

The Secret Revelation to John

Karen L. King



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KAREN L. KING

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TO ELAINE PAGELS

and

DANIEL BOYARIN

my conversation partners in all things heretical

Preface

The importance of the *Secret Revelation of John* can hardly be overestimated. It was the first Christian writing to formulate a comprehensive narrative of the nature of God, the origin of the world, and human salvation. Its fresh and provocative interpretation of some of the most prestigious intellectual traditions of antiquity—from *Genesis* to Plato and beyond—illustrates the extraordinary intellectual labor that was going on during the foundational period of Christianity. Yet this work remains almost entirely unknown to the larger public, and indeed is only rarely cited in works on early Christian history and theology. Part of the reason for this obscurity is that it was entirely unknown until four copies were discovered in Egypt over the last century. Once found, however, the work was classified as “Gnostic heresy” and largely relegated to the scholarly interest of a few specialists. Moreover, it was not until 1995 that an edition of all four manuscripts was first published (in the superb edition of Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse). The fact that the *Secret Revelation of John* has survived only in the Egyptian language of Coptic (even though it was originally composed in Greek) offers a further barrier; and the work’s assumption that readers will recognize a wide range of allusions to ancient literature and tradition creates difficulties for a more general readership. The purpose of this book is to ameliorate these difficulties by offering a translation in which the different surviving versions of the work can be compared in English, and to provide an exposition of the most important intertextual information needed to read and interpret the work.

This study also offers new readings of the *Secret Revelation of John*, illustrating the structure and content of Christ's revelation to John, as he describes the perfection of the Divine Realm above, the fall into evil and death, and humanity's ultimate salvation through knowledge of God and moral perfection. Among the many themes that could be raised, the work's aim to develop human spiritual insight in order to expose a radical social critique of worldly power is emphasized. Several chapters in Part II show how themes and images from ancient philosophy and religion, especially *Genesis*, Jewish Wisdom literature, Platonizing philosophy, and the *Gospel of John*, are imaginatively woven together in constructing the work's totalizing vision of reality. Finally, the introduction and last chapter discuss briefly how the interpretative context of the work shifted from the second to fourth centuries, as it moved from the great city of Alexandria in Egypt to the desert monastery of Pachomius and finally was hidden in a clay jar until its serendipitous discovery in Egypt in the modern period. These readings of the *Secret Revelation of John* do not exhaust the meaning of the text, but hopefully they will open it up to further reading and discussion.

One explicit goal of these readings is to overcome the usual stereotypes associated with Gnostic heresy. My previous book, *What Is Gnosticism?*, argued that our interpretation of newly discovered literature like the *Secret Revelation of John* has been distorted by the anachronistic framework of orthodoxy and heresy which stems back to the work of the early Christian polemicists. Indeed, as soon as the texts were discovered and before they had even been read, they were declared to be "Gnostic," raising the expectation that they would be characterized by anticosmic dualism, a docetic Christology, a radical world-hating and body-hating asceticism or libertinism incapable of providing a positive ethics, and so on. So when scholars read the text, that is what was found. Initially. But the text kept fighting back. The *Secret Revelation of John* offers stunning examples of this resistance to stereotyping. For example, when Christ reveals the names of the individual demons associated with each part of the body, it had seemed that this proved that Gnostics thought the body was demonically evil and

hated it. But instead the list belongs to a widespread belief that demons were responsible for disease; knowing their names gave a person the power to exorcise their demonic influence and thus provide healing to the affected part of the self. Not hatred of the body, but bodily healing was the purpose of Christ's revelation. Or again, stereotypes insist that Gnostics are either libertines, for whom anything goes, or more likely ascetics whose hatred of the body leads them to radical condemnation of sexuality and rejection of marriage and reproduction. In line with this, the story of Adam and Eve in the *Secret Revelation of John* has been read as a condemnation of all sexuality. But this stereotypical reading is at best incomplete. What the work says (especially the version in the Berlin Codex) is that the fleshly, sexual union of Adam and Eve in the birth of Seth is an act of salvation, one which brings humanity closer to the perfection of the divine image in which they were created. Again and again, the texts—not only the *Secret Revelation of John* considered here, but many other works from Nag Hammadi and other discoveries—have challenged and continue to challenge what we thought we knew was the theological nature of Gnosticism. So now that we have pulled back from our preconceptions and begun to ask, what is Gnosticism? it seems clear that the term carries so much intellectual baggage that it must be set aside in order to begin to examine the texts afresh. How then do we talk about these texts, if we don't label them Gnostic (or heretical or some such), but want merely to ask what they say? I think initially we need to refer to individual texts. That is, rather than generalize about what Gnostics believe or what Sethians believe—especially as opposed to what Christians believe—I think it best to talk about particular texts. The goal is not to create the perfect category (an impossibility in any case), but to make these texts available for critical and constructive work, whether in historical reconstruction or theology.

Moreover, this book offers an illustration of the interpretive framework I recommended in *What Is Gnosticism?* Rather than read the *Secret Revelation of John* in terms of its deviance from the posited purity of Christian origins, I have read it as an example of one kind of early Christian

theologizing. Rather than use the identification of the sources of the *Secret Revelation of John* to construct the history of Gnostic heresy, I have attempted to illustrate why those sources were chosen, how they were read together, and what work they do in literary and rhetorical practice. Rather than reduce the multiformity of the textual tradition to a monological essence, I have tried to show that even in antiquity the *Secret Revelation of John* meant different things to different people and was used for different social and theological ends. Rather than assume that the world view presented in the *Secret Revelation of John* is erroneous, I have tried to understand why anyone would have wanted to believe it in the first place, in hopes of opening up space for contemporary readers to engage critically and constructively with it. I think that such reading practices are important as a first step in integrating new works like this one into a more adequate account of the religious, intellectual, and social practices of the ancient Mediterranean more generally and of early Christianity more particularly. If we only reproduce the discursive and interpretive position of the “orthodox” winners, we will never understand adequately what was at stake in the early Christian controversies that shaped what has come to be one of the most influential religious traditions the world has yet known. This book is only one small piece in that larger complex puzzle.

Over the gestation of this project, I have profited enormously from conversations with numerous friends, colleagues, and students. Although it is not possible to name them all here, I would like to acknowledge my sincere appreciation for their criticisms and encouragement. My thanks go in particular to the individual colleagues and organizations who made it possible to present initial ideas and drafts on various occasions: the conference on “‘In Heaven as it is on Earth’: Imagined Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religion” at Princeton University, January 14–15, 2001; the Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism Section meetings at the Society of Biblical Literature/American Academy of Religion Annual Meetings in Denver, Colorado, November, 2001 and in Atlanta, Georgia, November, 2003; the Nordic Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism Network Seminar in

Helsinki, Finland, August 8–15, 2004; the conference on “New Testament and Roman Empire. Shifting Paradigms for Interpretation” at Union Theological Seminary, New York, October 29–30, 2004; and The LOKA Seminar on “The Language of Body and Bodily Processes: Sensual and/or Metaphorical?” at the University of Oslo, November 8–9, 2004.

I am extremely appreciative to Maryanne Shenoude for her expert preparation of the index comparing the new numbering system of the *Secret Revelation of John* given here with the numbering of the manuscripts from the Berlin Codex and the Nag Hammadi Codices.

I would also like to offer special thanks to colleagues who at various points gave me invaluable feedback and encouragement. Particular thanks go to Virginia Burrus and Ingvild Gilhus whose own work at the LOKA conference pushed me to see that birthing and sexual imagery extended beyond the lower world into the Divine Realm and hence to acknowledge a more positive valence on sexuality in the *Secret Revelation of John*. I am extremely grateful for the generosity of time and collegiality from Daniel Boyarin, Elaine Pagels, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Hal Taussig, who read early drafts of the full manuscript and offered invaluable criticism. It was Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s recommendation to write a volume devoted to my reading of the *Secret Revelation of John*, saving direct engagement with methodological issues for another occasion. Virginia Burrus was kind enough to read the final draft and offer a very helpful evaluation—my warmest thanks to her. Without the sustenance of these conversations and friendships, the book would be less than it is.

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The Secret Revelation of John

Introduction

AT THE BEGINNING of Christianity, nothing of what would later define it existed: no fixed canon, creed, or ritual, no established institutions or hierarchy of bishops and laity, no church buildings or sacred art. The story of Christian origins is the story of the formation of these ideas and institutions. It is a story fraught with conflict and controversy. Early Christians hotly debated the meaning of Jesus' teachings and his violent death; they experimented with ways of organizing their communities and determining who should be in charge; they disagreed about the roles of women and slaves; and they constructed boundaries between themselves and others in different ways, especially with regard to Judaism and Roman power. They developed distinct ways of contesting orthodoxy and heresy, and in so doing they created discourses of identity and difference that would pervade the West for millennia to come.

Until recently, our information about these controversies came largely from the writings of the side that won and claimed for itself the title of orthodoxy. The views of other Christians were either refracted through the accounts of their detractors or lost to history. But this situation has changed dramatically with the discovery of ancient manuscripts written by the historical losers, the "heretics." Beginning in the eighteenth century, archaeologists and scholars exploring Egypt and the Ancient Near East or traveling the silk route to China returned to Europe with ancient manuscripts containing lost works written by these early Christians. European wealth also created a lucrative market in antiquities, and locals began

stocking it with finds of their own. Many of these documents found their way into the libraries and museums of London, Paris, Berlin, and other European cities. In 1945, the most important single discovery for the history of early Christianity was made. A peasant digging for fertilizer in the hills near the village of Nag Hammadi in Egypt uncovered a clay jar containing a collection of fourth-century papyrus books. As it turned out, these books contained a wealth of early Christian writings that had been buried by monks from the local Pachomian monastery in order to save them from the censors of the fifth-century Church.

Almost immediately scholars touted this discovery as a Gnostic library,¹ but that characterization is misleading for a number of reasons. First of all, the collection itself is extraordinarily diverse, containing known works such as a fragment of Plato's *Republic* alongside new and widely ranging works of Christian thought. Wisdom literature, revelations, gospels, letters, prayers, and ritual texts are all to be found. This diversity complexifies any simple characterization. Second, the term "Gnostic" is an anachronism ultimately stemming from hindsight. It belongs to modern attempts to classify certain types of ancient Christianity as heresy, but the lines of orthodoxy and heresy were not so clear in the second to third centuries when these texts were composed.² In order to comprehend the dynamic processes by which Christianity was formed, it is necessary to set aside the winners' account of that period and attempt to place ourselves in the midst of debates whose outcome was not yet certain. Already the work of Elaine Pagels has masterfully produced sketches of what such a portrait might look like. My hope is that this book will contribute to that larger project by examining in greater detail one of the most fascinating of the newly discovered works, the *Apocryphon Johannis*, in English titled the *Secret Revelation of John*.

The *Secret Revelation of John* was the first writing to formulate a comprehensive narrative of Christian theology, cosmology, and salvation.³ In fewer than sixty manuscript pages,⁴ it describes Christ's revelation of God and the divine world, the origins of the universe and humanity, the cause

of evil and suffering, the nature of the body and sexuality, the path to salvation, and the final end of all things. At the heart of this deeply spiritual story lies a powerful social critique of injustice and a radical affirmation of God's compassion for suffering humanity. In contrast to Roman rulers who declared themselves the authors and enforcers of universal justice and peace, the story describes the world as a shadowed place ruled by ignorant and malevolent beings. It exposes their lies and violence as violations of the true God's purpose, and offers sure knowledge of humanity's true spiritual identity and destiny. Divine emissaries frequent this dark world, bringing revelations and working in secret to lift the soul out of ignorance and degradation, and restore it to its rightful place in the world of light.

As the story opens, the Savior's disciple John is going up to the temple. He encounters a Pharisee named Arimanios who taunts him, charging that John's teacher has led him astray from the traditions of his fathers and now has abandoned him. John is so deeply disturbed by the Pharisee's charges that he goes out alone into a mountainous place in the desert, feeling lost and perplexed.

