo was by far the strongest, with 1,500 or more *perfecti* (Perfects, that is, confirmed Cathars) from a total that, for the whole of southern and southeastern Europe, must not have exceeded 4,000. (The whole of Provence was left by then with no more than 200.) The "Albanians" of Verona followed with 500, the Bagnolenses concentrated in the area of Mantua, Brescia, and Bergamo, reaching perhaps 200. Furthermore, there was a church "of the French" in Verona and in Lombardy with about 150 Perfects, and communities in Tuscany (Florence, Spoleto) with 100 Perfects.<sup>10</sup>

The Albanenses, not actual "Albanians" (who migrated in waves to eastern and southeastern Italy from the mid-XVth century) but Albigenses—that is, adhering to the tenets of the radical Provençal Cathars from Albi (northeast of Toulouse) and the surroundings—had two factions: one of Balasinanza, bishop of Verona, and one of John de Lugio (perhaps Lugano?) from Bergamo, *filius maior* and, according to Sacconi, "ordained bishop."<sup>11</sup> According to the same Sacconi, the Bagnolenses agreed in principle with the moderates of Concorezzo, except for the fact that, like Nazarius, they remained phantasiasts, and like the radical Cathars they believed in the preexistence of the soul, whereas the church of Concorezzo under Desiderius had given up Bogomil phantasiasm and stuck to Bogomil Traducianism instead of a preexistent soul. Finally, Sacconi gives us precious information about the churches of Toulouse, Albi, and Carcassonne, which were still radical like the "Albanenses," whereas the "French" (in Lombardy) held the Bagnolo faith, and the Cathars of La Marche, Florence, and Spoleto varied between the faith of Bagnolo and the "Albanians," inclining rather toward the latter.

The *Tractatus de hereticis* (1266–67) of the Lombard inquisitor Anselm of Alexandria in Piedmont (near Turin), who had been one of Sacconi's deputies, confirms the tripartition of the Italian Cathars into Garattenses (from Garattus, bishop around 1190) in Concorezzo, Albanenses in Verona, and Bagnolenses in Bagnolo, Lombardy. The Concorezzians were divided into two factions, one of their former bishop Nazarius, who remained faithful to the doctrine of the *Interrogatio* received about 1190 from a Bulgarian bishop, and the other one of Desiderius, former *filius maior* to Nazarius and then bishop, who had given up phantasiasm. Anselm further differentiated three schools of Bagnolenses but failed to explain the differences.

The Cathars themselves were fully aware of their diversity. The doctrines of the three main churches of northern Italy are fairly well known



through heresiological sources. Two of them professed a pseudodualism directly derived from Bogomilism; and the third one, deriving from a mysterious church of Dragovitsa, professed a radical dualism of which most elements, as we will see shortly, are Origenist.

## 2. The Pseudodualists

The doctrine summarized by Bonacursus in his *Manifestatio* is that of the monarchian or moderate Cathars, who believe the Devil to be the author of the human body, in which he imprisoned by force an angel of light. He made Eve, seduced her, and begat Cain. Abel in turn is the son of Adam and Eve and was killed by Cain. From his blood the dog was born; this is why dogs are faithful to humans (popular etiological legend). All things in the world, animated or not, have been created by the Devil, yet Bonacursus does not make any distinction between *creator* and *factor*, Creator and Craftsman. The daughters of Eve were made pregnant by the demons and gave birth to the race of Giants, who learned that the world had been created by an evil principle. This is why the Devil in his anger destroyed them with the deluge. Enoch belongs to the Devil, and the Patriarchs likewise. Moses followed the Devil's will and received his Law. David was an assassin, and Elias was abducted to heaven by the Devil himself. Yet the Holy Spirit spoke often through the mouths of the Prophets. John the Baptist belongs to the Devil. Mary's conception was immaculate, with no help from a man. Jesus had no physical body. He is not equal to God (subordinationism). The cross is the sign of the Beast of the Revelation of John. Furthermore, the Cathars are said to be vegetarian, to reject the sacraments and the Church Fathers, and to swear no oath.

Except for the popular story that explains the origin of the dog, the only information in Bonacursus that does not stem from the *Interrogatio* concerns the fornication of the two major heavenly bodies: "They believe that the Devil himself is the Sun, Eve being the Moon, and the two of them commit adultery each month, like a man with a whore. All stars are demons" (*Diabolum esse Solem, Lunam esse Evam, et per singulos menses dicunt eos fornicari*).<sup>12</sup>

The *De heresi catharorum* does not ascribe to the moderate Cathars a dualistic doctrine. In fact, the disciples of Caloiannes and Garattus believe in one omnipotent God, creator of the angels and of *the four elements*. Moreover, the elements have been divided not by the Devil but by a good angel of the Lord. Lucifer sinned while in heaven, but some

Cathars speak of an Evil Spirit with four faces, which superficially recalls the symbols of the Evangelists (man, bird, *fish*, and beast). This Spirit dwells at the very bottom of the universe. It was he who seduced Lucifer when the steward paid him a visit (according to the *Interrogatio*, Satan indeed visited Hell), and Lucifer in turn seduced the heavenly angels. It is not impossible that the description of this Evil Spirit was a vague and bookish recollection of the description of the five-faced Manichaeian King of Darkness in Augustine, somehow contaminated with the far better known symbols of the Evangelists.

Lucifer is the Old Testament god. He fabricated the bodies of Adam and Eve from mud and introduced angels into them by force. Eve is the instrument of sin; the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is fornication. The *De heresi* discerns among the monarchian Cathars two sorts of theories on the origin of each human soul: Some of them are Traducianist like the Bogomils, some believe in the preexistence of the soul (like Origen). God supposedly created some new souls to compensate for the loss of those that will not share in eternal salvation.

"Sclavini" and Bulgarians have in common, according to *De heresi*, a number of beliefs: It was the Devil who sent the deluge and spared Noah, it was he who spoke to Abraham, destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, drew the Israelites out of Egypt, gave them the Law, and sent them the Prophets. The Holy Spirit sometimes used the latter to announce the coming of Christ. Yet the Devil is nothing but the minister of God and acts with his permission.

The "Sclavini" believed that Jesus, John the Baptist, and Mary were three angels of the Lord, but James de Capellis, reporting the same thesis, says that God "tres angelos misit in mundum, unus ex eis formam mulieris accepit, et hic fuit b. Virgo Maria. Alii duo angeli viriles formas sumpserunt. Unus fuit Christum, alius Johannes *Evangelista* (sent three angels into the world, one of which took on a woman's shape, and that was the Holy Virgin Mary. The other two angels took the form of men. One was Christ, the other John *the Evangelist*).<sup>13</sup> This makes more sense, for the Bogomils marked John the Baptist as one of the Devil's followers. Furthermore, the "Sclavini" were phantasiasts.

Some among the "Bulgarians" of Concorezzo, by contrast, believed that Mary had been a real woman and Jesus a real man and that he *actually* died but discarded his body during his Ascent. (How this body could go to heaven is an unfathomable problem for the orthodox, which can be solved only by suspension of reason.) To them John the Baptist is the envoy of the Devil. This is the reformed faith of Desiderius, which wins over Nazarius's phantasiasm and comes very close to orthodox doctrine.

There is nothing fundamentally new in Salvo Burci's summary of the beliefs of the Concorricii.<sup>14</sup> He also knows the story of the four-faced Spirit and adds that Lucifer, the Spirit, and a third partner—the Evil Trinity—have divided the elements. This innovation probably derives from an attempt to explain the plural in Gen. 1:26 (in Latin: "*Faciamus hominem*") as referring to Lucifer *and his associates* ("Lucifer fuit locutum in persona sociorum"; Burci's language is something between Latin and Italian). The episode must be a local variant, for it does not occur in other sources. Otherwise the Concorricii are rigorously Bogomil, faithful to the *Interrogatio*.

Moneta of Cremona emphasizes several times that among the monarchian Cathars God is the Creator of primordial matter, whereas the Devil is no more than its organizer, he is only the Craftsman (*factor*) of the visible world: "He is exclusively designated as the maker [*factor*] of the visible things, for he worked with a preexistent material; this is why, they say, Christ called him Prince of this World. They do not concede that he is the world Creator, for they assert that to create means to make something from nothing."<sup>15</sup>

The distinction *creator* versus *factor* played a very important part in the debate between the "Albanenses" and the Garattenses, the radical and the pseudodualist, as the *Book of Two Principles* of the school of John of Lugio shows (see below). James de Capellis also states that the moderates "say that the devil is not the Creator, but the Craftsman, for he modeled the preexistent matter of the four elements as a potter models clay into a vase" (*diabolum vero non creatorem, sed factorem dicunt, quia ex praejacente materia quatuor elementorum operatus est, sicut figulus ex luto vas operatur; emphases mine*).<sup>16</sup>

Lucifer is not a rootless principle; he was created by God, and he sinned out of free will (being jealous of God's creation). Upon his return to heaven he seduced the star-angels. The Sun, the Moon, and the stars are demons; and the major heavenly bodies fornicate every month, and the product of their intercourse is the morning dew: "Dicunt enim quod Sol et Luna et aliae Stellae Daemones sunt, adiicentes quod Sol et Luna semel in mense adulterium committunt, quod in Astronomia legitur de coitu olis et Lunae. Dicunt enim quod ros ex illo coitu spargitur super aërem et super terram, quod istam claritatem amittent et habebunt eam salvandi qui ex semine angelico, scilicet qui ex Adam generati fuerunt."<sup>17</sup>

Besides this myth, which we already encountered in Bonacursus, Moneta's monarchian Cathars are said to be Traducianist, antisacramentarian, allegorizing, and subordinationists, which shows that they conscientiously follow the *Interrogatio*. Their christology is not reported in

full. Some believe that Christ crossed Mary as if through a pipe, others that he received something from her.

Raniero Sacconi repeats the same things about the Concorezzo monarchians: They profess a single principle, God the Creator of the angels and of the four elements *ex nihilo*. The Devil fashions the visible world with God's permission; he then makes human bodies and imprisons fallen angels in them. The Cathars of Concorezzo are Traducianist. They reject the Old Testament yet have doubts concerning the Patriarchs "and especially the Prophets"; once they held John the Baptist to be evil, but during Sacconi's time (1250) they changed their mind. Desiderius's realistic christology prevailed over Nazarius's Bogomil phantasiasm, but one detail is missing from a perfectly Catholic picture, for the reformed Concorezzans assert that Christ relinquished his body during his Ascent in a heavenly place where the Virgin and the apostles dwell, and he will recover it for the last time at the last judgment. Obviously Desiderius has some problem understanding Cyril of Alexandria's emphasis on the heavenly ascent of Christ's body, not to mention Mary's, and thought to solve the problem by somehow lowering its status. The body clearly cannot abide in God's presence yet has a place in heaven. That much Desiderius could concede, and he was closer to orthodoxy than some of the Antiochene Fathers (see Introduction above).

According to Sacconi, the monarchians of Bagnolo were phantasiasts like Nazarius but had replaced Bogomil Traducianism with Origenist preexistence of the soul.

Anselm of Alexandria further specifies that Nazarius shared the ancient theory of the conception and birth of Jesus Christ through Mary's ear and that he was so subordinationist as not to accept Christ's divinity at all. Desiderius's christology, by contrast, was realistic (the Virgin's and Christ's bodies were made of flesh, Christ's Passion and death were real). The Virgin and John the Baptist are awaiting the last judgment in Paradise. During his Ascent Christ left his body in Paradise and will recover it for the last time to judge the living and the dead. The Prophets were not evil, although the Devil often spoke through their mouths, whereas at other times they were speaking as human beings. They are already saved, for they resuscitated upon Christ's death.

Old Nazarius would also have preached the story of the fornication of the Sun and the Moon, whose products are morning dew and *honey*. Nazarists abstained from honey.

Anselm mentions three schools of Bagnolo but reports only one doctrine, deriving from the interpretation of the *Interrogatio*. The *Interrogatio* indeed seemed to make a distinction between the angels *seduced* by

Sathanas and those who were simply *dragged* down by his tail(s). The innocence of the angels planted in the clay bodies points toward their belonging to the second class. The Cathars of Bagnolo thus differentiate the angels who willingly followed Sathanas from those who were unwillingly drawn with him in his fall, and they assert that human souls are angels of the second category. The Bagnolenses are furthermore Traducianist, subordinationist, and believe—according to the *Interrogatio*—that the Devil is the author of unpleasant meteorological phenomena.

In conclusion, it appears that the monarchian Cathars of Lombardy are pseudodualists whose ethics are Bogomil and whose doctrine is directly derived from the *Interrogatio*. In comparison with this text, the heresiologists signal a few innovations:

- The myth of the Evil Spirit at the bottom of the universe, which replaces Bogomil pseudodualism with radical dualism;
- The myth of the fornication of the Sun and the Moon, which has no doctrinal consequence;
- Desiderius's christological realism and the doctrine of an intermediate Paradise, which replace the "orthodox" Bogomil phantasiasm of old Nazarius;
- The Origenist doctrine of the preexistence of the soul, which competes with Bogomil Traducianism.

Despite all of these transformations, which only affect some sectors of the monarchian communities and have not altogether decisive doctrinal weight, moderate Catharism is Bogomilism in a pure state, drawn into a process of blending with the radical doctrine, whose origin is completely different.

### 3. The Radical Cathars

*De heresi catharorum* ascribes radical dualism to the Desenzano Cathars: They believe in two gods, one entirely good, the other entirely evil, each of them creator of angels. Lucifer is the Son of the Lord of Darkness. He transfigures himself into an angel of Light to ascend to the heaven of the good God, where the angels intercede for him and God adopts the stranger and makes him into the steward of his Kingdom, the dishonest steward of Luke 16:5–7. God would live to regret it, for Lucifer seduces his angels and provokes civil war in heaven. God is compelled to evict him, together with one third of the angels, those who took part in his

rebellion. Angels are made of *body*, soul, and spirit. Their bodies and spirits remain in heaven; only their souls fall and are imprisoned by Lucifer in human bodies. Consequently humans have angelic souls but spirits from the Devil. Christ comes down to save the angelic souls. The garments, crowns, and thrones of glory are awaiting their ancient owners in heaven. At the conclusion of numerous transmigrations from body to body, a sincerely repenting soul may recover its heavenly body and spirit.

Salvo Burci is more specific and is acquainted with a slightly different tradition: The two coeternal creators each have a Trinity and a world of their own (*habent ambo trinitatem et unusquisque habet suam creationem*).<sup>18</sup> The Son of the Lord of Darkness ascended to heaven with his angels, beginning a merciless war against the angels of the good God. He seduced many of God's angels and drew their souls down into his own world, where "they transmigrate from body to body until they reach the knowledge of truth" (*vadunt incorporando se de corpore in corpore, dum veniunt ad cognoscendum veritatem*). Angels have body, soul, and spirit. The spirits of the fallen souls remained in heaven, but their spirits came down in quest of their souls, and, as soon as a spirit finds its soul, it speaks to her, and the soul answers: "And as soon as the soul acknowledges the spirit, she remembers having been in heaven and having sinned and afterwards she starts doing good and [draws back] from the sin she had done."

Christ, Son of God, is an angel born from the angel Mary. His body was a phantasm, he did not suffer, did not die, did not resuscitate. This world is Hell, and there is no other. When all angelic souls have returned to God's world and recovered their heavenly bodies and spirits, the angels of Evil will again declare war against them. This seems to be one of the rare examples of dialectical dualism, which ends in a loop where it began.

Moneta of Cremona knows further details. The Devil, coeternal with God, created all things visible, including all the stars. He is the god of the Old Testament, which is rejected by the "Albanenses" with the exception of the sixteen Prophets, the Psalms, and the five books of Solomon. Some also accept Job and Esdras.

God is the author of an incorruptible Kingdom, with its heavens, its Sun, its Moon, its stars, its four elements. Heavenly human beings have, like us, body, soul, and spirit, but their spirit does not dwell within the body.

Satan, the dishonest steward, ascended to heaven, seduced the angels, was defeated by the archangel Michael, was expelled, and

returned to his own Kingdom, taking with him one third of God's angels (an allusion to Rev. 12:4), whom he imprisoned in human bodies. Jesus came to the world to save the angelic souls, who, since his coming, repent after receiving the laying on of hands or spiritual baptism (that is, *consolamentum*, or consecration to Perfect Cathar). During *consolamentum* each soul receives a heavenly protective spirit called *Spiritus Paraclitum*, or consoling spirit, and different from both the *Spiritus Sanctum*, which designates the personal spirit of each soul-angel, and the *Spiritus Principale*, who is the Holy Spirit, third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit and Jesus are divine creatures and are not equal to God (subordinationism). Mary is a heavenly being, endowed—as all of her species—with a heavenly body, soul, and spirit. Jesus is another heavenly being, *actually* conceived and born as if through a pipe by the other heavenly being, who is Mary. Jesus suffers and dies *in his heavenly body*, and his resurrection is therefore true. For his having defeated the Devil, his Father gives him a place at his right side in heaven. Some radical Cathars believe that judgment has already occurred. Christ's miracles are not physical but spiritual. There is no resurrection of the body, only of the *angelic or heavenly body*. The Albanenses deny free will, for God himself has none, the less so could he concede it to his creatures. They profess the preexistence of souls, saying that God's psychic nation is *antiquus*, "primordial," for God does not create new souls. They are antisacramentarian, vegetarian, do not swear oaths, do not kill. They believe that the Prophets, who were not evil, have prophesied in a different world.

The most complete file on the radical Cathars is collected once again by Raniero Sacconi, who acknowledges the existence of two schools: one of the Bishop of Verona Balasinanza and one of John of Lugio of Bergamo, once *filius maior* of the first.

The followers of Balasinanza believe in two coeternal principles, each with his own Trinity (God's Trinity being subordinationist), his own angels, and his own world. The Devil goes to heaven to fight Michael and God's angels and returns to his world with one third of them, whom he imprisons in bodies of humans *and animals*. The angels transmigrate from body to body pending their final return to the divine world. Here for the first time the doctrine of the preexistence of the soul is combined with the idea, current in Provençal Catharism, that reincarnation is possible not only in the human but also in the animal realm.

Mary is an angel; the Savior's body is immaterial, apparent, he has not suffered, he has not died (Bogomil phantasiasm). His miracles are fake. All of the Patriarchs and John the Baptist were servants of the

Devil, who is the author of the Old Testament, with the exception of Job, the Psalms, Solomon, Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, and the sixteen Prophets. "They teach that this world will have no end, that the final judgment has already taken place and will not be repeated, that Hell, fire, and eternal punishment are in this world and nowhere else."<sup>19</sup>

Sacconi is likewise our major source concerning the most original Cathar thinker, John of Lugio, who, born about 1180, was first a Cistercian monk and later became *filius maior*, perhaps even bishop of the Cathar church of Desenzano.<sup>20</sup> In 1939 Antoine Dondaine published the *Book of the Two Principles*, a collection of seven writings from the school of John of Lugio. Arno Borst extensively commented on the authorship of the text, Christine Thouzellier gave a critical edition, and René Nelli devoted to it a beautiful study in which he tried to show that its basic doctrine was Augustinian.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, the quality of these tracts is extremely questionable, and although the *Book of the Two Principles* sheds much light on the debate between the moderate Cathars of Concorezzo and the radical ones from Desenzano, it is of little help in pinning down John of Lugio's doctrine with certainty. For this we should revert once again to Sacconi.

John of Lugio adopts and adapts the dualism of the two Principles, and his arguments must have been of the same kind as those developed in the best tract of the *Book of the Two Principles*, *De libero arbitrio*, which begins with a merciless attack on monistic theodicy. There must be two Principles—the *Book* resumes an argument also embraced by Marcion and the Manichaeans—because "the good tree bears good fruit but the bad tree bears evil fruit" (Matt. 7:17). What is more, the *Book* prefigures Kant in that it emphasizes the logical impossibility of a coherent theodicy: If God is endowed with all the positive attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, holiness, goodness, and justice, then he must have known that his angels would have fallen and *must have wanted to make them imperfect*. The conclusion is inescapable that "God then . . . would be the supreme cause and principle of all evil." The Desenzano school intends to demonstrate that the only coherent theology must be dualistic, for either God is omniscient but not good or he is good but not omniscient.

For John of Lugio the two separate creations are spiritual processes. The Evil One has many names, which are as many hypostases of Evil. In debate with the moderates, he repeats as often as his follower who wrote the *Book* that *creator* and *factor*, Creator and Craftsman, are exactly the same thing, and not that the first creates the elements and the second fashions the world from preexisting material. This world was made—



*created*—by the Father of the Devil (the Devil is Lucifer himself). The good God runs a parallel universe, invisible and incorruptible. In God's parallel world there is marriage, fornication, and adultery; the men of that earth have married the daughters of the Devil and have thus generated the race of Giants. All this is the work of the Devil, who is stronger than God's creatures, and *occurs without God's will or permission*.

The *Compendium ad instructionem rudium* that is part of the *Book of the Two Principles* adds that God created a heaven and an earth out of matter different from the changing and irrational elements of our world, inhabited by intelligent and sentient creatures. God is thus by no means the creator of the elements of *this* world, "weak and barren" (Gal. 4:9). "There is another *creator* or *factor* who is the Principle and cause of death, perdition and all evil." God is not omnipotent, for he has neither the power of doing evil nor *the power of self-destruction* nor the power of duplicating himself. He is metaphorically called omnipotent because he is capable of doing all good. Evil derives from an Evil Principle other than God: this Principle, Sathanas, the "Power of Darkness" (Col. 1:12-13; Luke 22:53), is *powerful* in iniquity. The Evil, divided up into Lords and Princes, is coeternal with God and will have no end. In fact, according to Sacconi, John of Lugio held that nothing that exists has free will, not even God, for if he had, his will would prevail over that of his Opponent. Consequently God is *neither omniscient nor omnipotent*. There exists but one single creature of God who has not been spoiled by the Devil: Christ.

The good God actually performed all that the Old Testament attributes to him: He caused the deluge and other destructions in order to counteract sin. Yet all this took place not in our world but in another world, his world. Consequently *John of Lugio accepts the Bible in its entirety as a reliable historical document*, yet a document that refers not to our universe but to a parallel universe. It was likewise in this parallel universe of God that Christ was born, suffered, died, and resuscitated.

Finally, John of Lugio asserts that human souls go from body to body until they are eventually saved, a theory that has to be interpreted as Origenism.

Unfortunately we cannot deduce from the data of the heresiologists what the relation between the two parallel universes was. He might possibly have believed this world to be Hell.<sup>22</sup>

Before proceeding, a brief and imperfect picture should be sketched of the ancient trend of thought from which radical Catharism derived: Origenism.

#### 4. Origenism and Radical Catharism

Origenist traits have been discovered in radical Catharism by Marcel Dando (1967),<sup>23</sup> and the hypothesis of a close relation between Origenism and Catharism was embraced by Jean Duvernoy.<sup>24</sup>

This Origenism is not entirely Origen's original doctrine, which is difficult to reconstruct due to the vicissitudes of his writings. It is a transformation of Origen's genuine teachings effected and practiced by Egyptian monks in the IVth and Vth centuries and systematically refuted by heresiologists like Epiphanius<sup>25</sup> and the former Origenist Jerome. The file on the Origenist debate was collected by Antoine Guillaumont in his book on Evagrius of Pontus (1962).<sup>26</sup>

Epiphanius accuses the Origenists of four major heretical beliefs: 1. that the *body of resurrection* is not identical with the physical body; 2. of being *subordinationist*; 3. of asserting that *the human soul preexists*, that those preexisting souls are angels and superior powers, that they contracted sins and for this reason were imprisoned in this body to be punished, and that God dispatched them down here for the punishment, to undergo the effect of a first judgment;<sup>27</sup> and 4. to profess the Platonic doctrine of the body-tomb: Coming from above, the soul (*psychē*) "cooled off" (*epsychthai*) when she was set in the "garment of skin" (Gen. 3:21), which means the terrestrial body.<sup>28</sup>

All of these are to a certain point authentic ideas of Origen. Even the pun based on the resemblance between the Greek words *psychē*, "soul," and *psychros*, "cold, chill," was used by Origen himself.<sup>29</sup> Yet, as P. F. Beatrice has shown, Origen did not endorse the Philonic identification of the "garments of skin" (*dermatinoi chitōnes*) of Genesis with physical bodies, which was, on the contrary, accepted during Epiphanius's own time by orthodox and authoritative Fathers such as Ambrose of Milan.<sup>30</sup>

In a letter written by Epiphanius in 394, a fifth accusation is added to the four above: that, according to the Origenists, "the Devil will again become what he once was, he will recover the same dignity and return to the Kingdom of heaven."<sup>31</sup>

In a 396 pamphlet Jerome found eight counts on which the Origenists erred:<sup>32</sup> subordinationism, preexistence of souls, the final absolution of the Devil, the "garments of skin," the resurrection body, and three others that did not occur in Epiphanius—the allegorical interpretation of Paradise, the idea that after being chased away from Paradise humans lost their resemblance to God, and one last charge that should be quoted here in full: "He thinks that those waters which in the Scriptures are said to be above the heavens are holy and superior

Powers, whereas those which are above the earth and under it are opposed and demonic Powers."<sup>33</sup>

To this Jerome adds, according to the oral communication of an Origenist, that they take the soul to be a soul only after being embodied; prior to that, she is either an angel or a demon.<sup>34</sup>

A ninth charge preserved by the same Jerome concerned the belief that "the sun, the moon and the chorus of the stars are reasonable souls, creatures once incorporeal who are now subject to vanity and to bodies of fire which, in our ignorance, we call the world luminaries. They will be freed from servitude and corruption to enjoy the glorious freedom of the Sons of God."<sup>35</sup>

In a letter of 401 preserved by Jerome, the Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria, first a sympathizer and then the fiercest persecutor of the Origenists of the Egyptian desert, gives a few details on the resurrection bodies and completes the list of errors with two more counts. The bodies of resurrection are not incorruptible, they are still "corporeal"; it is only after several centuries of subtle corporeality that the being undergoes a "second death," which completely destroys the corporeal substance.<sup>36</sup> The two new charges against the Origenists concern the end of Christ's reign and his second crucifixion: "The Christ will one day be crucified for the demons and the spiritual crimes incurred by the superior Powers."<sup>37</sup>

A twelfth accusation is recorded by the same Theophilus in a 402 letter: According to the Origenists, *God is not almighty*; "He created rational creatures only to the extent that he could."<sup>38</sup> And eventually, in a 404 letter, the patriarch adds that the Origenists are encratite: They reject marriage and procreation.<sup>39</sup>

How many of these accusations are confirmed by the works of the most important IVth-century Origenist, Evagrius of Pontus? Most of them, according to Antoine Guillaumont, the most distinguished scholar of Evagrius, except subordinationism and antisomatism, since Evagrius holds the body to be the most important instrument of salvation.<sup>40</sup> Yet there is more. Some of the points in Evagrius's doctrine that will assume paramount importance among the radical Cathars have not even been mentioned by the heresiologists. For in fact Evagrius admits a plurality of worlds:

Thus there is a world for the angels, a world for humans, a world for demons. Located in one world, any fallen intellect or soul is immediately united with a body. In other words, any fallen rational nature possesses a body, the angels as well as the humans and the demons. All these bodies are made of the four elements and are thus to some extent material. What differentiates them is simply the variable proportion of

these elements, that is, their "quality," which follows the varying proportions of the three parts that constitute the soul:<sup>41</sup> "There is in the angel predominance of the intellect and of [the element] fire, in humans predominance of concupiscence and earth, in demons predominance of anger and air."<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, "the bodies and the worlds, that is, the visible and sensible universe, have been the object of a second creation, distinct from the first, which had as its object the Intellects only, the purely intelligible natures. . . . It was the sin of the rational creatures that led God to the creation of the visible world; and . . . the creation of bodies is connected with the fall of the souls in heaven."<sup>43</sup> Yet the second creation, the *visible* creation, *is not evil*:

If the creation of the bodies, of matter, and of the visible world follows indeed the fall of the rational natures, it is not only a catastrophic and deplorable consequence thereof. On the contrary, this second creation is the work of the same God who had created the rational natures only so that they would enjoy his science, and who, making himself "salvific providence" . . . , created, after their fall, the bodies and the world in order to allow them to return to their prior state.<sup>44</sup>

More than a prison, a place of punishment, or a tomb, the body is thus an instrument of liberation and salvation, desired by God's providential and benefic disposition.<sup>45</sup>

The creation of the bodies was preceded by a "first judgment," which will be followed by many others.<sup>46</sup> The last judgment will mark the definitive disappearance of corporeality;<sup>47</sup> when all will submit to Christ, Christ's reign will come to an end.<sup>48</sup>

What of the Origenism anathematized in the VIth century, in 543 and 553 at the Vth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople? Only a few details are added to the list above, such as the idea that the body of resurrection will be spherical like Plato's androgyne in the *Symposium*.<sup>49</sup>

Bogomilism and mitigated Catharism share almost nothing with Origenism, except perhaps subordinationism, which they certainly could have found elsewhere, and the imprisonment of the angelic soul in the body of clay. On the contrary, Bogomilism is Traducianist, envisions the world as bipartite since God's creation (popular Platonism or Aristotelianism), ignores the capital problem of the corporeality of angels, does not multiply the number of judgments, and does not deny God's omnipotence. We can conclude that Origenism and Byzantine Bogomilism have little more in common than the doctrine of the body-tomb and the interpretation of the garments of skin of Gen. 3:21, which is current Platonism.