Suddenly the heavens open, a heavenly light shines, and the Savior appears to him in multiple forms. The Savior comforts him and reveals to him the entire nature of the universe. He discloses the completely perfect and utterly transcendent nature of God the Father and describes the appearance of a multitude of divine beings who derive from Him. He explains that first of all appeared Pronoia-Barbelo, the Mother. From her came forth the Son, the divine self-generated Christ (Autogenes). He brought forth four great Lights, each with three androgynous (male and female) pairs of eternal Aeons. The last of the eternal Aeons to appear is called Sophia, whose name in Greek means "wisdom."

She desired to produce a likeness of herself, but acted without the consent of the Father or her male partner (the male side of her aeonic pair). Although her intention was good, she acted in ignorance and as a result her product was an ignorant and evil being, a lion-faced serpent with eyes that flashed fire. This is the creator God of *Genesis*; his true name is

Yaldabaoth and he is called “the Chief Ruler.” Possessing only a soul but not the higher power of the Spirit, Sophia’s offspring is arrogant and ignorant of his own mother. His first act is to steal some of her Spirit in order to create seven minions to serve him along with a host of angels and arch-angels.⁵ Yaldabaoth then shapes the world below. Although he uses the Divine Realm as a pattern, the lower world is deficient like its creator.

The Chief Ruler demonstrates his profound ignorance by boasting to his minions, “I am a jealous God and there is none except me.” When Sophia hears this lie, she realizes her error and repents. In an attempt to comfort her, Autogenes-Christ descends to instruct the lower creation. His luminous image is revealed in the form of a human being in the waters below, and immediately Yaldabaoth and his minions seek to possess it. They now create a human likeness according to the image that they have seen in the waters, but their molded form cannot move because it has no life in it. Surreptitiously the divine Lights persuade Yaldabaoth to breathe into the human form, and Adam becomes a living being, for the breath that Yaldabaoth breathes into Adam is the Spirit he had stolen from his mother, Sophia. Left again with only soul substance, the spiritually bereft world rulers immediately see that their creation is superior to them, and they imprison Adam in a body of flesh in order to strengthen their faltering hold over him. As a result, humanity comes to be composed of Spirit from the mother, Sophia, soul from the psychic substance of Yaldabaoth and his angels, and flesh from the four elements of the earth. Humanity is thus made in the image of the Divine, but formed in the likeness of the lower world rulers. Enclosed in matter, Adam is temporarily ignorant of his true nature and origin, and becomes subject to passion, suffering, and death.

In order to save humanity from this fate, the divine Mother Pronoia sends down a female savior, the Epinoia of Light, to instruct Adam, enlightening him about his true nature and the existence of the Divine Realm above. The world rulers dimly perceive her presence within Adam, but they do not understand exactly who and what she is. They foolishly attempt to remove the female savior from Adam surgically, which results

in the birth of Eve, who is “bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.” Taking the form of an eagle on the Tree of Knowledge, Epinoia continues to instruct them both in the true knowledge. But now the world rulers try a new strategy to maintain their domination over the humans; they invent food, wealth, and labor. They rape Eve and attempt to trap humanity with sexual lust. But again they fail, for Adam recognizes his own spiritual essence in Eve and their sexual union produces Seth, a child in the image of the true Human. In contrast to the sexual violence and lust of the false world rulers, true sexuality consists in spiritual generation following the pattern of the Divine Realm.

At last Pronoia sends down her own Spirit of Life to instruct humanity. Those souls who receive her Spirit reject the things of this world and cultivate the Spirit within them; those who do not become subject to the counterfeit spirit which binds humanity to the power of the wicked world rulers. They chain people to fate in order to blind them further and lead them into sin and suffering. Rather than despair, however, the *Secret Revelation of John* offers hope, for in the end all humanity will be saved and brought into the eternal light.⁶ After a period of instruction and purification, each soul will ascend up to the Divine Realm, taking its rightful place in the Aeons of the great Lights. The situation of alienation in the world does not signal hopelessness and nihilism, because salvation awaits all those who recognize the true Spirit within, renounce evil, and grasp the living hope.

When Christ has completed this revelation, he commands John to write it down and pass it on to his fellow spirits. No longer in doubt or sorrow, John immediately goes forth to his fellow disciples and tells them everything the Savior had revealed. With this happy ending, the book closes.

Buried for more than 1500 years, this revelation has now once again come to light. What are we to make of it? The text claims to provide salvation to humanity. But salvation from what? and for what?

At the beginning of the story John is filled with doubt and perplexity. By the end he is confident, knowing the truth. Like John, those who gain

salvation know who they truly are, where they belong, and how to gain peace and stability in a world of violence and deception. They know that they are the undimmed light of the world, the light that shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. Their goal is to be freed, no longer to be pawns and dupes of the powers that rule the world, but purified from all sin and evil. Baptismal ritual conveys the power of the Spirit, sealing and protecting humanity against the evil machinations of the world rulers and against all suffering.

Certainly it is reasonable to suppose, as scholars have long proposed, that such a negative assessment of life in the world would reflect attitudes of alienation and disappointment. The text itself, however, actually offers little concerted preoccupation with these themes. Rather it focuses repeatedly upon exposing the injustice and illegitimacy of those who created and rule the lower world, and upon humanity's dire and immediate need for salvation. The *Secret Revelation of John's* "logic of salvation" requires people to reject unjust domination in order to be oriented ethically and spiritually toward God. Its message clearly challenged the ruling order of its day, which claimed that the current arrangements of worldly power were divinely sanctioned and hence natural, just, and good. The *Secret Revelation of John* perceived instead a nearly unbridgeable gap between the utopian ideals of its age and the less-than-ideal realities of lived experience. By contrasting the perfection of ruling power in the Divine Realm with the flawed violence and deception of the lower world rulers, the *Secret Revelation of John* launched a wide-ranging social critique of power relations in the world. Although this critique was couched in the language of cosmology and revelation, at least some people in antiquity understood this criticism of current social arrangements sufficiently well to be outraged, and they objected stridently to its portrait of the world ruled by ignorant and arrogant pretender-gods.

At first, this narrative may appear very strange to contemporary readers, but its ideas are not so far removed from the version of the story adopted by other forms of Christianity and promulgated through sermons, literature, and art for centuries. The better-known Christian heav-

ens are also filled with a divine Trinity (although a Father-Son-Holy Spirit rather than the Father-Mother-Son of the *Secret Revelation of John*), as well as angels, archangels, and all the hosts of heaven. Below, the lower world is ruled by fallen angels, headed by Satan and his demonic minions. So, too, the story of Adam and Eve replays all that is wrong with humanity, its sin and suffering. And most centrally, God acts to save humanity through the sending of his son Christ.

Yet despite these familiar elements, the *Secret Revelation of John* can be daunting on a first reading. Not only are there many strange new characters, but the familiar story takes unfamiliar twists and turns, putting well-known materials such as the *Genesis* story of creation into fresh relief, and often giving it shockingly different meanings. The main difficulty for modern readers, however, is that the text assumes a knowledge of ancient traditions that most do not possess. Readers are clearly expected to hear allusions to a wide variety of materials that were well-known in antiquity but are less well-known today, including Jewish Wisdom literature and Plato's dialogues, especially the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*, alongside better-known works like the *Gospel of John* and *Genesis*. Modern readers are most likely to know the story from *Genesis* and immediately hear its resonances in the *Secret Revelation of John*, but ancient readers would have recognized a much wider range of allusion. A major goal of this book is to introduce readers to the most important of those materials. We need to understand not only what cultural resources were used to tell the story but also what story was told, how it was told, and why it was told the way it was. The first question, however, is Who wrote and read such a work? What kind of Christians were these?

Who Wrote and Read the *Secret Revelation of John*?

We can start to answer the question of who may have written and read this work by tracing the history of the *Secret Revelation of John* from its re-discovery in Egypt back to the time and place of its composition and then forward through history to the present.

The *Secret Revelation of John* was completely unknown to the modern

world until 1896, when a fifth-century papyrus book appeared on the antiquities market in Cairo. It was purchased by the German scholar Carl Reinhardt and taken to Berlin.⁷ It contained not only the *Secret Revelation of John*, but three other works as well: the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, and the *Acts of Peter*.⁸ All were written in the Coptic language, which is the last stage of ancient Egyptian transcribed into Greek letters (with a few additional letters from Demotic). The Egyptian dealer from Achmim who sold the book to Reinhardt told him that a peasant had found the book in the niche of a wall.⁹ This story cannot possibly be true, since no manuscript could survive for 1500 years in the open air, and indeed the first editor, the Egyptologist Carl Schmidt, assumed that the manuscript had been found in the ancient graveyards of Achmim or in the area surrounding the city.¹⁰

Once in Berlin, the book was placed in the Egyptian Museum and given the official title and catalogue number of Codex Berolinensis Gnosticus (BG) 8505 (commonly referred to as the Berlin Codex). Schmidt undertook to produce a critical text and German translation of the new find. This work was delayed, however, first by broken water pipes that destroyed his first edition, then by the ravages of World War I, and finally by his own untimely death in 1938.¹¹ The task of continuing the edition fell to Walter Till, but it was now interrupted by World War II. Then at the end of the war, just as Till was preparing to send the manuscript to press, fabulous news reached Berlin: the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices. They contained not one, but *three* additional copies of the *Secret Revelation of John*.¹² Realizing that he would have to consider these manuscripts as well for his critical edition, Till delayed publication again. In the end, however, he decided that it was likely to be a long wait before the Nag Hammadi texts reached his hands, and he gave up. He confided his exasperation to his readers: "In the course of the twelve years during which I have labored over the texts, I often made repeated changes here and there, and that will probably continue to be the case. But at some point a man must find the courage to let the manuscript leave one's hand, even if one is convinced that there is much that is still imperfect. That is

unavoidable with all human endeavors.”¹³ At last in 1955, the first printed edition of the text of the *Secret Revelation of John* finally appeared with a German translation.¹⁴

In 1996, Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse published a complete synoptic edition of all four copies of the *Secret Revelation of John* (the Berlin Codex and the three Nag Hammadi versions), along with an English translation.¹⁵ Although several editions of individual codices appeared between these two works, the edition of Waldstein and Wisse will no doubt be the standard work for years to come.¹⁶ It is the basis for my translation in this book.

Who wrote and read the *Secret Revelation of John* in antiquity? The four surviving manuscripts yield multiple clues that let us place the work in at least four different settings during its five hundred year history: composition in an urban school setting, probably in Alexandria, Egypt; use by the Christian polemicist Irenaeus for purposes of refutation in second-century Rome; circulation in Egypt; and collection and burial by Pachomian monks. In addition, we need to look more carefully at the history of the *Secret Revelation of John* after its recovery in the modern period.

Urban School Setting

The *Secret Revelation of John* claims to be John’s record of his revelation from Christ, recorded at the command of the Savior and intended for all those who are worthy to receive its message. Modern scholars correctly reject this framing narrative as fiction, but it is worthwhile to linger a bit longer over it. Why attribute the book to John if he is not its author? What function did authorial attribution play for those who read the *Secret Revelation of John*?