In Italy monarchian Catharism oscillates between Bogomil Traducianism and the preexistence of the soul (borrowed from the radical Cathars), popularly interpreted as reincarnation. Another monarchian myth that may be explained by the Origenist idea that all stars have a fiery corporeality as a consequence of sin is the fornication of the Sun and the Moon. That they have intercourse is widespread folklore, but that they are demons seems to be a negative interpretation of Origenism, which one would expect among radical Cathars. Yet heresiologists mention this myth only among the monarchians.

The analogies between radical Catharism and Origenism are so impressive that the former could only be a transformation of the latter, which could only have been performed in Byzantine ascetic religious circles, for the Origenist controversy was not as relevant in the West as it was in the East. We have here a phenomenon of revivalism—the revival of a very sophisticated doctrine, reinterpreted in such a way as to become popularly palatable and combined with a likewise bookish but more superficial Manichaean element (the antagonism of the two Principles). The following traits of Origenism have been revitalized in radical Catharism:

- preexistence of the soul;
- corporeality of the angels;
- double creation and parallel universes;
- multiple judgments;
- the resurrection body;
- denial of God's omnipotence and free will.

Only subordinationism and fall of the soul in the body are common to Origenists, monarchian Cathars (Bogomils, reformed or not), and radical Cathars.

## 5. Provençal Catharism in the XIVth Century

Jacques Fournier (ca. 1280–1342) became bishop of Pamiers on March 19, 1317, was elected cardinal in 1326 and transferred to Mirepoix, and became pope on December 26, 1334, under the name of Benedict XII. As a result of his inquisitorial zeal while in Pamiers, we have complete information on the preaching of the last significant Cathar Perfect in what by then was southern France: Pierre Authié.<sup>50</sup>

Notary public in Aix-les-Thermes, a cultivated man, Pierre Authié belonged to a "good family of legists with an illustrious clientele."<sup>51</sup>

About 1295–96 Pierre and his brother Guillaume “were clerks, knew the law, had wives and children and were rich.”<sup>52</sup>

One day when Pierre had read in his house a book in Guillaume’s presence, he told his brother what was in the book. His brother read for a moment. Pierre asked: “Now, my brother, what then?” Guillaume answered: “It looks to me as if we’ve lost our souls.” Pierre replied: “Let’s leave, then, brother, and seek for the salvation of our souls.” This said, they abandoned all they had, and went to Lombardy. And there they became good Christians and received the power to make others good Christians and to lead their souls to salvation.<sup>53</sup>

Pierre Authié’s preaching addressed simple people apt to be persuaded through lively mythical narratives:

Among other things, he said that the heavenly Father had in the beginning made all spirits and souls in heaven, and these spirits and souls were with the heavenly Father. Then the Devil went to the gate of Paradise and wanted to enter but could not, and thus he stood by the gate for one thousand years. Then he entered Paradise by fraud and when he was inside he persuaded the spirits and the souls made by the heavenly Father that their fate wasn’t good, for they were dominated by the heavenly Father, but if they wanted to follow him, he would give them possessions, namely, fields, vines, gold and silver, women and other goods of this lower visible world.<sup>54</sup>

The promise to give the angels “wives whom they would cherish”<sup>55</sup> is elsewhere replaced by the introduction of a woman “superbly dressed into Paradise, and the spirits rushed to follow her.”<sup>56</sup>

Touched by this persuasion, the spirits and the souls in heaven followed the Devil, and all those who followed him fell from heaven. They poured like heavy rain for nine days and nine nights. The heavenly Father, seeing himself thus abandoned by spirits and souls, rose from his throne and set his foot over the hole through which the spirits and souls were falling. And he told those who remained with him that if one of them would move, there will be no resting place for him forever. And to those who fell he said: “Go, for the time being and *per ja* [Provençal: for now]!” Had he said “from now on,” then not one of these spirits [and souls] would ever be saved and revert to Paradise. Yet, since he said *per ja*, which is “for a while,” all these spirits will revert to heaven.<sup>57</sup>

The fallen spirits are deceived and afflicted by the Devil, who introduces them into physical “tunics” (the Latin translation of the “garments of skin” in Gen. 3:21 is *tunicæ pelliceæ*). “In these bodies the souls forget what they had been in heaven, and are unwilling to leave them

[the bodies] anymore. These bodies are called 'tunics.' "58 The soul transmigrates in many bodies, of humans and animals (the famous example is here given of the Cathar who remembers having been the horse of a lord and finds the horseshoe that he had lost between two boulders), but after being incarnated in a "good Christian" she reverts to heaven.<sup>59</sup> Pierre Authié still professes Bogomil phantasiasm: Christ never "adumbrated" himself of something so vile as the womb.<sup>60</sup> The concept of "adumbration" is explained by the Montailou curate in this way: "The same way as a man who is in a barrel is in the shadow [*umbra*, hence *adumbrare*] of the barrel without receiving anything from it, but is simply contained down there, thus the Christ dwelt in the Virgin Mary without taking anything from her, and was in her only as the content in the container."<sup>61</sup>

This explanation seems clear enough, but Pierre Authié does not seem to understand the concept, for he denies that Christ may "adumbrate" himself in Mary without taking anything from her by asserting that Christ does not even "adumbrate" himself.<sup>62</sup>

As for the rest, Pierre Authié rejects the worship of the cross and icons, baptism in "material water," the eucharist, marriage, feasts, and the resurrection of the flesh.<sup>63</sup>

The Cathars knew two distinct reasons for adopting a vegetarian diet. One they had inherited from the Bogomils: Nothing should be taken in that derives *ex coitu* (from sexual intercourse), which is a diabolical operation. The other reason was a consequence of their vulgar interpretation of Origenism as reincarnation of the soul in animal bodies. By eating *fereza* ("food from beasts"), one could mistakenly eat one's own father or mother.<sup>64</sup> Fish is not included among forbidden foodstuffs either because they are said to be born without intercourse or because they do not appear to be endowed with spirit since they lack blood; the reason fallen spirits avoided incarnation in their bodies was because they were endowed with *legeza*, "ugliness," like the reptiles and the invertebrates.<sup>65</sup> Two of these explanations are included in Bernard Gui's *Manual of the Inquisitor*:

They would not in any way kill [*nullo modo occiderint*] an animal or a bird, for they say and believe that the spirits that withdraw from the bodies of people who have not been initiated into their sect and into their order by the laying on of hands effected according to their rites, take refuge in animals deprived of reason and even in birds and pass from body to body.<sup>66</sup> [And the other reason is that] they eat neither meat, or even touch it, nor do they eat cheese or eggs or any being born through generation or intercourse, *per viam generationis seu coitus*.<sup>67</sup>

The three inalienable negative principles of the Cathar Perfect appear thus to be, according to the formula of the Inquisitor Bernard Gui, "in nullo casu jurant, nullo modo occiderint, non tangunt aliquam mulierem" (they would never swear an oath, would not kill, would not touch any woman).<sup>68</sup>

Arnaud Teisseyre de Lordat, the husband of Guillemette, Pierre Authié's daughter, remembers that Pierre knew the radical interpretation of the Prologue to the Gospel of John three years *before* he suddenly converted and left for Lombardy. "He asked me: 'Do you know what *In him all was made and nothing was made without him* means?'" And he explained this according to the ancient Cathar interpretation, in which *nihil* is taken not as an adverb but as a noun: "Pierre answered that the meaning of the passage was that 'without him nothingness was made,' that is, 'all things were made without him,'"<sup>69</sup> for all things are but nothingness (*nihil* or *unum purum nihil*, "sheer nothingness").

This exegesis was ancient. It is found for the first time in an author refuted by Durand of Huesca, a former Waldensian converted during a debate held at Pamiers in 1207 between Bishop Diego of Osma, probably accompanied by the subprior Domingo Guzmán, the future Saint Dominic.<sup>70</sup> Durand's *Summa*, which resumes the topic of a prior work (*Liber Antiheresis*), was written in 1222–23 and submitted for approval to the Curia in 1224.<sup>71</sup> The Cathar author whose thesis is discussed by Durand—probably Bartholomeus of Carcassonne—asserts: "John said in the Gospel: Through him all things were made and without him the *nihil* was made,"<sup>72</sup> meaning the visible world. A little later (1235), Salvo Burci attributed the same exegesis to the "Albanians."<sup>73</sup>

Jacques Authié, Pierre's son, "was cultivated, and the testimonies show him deep in his books or 'preaching like an angel.'"<sup>74</sup> Pierre Maury of Montailou had received from him the same version of the fall of the angels that Jacques's father told. Jacques was a better storyteller and would dwell longer on the "tunics, that is, the bodies of the earth of forgetfulness":<sup>75</sup> "The Holy Father told the fallen spirits: 'You others will have reversed tunics of different sorts, for you will go from tunic to tunic until you will revert to a tunic in which you will be according to justice and truth, in which you may be saved.'"<sup>76</sup>

The preaching of Pierre and Jacques Authié, to the extent that one can form an idea from the testimony of people in whom the two must not have had much trust, has nothing of radical dualism, let alone the dark grandness of John of Lugio's speculative subtleties. The Authiés are by no means heirs to their Provençal forefathers, the Albigenses, but to the teachings of a Lombard church of the late XIIIth century in which it



is easy to recognize the "French," a.k.a. "Sclavini"—the disciples of Caloiannes or "Bagnolenses" of later heresiologists.

In general the doctrine professed by the Authiés can be defined as monarchian, although that God who uses his foot to plug up the hole in heaven through which his angels escape seems rather outlandish. But the preachers' audience was not disposed to speculate on God's omnipotence or free will. Nazarian phantasiasm was preferred over Desiderius's realism, popular Origenism intended as reincarnation over Bogomil Traducianism, and the "garments of skin" received the same attention as of old. During his three years as a novice in Lombardy (1296–99), Pierre Authié must have forgotten the interpretation of the Prologue of John's Gospel that he had revealed to his son-in-law about 1293, which went back to radical Catharism.

To judge Catharism in its entirety only by the crude fairy tales that already prefigure the sad time of the lapsed Perfect Guillaume Bélibaste, last of his species but not best, would be like reconstructing the theology of Duns Scotus from the story of a Languedoc peasant summarizing the Sunday sermon of his curate. Yet it is undeniable that the monarchian schools do not sin by an excess of intellectualism, this being rather the exclusive gift of the radicals.

## 6. Cathar Dualism

The fifth of the tracts included in the *Book of the Two Principles* of the radical Albanenses bears the title *Contra Garatenses*, "Against the Disciples of Garattus," bishop of the monarchian Cathars of Concorezzo—the irreducible opponents of the Desenzano faction.

I intend to make known to all enlightened people the madness of the Garatists. Albeit believing, like the others [the "Romans"], that there is only one most holy Creator, they still keep preaching on many occasions that there is also another God: the evil God, Prince of this World, who, they say, was first a creature of the good God but subsequently corrupted the four elements created by this true God and from these elements he formed and constituted, in the beginning of the world, man and woman and all other visible bodies from which issued all creatures which now reign over the earth.<sup>77</sup>

If this is the heresy of the Garatists, rhetorically asks the author (and his summary is perfectly correct), then what is the difference between them and the Romans?

If it is true that the Lord and true God made in the beginning man and woman, the birds and the animals and all other visible bodies, then why do you every day condemn the works of flesh and the intercourse of man and woman, asserting that it is the Devil's work? Why is it that you do not eat meat, eggs, cheese, and all things that were created by your excellent Creator? And why is it that you so severely condemn those who do, if you believe that there is one Creator only, author of all that is?<sup>78</sup>

The Garatists are in flagrant logical contradiction: "Every day you repudiate the creation of the Lord and true God, if it is true that it is this very good and merciful God who created and made man and woman and the visible bodies of this world."<sup>79</sup>

Obviously the main point where radicals and monarchians diverge is the meaning of the words *creator* and *factor*. According to the monarchians, God is *creator* of all that is, including primordial matter, whereas the devil is *factor* of the visible world, with God's permission. In this sense the "Albanians" are perfectly right in denouncing them as "Romans," that is, nondualists. The radicals in turn assert that *creator* and *factor* are perfect equivalents, the Evil Principle is both. He is *creator* and *factor* in the sense emphasized in the tract *De creatione*:<sup>80</sup> because he *organized* the things of this world,<sup>81</sup> whereas God is creator and factor of a parallel universe.<sup>82</sup> *What* they have got to organize remains unexplained, since there is nothing but themselves. Yet at stake here is not the logic of the radicals but the terrible accusation they cast against the Concorezzo Bogomils—that they are not actual dualists although they profess ethical principles like encratism and vegetarianism that can only be the consequence of a dualistic religion. The "Albanians" were the first to discover that their opponents were pseudodualists only and should have enjoyed the company of the orthodox.

If we could already conclude, in chapter 8, that the Bogomils were pseudodualists for not attributing to the Devil any part in the creation of the world, the more we should here emphasize the nondualistic character of the doctrine of the monarchian Cathars, which never ceases to insist on the fact that *the Devil's operation took place with God's permission*. The accredited definition of heresy perfectly suits the monarchians: The heretic is a misbeliever, not a disbeliever.<sup>83</sup>

The radicals are more difficult to define. It is obvious that Origenism forms the basis for their belief.<sup>84</sup> Yet the ethics and the practice of the radicals and the monarchians alike are derived from Bogomilism. This shows that the ascetic intellectuals who revitalized Origenism at some point prior to 1167 and certainly in the Byzantine Empire, where

Origenism could be readily exhumed from books, might have already been Bogomils or anyway knew and approved of Bogomilism to some extent.

Provençal Catharism at the beginning of the XIVth century is not radical anymore. It depends entirely on the doctrine of the monarchian church "of the French" in Lombardy.

As far as reversed biblical exegesis is concerned, the two religions of the Cathars continue to activate new possibilities inherent in the system and at the same time rediscover, or simply adopt, old solutions once used by the Marcionites, the Manichaeans, and obviously the Bogomils, who are their source and their model. Most of the Cathars thus continue to identify the Old Testament god with the Devil, according to an option present in Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and Bogomilism. The school of John of Lugio is revolutionary in so far as it accepts the reality of both the Old and the New Testament, yet in a world other than this one, a parallel universe that, although much superior to ours, is still frankly bad for being corruptible. It is difficult to understand why John of Lugio had to resort to such an unexpected interpretation. Rationalism is one reason, according to which miracles are not, and never have been, possible in this world but may be possible in a parallel one. Yet it may be arbitrary to ascribe to John of Lugio this Protestant understanding of God's silence. We must therefore content ourselves with the observation that the deepest Cathar thinker activated one of the least probable options of reversed exegesis, namely, the reversal of the reversal: The Bible is absolutely false for this world (extremistic reversal), but it is absolutely and literally true in another world (extremistic reversal of the reversal, denial of the denial), to which the perfectly historical narratives of the Old and New Testaments apply. From a systemic viewpoint, this is the most original contribution of Catharism to the working out of the system.

## Notes

1. See *De haeresi catharorum in Lombardia*, ed. Antoine Dondaine, "La Hiérarchie cathare en Italie, I: Le 'De haeresi catharorum in Lombardia,'" *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 19 (1949), 305-12. Most sources of Catharism are collected and translated in Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages: Selected Sources Translated and Annotated* (Columbia Univ. Press: New York, 1969), 127-373. (About the radical church of "Drugunthia"-Dragovitsa, see 164-65.) Other texts concerning Catharism are translated in Robert I. Moore, *The Birth of Popular Heresy* (E. Arnold: London, 1975), 88-154.

Texts in Latin from heresiologists are contained in Ignaz von Döllinger, *Beiträge II*. Other important heresiological sources have been made available by Antoine Dondaine, *Un Traité néo-manichéen du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Le 'Liber de duobus principiis,' suivi d'un fragment de rituel cathare* (also containing the *Summa de Catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno* of Ranierus Sacconi) (Istituto Storico Domenicano Santa Sabina: Rome, 1939), 64–78; “La Hiérarchie cathare en Italie, II: Le ‘Tractatus de hereticis’ d’Anselme d’Alexandrie, O.P.; III: Catalogue de la hiérarchie cathare en Italie,” in *AFP* 20 (1950), 308–24. Moneta of Cremona’s *Adversus Catharos et Valdenses libri V* is available only in the old edition of Th. A. Ricchini (Rome, 1743); the most important fragments are translated in Wakefield and Evans, 308–29. The *Liber contra Manicheos* of Durand of Huesca, containing fragments from original testimonies, is available in Christine Thouzellier’s edition: *Une Somme anti-cathare: Le Liber contra Manicheos de Durand de Huesca* (Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense: Louvain, Belgium, 1964). A condensate of common places on Catharism is the *Manual of the Inquisitor* of Bernardus Guidonis: Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l’Inquisiteur*, ed. and trans. G. Mollat (with G. Drioux), vol. 1 (Les Belles Lettres: Paris, 1964<sup>2</sup>).

The direct sources on Catharism are the following: the *Liber de duobus principiis* from the school of John of Lugio, ed. Antoine Dondaine and more recently by Christine Thouzellier, *Livre des Deux Principes* (SC 198) (Cerf: Paris, 1973); also translated in René Nelli, *Écritures cathares: La Cène secrète. Le Livre des deux Principes. Le Rituel Latin. Le Rituel occitan. Textes précathares et cathares* (Denoël: Paris, 1959), 69–201. The Latin Ritual, which will not detain us in this book, was edited and translated by Christine Thouzellier, *Rituel cathare* (SC 236) (Cerf: Paris, 1977). Among the direct sources may also be mentioned the transcripts of the Inquisition, especially those of the investigations led at Pamiers (1318–25) under Bishop Jacques Fournier (for the earlier XIVth century, excerpts are published in Döllinger, *Beiträge II*), published in Latin by Jean Duvernoy, *Le Registre d’inquisition de Jacques Fournier*, 3 vols. (Privat: Toulouse, 1965), and translated into French by the same, *Le Registre d’Inquisition de Jacques Fournier (Évêque de Pamiers) 1318–1325*, 3 vols. (Mouton: Paris, The Hague, New York, 1978).

The most important scholarly studies on the Cathars are now the two books by Jean Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme: L’Histoire des Cathares* (Privat: Toulouse, 1979), and *Le Catharisme: La Religion des Cathares* (Privat: Toulouse, 1976). Several other works will be mentioned in further notes.

General bibliographies on Catharism are contained in Herbert Grundmann, “Anhang: Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte der religiösen Bewegungen im Mittelalter, 1955,” in *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (1960<sup>2</sup>; reprint, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1977), 487–567; Carl T. Berkhout and J. B. Russell, *Medieval Heresies: A Bibliography 1960–1979* (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies: Toronto, 1981).

2. Sacconi, in Moore, *The Birth*, 143–44.
3. PG 104 col. 775.
4. Döllinger II, 52.
5. Döllinger II, 53.
6. Wakefield-Evans, 358–61.
7. Wakefield-Evans, 301; text in Döllinger II, 273–79.
8. Moore, *The Birth*, 132.
9. Moore, *The Birth*, 133.
10. Moore, *The Birth*, 138.
11. Moore, *The Birth*, 139; Arno Borst, *Die Katharer*, contests John of Lugio’s ordination.
12. PL 204 col. 777; see my “The Sun and The Moon,” in *International Journal of Roumanian Studies* 3 (1981–83), 83–97.
13. Döllinger II, 277.
14. Döllinger I, 60–61.

15. Moneta, in Wakefield-Evans, 317–18 (my Eng. adaptation).
16. Döllinger II, 274.
17. See my "The Sun and the Moon," 90–91.
18. Döllinger II, 58.
19. Moore, *The Birth*, 139 (my Eng. adaptation).
20. Arno Borst, *Die Katharer*, 270–72.
21. René Nelli, *La Philosophie du Catharisme: Le Dualisme radical au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Payot: Paris, 1978), 73–124.
22. Wakefield-Evans, 356.
23. Marcel Dando, *Les Origines du Catharisme* (Paris, 1967).
24. Duvernoy, *Religion*, 295ff; 344ff.
25. Epiph., *Pan.* 64.
26. A. Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostika" d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'Origénisme chez les Grecs et les Syriens* (Seuil: Paris, 1962).
27. Epiph., *Pan.* 64.4.5–6; see Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 85.
28. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 85–86.
29. De principiis II.8.3; see Henri Crouzel, *Antropologia*, 43.
30. Ambrose, *Ep.* 49:4; see P. F. Beatrice, "Le Tuniche di pelle: Antiche letture di Gen. 3,21," in U. Bianchi, ed., *La Tradizione dell'Enkrateia: Motivazioni ontologiche e protologiche* (Ateneo: Rome, 1985), 433–84.
31. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 89.
32. In Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 89–92.
33. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 90.
34. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 91.
35. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 93–94.
36. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 98.
37. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika."
38. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 101.
39. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika."
40. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 110–11. A good English presentation and translation of texts by Evagrius is Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos: Chapters on Prayer*, trans. and introduction by John Eudes Bamberger (Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo, MI, 1981).
41. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 108.
42. Evagrius, *Kephalaia gnostika* I.68; Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 108.
43. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 109.
44. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 110.
45. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika."
46. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 111.
47. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 116.
48. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 116–17.
49. Anathematismata V of 543 and X of 553, in Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 141 and 145.
50. The last Cathar Perfect in South France was a certain Guillaume Bélibaste, appropriately defined as "the last, not the best."
51. Duvernoy, *Histoire*, 322.
52. Sibille, widow of Raimond Peyre d'Arques, in Duvernoy, *Registre* II, 566.
53. Duvernoy, *Registre* II 567.
54. Duvernoy, *Registre* II 569; Latin text II, 406–7.
55. Fournier II, 406–7.
56. Fournier II, 34; Duvernoy, *Religion*, 70, n. 83.
57. Duvernoy, *Registre* II 569.

58. Duvernoy, *Registre* II 570.
59. Duvernoy, *Registre* II.
60. Duvernoy, *Registre* II 571.
61. Fournier I, 230; Duvernoy, *Religion*, 84.
62. Duvernoy, *Religion*, 84.
63. *Registre* II 572–73.
64. Duvernoy, *Religion*, 173.
65. Duvernoy, *Religion*, 192; Fournier II, 108.
66. *Manual*, 18.
67. *Manual*, 18.
68. *Manual*, 18.
69. *Registre* II 603.
70. Thouzellier, *Une Somme*, 31.
71. Thouzellier, *Une Somme*, 36–38.
72. Thouzellier, *Une Somme*, 209; see Nelli, *Philosophie du catharisme*, 17; 34, n. 8.
73. Döllinger II, 59.
74. Duvernoy, *Histoire*, 324.
75. Psalm 136:4; Duvernoy, *Registre* 931.
76. Duvernoy, *Registre* 930.
77. *Liber de duobus principiis*, after Nelli, *Écritures cathares*, 175.
78. Nelli, *Écritures cathares*, 179.
79. Nelli, *Écritures cathares*, 180.
80. French trans. in Nelli, *Écritures cathares*, 119.
81. Nelli, *Écritures cathares*, 161.
82. Nelli, *Écritures cathares*, 162.
83. H. Grundmann, "Oportet et haereses esse," in *L'Eresia medievale*, ed. Ovidio Capitani (Il Mulino: Bologna, 1971), 23–60, quotation from 30.
84. Augustinian influences have been emphasized by Nelli, *Philosophie*, 58–62.

# Chapter 10

## The Tree of Gnosis

I saw that One was animate  
Mankind inanimate fantasy  
—YEATS

A famous Chicago gangster of the 1930s used a simple method to make all of his decisions (which were indeed consequential, to himself and others): He tossed a coin. Heads was yes, tails was no. Only once did the information prove wrong, with deadly consequences.

An "Aristotelian square"—two flips of the coin—would have furnished him with a four-way choice: + / -, - / +, + / +, - / -. Combining two events (and two logical "squares"), he would have obtained sixteen choices. More than a few events combined in binary couples would lead to hundreds if not thousands of options, and one would spend longer than one whole day tossing a coin for one's daily quota of decisions.

Yet life is almost by definition a type of operation that we call analogue: It gives the impression of smoothness, because the decisions it requires are too fast to be perceived as "digital," that is, as a sequence of binary switches. The passage from "digital" to "analogue" itself has a ratio, which is one to seven—a process perceived as binary will on the contrary be perceived as continuous if run at a speed seven times greater.

A chess player's mind is trained to analyze hundreds of binary decisions within a complex situation. The fascination many of us have with chess and other games derives from their ability to challenge the mind's computational skills, which, we may add, is all the mind has when viewed at a certain level.

Fascination with religion derives—although much more unexpectedly—from the same source, for religion, like philosophy, science, and even literature, is equally a computational process.

The gangster tossing his coin showed us that life is a multiple-choice mechanism. Myth too. And in myth as in life, the wrong choice can be

deadly. It proved indeed deadly for innumerable Marcionites, Manichaeans, Paulicians, and Cathars, who came to grips with various authorities, were persecuted, hunted down, and exterminated. Yet their original and basic option was closer to the gangster's method than we think. It consisted of a simple, binary alternative: one principle or two principles. Either the Evil derives from Good and then Good is not so good and Evil is not so evil or else Evil and Good are separated, Evil is genuinely evil, and Good is genuinely good. In a certain way it seems astonishing that so much blood was shed for so little. And that all these heretics of old, not unlike ourselves, lived and died for a truth that was only one among multiple choices.

Should we think that their choice was dictated by some obscure "existential root" or more plainly by their idea of the world in a time of economical, political, or religious "crisis," or more often Crisis with capital C? Were they not sick, even neurotic, if they located the world within the sphere of Evil or at any rate made it into a mixed blessing?

A system of ideas is not innocent, and many battles are fought for every binary option in it. So many brave Christians were disqualified by their more vociferous brethren for a simple *iota* that it is not hard to understand why dualists were so tenaciously and persistently tracked down until, apparently, they were altogether uprooted from Western society. Yet the system was not dead, and they were going to take unexpected revenge, as chapter 11 and the Epilogue of this book will make plain. It is not only immoral but simply hard to believe that the losers of history were the expression of some "Crisis," that they were "sick" or "pessimistic." We've spent enough time with them so far to understand that their only sin was *thinking*, and they surely thought better at times than their opponents. The losers of history were losers not in a game of mind but of power.

The morphodynamic of the dualist system may be hard to follow, especially when it comes down to its many transformations at a lower level, but at its top it starts with very simple rules. A number of matters had to be settled in advance, and it must have taken an extraordinary intellectual effort to come to think of the "world" as the sum total of all objects and of a "non-world" from which the world derives. It must have taken less effort to establish from experience the eternal binary pair "good" and "bad," which accompanies every infant at the dawn of its experience, together with contentment and crying.

Here were the terms of the problem: on the one hand a world, created by a (but not necessarily *one*) cause; on the other the pair "good" and "evil." At this basic level, flipping a coin is always consequential.



For it is here that the decision is made whether the world was created by "good" or by "evil" or by "good-and-evil," and in what proportion. It appears that at a very early stage in time these were the terms of the problem, a problem run ever since through billions and billions of human minds. No wonder that, by today, it should appear so complex and abstruse that we fail to understand the import of dualism and we count it among the oddities of history. In reality dualism was like an aborted chess game, if we want to persist in this analogy. It was not a bad game, it was simply interrupted by force. The stake was meaning, but meaning was not in the game itself.

Thus if we say that the world *is created*, then it can be created by Good, by Evil, by both, or by neither. Few creationists, including those of our time, were ever so bold as to assert that the world is simply and genuinely good, and if they did, there was always a Monsieur de Voltaire to contradict them. The world is pervaded with impermanence, suffering, and anxiety; if it was Good who created it, something must have corrupted it in between. *The Devil appears as a necessity from our first reflection on our experience of the world.* And yet the dualists do not exclude a priori any of the possible hypotheses: For the Manichaeans, the world was created by Good to evict Evil; for the Bogomils and the monarchian Cathars, the world was created by Good and organized by Evil, but Evil depends on Good; for most gnostics and Marcionites, the world was created by an intermediary that is neither good nor evil. In Gnosticism he maintains relations with both Good and Evil, and sometimes Evil paradoxically derives from him, although it is superior by nature to the intermediary. For Marcion, Evil equally derives from the intermediary, yet their relation is tense: Evil is the Opponent not exactly of Good but of the intermediary from which it proceeds.