In the Western world today, authorship suggests an individual’s creativity and originality. To avoid charges (and penalties) of plagiarism, authors are required to place borrowed materials in quotation marks or provide references to them in footnotes. Presumably the unmarked text is the author’s own creation and his or her own intellectual property. In antiquity, ascription of authorship functioned differently. The existence of so many

anonymous and pseudonymous texts attests to a different sensibility. It was not originality that carried weight and prestige, but venerable tradition. Writers appealed to tradition to support their arguments and tended to disguise innovations by presenting their ideas as the continuation of tradition or as the exposition of its heretofore unperceived meaning. Pseudonymous ascription of authorship, such as we have in the case of the *Secret Revelation of John*, is not meant to suggest innovation on the part of an individual named John, but rather is intended to place the work within tradition. Ascribing the text to the disciple John gives the *Secret Revelation of John* an apostolic lineage, one that connects it directly to Johannine tradition.¹⁷

Modern scholars, however, universally dismiss the attribution of the text as a revelation of Christ to John as a fiction (which it assuredly is), considering it to be a pseudonymous work whose real authorship remains unknown to us. Moreover, it is relatively easy to remove all the references to both Christ and John from the *Secret Revelation of John's* narrative without disturbing the story much at all. The two names appear only in the introduction, in a few questions and responses within the work, and in the conclusion. All of these could have been added long after the rest of the work was written. Without these elements, some scholars have charged, nothing specifically Christian remains in the work. Removing John as author would seem to remove the work from Christian tradition altogether. Yet the question why add the references to Christ and John? still remains, and indeed it takes on greater significance when examined from this perspective. The only purpose of the addition would have been to strengthen and clarify the connection of the work to (Johannine) Christianity. Moreover, as we shall see, every setting in which the *Secret Revelation of John* appears in antiquity is decidedly Christian.¹⁸

The most likely setting for the initial composition of the *Secret Revelation of John* is a second-century school, probably in Alexandria, Egypt. The broadest definition of "school" in antiquity would center on the relationship of teacher and student, of master to pupil. That definition, however, covers a broad variety of social formations.¹⁹ It applies, for example, not

only to elementary education or formal training in rhetoric and philosophy, but equally to Jesus and his disciples or the “Teacher of Righteousness” who headed the Qumran community. The ancient Mediterranean world offers many examples of teachers who gathered advanced students around them for such teaching, including Jewish Rabbis, the Christian instructors of the so-called “catechetical school” in Alexandria, the Hermeticists in Upper Egypt, Platonizing philosophers such as Numenius and Plotinus, independent teachers like Justin Martyr or Valentinus in Rome, and the woman prophet Philomene and her student Apelles. Such groups could be led by women teachers, especially prophets, as we know from the case of Philomene, and some included women as disciples and students. The autobiographical statements of the second-century Christian philosopher Justin Martyr paint an intriguing picture of the ancient situation. He describes how he had wandered from place to place, from teacher to teacher, seeking true knowledge; he claims to have found it only when he came to the school of Christ.²⁰

The type of education differed quite substantially from teacher to teacher. Some offered elementary training in reading and writing, others trained students for careers in medicine or law, while yet others undertook to train their students in virtue and wisdom.²¹ Schools of all these types were prominent in Alexandria, which boasted the greatest library of antiquity, and attracted scholars and philosophers from all over the Mediterranean world.²²

What kind of school setting should we imagine for the composition of the *Secret Revelation of John*? Garth Fowden has offered a perceptive description:

From the philosophical texts there emerges, then, a picture of an inspired spiritual teacher surrounded by a small group of followers who sought a philosophical understanding of the divine realm which was not otherwise available to them even in the mystery religions. Beyond that, some at least longed for a personal illumination which would permanently transform their lives. Through study, instruction, question

and answer, prayer, the singing of hymns and the enjoyment of other sorts of close fellowship with master and fellow pupils, the adept came to feel himself part of a tradition, if not, in the strict sense, of a community; and, thus strengthened, he could the more easily endure the ascetic discipline required to extract himself from the snares of the world. But the most striking external characteristic of this milieu was its informality, even fluidity. There was no institutional structure to provide formal limits and sanctions—all depended on the personal authority of the teacher. Likewise there was no fixed body of doctrine, and both the manner and the content of instruction will have varied widely, to an even greater extent than is reflected in the surviving texts.²³

In such settings, the teachings of past masters were studied and the teachings of living masters were recorded. As Fowden notes: “although the ultimate revelation of divine knowledge can occur only in the personal intercourse of master and pupil, there is a parallel and supplementary literary tradition which, since it records what passes between master and pupil, has a sanctity of its own.”²⁴ Indeed, the relationship between master and pupil was constructed “as just one link in a longer chain—the idea of the *diadoché*, or succession so familiar from the history of the Greek philosophical schools . . . And what cannot be transmitted in person to the next link in the succession must at all costs be preserved by being written down.”²⁵

The themes and content of the *Secret Revelation of John* are just what one might expect in such a setting. It claims to record the final teaching given by the master, Christ, to his disciple John, who is instructed to pass it down to those who are worthy of receiving its message. The question and answer form of the dialogue resembles the method of instruction used in some schools of antiquity.²⁶ The *Secret Revelation of John* refers to baptism, healing, and ascetic practices, as well as to the close study of sacred texts (by Moses and Zoroaster). By writing down the teaching of his master,

John takes his place within the succession of the school of Christ. Alexander Böhlig has rightly argued that the materials in the Nag Hammadi collection generally demonstrate knowledge gained in school settings, knowledge required by both those who wrote and those who read these works. Not only writing and reading, but mathematical, philosophical, astrological, and medical studies were taught and studied in such settings.²⁷ The contents of the *Secret Revelation of John* reflect the frequent emphasis of such schools on cosmology, anthropology, and ethics. Syncretic appropriation of a wide variety of materials, not only from diverse philosophical and sacred traditions, but from astrology and magic as well, belongs to this setting. Such schools made room as well for practices we might call religious, especially prayer, baptismal rites of initiation, exorcism, healing rites, and asceticism. All are consistent with the ideals of the esoteric school relationship.

One of the great puzzles about the *Secret Revelation of John* is that, on the one hand, it shows a knowledge of Jewish literature and hermeneutics that cannot be the result of a merely passing acquaintance; themes from *Genesis*, wisdom literature, and apocalyptic abound, and are foundational to its stories of creation and the human condition. On the other hand, it sharply denigrates the Jewish creator God, styling him as a theriomorphic misfit who is ignorant, arrogant, and malicious. Some suggest that the *Secret Revelation of John* was produced by rebellious or spiteful Jews, who had broken with their own traditions.²⁸ Others think that such anti-Jewish attitudes are best ascribed to Christians.²⁹ Hans Jonas proposes that we look for an environment in which people are living “in a zone of proximity and exposure to Judaism, where the Jewish share—besides the contribution of much transmissible material—was in essence *catalytic* and *provoking*.”³⁰ One site that answers this description would be Alexandria, given the long and thriving presence of an intellectually active Jewish community in Egypt combined with disastrous conflicts under first- and second-century Roman rule.

During the Ptolemaic period, a thriving community of Greek-speaking

Jews flourished throughout Egypt, especially in Alexandria. As Joseph Modrzejewski writes: “Without having had to relinquish their religious practices nor their Jewish identity, they were, socially and culturally speaking, full-fledged members of the Greco-Macedonian community, the ‘Hellenes.’”³¹ Gentile intellectuals in Alexandria had access to extensive Jewish materials. The translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, called the Septuagint (LXX), was most probably done in Alexandria, and it clearly furthered knowledge of these works. Jewish monotheism was widely admired, and Moses was treated as a distinguished lawgiver.³² Jewish authors writing in Greek in the first century CE, such as Josephus and Philo, promoted their traditions among Gentiles. With the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 BCE, however, this “golden age” of Egyptian Jewry had already entered a period of decline.³³ Serious pogroms occurred under the governorship of Flaccus (32–38 CE), and a disastrous delegation was sent to the Emperor Gaius Caligula to seek redress. Philo participated in the delegation, and he has left an account of his distressing experience in *The Embassy to Gaius*. But worse awaited. In 115–117 CE the Jews of Alexandria, the Egyptian countryside, Cyprus, and Cyrene rose up in rebellion; thousands of Jews perished in an unmitigated disaster that effectively ended a flourishing Jewish presence in Egypt.

Where are we to place the *Secret Revelation of John* in this history? Alexandria fits particularly well as a hypothetical site for the location of the school setting in which the *Secret Revelation of John* was composed in Greek. We know that Christianity reached Alexandria relatively early (probably already in the first century), but that the views of Christians there varied widely. Birger Pearson demonstrates that the earliest evidence for Christianity in Egypt points to a close relationship to Judaism.³⁴ Yet the two earliest Christians in Alexandria we can identify are Basilides and Valentinus, both of whom developed Platonizing forms of Christian thought with strong intellectual interests in theogony, cosmology, and salvation in many ways comparable to features of the *Secret Revelation of John*. The first more or less “orthodox” writer in Alexandria was Clement, but he came from Athens, and his teacher, Pantaenus, was from Sicily. How are we to

make sense of these apparent contradictions? Modrzejewski suggests that Christians immersed in the Jewish community in Alexandria probably perished along with it. Although the existence of strong Jewish connections with first-century Christianity in Egypt does not exclude the possible co-existence of “some pagano-Christian groups,” nonetheless “In the troubled career of Egyptian Christianity, the revolt of 115–117 CE was, clearly, the decisive moment. It launched the irreversible process of separation of Christianity from Judaism, and was simultaneously the nodal point of continuity attaching the former to the latter.”³⁵

This reconstruction of the history of Christianity in first- and second-century Egypt helps to make sense of the strong presence of Jewish materials among the intellectual resources used by the *Secret Revelation of John*, while at the same time providing evidence of the tension that may have existed between Jews and Christians. We know that Gentile Christians in Alexandria studied with Jewish teachers,³⁶ and indeed after the destruction of Egyptian Jewry, it was Christians who preserved the Greek translation of Jewish Scripture and the works of Philo, which were of central importance to the development of Christian biblical interpretation. It comes as no surprise, then, to see a Christian work like the *Secret Revelation of John* displaying an erudite understanding of Jewish Scripture and hermeneutics. Moreover, the surviving information indicates that Gentile philosophers, many of whom lived and wrote in Alexandria, were also acquainted with Jewish cosmology, and had figured the Jewish God into their own speculations.³⁷ The *Secret Revelation of John's* portrayal of the Jewish creator as the demiurge is thus no real innovation, but has its roots among Gentile philosophers acquainted with Jewish lore. Nor is it a surprise to see the work characterize Yaldabaoth's claim to be the only true God as an affront and a lie. As Feldman notes, “it is the Jewish insistence on derogating every other theology that aroused the ire of pagan intellectuals.”³⁸ The claim to an exclusive God was well-known and widely considered to be arrogant and impious. It is precisely this claim that the *Secret Revelation of John* singles out as the lower creator's most offensive act of arrogance and ignorance. An Alexandrian

setting would fit well with the *Secret Revelation of John's* extensive knowledge of Jewish materials, coupled with its ridicule of the creator God of *Genesis*.³⁹

Moreover, the contents of the *Secret Revelation of John* evidences knowledge of materials of distinctively Egyptian provenance, notably in the use of the Decan, the connection of body parts to divinities, the theriomorphic shape of the archons, and the names of a significant number of the daemons. Parallels to Hermetic texts also suggest Egyptian influence.⁴⁰ Although materials of Egyptian provenance were circulating widely in this period, their appearance in the *Secret Revelation of John* reinforces other evidence to point toward a specifically Egyptian locale for this work.

It should be noted that the *Secret Revelation of John* does not reserve its parody and contempt for the Jewish God alone; the denigrating representation of the lower world rulers as theriomorphic deities illustrates the disdain of Hellenized intellectuals for local Egyptian religion as well. Nor does Plato avoid censure; although Platonizing philosophy is foundational to the *Secret Revelation of John*, it too undergoes serious critical revision. The only tradition that escapes reproof is Christianity. While the *Secret Revelation of John* may appear only superficially Christian when retrospectively compared to types of Christianity based on a New Testament canon, that is a modern standard that apparently was not applicable to the early stages of Christianity in Egypt. Just because the *Secret Revelation of John* in many respects represents a type of Christianity that was largely rejected, we cannot assume that it was not regarded as Christian in its own day.