*Unde malum?* If two Principles are postulated, then Evil is one of them, without origin or beginning. If only one Principle is set *ex hypothesi* (and here everything occurs by decision of the mind, for no "experience" whatsoever can tell us about the mysterious operations of transcendence), then Evil must derive from Good. To explain its appearance, a myth is needed, the myth of the fallen Lucifer or Iblis or Samael. The gnostics morphodynamically reinvented *two* dualistic myths (of a Trickstress and of a male Trickster), which they used in a tight sequence to show the immense distance between transcendence and this world. Contrary to the followers of the Catholic church, the gnostics had no authority to tell them which path to take in the jungle of the mind. Therefore they used all possibilities the mind was able to produce during the few centuries of their existence. Even if few, and persecuted by

all, the gnostics were mentally more creative than their Christian opponents, who eventually, especially when they had sufficient power, decided to canonize the unsolved paradoxes of their faith. The most courageous decision was to allow Christ's *physical* body to go to heaven. Yet all of this could happen only with the immense risk, taken by Catholic Christianity up until very recently, of "ghettoization," as the Italian Catholic historian G. Romanato calls it, meaning that any non-Catholic around who would think at all would certainly think differently. It was, after all, a lucky event that the gnostics were losers in history; for had they not been, they would have chosen one path and walked it forever. Since they had no chance to do it, they deserve the appealing title of champions of free thought in Western history, freedom to think through not one but all possible choices of a logical problem.

Many dualists did not have their own myth to differentiate themselves from Christianity. Marcion, the Bogomils, and the Cathars made use of the myth of Lucifer: Marcion, according to the orthodox formula, applied it only to the lower world of the Demiurge, and the Bogomils and Cathars by transforming the orthodox formula.

We see how, from a seed, Gnosis grows into a tree that starts to split into branches; some branches remain virtual, some actually grow. The generative model of gnostic systems *is* actually a Tree, the Tree of Gnosis. From this Tree of Knowledge scholars, in their strong respect for tradition, seldom eat; but once they do, they must acknowledge to what extent human beliefs and theories are related to human games.

At this point all Western dualists without exception feel that they should settle their account with the Book of Genesis. Here the game changes. It becomes sequential, like a board game in which the character advances by rolling the die, and any square he or she lands on presents a multiple-choice case (on which a few other choices may depend). Any of the gnostic groups that produce texts seem to play the board game anew every time, and thus the results are different—they are transformations of each other.

This operation can be understood through the simple use of morphology. It does not entail morphodynamics. Yet the basic option, which is in most cases to say that the Old Testament is the Scripture of the Demiurge, can be comprehended only in morphodynamic perspective. We saw that Marcion based his rejection of the Old Testament on Paul's distinction between two regimes of the world: *sub lege* and *sub fide*, under the Law and under Faith. Yet we also saw that the rejection was motivated by a mental operation that sought confirmation in the Bible for the qualities of omnipotence and omniscience of God but could not

find it. It also appeared that the only group that would have been sufficiently close to Judaism to keep using its Scriptures, and sufficiently free to use them away from Judaic interpretive tradition, thereby triggering a rational hermeneutic of suspicion eventually directed against the biblical God, was the Christians themselves. Starting from the hypothesis formulated by distinguished members of the German and Swedish School of Religion like Geo Widengren and Hans Jonas, researchers investigated the possible Samaritan roots of Gnosticism. All in all, the results were rather deceiving. Simon Magus could indeed be largely explained from Samaritan beliefs. Yet the passage from Protognosticism to full-blown Gnosticism could be accomplished only by a dilation of perspective that could not be achieved in a Samaritan setting. Perhaps the first Christian gnostics expanded on the premises of Simon's successors; yet perhaps the morphodynamics of Gnosticism did not need Simon at all.

Let us analyze again the terms of the problem. There are two Principles, and there is the Old Testament. Theoretically the Old Testament can belong to Good, to Evil, to both, or to neither. The orthodox assign it to Good, some of the dualists to Evil, most of them to the intermediary who is good-and-evil, a very few of them to a parallel universe that is neither perfectly good nor evil (although it is more good than evil). And this is in some cases what truly and ultimately separates a sect like the Bogomils or the mitigated Cathars from orthodoxy; it also explains the interest of the militant Lutheran Adolf von Harnack in Marcion, in whom he saw the champion of Lutheranism *avant la lettre*. Harnack thought that Luther should have followed his youthful impulses and Pauline allegiances and expelled the Old Testament from the Christian canon. And wasn't the battle about the Bible the main one that Augustine fought against the shrewd Manichaean Faustus of Milevum, whose impressive intellectual stature still paralyzed the bishop of Hippo long after his opponent's death?

Having once decided that the Old Testament is the Scripture of a lower god, the board game played on the Book of Genesis is easy to follow and is, *entirely and exclusively*, a logical game. Sometimes it gives the impression of "borrowings," but what is borrowed are logical "bricks" that circulate and perpetuate the sequential transformation of each reading of Genesis. And each reading is new and part of a "map of misprision" that will never be complete. Let us follow this board game as it develops.

First the board: the Book of Genesis, put together from different versions by traditionalists who were not thinking of the millennia of rationalism that would follow them.

In a class I gave in 1987 at the University of Chicago, the students and I came to the conclusion that the first two verses of Genesis may admit approximately fifty different interpretations. To start with the first words: "In the *Beginning* God created the heavens and the earth" was interpreted by some Kabbalists as meaning that heaven and earth were created in, or through, the dawning hypostasis called Beginning. (This interpretation clearly includes the Prologue of John, and the Prologue of John includes it or perhaps formulates it for the first time: "In the Beginning was the Logos.")

The Creator God of Genesis makes the heavens and the earth and then is clearly confronted with a number of things that were not created by him: the Abyss, Darkness, the Waters. We showed that the mitigated gnostics interpreted this as a dualistic cosmogony and reacted vigorously against it by ascribing to Sophia or the Demiurge the origin of Darkness and Matter. Yet even they, as good Platonists, were not shocked at all by the fact that Abyss—interpreted as sheer Space, the Platonic *chōra*—was there with God.

The Spirit of God, *rūah ha-'elôhîm*, which must be a hypostasis of God but enters the story very abruptly, hovers over the Waters. God makes Light, which contrasts with Darkness, makes the Firmament to separate the upper from the lower Waters (whatever this might mean; "upper" and "lower" Waters are subject to perpetual interpretation), dry land appears, God orders it to put forth plants, he makes the luminaries of heaven, then orders the Waters to bring forth creatures. Then there appear (or are made) the birds of the sky, then God orders the earth to bring forth animals that live on the earth surface, then he addresses himself *in the plural* (Gen. 1:26) to fabricate humanity in his image, makes it male *and* female and master of creation. Ascertaining that all this was good, God rests one day.

The second chapter of Genesis stems from an entirely different source and entails a different and contradictory version of creation. Adam is created from dust and animated by God's breath (2:7). God makes the eastern Garden of Paradise with the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge in it (2:8–9). Adam is moved to Eden (2:15) and ordered not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (2:16–17). God makes all the animals again and introduces them to Adam, who gives them names (2:18–20). Then God causes "a deep sleep to fall upon" Adam, extracts one rib from him, and out of it he makes woman (2:21–22). Out of nothing the Snake appears and explains to Eve that she will not die from eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge but instead "will be like God, knowing good and evil" (3:4–5). Eve eats of it and passes it to Adam as well (3:6). They are

ashamed of being naked and hide from the sight of God (3:7–8). God does not know where they are (3:9) or what they have done (3:11), then finds out and curses the Snake, the woman, and the man (3:14–19), sets them in “garments of skin” (3:21), and expels them from Paradise; “and east of the Garden of Eden he set the cherubim with a flaming sword turning all around to guard the way to the Tree of Life” (3:24), lest, perhaps, as the common interpretation has it but the text would not say, humankind may become immortal.

Let us stop here and examine a few of the most salient episodes so far, the squares on the game board of Genesis on which our dualists would most certainly dwell.

In the beginning they stumble upon the Abyss, Darkness, and the Waters and try to figure out where they come from. The choices offered to them are the following, and they explored all of them:

1. God on the one hand and the Abyss, Darkness, and the Waters on the other, taken singularly or collectively, are distinct Principles. The Second Principle is the Waters for Irenaeus’s Ophites; Darkness for Hippolytus’s Sethians, the Manichaeans, and the radical Cathars; and, tacitly so, the Abyss for most Platonizing gnostics who do not want to be dualistic and in fact would be surprised to be called such.
2. Everything, including the Abyss, Darkness, and the Waters (primordial Matter) was created by God.
- 2a. but Genesis omitted to tell it. Besides, there is nothing wrong if God created the Abyss and the others, because all creation is good (orthodox, Bogomils, monarchian Cathars).
3. Not God but someone else created everything, and Genesis told it correctly. Something is indeed wrong if God created such things as primordial Matter; but the god of Genesis is not the true God (all Western dualists and pseudodualists with the exception of John of Lugio); consequently there is no harm in ascribing to him the origin of Darkness and primordial Matter (gnostics).

We notice again with some surprise that, between the orthodox and the seemingly speculative gnostics, the former take Genesis less seriously, and the latter take it quite literally. The orthodox are accommodating, for they use the Old Testament as a vast allegory to substantiate their claim that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Old Testament God. One allegory more or less can do no harm. The gnostics, by contrast, do not contend the truth contained in every single contradictory statement of Genesis; they simply want to make sense of it.

Another consequential square on the Genesis game board is 1:26, referring to God as plural. Only a few options are possible:

- A. The premise is that God is truly the high and dignified creator of the ecosystem; this premise is shared by Judaism and orthodox Christianity.
  1. The plural is explained away as being a *plurale maiestatis* with no concrete meaning;
  2. The plural means that God collaborated with someone else in the creation of humanity: Sophia or an angel.
  
- B. The premise is that the god of Genesis is not the ultimate God.
  1. The plural is tacitly explained away, for humanity was created by whoever the god of Genesis is, without any help (Marcion, the Bogomils, and the Cathars, provided we understand by "humanity" the physical bodies of man and woman);
  2. The plural indicates that whoever the god of Genesis is (either an intermediary or the Devil), he created humanity with the help of his Archons (most gnostics and the Manichaeans).

Let us move on to the next square (2:7): Who blew into Adam's nostrils the breath of life? That question depends on another question: What is the breath of life?

The only logical possibilities are the following:

1. Adam's maker;
2. someone other than Adam's maker.

In either case, he or she might have blown in Adam's nostrils

1. his or her own breath;
2. someone else's breath.

This gives us four choices

1. Adam's maker blows his own breath into Adam's nostrils (orthodox, Marcion, Manichaeans);
2. Adam's maker blows someone else's breath into his nostrils (many gnostics, one Bogomil myth);
3. Not the maker of Adam blows his own breath into Adam's nostrils (certain gnostics, another Bogomil myth);
4. Not the maker of Adam blows not his own breath into his nostrils (some gnostics).

Let us move a few squares ahead, when the game has tightened up and the Snake appears all of a sudden on the board (3:1). Who is the Snake?

We already explored the answers to this question in chapter 4. Yet it would be instructive to have a look at the logic of this multiple choice:

1. The Snake is a representative of the true God (many dualists);
2. The Snake is not the representative of the true God (orthodox, many dualists, and all pseudodualists);
  - 2a. He is the representative of the Demiurge or
  - 2b. of someone other than the Demiurge.

Choice 2a further splits in two, according to whether the Demiurge is or is not the Devil. The orthodox and the pseudodualists split on this issue only, for they both agree that the Snake is a representative of the Devil, but not that the Devil is the *Demiurge* of this world (although the orthodox give him the mysterious title of "Ruler [*archōn*] of this world" from John 12:31). This model will generate all possible solutions.

The morphodynamics of dualistic systems can be compared with a board game and could, as a matter of fact, be made into a board game of transformations. For indeed the system generated from the different premises mentioned above is nothing but a game of mind—no more and certainly no less.

Game stores today sell very advanced board games with numerous expansions. Theoretically a board game can expand limitlessly; yet in practice the minds of the potential buyers will remain interested in one game for a certain amount of time only. The more advanced among them might already have discovered that *one game is all games*; thus changing to a new game is not necessary. Why so? A game fascinates the human mind because the mind recognizes in it its own functioning, and this recognition does not depend on the kind of game offered to the mind.

The logic of any game is to set before the mind a multiple-choice scheme. The mind will immediately set upon its task of exploring all these possibilities. Theoretically it should do no more, but in practice the human mind is always faced with situations in which, among a plurality of solutions, only one or some are correct, and the incorrect ones may prove fatal. This probably explains why the mind will tend to cling to one choice instead of accepting many of them, but complex social interaction is certainly another reason.

Ancient dualistic trends were part of the explorative mind process, when most solutions to the riddle posed by the emergence of a new

religion out of old religions and philosophies had to be formulated. The morphogenesis of dualism can be followed step by step and understood in the terms of the logical game that was being played for approximately three centuries, before Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire. With this, far-flung solutions were discarded, and the rules of the game became stricter. The gnostics had had their time; the board belonged entirely to mainstream Christians, whose persuasive skills had to do not with logic but with power.

Yet the system of dualism was far from extinct. The rest of this book will analyze some of its actual or presumed diachronic manifestations up to today.



# Chapter 11

## Modern Nihilism

Wo keine Götter sind, walten Gespenster.  
—NOVALIS

### 1. The Birth of Nihilism

The intention here is not to summarize the debate surrounding *nihilism*, a concept that appeared in 1799 and continues to be a very live option.<sup>1</sup> It will suffice to sketch in a few lines the essence of this “uncanny guest” (Nietzsche) who came knocking at the door of our civilization at the outbreak of the modern era. We must address the work of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (d. 1900) in order to seek a ruling on the “death of God.”

Nietzsche, as harbinger of the new era, feels and proclaims that the transcendence of the Christian-Platonic faith that dominated Western civilization for over two thousand years has become void, has spent its vital force and creativity. Obviously this means the *liberation* of humankind from transcendence, yet what remains without transcendence is *nothingness* (*das Nichts*, or the Cathars’ *nihil*) and liberation becomes “liberation unto nothingness” (*Befreiung in das Nichts*).<sup>2</sup> Under these circumstances, there are two alternatives: either to find a substitute or *Ersatz* for transcendence—and this substitute is the Enlightenment’s *belief in Reason* (*Vernunftglauben*), which is not a “hard value” for being deprived of any metaphysical justification—or to accept nihilism as an active force and to become its instruments. This is defined by Nietzsche, with an untranslatable pun, as an “unbuilding”: “man legt Hand an, man *richtet zugrunde*.”<sup>3</sup> The verb *richten* means “to build,” *zugrunde* means “down to the ground,” and their combination, “to demolish, unbuild, build down.”

If nihilism is the state that ensues from the "unbuilding" of transcendence and the attitude that pursues transcendence in order to "build it down," then we are entitled to notice that Gnosticism is the obverse of nihilism, for being the champion of transcendence. It has become apparent that one of the most relevant characteristics of Gnosticism and of all other trends of Western dualism is the extreme and extremistic affirmation of transcendence *at the expense* of the physical world. If we persist in calling these trends nihilistic, then we must define their nihilism as the most powerful *metaphysical nihilism* in the history of Western ideas. Modern nihilism, by contrast, is *antimetaphysical*.