In conclusion, the most likely setting for the production of the *Secret Revelation of John* is a Christian school setting in a Greek-speaking, pluralistic, urban environment boasting a flourishing and fluid intellectual life. The *Secret Revelation of John's* most extensive intertexts include the interpretive traditions of the *Gospel of John*, *Genesis*, Jewish wisdom literature, Plato (notably the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*), astrology, and demonology. The presence of these diverse intellectual resources would be no surprise in the rich intellectual environment of Alexandria. Nonetheless, it is not the only

location for which an argument could be made as the site of composition. Many cities of the Mediterranean world, including Antioch and Rome, can also be described as pluralistic urban environments. The cumulative evidence, however, points most directly to Alexandria. Indeed if the *Secret Revelation of John* were not written in Alexandria, it would need to have been written in a place just like it.

Second-Century Rome: Irenaeus

The earliest evidence for the existence of the *Secret Revelation of John*, however, is found in the writing of Irenaeus, a Christian theologian from Smyrna in Asia Minor who visited Rome and later became (perhaps) bishop of Lugdunum (Lyons) on the Rhône River. Around 180 CE, he wrote a polemical work in five volumes titled *Exposé and Overthrow of What Is Falsely Called "Knowledge"* (commonly known as *Against the Heresies*). In it, he recounts a theogony, an account of the generation of the Divine Realm, that shows close similarities with part of the theogony in the *Secret Revelation of John*.⁴¹ The parallel material begins with the generation of Barbelo, Autogenes-Christ, and the four Light Aeons. It then moves to the story of Sophia's decision to create alone and the resulting production of an ignorant and arrogant offspring, the world creator Yaldabaoth, who proceeds to generate his own heavenly archons and angels in imitation of the Divine Realm above. This section concludes with Yaldabaoth's erroneous claim: "I am a jealous God and no other god exists beside me."⁴² Irenaeus cites this story solely for the purpose of refutation, presenting it as an example of how the Devil pollutes the pure stream of Christian thought.

Although significant differences between the two versions are apparent, the similarities are sufficiently close that Irenaeus must have been acquainted with at least a portion of some version of the *Secret Revelation of John*. Since he wrote his refutation in Rome, that version of the work would have been known to Christians living there around 180 CE. This context indicates quite clearly an early Christian setting in which at least a portion of the *Secret Revelation of John's* cosmology was known outside of Egypt.

Circulation in Egypt

Evidence for circulation in Egypt is overwhelming. All four surviving copies of the *Secret Revelation of John* were found in Egypt and all are translations from Greek into the Coptic (Egyptian) language.⁴³ Indeed three independent translations were made, a fact which indicates considerable interest among monolingual Copts. In addition, the manuscripts show evidence of having been copied multiple times, indicating an even broader circulation in Coptic. The variations in the construction of the codices, scribal hands, and dialect suggest that each copy had its own history. Wolf-Peter Funk has argued that the dialectical differences among the texts contained in the Nag Hammadi codices indicate that they were repeatedly copied and distributed as they traveled along the Nile River.

Quite evidently, at least a few of our “texts”—in some Coptic version and format—did a great deal of traveling along the Nile valley before they arrived in the Nag Hammadi region. During these travels, they were doubtless part of the luggage of certain persons (who may or may not have been interested in their specific contents). They may have changed carriers from time to time, and they were probably taken out of the bag at a number of places—to be read, modified, copied (thus, in a sense, “published”) so as to multiply into several chains of transmission. That is to say, at such stopovers on the way—possibly involving a more extended stay in some places—they can be assumed to have undergone the same kind of treatment that they were evidently given on their arrival in southern Upper Egypt: as a consequence of the personal or professional contacts between their carriers and other persons, indigenous to the region, they were gradually adapted to their new environment. (This adaptation, it seems, was hardly ever accomplished one hundred per cent.) At some stages during the process, there happened to be editors who thought it fit to unite one or two pieces of the im-

ported goods with other interesting material that derived more directly from their home production. Such miscellaneous volumes may have had quite a history of their own before some of the items happened to be chosen for inclusion into the codices we are proud to have.⁴⁴

The *Secret Revelation of John* fits this pattern very well, displaying a number of interesting dialectical and textual variants among the four surviving copies. That these each had a distinctive history is further suggested by the other texts included in the various codices, as the table below illustrates. The works in each codex illustrate the differing interests of the codices' owners and also which texts were being read alongside the *Secret Revelation of John*. Though the contents vary considerably, all four codices contain only explicitly Christian works.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, we may not assume a single type of audience or use. The books may have been read by individuals or used in school or church settings, or they may have been additions to the libraries of individuals with diverse interests that included Christianity. We can only speculate.

NHC II	Berlin Codex
<i>Secret Revelation of John</i>	<i>Gospel of Mary</i>
<i>Gospel of Thomas</i>	<i>Secret Revelation of John</i>
<i>Gospel of Philip</i>	<i>Sophia of Jesus Christ</i>
<i>Hypostasis of the Archons</i>	<i>Acts of Peter</i>
<i>On the Origin of the World</i>	
<i>Exegesis on the Soul</i>	
<i>Book of Thomas the Contender</i>	
NHC III	NHC IV
<i>Secret Revelation of John</i>	<i>Secret Revelation of John</i>
<i>Gospel of the Egyptians</i>	<i>Gospel of the Egyptians</i>
<i>Eugnostos the Blessed</i>	
<i>Sophia of Jesus Christ</i>	
<i>Dialogue of the Savior</i>	

Pachomian Monastery

The only setting for the *Secret Revelation of John* of which we can speak with certainty is the late fourth- or fifth-century burial of three copies in a jar near a Pachomian monastery in middle Egypt. The monks did not themselves produce any of the codices containing the *Secret Revelation of John*, but it is likely that these works belonged to the monastery, having been given as gifts either by individuals who joined or by other supporters. Although we know relatively little about the Pachomian monastery at Chenoboskian and indeed about Christianity in Egypt more generally, especially outside of Alexandria, three facts can be ascertained and those must form our starting point. First is that three copies of the *Secret Revelation of John* were in the possession of the Pachomian monastery, however they came to be there. Second, the content of the buried manuscripts was considered to be heretical by the standards of emerging orthodoxy. Third, the hierarchical leadership of the Church in the late fourth and fifth centuries, with the support of the Roman authorities, was making efforts to exert its authority over the independent monastic establishments, in part to enforce the new standards of orthodoxy. Our best guess therefore is that the codices were hidden as a response to the Church's attempts to bring the monastery under its control. But even if we accept that explanation, many questions remain unanswered.

Why were these texts collected together and buried? Who collected and buried them? Was it a renegade monk acting alone to save texts that the monastery had condemned? Or were the texts considered to be of great value and worth preserving? Why were they never recovered? Was their burial place forgotten? What does the possession of these codices say about the theological character of early Pachomian monasticism? How did the monks interpret these works (assuming they even read them)? How were these books used in the life of the community?

Frederik Wisse has pointed out that the ascetic tendencies of these codices would fit well with the ascetic practices of monastic life. Perhaps, he

suggests, the monks were more interested in “orthopraxy” than “orthodoxy.”⁴⁶ But that assumes a division between practice and belief that is hard to comprehend. What is clear is that if the *Secret Revelation of John* were read in the community, whether by individual monks or for community edification, its interpretation would have fit well with the larger purpose of the monastic community: to shape individuals toward spiritual perfection by separating them from the world in order to cultivate the life of the Spirit in religious community. The monks would probably have read the work for its interpretation of the *Gospel of John*, for its ascetic tendencies, and for its list of demons used for purposes of healing. The *Secret Revelation of John’s* condemnation of sexual lust, sensuous foods, and wealth would have been emphasized. It is also interesting to note that the Berlin Codex found near Achmim censures the subordination of women to men, interpreting it as yet another attempt of the world rulers to deceive and degrade humanity. In the three codices found near the Pachomian monastery, however, this passage has been changed in order to identify sexual desire with Eve, and thus reinforce what may have been monastic attitudes toward the subordination of women and the separation of men and women in community life.⁴⁷ Such hints indicate particular ways in which the *Secret Revelation of John* may have been read in the monastic setting.

Rediscovery in the Modern Period

Of course the story does not end with the burial of these books. The transmission history of the *Secret Revelation of John* continues into our time as well. For the Berlin Codex, the story is a simple one—at least what we know of it. From the time it was sold to Carl Reinhardt, the Berlin Codex largely has remained in the provenance of university trained scholars.⁴⁸

The story of the Nag Hammadi Codices is more complicated, in part because we know a lot more about the find and about the middlemen who brought these books to the attention of Western scholars. Here again war played its role, first at the turmoil within Egypt at the end of World War II, and then in the “inaccessibility of the Egyptian countryside to foreign-

ers from the Six Day War in 1967 until 1 November 1974,"⁴⁹ to quote the American biblical scholar James Robinson. Robinson tracked down the various parties involved and published an intriguing adventure story of the texts' transmission "from the cliff to Cairo," involving blood feud, technologies of subsistence agriculture, the social complexities of village life, bribes, clandestine adventures, and especially a growing awareness that these worthless scraps—at first deemed useful only as fuel for cooking—might actually have some value in local exchange. Robinson tells us that the discoverer, Muhammad Ali, divided the twelve codices "with the seven other camel drivers who were present at the time of the discovery," but they refused to have any part in sorcerous texts that at any rate were worthless.⁵⁰ Thus at first Muhammad Ali was not even able to give the books away. Eventually they were exchanged for a few piasters or cigarettes. As time went on, the books moved into the hands of local Copts and dealers, who began to offer them for sale at increasingly higher prices, creating a certain sense of unfairness to those who had at first possessed them. Eventually, the books were declared national property and deposited in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, but not before at least one codex had been smuggled out of Egypt.⁵¹ Eventually an international team of scholars from Egypt, the United States, and Europe assembled under the auspices of UNESCO and produced a complete facsimile edition of the texts and initial translations into modern languages (notably English, German, and French).⁵² As of 1996, the entire collection from the Nag Hammadi discovery had been published. The most recent publication is Waldstein and Wisse's synoptic edition of *The Apocryphon of John*, containing all four versions in Coptic and English translation.

Beginning with the initial discovery of the Berlin Codex in 1896, a new phase in the history of the *Secret Revelation of John* was inaugurated, one firmly entwined in the identity politics of religion, nationalism, international law, and (post) colonialism of our own times, not to mention the discourses and economics of the university and academy. The story of the codices' fate after their rediscovery includes the economic contrasts be-

tween Egyptian village life and international academia, the interests of the Egyptian government to preserve their national heritage against colonial acquisitiveness, and the very different technologies of textual production and disciplinary training in antiquity and in modern print societies. We should regard modern printed editions and translations of the *Secret Revelation of John* as part of its ongoing transmission history.

The most notable consideration in the modern history of the *Secret Revelation of John* is the enormous shift in its meaning. While it may seem that modern scholars are involved in activities similar to those of the ancients—producing a text, translation, interpretation, and teaching—we perform these activities in radically changed contexts and circumstances, and consequently those activities have vastly different goals and impacts. In antiquity, readers studied the *Secret Revelation of John* in order to perfect the divine image of their souls; it was composed, translated, and distributed largely to further salvation—or to refute its claims to aid in salvation. In the modern world, however, it has rarely been read with such goals in mind.⁵³ It usually finds its place either in the theology of orthodox Christianity as a chapter on Gnostic heresy or in disputes about the historical origins and definition of Gnosticism. Within the academy more narrowly its value largely has to do with intellectual production and prestige, including concerns about tenure and promotion—salvation, if you will, of a rather different sort. As the *Secret Revelation of John* becomes known more widely, we may expect it to have new and varied impacts on early Christian historiography, constructive theology, and personal appropriation. In any case, modern readers do not stand outside the work's history, but take it up on a new historical stage.

Conclusions

In the *Secret Revelation of John*, we have, then, a work that was probably composed in Alexandria and traveled extensively throughout Egypt over a period of about three centuries. The significant presence of Christian materials indicates ever closer ties with the history of Christianity in Egypt.

That Irenaeus, writing in Rome in the second century, knew a portion of the material that came to be inscribed in the *Secret Revelation of John*, albeit with some variation, suggests that the work circulated outside of Egypt as well. Irenaeus' treatment of the work represents an audience that was reading the *Secret Revelation of John* not to endorse it, but to refute it. We can locate, then, with varying degrees of certainty, at least three different audiences in antiquity: those who composed, edited, and used the *Secret Revelation of John* for their own varied religious purposes over a period of at least two to three centuries within Egypt (and perhaps in Rome); those like Irenaeus who read some version of it for purposes of refutation in order to establish their own counter-views about the theological truth of Christianity; and the Pachomian monks who collected this literature and eventually hid it.

This history of the *Secret Revelation of John* leads to a number of conclusions that confound many currently prevailing views about its origin. First of all there is no evidence that Jews composed or used this work. All the evidence points toward Christian contexts. Those Christian contexts do not support an early distinction in Egypt between "orthodoxy" and "heresy." Instead they invite us to consider the multiformity of Christian belief and practice in the first and second centuries, a situation that may have continued well into the fourth and fifth centuries if this supposedly "heretical" Nag Hammadi collection was used for edification among supposedly "orthodox" Pachomian monks.

In its history, the *Secret Revelation of John* has crossed many borders: from an urban school to a desert monastery; from Greek to Coptic; from cliff to Cairo; from subsistence economics to academic politics; from buried jar to Amazon.com. Print technologies now make this ancient work available to the widest and most diverse audiences it has ever had. What these new audiences will make of it remains to be seen.

Translation

AS WAS INDICATED in the Introduction, four copies of the *Secret Revelation of John* have survived, representing a shorter and a longer version. The two copies of the longer version from Nag Hammadi Codices II and IV are virtually identical, with only minor variants mostly of an orthographic nature. The variant readings in the shorter versions, the Berlin Codex (BG) and the Nag Hammadi Codex III, are more substantive. Due to considerations of space, the following pages include the full translation only of the Berlin Codex and Codex II. Significant variants in Codex III, however, are provided at the foot of pages of the translation.

Like all ancient codices, the manuscripts suffered some damage over the centuries, leaving numerous holes (called lacunae) in the surviving papyrus leaves. Scholars have attempted to determine what was written in these lacunae, and in the translation below I have noted these suggestions by placing them in square brackets [. . .] following the usual convention. I have not, however, placed the translation in brackets when the corresponding manuscripts (III or IV) contain clear and undamaged attestation to the missing text in BG and II. Material in parentheses (. . .) has been supplied in order to render the translation into a more fluent English prose.

The following is a translation of the Coptic texts given in the edition of Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse. The numbering system, however, is newly devised in order to divide the text into literary and sense units rather than following the standard practice of referring to the four different manuscript divisions of page and line numbers. An index at the end of the volume supplies correspondences to those numbering systems for reference.

BERLIN CODEX (BG)

- 2 ¹Now it happened one day when John the brother of James, the sons of Zebedee, was going up to the temple, a Pharisee named Arimanius approached him. ²And he said to him, "Where is your teacher, the one whom you used to follow?"
³He said to him, "He returned to the place from which he came."
⁴The Pharisee said to me, "This Nazorene deceived you (pl.) with error. [He filled [your (pl.) ears with lies], and he shut [your hearts].
⁵He turned you (pl.) [from] the traditions of your fathers."
⁶When I heard these things, I turned from the temple to the mountain which was a place of desert. ⁷And I grieved greatly in my heart, saying, ⁸"How was the Savior appointed? ⁹Why was he sent into the world by his father who sent him? ¹⁰Who is his father? ¹¹And of what sort is that aeon to which we will go? ¹²He told us that the aeon is modeled on that indestructible aeon, ¹³but he did not teach us about what sort the latter is."
- 3 ¹Just then, while I was thinking these things, the heavens opened, ²and the whole creation below the heaven was illuminated with light [below] heaven. ³And the [whole] world [quak]ed.
⁴I was afraid an[d I watch]ed. ⁵And behold a child [appeared to] me.
⁶Then [he changed himself] into the form of an old man [who had l]ight existing within him. ⁸[Although I was watch]ing him, I did not [understand th]is wonder, whether it is a [likeness] having numerous forms [in the l]ight—for its forms [appea]red through each oth[er—or] if it is one [likeness th]at has three aspects.

- 1 ¹The teaching [of the Savi]or and the re[vel]ation of the mysteries
²[together with the things] hidden in silence a[nd those (things)
w]hich he taught to Joh[n, his dis]ciple.
- 2 ¹[Now] it happened one [d]ay when John [the brother] of James, the
so[n]s of Ze[bed]ee, was going up to the temple, a [Pha]risee named
Arimanios [appr]oached him. ²And he said to him, "Where is your
teacher, the one whom you used to follow?"
³I [said] to him, "He returned to the pla[ce] from which he came."
⁴The Pharisee [said to me, "This Nazorene] deceived you (pl.) with
error. He filled [your (pl.) ears with lies], and he shut [your hearts.
⁵He turned you (pl.)] from the tradi[tions of your fathers."
⁶When I, John,) hea[rd] these things, [I turned] from the temp[le to a
mountainous and desert place] ⁷and I grieved [greatly in my heart,
asking] ⁸"How [was the Savior appointed?]" ⁹and "Why was he sent
[into the world] by h[is father? ¹⁰Who is his] father who [sent him?
¹¹And of what sort] is [that] aeon [to which we will go?]" ¹²For what
did he s[ay about it? He told us] that the aeon to which [we will go is
mo]deled on the [indestructible] aeon, ¹³[but he did not tea]ch us
about[t what sort] the latter is.]"
- 3 ¹Just th[en, while I was thinking these things, be]hold the [heavens
opened, ²and] the [whole] crea[tion] below the heaven [was] illumi-
nated. ³And [the world] quaked.
⁴[I] was [afraid ⁵and behold] in the light [I] saw [a child stand]ing by
me. ⁶When I sa[w him, he becam]e like an old person ⁷and he
shi[fted hi]s semblance, becoming like a servant. ⁸These (semblances)
before me were not multiple beings but there was only a (single)
[li]keness [having] many forms in the lig[ht]. And the [semblances]
appeared through each other, a[nd] the [semblan]ce had three forms.

⁹[He sa]id [to me], “John, wh[y] are you doubting and [fearful]? ¹⁰For you are not a stranger [to this like]ness. Do not be faint[hearted]! ¹¹I am the one who dwells with [you (pl.) al]ways. ¹²I am the [Father.] I am the Mother. [I] am [the S]on. ¹³I am the one who exists for ever, undefil[ed and un]mixed.

¹⁴N[ow I have come] to instruct you [about what] exists and what [has come] into being and what mu[st] come into being, ¹⁵so that you will [understand] the things which are invisible a[nd those which] are visible, ¹⁶and to t[each you] about the perfe[ct Human].

¹⁷Now then lift up your [face to] me and listen. [Receive the things that I] will tell you toda[y ¹⁸so that] you yourself will tell the[m to your fel]low spirits who are [from] the im[mov]able generation [of the] perfect Human.”

4 ¹And [I asked] to know.

²He said to me, “[The Unit]y is a monarchy [with nothing] ruling over it. ³[It is] the Go[d and] Father of the All, the [h]oly, the invisible, [who ex]ists over the All, the one who [. . .] incorruption, ⁴[exist- ing as] pure light, into which it is not possible for any light of the eye to gaze.

⁵It is the Spirit. It is not appropriate to think about It as god or that It is something similar. ⁶For It surpasses divinity. It is a dominion hav- ing nothing to rule over It.

⁷For there is nothing existing before It nor does It have need of them.

⁸It does not need life.

¹⁰For It is eternal. It does not need anything. ¹¹For It cannot be made perfect as though It were deficient and only required perfecting.

Rather It is always totally perfect. ¹²It is light. ¹³It cannot be limited because there is nothing before It to limit It. ¹⁴It is inscrutable for there is no one before It to scrutinize It. ¹⁵It is immeasurable because there is no other to measure It as though (anything) exists before It.

¹⁶It is invisible because there is no one to see It. ¹⁷(It is) an eternity

⁹[He] said to me, “John, Jo[h]n, why do you doubt and why [are you] fearful? ¹⁰Are [you] are a stranger to this likeness?—This is to say, do not [be] faint[hea]rted! ¹¹I am the one who [dwells with you (pl.)] always. ¹²I [am the Father. I am] the Mother. I am the So[n]. ¹³I am the one who is undefiled and unpolluted.

¹⁴[Now I have come to teach] you what exists [and what has come into being an]d what must [come into being ¹⁵so that you will understand the] things which are not apparent [and those which are apparent, ¹⁶and to teach] you about the [immovable] genera[ti]on of] the perfe[ct Human].

¹⁷N]ow [then lift up] your [face so that] you will [receive] the things that [I will teach you] today ¹⁸[and you will tell them to your fellow] spirits who c[ome from the immovable] generation of the perfect Human.

4 ¹And [I as]ked so that I might [know.

²And he said] to me, “The Monad [is a mo]narch[y with]out anything existing over it. ³[It exists as the God] and Father of the [A]ll, the [invisi]ble which dwells above [the All, . . .] imperishableness ⁴which exi[sts as the] pure light upon which it is not pos[sible for any eye to] gaze.

⁵[It is the] invisible [Spirit], and It is not appropriate [to consider It] to be like the g[o]ds or that It is something similar. ⁶For It is more than divine, [without anything] existing over It. For nothing lords [over It].

⁹[. . .] not [. . .] in an[yth]ing less [. . . ex]ists in It.

¹⁰It alone [is eternal] since It does not need [anything.] ¹¹For It is totally perfect. [It] does not [lack] anything such that [anything] would perfect It, ¹²[but] It is [al]ways completely perfect in [light]. ¹³It cannot be [limi]ted because there is nothing [before It] to limit It. ¹⁴[It is] inscrut[able because there] is no one who exists before It [to scruti]nize It.] ¹⁵[It is im]measurable because there is nothing [which exists before It to measure] It. ¹⁶[It is] in[visi]ble because there is] no one to

existing forever. ¹⁸(It is) ineffable because no one has comprehended It in order to speak about It. ¹⁹(It is) the one whose name cannot be spoken because no one exists before It to name It. ²⁰It is the immeasurable light, the pure one who is holy and unpolluted, ²¹the ineffable one who is incorruptibly perfect. ²²It is neither perfection nor blessedness nor divinity, but It is a thing far superior to these. ²³It is not boundless nor is It limited, but It is a thing far superior to these. ²⁴For It is neither corporeal nor incorporeal. ²⁵It is neither large nor small. ²⁶It is not a quantity. ²⁷It is not a creature. ²⁸Neither is it possible for anyone to know It. ²⁹It is not something pertaining to the All which exists, rather It is a thing which is better than these—not as being superior (to others as though It is comparable to them) but as that which belongs to Itself. ³⁰It does not participate in an aeon (as a constitutive part of it). Time does not exist with regard to It. For whoever participates in an aeon would have to have had it prepared for It by others. ³¹And time was not delimited for It since It does not receive from another who sets limits. ³³And It does not need (anything). Nothing from the All exists before It.

³⁴All It asks for is Itself alone within the perfect light. ³⁵It will contemplate the unmixed light, the immeasurable vastness. ³⁷(It is) the eternity who gives eternalness, the light who gives light, the life who gives life, the blessed one who gives blessedness, the understanding which gives understanding, the ever good one who gives good, the one who does good—³⁸not such that It possesses but such that It gives—the mercy which gives mercy, the grace which gives grace.