Here, nevertheless, a circumstance intervenes that makes the two—Gnosticism and modern nihilism—closely resemble each other: the fact that, for purposes that are the inverse of each other, the two actively "build down" the same transcendence, namely, the Jewish-Platonic one as embodied in nearly two millennia of Christianity. For Western dualism this is the *false* transcendence that has to be unmasked and demolished in order to proclaim the *true* transcendence; for modern nihilism this transcendence is equally *false*, because it is a mental construct that shielded us from the hard fact of nihilism for well over two millennia; it likewise has to be unmasked and "built down." This accounts for many traits that the two inverse forms of nihilism—the metaphysical one and the antimetaphysical one—share, the most conspicuous being their constant attack on the Christian Scriptures, the embodiment, for both of them, of a fallacious transcendence.

Consequently at the outbreak of modern era, *the system of inverse biblical exegesis was once again activated and continues to produce solutions according to the same rules of the game* (see chapter 10), almost as if there were no interruption between the ancient gnostics and Romanticism. This explains the impressive analogies between dualistic mythologies and Romantic mythical narratives. From a systemic viewpoint, we may add that the game of modern nihilism starts from a rule that is the extreme opposite of the rule that produces dualistic scenarios, but it reaches conclusions that are formally identical in so far as it recognizes the need to annihilate the current (Christian) concept of "value." Thus the two systems differ by their first and foremost option—affirm versus deny transcendence; yet the first alternative is more complex, in so far as the affirmation of transcendence goes together with a denial of the common concept of transcendence, the Christian (Jewish-Platonic) one.

If the system of modern nihilism starts with a powerful substitute for transcendence, which is belief in Reason, it discovers sooner or later that there is no value if there is no metasystem in which value is defined.

This is the experience of the existentialist philosophers and is again the mirror equivalent of the dualistic experience, in so far as both recognize the necessity of transcendence; but dualism affirms it and existentialism complains about its complete absence. A writer like Albert Camus would make constant use of gnostic dualistic metaphors in the titles of his major works: *Exile and Kingdom*, *The Stranger*, *The Fall*.

In what follows we will analyze, with no pretense of exhaustiveness, some of the more salient episodes of inverse biblical exegesis in Romantic nihilism and subsequently will pass to the modern debate on Gnosis.

## 2. The Post-Miltonians

With *Paradise Lost* (1667) John Milton (1608–1674) inaugurated a tradition of mythological narratives using the Bible that would be continued by William Blake (1757–1827) and, in the early XIXth century, by the British Romantics. A nonconformist in social life and in his religious outlook, which became public only 150 years after his death, Milton nevertheless respected the strict limits of orthodoxy in his great poem. Despite his dramatic grandness, his hero Satan remains the jealous opponent of an almighty God. As far as Adam and Eve are concerned, they sin, in the good Augustinian tradition, out of a free will that is, however, not defined in sexual terms, sexual fulfillment being, even among angels, a desirable event.

It will be impossible to analyze here the mythical narratives produced by William Blake under the influence of Thomas Taylor's Platonism, Swedenborg's visionary experience, and George Berkeley's philosophy. Blake's *[First] Book of Urizen* (1794) is a free Genesis paraphrase combined with reminiscences from Greek mythology, in which the awesome primordial being Urizen plays the part of the biblical creator god. Urizen, the architect of this universe, is the hypostasis of the hatred and contempt that Blake himself felt for the soulless, mechanistic philosophy of Newton and for Locke's sensualism, and at the same time he is the legalistic tyrant of the Bible. Creation is defined as both a contraction and a fall in six stages, the six days of Genesis. Blake's narrative contains inverse exegesis tightly interwoven with original elements in a dense plot on which we cannot expand here.<sup>4</sup>

The birthpangs of nihilism are heard in gnostic tones in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1818–19), which likewise belongs to the post-Miltonian tradition. In his *Preface*, Shelley confesses that he did not choose Satan as a main character instead of Prometheus since the latter

"is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge and a desire for personal aggrandizement, which, in the Hero of *Paradise Lost* interfere with the interest."<sup>5</sup> Nihilistic exegesis was still in its infancy, and Milton's shadow too authoritative to be overcome. Instead of reviving Satan—an operation performed by Lord Byron a few years later—Shelley prefers to stay within Greek, not biblical, mythology, and many opportunities for a reversed exegesis of Genesis are thereby lost. Nevertheless, the regime of the world in Shelley's drama is clearly bad, and this not only because of Jupiter, who threw Prometheus in chains and let him be tortured. Jupiter himself is only a sky god; he can play with meteorological phenomena and nothing more. Mightier than Jupiter are those divinities who govern human life: "Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change. To these / All things are subject but eternal Love."<sup>6</sup>

Jupiter is not really evil; he is an impotent and abusive tyrant who occupied the throne of the Ruler of the world and will be supplanted by the better Ruler Love. Like the gnostic Demiurge, Jupiter is unaware of the existence of a mightier Pleroma above him. With the unchaining of Prometheus, the tyrant will be cast into the abyss, and the nature of the world's Rule will change dramatically, for

the man remains  
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man  
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,  
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king  
Over himself.<sup>7</sup>

This overly optimistic vision of a world ruled by Love is finally blessed by the Creator of all,

king of suns and stars, Demons and Gods,  
Ethereal Dominations, who possess  
Elysian, windless, fortunate abodes  
Beyond Heaven's constellated wilderness.<sup>8</sup>

The "blest" and "great Republic" of the aeons, a sort of Pleroma around an alien God, manifest themselves through an anonymous Voice to show their approval of the dismissal of the despotic Jupiter.

The analogies between Shelley's myth and gnostic myth are obvious. In both cases an ignorant and impotent celestial tyrant rules over the earth; in both cases a Savior must come to redeem humankind and must suffer to effect redemption; in both cases there is an unknown, transcendent Pleroma; and in both cases a new world regime follows the

unmasking of the false transcendence. Yet Shelley's worldview is very different from the gnostics': *All* humans will be redeemed on a transfigured Earth, freed from the chains of Power. In so far as this would entail redemption of physicality and Matter, the only ancient equivalent of it is Origenist eschatology. Among all the Romantics who reinvent gnostic myth, Shelley is the only one who needs a higher transcendence to bless the dethronement of Jupiter-Yahweh. Yet his positive vision of the Earth shows that he, like all modern nihilists, disinvests from transcendence and invests in mundane reality. The investment yielded a return in all but philosophical terms, as prophets of doom would now and then remind us still.

With *Cain: A Mystery* (1821), Byron goes one step further: He restores Satan-Lucifer to his rights yet gives him powers far beyond those granted him by the Christian Milton. It is true that the narrative is from the perspective of Cain, who may be deceived by Lucifer; Byron's genius knew how to keep the finale perfectly ambiguous.

*Cain* may be considered the best systemic introduction to the study of Gnosticism and other Western dualistic trends, for it is an extraordinary illustration of how the Genesis board game can be played at any time and will deliver outcomes that are transformations of each other. Byron, indeed, played the game starting from the (nihilistic, not gnostic) rule that the transcendence of Genesis is false and therefore its traditional exegesis ought to be reversed. He thus produced a narrative that perfectly resembles gnostic myth.

Byron's story starts with the revelation that a god who permitted man to be mortal and the world to be a place of suffering and injustice cannot be good. Lucifer acts as a Savior and discloses to Cain the most potent secret of creation: that *there is a second Power*, which is good. That second power is Lucifer himself, who further reveals to Cain another shocking secret: that he is not mortal, as god wants him to believe, but immortal. Like John in the narrative framework of the *Apocryphon of John*, Cain asks his Savior a number of questions, which sometimes happen to be exactly the same as those asked by John, such as, Who was the Snake in the Garden of Eden? Cain, like many gnostics, believes that the Snake was a spirit, but Lucifer energetically denies that he himself took on the Snake's shape: "The snake *was* the Snake—no more and yet no less." This is the interpretation of the gnostic *Testimony of Truth*, as against the interpretation of the *Apocryphon of John*, according to which the Snake was a representative of Evil, or against the opposite interpretation that makes the Snake into a representative of the good Pleroma. It is as if, at this stage on the game board, the player may draw cards that

allow a definition of the Snake in terms of "Good," "Neutral," or "Evil" and would further indicate who the Snake character really is (he may be Lucifer, Sophia, the Devil, the Demiurge, or some other, and all this makes for a *transformation* of the sequential mind game played along the Book of Genesis).

Lucifer's revelation to Cain contains more than a promise of immortality, should Cain recognize the eternal character of his mind, "if the mind will be itself / And centre of surrounding things."

Lucifer takes Cain on an ecstatic tour of the universe, showing him that it consists of many parallel worlds, all aborted creations of the same god. The multiplication of systems of power belonging to an unhappy creator changes suffering into a cosmic dimension of being.

"Mind" in Byron's poem stands for the Enlightenment's Reason. Consequently his message is that the only salvation of humankind is to abandon despotic transcendence and become centered in Reason. Although Byron's mythical inventions look superficially like gnostic myth, his basic mood is modern nihilism.

The great poet of Recanati, Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837), who in 1833 desperately asks the Maker of the World, Ahriman (Arimane), "Spender of all Evil," to cut his life short before his thirty-fifth birthday, prefigures existentialist philosophy in so far as he is disenchanted with the abyss of nihilism watching from behind the weak mask of Reason. To him Reason is good only for ascertaining the evil essence of the immanent god, not for overcoming his power. God can be defeated only by the power of death. Direct gnostic influence has been suggested, but Leopardi's nihilistic mood is definitely the opposite of the gnostics'.<sup>9</sup>

In 1953 René Nelli noticed that the great epics of French Romanticism were permeated by a Manichaeian spirit.<sup>10</sup> This would apply to Lamartine's (1790–1869) *The Fall of an Angel* (*La Chute d'un ange*, 1837–38),<sup>11</sup> as well as to Victor Hugo's *La Fin de Satan*. It is hardly true for Lamartine's poem, in which an angel, infatuated with the beautiful young woman Daïdha, is ejected from his spiritual dimension into a physical body, undergoes innumerable humiliations and mistreatments in different human societies, all based on injustice and absurd laws, and eventually realizes that the world is evil and decides to commit suicide with all the members of his family. This suburban Paris tragedy, superficially tinted with nihilism, moves among many literary worlds that abound in eros, use sci-fi devices, and indulge in sadistic performances. Lamartine's poem is not an heir to Manichaeism but a pessimistic precursor of the early XXth-century entertainment novel.

Things are different as far as Hugo's *The End of Satan* is concerned (1854–57, posthumously published in 1886),<sup>12</sup> which is an original narrative belonging to the post-Miltonian tradition. In 1854 Hugo lived in exile at Jersey, practiced spiritism, and received the nocturnal visits of a faithful ghost, the "Dame blanche" that might have inspired the name of the homonymous ice cream. At the autumnal equinox Death herself spoke through the spirit table, spurring him to write a work full of horror and mystery; on October 22 Death gave him a title: *Conseils à Dieu*. At the beginning of 1855 Jesus Christ manifested himself several times, predictably criticizing Christianity and revealing that there is no God at all. Jesus Christ was, however, repeating himself. He had said the same thing sixty years before, in a poem by the Romantic Jean Paul. On March 8 Jesus Christ entertained Hugo on the subject of the *pardon*, and Hugo noted: "I am writing a poem called *Satan pardoned*," adding that he had started it in March of 1854. He continued *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan* at Guernsey, where his nights were inhabited by strange presences. The two poems bear the imprint of this tormented period of his life.

*La Fin de Satan* lacks the complexity of gnostic myth, yet it succeeds in devising an original plot in which God is trapped by Satan in his own creation, which God therefore repeatedly tries to destroy, without success. God is clearly not almighty, yet his Opponent cannot unseat him for one unexpected reason: As a former Angel, Satan is desperately in love with God and detests the fetid darkness in which he is compelled to abide, which is tantamount to saying that he hates himself as much as he cherishes his enemy. Eventually the two must come to terms, lest God's creation be irremediably spoiled and Satan altogether disgusted with himself and his foul surroundings. Strangely enough, the stakes of the final reconciliation of the two mighty opponents are the destruction of the world, envisioned as a positive outcome.

### 3. Gnosticism as an Analogue Model

Philosophy, said one of the greatest German philosophers, is a German provincial affair. The modern debate on Gnosis has not yet left this province, where, beside concepts like "secularization" and "nihilism," it continues to fascinate philosophical minds. Actually the stakes here are not modest either. At issue is the meaning of history itself.

It is only by convention that Ferdinand Christian Baur's work *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religionsphilosophie* (Tübingen, 1835) is

said to be the starting signal for the Gnosis debate. One could actually go back further to Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714), whose *Unparteiische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie* (1699) had, as it seems, a decisive impact on Goethe.

It is Baur anyway who kicks off the fashion of comparing modern thought with ancient Gnosis. For him, Hegel is the heir to Valentinus. In Valentinianism the *absolute Spirit* is the top of the pyramidal Pleroma, and the aeons are the essences through which the Spirit knows itself by creating a negative reflection of itself. The link between aeons is *love*. All of this returns in Hegel, as well as Sophia's fall, which takes on the form of a break in the "Kingdom of the Son of the World," when the "finite spirit" (*endlicher Geist*) appears, which is the equivalent of the Valentinian low-quality *psychē* (soul). The "Kingdom of the Son of the World" will be concluded by the dialectic "negation of negation," a "process of reconciliation" (*der Prozess der Versöhnung*) in which the absolute Spirit recognizes itself for what it is.<sup>13</sup>

Baur remains unaware of gnostic anticosmism (and perhaps dualism), which was only spotted by Hans Jonas in 1934. Therefore his interpretation of Gnosis fits not only Hegel but Christianity and Platonism as well. In modern scholarship and hermeneutics the variations on the meaning of Gnosis itself are considerable, and our intention here is not to establish even a tentative catalog thereof. We already came across Eugen Heinrich Schmitt in our survey of feminist interpretations of Gnosis (chapter 3 above). Yet Schmitt also inaugurates the proliferation of unchecked meanings of the word *Gnosis*. In the Protestant (evangelical) tradition, rather than in that of Clement of Alexandria, who also made a distinction between *gnōsis* and mere *pistis*, "faith," he opposes "Gnosis" intended as inner experience to sheer "faith," which is the vulgar experience of those associated with the Church.<sup>14</sup> According to this definition, the greatest gnostic of modern times would be . . . Count Leo Tolstoy!<sup>15</sup>

It was undoubtedly the merit of Hans Jonas's first volume of *Gnosis and the Spirit of Late Antiquity* (1934) to introduce some coherence into the debate. According to Jonas, constitutive of the gnostic systems are *anticosmism* and the idea of *devolution*, that is, of a catastrophic break that interrupts the evolution of the aeons. For Jonas, Hegel is the representative of a worldview quite opposite to that of Gnosis, evolutionary and procosmic.