- 5 ¹What shall I say to you about the immeasurable light? What is incomprehensible (can only be expressed as) the likeness of the light. ²In this manner, I will speak to you as far as I will be able to know It—for who could know It infinitely?

see [It. ¹⁷It is an eternity existing] eternally. ¹⁸[It is ineffable because] there is no one able to comprehend It in order to sp[ea]k about It.]
¹⁹It is [un]nameable because [there is no one before It] to name [It.]
²⁰It is [the immeasurable light,] which is pure, [holy, and unpolluted.]
²¹It is in]effable [being perfect i]n incorruptibility. ²²(It does) [not] (exist) in per[fection], blessed[ness, or] divini[ty] but It is [far] superior (to these).
²⁴It is neither corporeal [nor in]corporeal. ²⁵[It] is not large or small.
²⁶[It is not] such that one could [say] that It has quantity or [quality].
²⁸For it is not possible for anyone [to know It]. ²⁹It is not something among [existing things, but It is] far [super]ior—[not] as [being superior] (to others as though It is comparable to them) but as that which belongs to Itself. ³⁰It does [not partici]pate in the aeons or in time (as a constitutive part of them). For that which participates i[n an aeon] was first prepared (by others). ³¹It was [not given a p]ortion in time [because] It does not receive anything [from ano]ther—³²for [what- ever] It received would be received as a loan. ³³For what exists pri[or] to anything else is not deficient such that It should receive [from any- thing].
³⁴For this one gazes marveling at Itself [alone] in Its light. ³⁵[. . .]
 For It is a vastness. ³⁶[It poss]esses the immeasurable [simpli]city.
³⁷[It is] an aeo[n gi]ving aeon, life giving [life, a ble]ssed one giving blessedness, a knowledge giving understanding, a goo[d one giving] goodness. ³⁸It is mer[cy giving] mercy and salvation. It is grace giving grac[e—not] such that it possesses it but that It gives.

5 ¹[How am I to speak] with you about the immeasurable, incomprehen[sible light]?

III 4.27 It is not a creature; *It is not [a] quality.*

³His aeon is indestructible, being in a state of tranquility, at rest in silence. ⁴(It is) the one that exists before the All, for It is the head of all the aeons

—⁵if another thing does exist with It.

⁶For none of those among us understood the things which belong to the immeasurable one except the one who appeared in It. ⁷It is he who told these things to us.

⁸(It is) the one who knows Itself alone in the light-water that surrounds It, which is the spring of living water, the light which is full of purity. ⁹The spring of the Spirit flowed from the living water of the light ¹⁰and it abundantly supplied all the aeons and the worlds.

¹¹In every way It perceived Its own image, seeing It in the pure light-water which surrounds It.

¹³And Its thinking become a thing. ¹⁴She appeared. She stood in Its presence in the brilliance of the light; ¹⁵she is the power which is before the All. ¹⁶It is she who appeared, ¹⁷she who is the perfect Pronoia of the All, ¹⁸the light, the likeness of the light, ¹⁹the image of the Invisible, ²⁰she who is the perfect power, Barbelo, the perfect aeon of the glory.

²¹She glorifies It because she appeared through It ²²and she perceived It. ²³She is the primal Thought (Protennoia), Its image.

²⁵She became a primal Human, which is the virginal Spirit, ²⁶the triple male, the one belonging to the triple power, the triple na[med], the triple begotten one, the androgynous aeon which does not grow old, who came from Its Pronoia.

III 5.4 (It is) the head of all the aeons *because its goodness provides for all the aeons.*

III 5.9–10 and the spring of the Spirit *from which the [living] water flows.* It abundantly supplied all the aeons and *their* worlds.

³[For] Its [aeon] is indestructible, being tranquil [and] existing in [silence, being at rest]. ⁴It exists prior [to the All, for] It is the he[a]ld of [all] the aeons [and] It gives them strength in Its goodness.

⁶For we do not [understand these ineffable matters, and] none of us knows those [immeasurable] things ex[cept for] the one who appeared from the Father. ⁷This is the one who [spoke to us alone].

⁸For (It is) the one who gazes at Itself [alone] in Its light that surrounds [It], which is the spring of the living water.

¹⁰And It provides for [all] the ae[ons].

¹¹And in every way It ga[zes upon] Its image, seeing it in the spring of the Spirit, ¹²willing in Its light-w[ater which is in the spring of the pure light[-water which] surrounds It.

¹³And [Its thinking became a] thing. ¹⁴And she who ap[pea]red in Its presence in [the lu]min[escence of] Its light was revealed. ¹⁵She is the first [power who came into] being before them a[ll]. ¹⁶She appeared] from Its thought, ¹⁷[the Pronoia of the All], ¹⁸her light [. . .] light, ¹⁹the [perfect] power, that is, [the im]age of the perfect invisible virginal Spirit, ²⁰[the first po]wer, the glory of Barbelo, the glory which is perfect in the aeons, the glory of the revelation.

²¹[She] glorified the virginal Spirit and praised It since she had appeared because of It. ²³That one is the first Thought (Protennoia) of Its image. ²⁴She became a womb for the All because she is prior to them all, the Mother-Father, ²⁵the first Human, the holy Spirit, ²⁶the triple male, the triple power, the triple named androgynous, and the eternal aeon among the invisible ones, and the first to come forth.

III 5.21–22 the glory who glorifies It because she appeared t[hrough] It. *And she glorified [It].*

III 5.26 [the triple male, *the triple*] *hymned*, the [triple named, the tri]ple po[wer, the] andr[ogynous aeon which does not grow o]ld, [which ca]me forth fr[om Its Pronoia].

6 ¹And Barbelo requested It to give to him Foreknowledge. ²It assented.
³When It had assented, Foreknowledge appeared. ⁴He stood with
Thought, who is Pronoia.
⁶She glorified the Invisible one and the perfect power, Barbelo, for
they came into being through her.

⁷Again, this power requested (It) to give her Incorruption. ⁸And It as-
sented. ⁹When It had assented, Incorruption appeared ¹⁰and she
stood with Thought and Foreknowledge, ¹¹glorifying the Invisible one
and Barbelo since she had come into being because of her.

¹²She requested (It) to give her Eternal Life. ¹³It assented. ¹⁴When It
had assented, Eternal Life appeared. ¹⁵And they stood, ¹⁶glorifying It
and Barbelo for they had come into being because of her ¹⁷from the
revelation of the invisible Spirit.

²³This is the pentad of the Aeons of the Father, ²⁴who is the primal
Human, the image of the Invisible one, ²⁵namely: Barbelo, Thought,
Foreknowledge, Incorruptibility, and Eternal Life. ²⁶This is the an-
drogynous pentad which is the decad of the Aeons, the Father from
the unbegotten Father.

III 6.11 for *she* had come into being because of her

III 6.11 *They* glorified the invisible Spirit and Barbelon for *they* had come
into being because of her.

6 ¹Barbelo requested the invisible virginal Spirit to give her Fo[re]kn[ow]ledge. ²And the Spirit stared. ³When [It stared], Foreknowledge was revealed ⁴[an]d stood with [P]ronoia. ⁵She is fr[om] the Thought of the invisible [vir]ginal Spirit. ⁶She glorified It a[nd] Its perfect power [Ba]rbelo, fo[r] it was b[eca]use of her that she had come into being.

⁷A[nd ag]ain she reque[st]ed (It) to give her In[destr]uct[ibility]. ⁸And It stared. ⁹And in [Its staring], Indest[ruct]ibility [was reveal]ed. ¹⁰And she stood with Thought and Foreknowledge. ¹¹She glorified the Invisible one and Barbelo, for they had come into being because of her.

¹²And Barbelo requested (It) to give her Ete[r]nal L[ife]. ¹³And the in[v]isible Spirit stared. ¹⁴And in Its staring, Eternal Life was revealed. ¹⁵And [they s]to[od]. ¹⁶They glorified the invisible [Spir]it and Barbelo, for they had come into being because of her.

¹⁸And again she asked (It) to give to her Truth. ¹⁹And the invisible Spirit stared. ²⁰Truth was revealed. ²¹And they stood. ²²They glorified the invisible Spirit who was approving and his Barbelo, for they had come into being because of her.

²³This is the pentad of the Aeons of the Father, ²⁴who is the first Human, the image of the invisible Spirit. ²⁵This is Pronoia, namely: Barbelo, Thought, Foreknowledge, Indestructibility, Eternal Life, and Truth. ²⁶This is the androgynous pentad of the Aeons which is the decad of Aeons, the Father.

III 6.15 And *he* stood

III 6.26 This is the androgynous pentad which is the decad of the Aeons of the Father.

7 ¹Barbelo gazed intently into It, the pure light. ²She turned herself toward It. ³She gave birth to a spark of blessed light, ⁴but it was not equal to her in greatness. ⁵This is the Only-begotten who appeared from the Father, ⁶the divine Autogenes, the first-born son of the All of the Spirit of pure light.

⁷The invisible Spirit rejoiced over the light which had come into being, the one who was the first to appear from the primal power, which is Its Pronoia, Barbelo. ⁸And It anointed him with Its goodness/Christhood ⁹so that he became perfect. There was no lack of good/Christ within him ¹⁰because he was anointed in the invisible Spirit's goodness/Christhood which It poured out for him. ¹¹And he received the anointing through the virgi[nal Sp]irit. ¹²He stood in [Its pre]sence, glorifying the invisible Spirit and the perfect Pronoi[a], ¹³from whom he had appeared.

¹⁴And he asked to be given one single thing, Mind. ¹⁵The invisible Spirit assented. ¹⁶Mind appeared. ¹⁷He stood with Christ, glorifying him and Barbelo, ¹⁸for all these had come into being in silence and thought.

¹⁹The invisible Spirit willed to perform a work. ²⁰Its will became a work. ²¹He appeared. He stood with Mind and Light, glorifying It. ²²The Word followed the Will. ²³For through the Word, Christ created everything. ²⁴The divine Autogenes, Eternal Life and Will, Mind and Foreknowledge stood, ²⁵glorifying the invisible Spirit and Barbelo since they had come into being through her.

²⁶Through the Spirit, he perfected the divine eternal Autogenes, the son of Barbelo, so that he stood before the eternal virginal invisible

III 7.3 She gave birth to a spark of light *resembling the blessed light*

III 7.12 He stood in Its presence, glorifying the invisible Spirit and *the one because of whom* he had appeared.

III 7.14 And he asked to be given a *fellow worker*, Mind.

7 ¹And It gazed into Barbelo in the pure light which surrounds the invisible Spirit and Its luminescence, ²and she conceived from It. ³It begot a spark of light in a light resembling blessedness, ⁴but it was [not] equal to Its greatness. ⁵This one was only-begotten of the Mother-Father who had appeared. ⁶He is his only offspring, the only-begotten of the Father, the pure light.

⁷Then the invisible virginal Spirit rejoiced over the light [which] had come into being, that one who first appeared from the first power of Its Pronoia, which is Barbelo. ⁸And It [an]ointed him from Its own goodness/Christhood ⁹until he became perfect, not lacking anything of [good]ness/[Christ]hood ¹⁰because It had anointed him in the [goo]d[ne]ss/[Chri]st[ho]od of the invisible Spirit. ¹¹And he stood in Its presence while It poured upon him. ¹²A[nd] im[medi]ately when he had received from the Sp[irit], he gl[or]ified the holy Spirit and the perfect Pro[n]oia, ¹³for he had been revealed because of her.

¹⁴And he asked to be given a fellow worker, which is Mind. ¹⁵And It stared. ¹⁶And in the invisible Spirit's act of staring, Mind was revealed. ¹⁷And he stood with Christ, glorifying him and Barbelo, ¹⁸for all these came into being in silence.

¹⁹And Thought willed to create a work through the Word of the invisible Spirit, ²⁰and his Will became a work. ²¹And he was revealed with Mind and Light, glorifying It. ²²And the Word followed the Will. ²³For because of the Word, Christ the divine Autogenes created the All. ²⁴Eternal Life with Will, and Mind with Foreknowledge stood. ²⁵They glorified the invisible Spirit and Barbelo for they had come into being because of her.

²⁶And the holy Spirit perfected the divine Autogenes, the son of Itself and Barbelo, so he might stand before the great and invisible virginal

III 7.19 The invisible Spirit willed to perform a work *through the Word*

III 7.26 The *great invisible Spirit* perfected the divine Autogenes, the son of Barbelon.