Philosophically more ambitious, Jacob Taubes's *Western Eschatology* (1947) tackles the thorny question of the destiny of Western civilization, which had also preoccupied Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. Indeed,



when writing the book, Taubes himself was a Heideggerian. For Heidegger (*Being and Time*, 1927), a great lover of linguistic puns, the meaning of being shines in its being being-toward-death (*Sein zum Tod*). Taubes transfers this judgment onto the process of history and declares that the meaning of history is revealed only in the cessation of history, in the eschaton. "In the *eschaton* history exceeds its own limits and becomes visible to itself."<sup>16</sup> "Historial" (as opposed to "historical"—one of Heidegger's favorite puns, opposing the word *geschichtlich*, from *Geschichte*, which would be related to *Geschick*, that is, "fate," predestination, to mere *historisch*, "historical," intended as accidental) authenticity belongs therefore, according to Taubes, to those historical forces that speed up the end of world history through a process of "permanent revolution." Taubes thus identifies the leading edge of history with the gnostic-apocalyptic tradition, which he makes into the vocation of Israel, corresponding to Israel's unique characteristic of "spaceless people" and therefore "people of time," the people of a coming New Heaven and New Earth.<sup>17</sup> This is why Israel as historical "place" is the "place of Revolution."<sup>18</sup>

Taubes makes no distinction between apocalypticism and Gnosticism. For him, to put it in his own words, Gnosticism is the "historial" ideology of apocalyptic Revolution, which manifests itself in Jesus' preaching of the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, this world is abolished, yet it is slow to disappear. Paul is the first to give this paradox "gnostic" expression by moving Christian salvation from the horizontal dimension of time to the vertical dimension of being, by transforming the end of the world into an individual escape from the prison of the world.<sup>19</sup>

Starting with Origen, the Church Fathers choose against "historial" authenticity and systematically condemn the millennial, apocalyptic ferments present at all times in Christianity.<sup>20</sup> The eschatological spirit of Christianity is extinguished in the Augustinian conception of the Church, which is a reversal of millennialism: The Church is *already* the Kingdom of Christ on earth.<sup>21</sup> After Augustine, millennialism becomes altogether sectarian but gains a new momentum in the preaching of Joachim of Flora,<sup>22</sup> whose interpretation of history will become political philosophy in the radical Protestant Thomas Münzer, who wants to install the Spiritual Church on earth and justifies totalitarianism based on power if power is exerted by the "good."<sup>23</sup> Enlightenment restores inauthenticity by reestablishing the Church, a "Church of Reason." During Hegel's time, the critical power of Christianity, its *raison d'être*, was altogether consumed. This is Taubes's interpretation of Hegel's

1802 statement (*Glauben und Wissen*) according to which God would be dead. Hegel himself is a Joachimite—he belongs to the millennial tradition and envisions his own philosophy as the last possible one.

Taubes emphasizes the role of the Reformation as a revealer of historical authentic forces. For him, Münzer is a revolutionary theocrat like the Old Testament Prophets. Through violence and subversion, he aims at installing God's Law on earth. Luther, by contrast is a moderate Marcionite, relieved to give over to the lay state that cursed side of existence which falls under the Law and to dedicate all his power to the construction of Christian interiority. Between the two, Münzer would be more perceptive, for he predicted that, saturated by the honey of prayer and grace, the soul (interiority, subjectivity) will be so submerged in sweetness that it will cease to exist: "Wer den bitteren Christum nicht will haben, wird sich am Honig totfressen" (Who shuns the bitterness of Christ will eat honey unto death). Indeed, Lutheran subjectivity would prove precarious, and any attempt to meet God in one's interiority would soon meet only His frightening silence.

With Hegel, the place of historical authenticity moves definitively from religion to philosophy, which takes over the revolutionary task of religion.<sup>24</sup> The representatives of "permanent revolution" are Kierkegaard and Marx: "Marx destroys the capitalist-bourgeois world, Kierkegaard the Christian-bourgeois world."<sup>25</sup> Whereas Marx publishes his *Communist Manifesto*, the Apocalypse of capitalist society on whose ruins a classless society would appear, Kierkegaard publishes an anti-communist manifesto (*Das Eine was nottut*). For Marx, 1848 was the historical year when the Fourth Estate made its entrance into history; for Kierkegaard, 1848 was the tangible sign of godlessness, the coming of the socialist Antichrist.<sup>26</sup> Which of the two was right? For Taubes only a *coincidentia oppositorum* of Marx and Kierkegaard could eliminate the contradiction between the external and the internal orders. But such a state could be reached only in the eschaton, which means that the place of historical authenticity is and remains the gnostic "permanent revolution."<sup>27</sup>

Taubes's poignant book launched an ongoing debate. It was Eric Voegelin who, although subscribing to Taubes's analysis, questioned both its premises and its results.<sup>28</sup>

Voegelin ascertains that Christianity, a messianic Jewish movement, possesses an inner tension that ensues from the delay of the expected world end. Since the eschaton (Parousia) never took place, the Church decided to change historical eschatology into supernatural eschatology. Yet the expectation of the world's end would never disappear from the

life of Christian communities. A ferment of anarchy and revolution accompanies Christianity along its whole history. Joachim of Flora, as both Taubes and Löwith had it,<sup>29</sup> remains for Voegelin the most important character in the renewal of eschatological expectations. Voegelin articulates Joachim's doctrine in four main points:<sup>30</sup> the three phases of world history, resumed by Hegel, Marx, and by the ideologist of the *Third Reich* (an invention of a pathological subject: the writer Moeller van den Bruck, author of a work on Dostoyevski called *Das dritte Reich*, 1923); the great historical Leader, *Dux*, resumed by Marx and Hitler (and, in a pathetic key, one might add, by the Italian *Duce*); the Prophet of a New Age, who is often conflated with the Leader (Marx, Hitler); and, finally, the eschatological age as a community of autonomous persons in direct contact with the Holy Spirit, without the mediation of sacraments and grace (communism).

Voegelin calls Gnosis the great millennial-apocalyptic trend that accompanies Christianity from its inception. For both Taubes and Voegelin, Gnosis is indeed that unique ferment of history which molds the present face of the West. Like nihilism in Heidegger (*Holzwege: Nietzsches Satz "Gott ist tot"*), the "Gnosticism" of modernity constitutes for both Taubes and Voegelin a fatal, historical force that determines the destiny of all peoples of the world, dragged along by the movement of the West. Yet, whereas Taubes qualifies this force positively and opts for "permanent revolution" in order to reach as soon as possible the cessation of history, which would also establish the ultimate meaning of history, Voegelin emphasizes the radical negativity of that "Gnosticism" which becomes more and more important and disquieting in the modern age.<sup>31</sup>

The "gnostic revolution" takes place in stages. One among these is the Reformation, which is the successful takeover of Western institutions by gnostic movements.<sup>32</sup> The most patent example of takeover is the British Puritans, who close every opponent's mouth citing John's words: "We are of God, and whoever knows God listens to us."<sup>33</sup> According to Voegelin, the Puritans represent an anti-Christian force camouflaged as Christian. But the genius of scriptural camouflage is John Calvin, whose work constitutes a Christian Qur'an—by which Voegelin means The Book that answers all questions, making all precedent or subsequent knowledge useless. Calvin accomplishes a complete break within the Western intellectual tradition. Other breaks, other Qur'ans: the *Encyclopedia* of Diderot and d'Alembert, the work of Auguste Comte, the work of Marx, and "the patristic literature of Leninism-Stalinism."<sup>34</sup> The qur'anic character of these works entails,

according to Voegelin, active exclusion of all they claim to supplant. The Reformation already replaces argument and persuasion by the immutable and undiscussed truth of a totalitarian society.<sup>35</sup> Totalitarianism is, in fact, the accomplishment of the gnostic quest for a civil theology. Today Gnosticism, the nearing of the Christian eschaton, manifests itself in two distinct forms: Marxism, which is the more explicit and less subtle, and "Westernization," which implies the destruction of the "truth of the soul" and contempt for existential problems.<sup>36</sup>

Voegelin's thesis has been taken quite seriously by Philip J. Lee in a recent work, at least to the extent that it applies to Calvinism.<sup>37</sup> The founding fathers of America are made into awesome gnostics. Lee recommends "the Degnosticizing of Protestantism" along disciplinarian lines. Fortunately he goes against the main trend of American liberal Protestantism.

Whether Gnosticism is viewed as that positive movement whose role is to free the world from itself (Taubes) or as a negative world power (*Weltmacht*) that is destroying the world (Voegelin), all parties agree that Karl Marx ought to be assigned a place of honor in it. To demonstrate Marx's gnostic derivation, the Austrian historian of philosophy Ernst Topitsch abandoned historical typology and tried to establish concrete historical links.<sup>38</sup> Through Hegel, Marx would draw upon the gnostic traditions contained in the "German Ideology," sort of a German "family inheritance" that goes along with Lutheran theology and permeates the entire history of modern German philosophy,<sup>39</sup> from Hegel to Heidegger. An important link in the transmission of the German Ideology was the Pietist Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-1782), an adept of Lurian Kabbalah, an admirer of Jakob Böhme, and a disciple of Johann Albrecht Bengel (d. 1752), a strange character who took inspiration from Joachim of Flora's theories in order to make numerological predictions from the Revelation of John and ascertained that the world would end in 1836. He never lived to be disappointed, nor did his follower Oetinger, who, spurred by the imminent end (just beyond his grasp), conceived of the project of a millennial Kingdom in which all people would be equal and in which private property, the state, and money would be abolished. It is difficult to establish to what extent Oetinger influenced Hegel, whose "Gnosticism" would primarily be contained in the theory of "alienation" (*Entfremdung, Entäusserung*): The Absolute has to alienate itself in order to become known to itself. Hegelian philosophy of history is nothing but gnostic theodicy in disguise.<sup>40</sup> Hegel himself prepares the terrain for Marx's theory of "alienation" of the worker's labor.

Topitsch follows the gnostic myth of the fall, alienation, and blindness of the humans deceived by the Demiurge down into the Hegelian myth of alienation of the Spirit and then into the Marxist myth of the alienation of humankind through religion and of its salvation through the exercise of "positive science."<sup>41</sup> Topitsch likewise ascertains that, in Marx's theory, the place of the gnostic elect is taken by the proletarians, who possess the secret lore of class struggle, as well as a true class awareness as against the false, alienated, or ideologizing conscience of everyone else.<sup>42</sup>

Among so many prophets of doom who conceive of Gnosticism as a perennial historical movement that shuffles like a grim parade through all of Western history, there is one discordant voice: the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg.<sup>43</sup> For Blumenberg, whose books are available in English translation, modernity is the stage not of the final victory of Gnosticism but, on the contrary, of its final eviction. The reverse would have taken place in that age of "theology of science" (as Amos Funkenstein brilliantly puts it),<sup>44</sup> the XVIIth century, when thinkers like Descartes and Leibnitz would discuss—and reject—the idea that the Creator of this world would be a "powerful deceiver" (*deceptor potentissimus*). Many have criticized the precariousness of Blumenberg's position, and Amos Funkenstein, among others, has shown that Descartes's philosophy would not have been thinkable without the influence of late medieval Nominalism, precisely that Nominalism which, according to Blumenberg, is the last Western "relapse" into Gnosticism. Yet Blumenberg entirely forgets that the tenets of the Reformation are the total confirmation of the Augustinian doctrine of original sexual sin and predestination, which otherwise Blumenberg holds for "gnostic." It would therefore be quite easy to overthrow all of Blumenberg's assumptions.

The question we must face in this book is not whether all these essayists are right in overextending the concepts of Gnosticism and Gnosis but *whether it is legitimate to interpret the occurrences mentioned (or invented) by them as outcomes of the gnostic system*. Or, to put it in other words, one should first ascertain whether Taubes's or Voegelin's "Gnosticisms" belong to the Tree of Gnosis of the preceding chapter of this book, whether they are transformations generated by the same principles that generate Western dualistic trends. For this, such powerful phenomena as the ideologies of the Reformation or German classical idealism from Kant onward should be carefully analyzed, an enterprise that can obviously find no place in this book. Gnosticism as a correct analogue model for

Hegelian or Marxist evolutionism may be objectionable, but what actually matters is the hermeneutical trend that has emerged, represented by Taubes, Voegelin, Topitsch, Pellicani, and others, according to which modernity is gnostic. Their creative misunderstanding of Gnosticism is possible, although it may have no legitimacy in the eyes of someone who looks for more than superficial analogies among phenomena. For such a one, the only modern philosopher who may be called gnostic to some extent is one who does not figure on the lists of any of the leading personalities of "modern Gnosticism" mentioned so far: Immanuel Kant, who in his booklet *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (1793) displays gnostic anthropology as his own. Man is evil by nature but contains at the very bottom of his soul (*Seelengrund*) a divine spark of goodness. This spark would allow him to become a "New Man," through a "moral revolution."

The case of existentialism has already been discussed elsewhere.<sup>45</sup> Like Romanticism, existentialism closely resembles Gnosticism, yet it is the obverse thereof: Whereas Gnosticism is the champion of transcendence, existentialism is the final acknowledgment of its absence.

We will not dwell here on the resemblance between gnostic myth and the myth of Neo-Darwinian biology as emphasized by Hans Jonas.<sup>46</sup> An assessment of the basic operational identity between religious and scientific myth will detain us elsewhere.<sup>47</sup> A last word should be spent here on the legitimacy of another enterprise that quite unfortunately has become current among literary historians, who would indiscriminately label as "gnostic" many if not all of the writers in the world, including François Villon, Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Robert Musil, Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann, and Flannery O'Connor.<sup>48</sup>

A more serious case has been made for science fiction inspired by Gnosticism, and the title of Philip K. Dick's novel *The Divine Invasion* has been mentioned in this connection.<sup>49</sup> A closer look at the novel shows that, indeed, Dick took inspiration from Jewish and Jewish-Christian apocalyptic literature (especially *The Vision of Isaiah*),<sup>50</sup> yet his novel, which describes the descent of God to the earth through the first heaven controlled by the troops of Beliar the Opponent, and God's encounter with his Wisdom in a kindergarten,<sup>51</sup> makes no use of gnostic material. More convincing is the analogy in the case of L. Ron Hubbard, himself a sci-fi writer who first published his best-selling *Dianetics* as a fiction novel in *Astounding SF*.<sup>52</sup> The central myth of Hubbard's Scientology by the method of Dianetic auditing starts from the assumption that the immortal Thetans of the beginning are bored and therefore willing to play games in which they build universes. Eventually they are lured into

the universes they created, remain trapped in them, and forget who they are.<sup>53</sup>

Yet, as Richard Smith perceptively noticed,<sup>54</sup> Harold Bloom is today the only author of both essays and fiction who consciously identifies himself with the gnostics, both as a literary critic and a writer. In *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) Bloom asserts that every act of creation is *ipso facto* an act of destruction toward tradition and believes that the gnostic Valentinus has set the example for such an operation, in so far as he "is troping upon and indeed against his precursor authorities, to reverse his relationship to the Bible and to Plato, by joining himself to an asserted earlier truth that they supposedly have distorted."<sup>55</sup> And in *Agon* (1982) Bloom praises Gnosticism as "the inaugural and most powerful of Deconstructions because it undid all genealogies, scrambled all hierarchies, allegorized every microcosm/macrocosm relation, and rejected every representation of divinity as non-referential."<sup>56</sup> With the expert eye of the literary theorist, Bloom has indeed discovered that Gnosticism signals a reversed exegesis of the Scriptures that runs right up against tradition.