Spirit. ²⁷It was the divine Autogenes Christ that It honored with great honor, ²⁸namely he who had come into being from Its primal Ennoia. ²⁹That one is the one whom the invisible Spirit appointed as god over the All, the true god. ³⁰It gave to him all authority and It caused the truth which is in It to be subject to him in order that he might know the All.

³²(He is) that one whose name they will speak among those who are worthy of it.

8 ¹For from the light, which is the Christ, and Immortality, through the divine [Spirit], ²the four great Lights appeared from the divine Autogenes so that they might stand before him.

³The three (are): Will [and] Thought and Life. ⁴And the four are: Grace, Understanding, Perception, and Prudence. ⁵Grace (belongs to) the primal Light Harmozel, who is the angel of light in the primal Aeon; ⁶with him are three Aeons: Grace, Truth, Form. ⁷The second Light Oroiael is the one he placed over the second Aeon; ⁸with him are three Aeons: Pronoia, Perception, Memory. ⁹The third Light Daveithe is the one he placed over the third Aeon; ¹⁰with him are three Aeons: Understanding, Lov[e, Likeness]. ¹¹The fourth Light Eleleth is the one he placed over the fourth Aeon; ¹²with him are three Aeons: Perfection, Peace, Wisdom. ¹³These are the four Lights which stand before the divine Autogenetor, ¹⁴the twelve Aeons which are placed beside the Child, the great Autogenetor Christ, through the approval of the divine invisible Spirit. ¹⁵The twelve Aeons belong to the Son of Autogenetos.

III 7.30 It caused the truth which is in It to be subject to him in order that he might know the All.

III 8.1 For from the light, which is the Christ, and immortality, through *the gift of the invisible Spirit*

III 8.5 Armozel

Spirit. ²⁷The divine Autogenes, the Christ, (is) that one who honored It with a mighty voice. ²⁸He appeared through the Pronoia. ²⁹And the invisible virginal Spirit placed Autogenes as true god over the All ³⁰and It subjected to him all authority and the truth which dwells in It so that he might know the All. ³¹(He is) that one whose name they call by a name which is more exalted than any name. ³²For they will say that name to those who are worthy of it.

- 8 ¹For from the light, which is the Christ, and Indestructibility, through the gift of the Spirit, ²he gazed out so as to cause the four Lights from the divine Autogenes to stand before him. ³And the three (are): Will, Thought, and Life. ⁴And the four powers are: Understanding, Grace, Perception, and Prudence. ⁵Now it is Grace which dwells in the Light Aeon Armozel, who is the first angel. ⁶And three other Aeons are with this Aeon: Grace, Truth, Form. ⁷And the second Light Oriael is the one who was established over the second Aeon. ⁸And three other Aeons are with him: Pronoia, Perception, Memory. ⁹And the third Light is Daveithai, the one who was established over the third Aeon. ¹⁰And the three other Aeons with him are: Understanding, Love, and Likeness. ¹¹And the fourth Aeon was established over the fourth Light Eleleth. ¹²And the [th]ree Aeons with him are: Perfection, Peace, Wisdom. ¹³These are the four Lights who stand before the divine Autogenes. ¹⁴These are the twelve Aeons which stand before the Son of the great Autogenes Christ, through the will and the gift of the invisible Spirit. ¹⁵And the twelve Aeons belong to the Son of [A]utogenes.

III 8.13-14 These are the four Lights which stand before the divine Autogenes, the twelve Aeons which stand before the Child *through the gift and approval of the great Autogenetor Christ, through the gift and the approval of the invisible Spirit.*

9 ¹All things were firmly founded through the will of the holy Spirit, through Autogenes. ²And from the first Understanding and the perfect Mind, through God, through the approval of the great invisible Spirit and the approval of Autogenes, It named the true perfect Human, the primal revelation, Adam.

³It set him over the primal Aeon beside the great divine Autogenetor Christ, being the primal Aeon of Harmozel and Its powers with him.

⁴And the invisible Spirit gave him an unconquerable intellectual power. ⁵He said, 'I glorify and I praise the invisible Spirit ⁶for it is because of you that all things came into being and all things (are) in you. ⁷And I praise you and Autogenes and the three Aeons: the Father and the Mother and the Child, the perfect power.'

⁸And It placed his Child Seth over the second Light Oroiael.

⁹And in the third Aeon was placed the seed of Seth, the souls of the saints who dwell forever in the third Light Daveithe.

¹⁰And in the fourth Aeon were placed the souls who did understand their perfection ¹¹yet they did not repent immediately but they persisted a while. ¹²In the end, however, they repented. ¹³They will remain in the fourth Light Eleleth, ¹⁴the one who yoked them to himself, glorifying the invisible Spirit.

10 ¹Our fellow sister, Sophia, being an Aeon, thought a thought from within herself and in the thought of the Spirit and the Foreknow-

III 9.1 (not in III)

III 9.2 From the first Understanding and the perfect Mind *through the gift and* the approval of the great invisible Spirit *in the presence of* Autogenes, the perfect, true, *holy* Human, the first who appeared—he was called *Adamas*.

III 9.4 And the *Invisible* one gave him an unconquerable intellectual power.

- 9 ¹And the All was firmly founded through the will of the holy Spirit, through Autogenes. ²And from the Foreknowledge of the perfect Mind through the revelation of the will of the invisible Spirit and the will of Autogenes, the invisible Spirit named the perfect Human, the first revelation and the truth, Piger-Adamas.
- ³And It set him up over the first Aeon with the great Autogenes Christ, beside the first Light, Armozel. And Its powers dwelled with him.
- ⁴And the Invisible one gave him an unconquerable intellectual power.
- ⁵And he spoke and glorified and praised the invisible Spirit, saying, ⁶'Because of you the All came into being and it is to you that the All will return. ⁷And I will praise and glorify you and Autogenes with the three Aeons: the Father, the Mother, the Child, the perfect power.'
- ⁸And It set up his Child Seth over the second Aeon beside the second Light Oroiel.
- ⁹And in the third Aeon were set up the seed of Seth over the third Light, Daveithai. And the holy souls were set up.
- ¹⁰In the fourth Aeon were set up the souls of those who were ignorant of the Fullness ¹¹and did not repent immediately but they persisted a while. ¹²And afterward they repented. ¹³They dwelled beside the fourth Light Eleleth. ¹⁴These are the creatures who glorify the invisible Spirit.
- 10 ¹Sophia of the Epinoia, being an Aeon, thought a thought from within herself and the thought of the invisible Spirit and Foreknow-

III 9.7 "I praise you and Autogenes and the aeon *the triad*: the Father and the Mother and the Child, the perfect power."

III 9.8 And his son Seth *was placed in the second aeon with* the second light Oroiael.

III 9.9 And in the third Aeon was placed the seed of Seth, the souls of the saints who dwell *in the aeon with* the third Light Daveithe.

III 9.14 *having been gathered to that place*, glorifying the invisible Spirit.

ledge. ²She freely willed the likeness to appear from within herself ³although the Spirit had not agreed with her nor had It consented nor had her partner approved, the male virginal Spirit. ⁴But she did not find her concord. ⁵As she was about to acquiesce without the approval of the Spirit or the understanding of her own concord, ⁶she swelled out.

⁷Because of the audacity within her, her thought was not able to be idle ⁸and her product came forth, being imperfect, ugly in his appearance, because she had made it without her partner. ⁹And he did not resemble the likeness of the Mother, for he had another form. ¹⁰As she deliberated, she saw that he had become modeled after a different likeness, ¹¹having the face of a serpent and the face of a lion. ¹²His eyes were shining with fire. ¹³She cast him away from her outside of those places so that none of the immortals might see him, ¹⁴because she had given birth to him in ignorance.

¹⁵She united a luminous cloud with him. ¹⁶She placed a throne in the midst of the cloud so that no one might see him ¹⁷except the holy Spirit who is called Life, the mother of everyone. ¹⁸And she named him Yaldabaoth. ¹⁹He is the Chief Ruler, the one who attained a great power from the Mother.

11 ¹He removed himself from her. ²He abandoned the place in which he had been born. ³He seized another place. ⁴He created for himself an aeon, which blazes with a shining fire, in which he now dwells.

III 10.2 She freely willed the likeness to appear from within herself. *Her thought was not idle and her product came forth imperfect, for it was not patterned in her form for she had made it without her partner, (and) it was not patterned in the likeness of the Mother.*

III 10.6 *she was complete.*

III 10.8 *and her product came forth, being imperfect, not being formed in her form, for she had made him without her partner.*

ledge. ²She willed a likeness to appear from within herself ³without the will of the Spirit—It had not approved—and without her partner and without his consideration. For the countenance of her masculinity did not approve, ⁴and she had not found her partner. ⁵She deliberated apart from the will of the Spirit and the understanding of her partner. ⁶She brought forth.

⁷Because of the unconquerable power within her, her thought did not remain idle. ⁸And an imperfect product appeared from her, and it was different from her pattern because she created it without her partner. ⁹And it was not patterned after the likeness of its Mother, for it had a different form. ¹⁰When she saw (the product of) her will, it was different, a model ¹¹of a lion-faced serpent. ¹²His eyes were like flashing fires of lightning. ¹³She cast him out from her, outside of those places so that none among the immortals might see him, ¹⁴for she had created him in ignorance.

¹⁵And she surrounded him with a luminous cloud. ¹⁶And she placed a throne in the midst of the cloud in order that no one might see him ¹⁷except the holy Spirit, who is called the mother of the living. ¹⁸She named him Yaltabaoth. ¹⁹This is the Chief Ruler, the one who got a great power from his Mother.

11 ¹And he withdrew from her ²and he abandoned the place where he had been born. ³He seized (another place). ⁴He created for himself another aeon inside a blaze of luminous fire, which still exists now.

III 10.17 except the holy Spirit who is called the Mother of *all the living*.

III 11.2 He moved *from place to place* away from the place in which he had been born.

III 11.4 He created for himself an aeon of fiery, luminous *flame*, in which he now dwells.

⁵And he copulated with Madness, who is in him. ⁶He begat authorities who are under him, ⁷the twelve angels, each one of them to his own aeon following the model of the immortal Aeons. ⁸And he created for each one of them seven angels each and for the angels three powers—⁹these are all under him, 360 angelic beings with his third power, ¹⁰following the likeness of the primal model which is prior to him.

¹¹Now when the authorities appeared from the chief begetter, the chief ruler of the darkness, these were their names from the ignorance of he who had begotten them: ¹²The first is Yaoth. ¹³The second is Hermas, who is the eye of the fire. ¹⁴The third is Galila. ¹⁵The fourth is Yobel. ¹⁶The fifth is Adonaios. ¹⁷The sixth is Sabaoth. ¹⁸The seventh is Kainan and Kae, who is named Cain, who is the sun. ¹⁹The eighth is Abiressine. ²⁰The ninth is Yobel. ²¹The tenth is Harmoupiel. ²²The eleventh is Adonin. ²³The twelfth is Belias. ²⁴They all have double names: one set of names from desire and wrath, but yet other names which are given to them by the glory of heaven. ²⁵The (latter) are the ones which reveal their nature in truth. ²⁶Saklas called them by the names which are from illusion and their power. ²⁷On the one hand, through (the names given by the glory of heaven), they are reprov'd and weakened, like the seasons, ²⁸while on the other hand, through those (of Saklas) they grow strengthened and increase. ²⁹And he commanded that seven kings should rule over the heavens and five over the chaos of Hades.

III 11.5 He copulated with *Ignorance*, who is in him.

III 11.9 (not in III)

III 11.11–13 The authorities who appeared from the chief begetter, the Chief Ruler of the darkness *and ignorance, together with the authorities were in ignorance* of the one who had begotten them. These are their names: the first is *Haoth*. The second is *Harmas*, who is the eye of the fire.