The question remains whether Bloom can be qualified as a "gnostic" fiction writer, in which case he would be the only unproblematic one. His narrative in *The Flight to Lucifer*,<sup>57</sup> which would look magnificent on a Hollywood Technicolor screen, was ostensibly not produced by a gnostic, although it deals with the gnostic planet, Lucifer. "The gnostic planet" is taken here quite literally to be a planet in the universe, where all gnostics are contiguous ethnic groups: The Mandaean with their leader Enosh live east of the River; on its western shore are the Sethians; west of them are the Manichaeans, followed by the Marcionites with their chief Cerdo, followed by the Kenoma of the Waters of Night, across which are the Arimaneans. North of the Manichaeans are the Scythians and the Hyperboreans, allowed, as shamans, to be part of the dualists' planet. Over the underground civilization of Siniavis reigns Saklas, the Demiurge with his seven Archons. Olam, the aeon of the Northern Pleroma who had entered the apple eaten by Adam, takes the memoryless Seth Valentinus and the strong Primordial Man Thomas Prescors to the planet Lucifer through an intricate labyrinth of black holes. Prescors is tempted there by Ruha, Saklas's sister, by her seductive mother, Achamoth, and by the Arimanean demoness Nekbael, who terminates her lovers in sweet and awesome tortures. Saklas tries to destroy the powerful trio by flood, as he had once destroyed humankind. But the three escape and head north toward Hyperborea, where the shaman Aristeas, once man in Proconnesus, flies in the shape of a

raven, and Abaris shamanizes, projecting piercing bird cries. This narrative of ignorance, premonition, dreams, and bewildering revelations ends with the mutual destruction of Prescors and Saklas and the recovery of Valentinus's memory.

Bloom's fantasy does not derive from a gnostic antic cosmic mood. It is an excellent sci-fi novel in which, nevertheless, the most elementary trait of all "Alexandrian systems" to which Gnosticism once belonged has been discarded: the verticality of the oppressive layers of the universe, beyond which looms the promise of liberation.

## Notes

1. On the birth of nihilism, see Th. Süß, "Der Nihilismus bei F. H. Jacobi," in Dieter Arendt, *Der Nihilismus als Phänomen der Geistesgeschichte in der wissenschaftlichen Diskussion unseres Jahrhunderts* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1974), 65-78; Ludwig Landgrebe, "Zur Überwindung des europäischen Nihilismus," in Arendt, 19-37. A history of the concept of nihilism and an anthology of salient texts are offered in Giorgio Penzo, ed., *Il Nichilismo da Nietzsche a Sartre* (Città Nuova: Rome, 1976). A synthesis of part of this chapter can be found in my article "The Gnostic Revenge: Gnosticism and Romantic Literature," in Jacob Taubes, ed., *Gnosis und Politik (Religionstheorie und Politische Theologie, 2)* (Fink-Schöningh: Paderborn, West Germany, 1984), 290-306.
2. Landgrebe, "Zur Überwindung," 32.
3. Nietzsche, *Wille zur Macht* XV 152, cited in Landgrebe, "Zur Überwindung," 33.
4. See also Richard Smith, "The Modern Relevance of Gnosticism," in J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (rev. ed., Harper & Row: San Francisco, 1988), 532-49, esp. 534.
5. P. B. Shelley, *The Poetical Works* (London and New York, n.d.), 201.
6. Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 230.
7. Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 243.
8. Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 255.
9. For Leopardi, see esp. my "Gnostic Revenge," 300-302.
10. René Nelli, cited in my article "Les Fantômes du nihilisme," *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* 4 (1980), 423.
11. Lamartine, *Oeuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. F.-M. Guyard (Pléiade 65) (Gallimard: Paris, 1963), 803ff.
12. Victor Hugo, *La Légende des siècles. La Fin de satan*, ed. J. Truchet (Pléiade 82) (Gallimard: Paris, 1950). For the redaction of this work, see Jean Gaudon, *Victor Hugo: Le Temps de la contemplation. L'Oeuvre poétique de Victor Hugo des "Misères" au "Seuil du gouffre" (1845-1856)* (Flammarion: Paris, 1969); and Hubert Juin, *Victor Hugo, II: 1844-1870* (Flammarion: Paris, 1984).
13. Baur's analysis was taken further in the only book of Jacob Taubes (1923-1987), written in his twenties, *Abendländische Eschatologie* (Francke: Bern, 1947), 159-61. Taubes drew information on Gnosis from Hans Jonas's *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist I* (1934), and on modern philosophy (the "Hegelian left") from Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche: Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1941; F. Meiner: Hamburg, 1978<sup>7</sup>). By Karl Löwith see also *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Univ. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1949).



14. Eugen Heinrich Schmitt, *Die Gnosis: Grundlagen der Weltanschauung einer ilteren Kultur*, (E. Diderichs: Leipzig and Jena, 1903) vol. 1, 3.
15. Schmitt, *Die Gnosis*, vol. 1, 9.
16. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 3.
17. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 5ff.
18. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 15.
19. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 71.
20. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 75–76.
21. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 79.
22. On medieval eschatology and Joachim of Flora in particular see Bernard McGinn's excellent books *Visions of the End* and *The Calabrian Abbot*.
23. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 86.
24. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 163–64.
25. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 167.
26. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 190.
27. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 192–93.
28. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (1952; Univ. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1974<sup>9</sup>); see also his *Wissenschaft Politik und Gnosis* (Kösel: Munich, 1959).
29. Löwith, *Meaning*, 145–59.
30. Voegelin, *New Science*, 111–13.
31. Voegelin, *New Science*, 124–28.
32. Voegelin, *New Science*, 134.
33. Voegelin, *New Science*, 137–38.
34. Voegelin, *New Science*, 140.
35. Voegelin, *New Science*, 142.
36. Voegelin, *New Science*, 163–78. These ideas are resumed by Voegelin in the booklet in German *Wissenschaft Politik und Gnosis* (1959), whose purpose is to analyze the structural analogies between modern philosophy and Gnosis already ascertained by F. C. Baur. The representatives of modern Gnosis (which is a world power, a *Weltmacht*) are Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger.
37. Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (Oxford Univ. Press: London and New York, 1987).
38. Ernst Topitsch, "Marxismus und Gnosis," in *Sozialphilosophie zwischen Ideologie und Wissenschaft* (1961; Luchterhand: Neuwied and Berlin, 1966<sup>2</sup>), 261–96; "Entfremdung und Ideologie: Zur Entmythologisierung des Marxismus," in *Sozialphilosophie*, 297–327.
39. Topitsch, "Marxismus," 262.
40. Topitsch, "Marxismus," 283.
41. "Entfremdung," 300–320.
42. An original follower of Voegelin and Topitsch is the Italian sociologist Luciano Pellicani, author of *I Rivoluzionari di professione: Teoria e prassi dello gnosticismo moderno* (Vallecchi: Florence, 1975), who combines their views with Karl Mannheim's theory of the intellectuals as *freischwebend*—fluctuating between the haves and have-nots and endorsing either position. Pellicani rightly notices that Marx and especially Lenin assigned the role of the gnostic elect not to the proletarians themselves but to the enlightened intellectuals who are supposed to act as leaders of the proletarians. In this Pellicani sees a successful attempt of the intellectuals to take over state power and legitimize it as service to the many (yet) unenlightened, whose interests are thereby taken care of. With the Soviet revolution, the intellectual leadership rapidly degenerates into a totalitarian bureaucratic clique. Other European political thinkers like Alain Besançon and Augusto del Noce share to a certain extent Pellicani's assumptions: see Giovanni Filoramo, *Il Risveglio della gnosi ovvero diventare dio* (Laterza: Bari, 1990), 11–21.
43. Hans Blumenberg, *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung* (rev. ed. of *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 1966) (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 1974). On Blumenberg, see Odo Marquard, "Das

- gnostische Rezidiv als Gegenneuzeit," in Taubes, ed., *Gnosis und Politik*, 31–36; Wolfgang Hübener, "Das 'gnostische Rezidiv' oder wie Hans Blumenberg der spätmittelalterlichen Theologie den Puls fühlt," in Taubes, 37–53.
44. Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton Univ. Press: Princeton, NJ, 1986).
  45. See my *Gnosticismo e pensiero moderno*; Hans Jonas (L'Erma di Brettschneider: Rome, 1985), 119ff.
  46. See my *Gnosticismo*, 123–25.
  47. Ioan Couliano, *A History of Mind, I: Religion* (in preparation).
  48. See my "Gnostic Revenge."
  49. Richard Smith, "The Modern Relevance," 545–46.
  50. On this apocalypse, see description and bibliography in my book *Out of This World: A History of Otherworldly Journeys and Out-of-Body Experiences, from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Shambhala: Boston, 1991).
  51. P. K. Dick, *The Divine Invasion* (1981; reprint, Grafton Books: London, 1989).
  52. David A. Halperin, "Gnosticism in High Tech: Science Fiction and Cult Formation," in D. A. Halperin, ed., *Religion Sect and Cult* (J. Wright: Boston, 1983), 257–66, esp. 264.
  53. Vanessa Weber, "Modern Cults and Gnosticism: Some Observations on Religious and Totalitarian Movements," in Halperin, ed., *Religion Sect and Cult*, 31–44, esp. 42.
  54. "The Modern Relevance," 547.
  55. Cited in Smith, "The Modern Relevance," 547.
  56. Cited in Smith, "The Modern Relevance," 547.
  57. Harold Bloom, *The Flight to Lucifer: A Gnostic Fantasy* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux: New York, 1979).

# Epilogue

## GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

The Mind is its own place, and in it self  
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.  
—MILTON, *Paradise Lost*

The conclusions of this book by far exceed the merely antiquarian interest with which most of us look at Gnosticism and the other trends of Western dualism. The Introduction showed us already that the main theological debates that led to the establishment of Christian doctrine were mind games people played with one another for centuries, mind games not unlike chess (only perhaps less complex), which should not have had any consequences for the parties involved and could not be properly won by anyone, for, unlike chess, they did not include a rule for checkmate. Yet they nevertheless accomplished the moral and physical destruction of many and were won by an exercise of power.

Likewise Western dualism was a mind game that overlapped with the Christian one and used many of its elements (and characters) to implement itself. It was a game that might have yielded no external consequence, since it existed in its own logical dimension. Yet for well over one millennium it committed its players to certain destruction at the hands of those in power.

Early Christian theology and Western dualism were "ideal objects" or systems in a logical dimension, having nothing intrinsically to do with the games of power that were played in their name, which belonged to other dimensions of reality. How the interaction of systems took place in history is another story.

The mathematics of chaos, fractal theory, and other mathematical disciplines have exposed the organized character of those phenomena that have the most anarchic appearance, and the mathematician Rudy Rucker (*Mind Tools*, 1987) has gone so far as to give a mathematical definition to the most anarchic of all: individual subjectivity. Thus practically

no sector of the world and human existence can not be defined as a mind game, with certain rules and often uncertain issue. Among ideal objects, or mind games played with ideas, it is thus predictable that not only religion but also philosophy and science are games entirely similar in nature and built according to the same binary principle. The same problems faced by the dualistic mythologies of old were later faced by classical German philosophy and by modern science. This book falls short of demonstrating this, but it will be followed by others whose main task will be to show how other mind games work, in science rather than religion.

Among this book's conclusions are also others that should be explored further. One is that mind games have necessarily similar mechanisms (because the way the mind works and its capacity have remained unchanged for at least sixty thousand years), and therefore systems that have been sufficiently run in time would tend to overlap not only in shape but in substance. With complex data at hand, we should be able to demonstrate that portions of the map of the Buddhist system would overlap with portions of the Christian system with portions of German idealism with portions of modern scientific thought, because all systems are infinite and tend to explore all possibilities given to them. Accordingly, when sufficiently extended, their maps of reality would certainly coincide.

To many the description of religion as a game of mind will come as a shock, and many believers will be repelled by what may seem a diminishment of their faith. They should not be. They should rather consider the extraordinary fact that, from a systemic perspective, there is no contradiction between religion and science (which are to the same extent mind games), and, moreover, there should be no contradiction among religions either, for where data of sufficient complexity are available, religions can be shown to correspond not only in operation (which is the operation of the mind) but likewise in the territories of reality they explore. And even when religions do not overlap, they still can be contemplated as the morphodynamic development of certain basic rules, perfectly intelligible and sometimes even sensible.

Should this book meet with less favor among fundamentalists of any religion, it will seek comfort in the assumption that it will be welcomed by people of ecumenical allegiance, and certainly by those who note the possible consequences of the perhaps inescapable wave of local particularisms that sweeps the world today. Such a game, played by the wrong minds in the wrong places, may seriously jeopardize two of the noblest

conquests of Western mind and society: that freedom of thinking out everything to its ultimate consequences should never be interfered with by any authority; and that the dangers of freedom are not lessened by its suppression.

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# Index

In the body of the index, the following abbreviations are used:

AJ	<i>Apocryphon of John</i>
CC	Coptic Codices
CMC	<i>Cologne Mani Codex</i>
EvPh	<i>Gospel of Philip</i>
Eug	<i>Eugnostos of the Blessed</i>
HA	<i>Hypostasis of the Archons</i>
KCC	<i>Kephalaia (Coptic Codices)</i>
PS	<i>Pistis Sophia</i>
PSem	<i>Paraphrase of Shem</i>
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
SST	<i>Second Treatise of the Great Seth</i>
SJ	<i>Sophia of Jesus Christ</i>
TT	<i>Tripartite Tractate</i>
Z	Zostriano

For a more extensive listing of abbreviations used in the book, consult pages 64-65.

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