⁵And he was stupefied in his Madness, the one who dwells within him, ⁶and he begat some authorities for himself.

¹²The name of the first is Athoth, the one whom the generations call the [reaper]. ¹³The second is Harmas, who is [the eye] of envy. ¹⁴The third is Kalila-Oumbri. ¹⁵The fourth is Yabel. ¹⁶The fifth is Adonaïou, who is called Sabaoth. ¹⁷The sixth is Cain, whom the generations of humanity call the sun. ¹⁸The seventh is Abel. ¹⁹The eighth is Abrisene. ²⁰The ninth is Yobel. ²¹The tenth is Armoupieel. ²²The eleventh is Melcheir-Adonein. ²³The twelfth is Belias; he is the one who is over the depth of Hades.

²⁹And he set up seven kings over the seven heavens, one per firmament of heaven, and five over the depth of the abyss so that they might rule.

III 11.18–21 The seventh is Kainan *Kasin*, who is called the sun. The eighth is *Abiressia*. The ninth is Yobel. The tenth is *Armoupieael*.

III 11.26 Saklas called them by the names which are from illusion and their *powers*.

III 11.29 And he commanded that *seven* should rule over the heavens and five over the chaos of Hades.

12¹⁶The names of the glories who are over the seven heavens are these:
 17¹⁷The first is Iaoth, the lion-faced. 18¹⁸The second is Eloaios, the donkey-faced. 19¹⁹The third is Astaphaios, the hyena-faced. 20²⁰The fourth is Iao, the snake-faced with seven heads. 21²¹The fifth is Adonaios, the serpent-faced. 22²²The sixth is Adoni the monkey-faced. 23²³The seventh is Sabbataios, whose face is a flame of fire that shines. 24²⁴This is the hebdomad of the week. 25²⁵These are those who rule the world.
 26²⁶Yaldabaoth-Saklas (is) the one whose forms are without number
 27²⁷such that he can appear with any face at will.

13¹He allotted them (portions) out of his own fire, ²but he did not give them any of his power from the pure light of the power which he had drawn from the Mother. ³Because of the glory which is in him from the power of the light of the Mother, he became Christ to them. ⁴Because of that, he made them call him

III 12.17 The first is *Aoth*, the lion-faced.

III 12.20 The fourth is *Yazo*, the serpent-faced *and lion-faced*.

III 12.22–23 The sixth is *Adomin*, the monkey-faced. The seventh is *Sabbadaios*, whose face is a shining fire.

12¹And he divided his fire among them, ²but he did not send them (anything) from the power of the light which he had received from his Mother. ³For he is ignorant darkness. ⁴When the light mixed with the darkness, it caused the darkness to shine, ⁵but when the darkness mixed with the light, it darkened the light, ⁶so that it became neither light nor dark, but it was weak.

⁷Now this weak ruler has three names. ⁸The first name is Yaltabaoth. ⁹The second is Saklas. ¹⁰The third is Samael. ¹¹He is impious in his Madness, she who dwells in him. ¹²For he said, 'I am God and no other god exists except me,' ¹³since he is ignorant of the place from which his strength had come.

¹⁴And the Rulers created seven powers for themselves. ¹⁵And the powers created for each of them six angels until they had produced 365 angels.

¹⁶These are the bodies of the names: ¹⁷The first is Athoth; he has a sheep's face. ¹⁸The second is Eloaiou; he has a donkey's face. ¹⁹The third is Astaphaios; he has a hyena's face. ²⁰The fourth is Yao; he has a serpent's face with seven heads. ²¹The fifth is Sabaoth; he has a serpent's face. ²²The sixth is Adonin; he has a monkey's face. ²³The seventh is Sabbede; he has a fiery face which shines. ²⁴This is the hebdomad of the week.

²⁶But Yaldabaoth possessed a multitude of faces, adding up to more than all of them, ²⁷so that when he is in the midst of the seraphim, he could masquerade in front of them all at will.

13¹He shared with them (portions) from his fire.

³Because of the power of the glory which dwells in him from the light of his Mother, he became Lord over them. ⁴Because of that, he called

III 13.3-4 Because of the glory which is in him from the power of the light of the Mother, he was *lord* over them. Because of this, *he called himself God over them*.

God, ⁵thus being disobedient to the reality from which he had come into being.

⁶And he joined with the authorities. ⁷When he spoke, the seven powers came into being, ⁸and he named them. Beginning with the highest, he placed authorities (as follows): ⁹The first, then, is Pronoia with the first (authority) Yaoth. ¹⁰The second is Divinity with the second one Eloaios. ¹¹The third is Goodness/Christhood with the third one Astaphoios. ¹²The fourth is Fire with the fourth one Yao. ¹³The fifth is Kingship with the fifth one Sabaoth. ¹⁴The sixth is Understanding with the sixth one Ad[oni]. ¹⁵The] seven[th] is Sophia [wi]th the seventh one Sabbataios. ¹⁶These are the ones who have a firmament corresponding to each heaven and aeon

²¹according to the likeness of the Aeon which exists from the beginning, ²²in the model of the indestructible ones.

¹⁴He saw the creation below him and the multitude of angels which are below him who came into being from him. ²And he said to them, 'I am a jealous God; without me there is nothing.' ³—already indicating to the angels who are below him that another God does exist. ⁴For if there were no other (god) over him, of whom would he be jealous? ⁵Then the Mother began to move to and fro as she understood her deficiency. ⁶It was her own perfection that had caused her to be blamed, ⁷because her partner had not been in concord with her."

III 13.6–7 And he joined the powers with the authorities. When he spoke, they came to be.

himself God, ⁵and he was not obedient to the place from which he had come.

⁶And he mixed with the authorities who dwell with him. ⁷Through his thinking and his speaking, seven powers came into being. ⁸And he named the powers one after another, beginning with the highest (as follows): ⁹First is Goodness/Christhood with the first (authority) Athoth. ¹⁰The second is Pronoia with the second one Eloaio. ¹¹The third is Divinity with the third one Astraphaio. ¹²The fourth is Lordship with the fourth one Yao. ¹³The fifth is kingdom with the fifth one Sabaoth. ¹⁴The sixth is Envy with the sixth one Adonein. ¹⁵The seventh is Understanding with the seventh Sabbateon. ¹⁶For these are those who have a firmament corresponding to each aeon. ¹⁷These were named according to the glory of those who belong to heaven for the destr[uction of the] power[s]. ¹⁸The names which they were given by the Chief Begetter had power in them, ¹⁹but the names which were given to them according to the glory of those who belong to heaven are for them destruction and powerlessness. ²⁰Thus they have two names.

²¹He ordered everything following the likeness of the first Aeons, which had come into being, ²²so that he might create them in the indestructible pattern. ²³Not because he had seen the indestructible ones, ²⁴but the power in him which he had gotten from his Mother bore in him the likeness of the world.

14¹And when he saw the creation which surrounded him and the multitude of the angels surrounding him who had come into being from him, ²he said to them, 'I am a jealous God and no other god exists beside me.' ³But his proclamation indicated to the angels who dwell with him that another God does exist. ⁴For if there were not another who exists, of whom would he be jealous?

⁵The Mother began to wander. She understood her deficiency ⁶when the brightness of her light was diminished and she was darkened, ⁷because her partner had not been in concord with her."

⁸But I said, "Christ, what does it mean 'to move to and fro?'"

⁹He smiled and said, "You think it happened like Moses said 'upon the water.' ¹⁰But in fact, she saw the evil and rebellion which would happen through her offspring. ¹¹She repented, and as she was coming and going in the ignorant darkness, ¹²she began to be ashamed and she did not dare to return ¹³but she continued coming and going.

¹⁴Now her coming and going is 'to move to and fro.'

¹⁵Now when the Arrogant one got a power from the Mother, ¹⁶he was ignorant of many beings who were superior to his Mother, ¹⁷for he said about his Mother that she alone existed. ¹⁸He saw the great multitude of angels that he had created. ¹⁹He was mighty over them. ²⁰And when the Mother understood that the untimely birth of the darkness was not perfect ²¹because her partner had not been in concord with her, ²²she repented. She wept great tears.

²³And It heard the entreaty of her repentance and the brothers prayed for her. ²⁴The holy invisible Spirit assented. When the invisible Spirit had assented, It poured upon her a Spirit from the perfection.

²⁵When her partner came down to her to put right her deficiencies, ²⁶it was through Pronoia that he willed to put right her deficiencies.

²⁷She was not, however, conveyed to her own Aeon, ²⁸but, because of the great ignorance which had appeared in her, she dwelled in the Ninth until she puts right her deficiency.

¹⁵ ¹A voice came to her, ²'The Human exists and the Child of the Human.' ³The chief ruler Yaldabaoth heard, ⁴but he did not think that the voice had come [from the exalted height above].

⁶The holy, perfect Father, the first Human of human form, taught them about himself. ⁷The Blessed one revealed his likeness to them.

⁸But I said, "Lord, what does it mean 'she wandered?'"

⁹He smiled and said, "Do not think it means as Moses said 'upon the waters.' ¹⁰But in fact, when she saw the evil which had happened and the theft which her offspring had committed, ¹¹she repented and she was overcome with forgetfulness in the darkness of ignorance. ¹²And she began to be ashamed. [She did not dare] to return ¹³but [she was . . .] in motion. ¹⁴This movement is the wandering.

¹⁵The Arrogant one had gotten a power from his Mother. ¹⁶For he was ignorant, ¹⁷thinking that no one existed except his Mother alone. ¹⁸And seeing the multitude of the angels whom he had created, ¹⁹he then exalted himself over them.

²⁰And when the Mother understood that the garment of darkness was not perfect, ²¹she then understood that her partner had not been in concord with her. ²²She repented with great weeping.

²³And the entreaty of her repentance was heard and all the Fullness praised the invisible virginal Spirit on her behalf. ²⁴The holy Spirit poured over her (something) from their entire Fullness. ²⁵For her partner did not come to her (by himself), ²⁶but it was through the Fullness that he came to her in order that he might correct her deficiency. ²⁷Yet even so, she was not conveyed to her own Aeon, ²⁸but (was placed) above her child so that she might dwell in the Ninth until she corrects her deficiency.

¹⁵¹And a voice came from the exalted heavenly Aeon, ²'The Human exists and the Child of the Human.' ³The Chief Ruler, Yaltabaoth, heard it, ⁴but he thought that the voice had come from his Mother, ⁵and he did not understand where it had come from.

⁶And the holy and perfect Mother-Father, the perfect Pronoia, the image of the Invisible, who is the Father of the All, in whom the All came into being, the first Human, taught them ⁷by revealing his likeness in a male model.

⁸And the whole dominion of the seven authorities bent down.

¹¹They saw the pattern of the image in the water.

¹²They said to each other, 'Let us create a human in the image of God and with the likeness.'

¹⁴They created out of each other and all their powers.

¹⁶They molded a form out of themselves and each one of (their) powers created from its power a soul. ¹⁷They created by imitating the image which they had seen, ¹⁸the image of the one who exists from the beginning, the perfect Human. ¹⁹They said, 'Let us give him the name Adam so that that name and its power might illumine us.'

²⁰And the powers began (creating their respective souls) from (the image) below: ²¹The first is Divinity; it is a soul of bone. ²²The second is Christhood/Goodness; it is a soul of sinew. ²³The third is Fire; it is a soul of flesh. ²⁴The fourth is Pronoia; it is a soul of marrow which is the whole foundation of the body. ²⁵The fifth is Kingdom; it is a soul [of blood]. ²⁶The sixth is Understanding; it is a soul of skin. ²⁷The seventh is Wisdom; it is a soul of hair.

²⁸And they set the whole body in order. ²⁹And their angels stood before them. ³⁰They created a substantial soul out of the things which had first been prepared by the authorities, ³¹the harmony of the joined parts.

III 15.22 The second is [*Lor*]dship]. . .

III 15.23 [*The third is both Christhood/Goodness and Fire, it is a so[ul] of [fle]sh [and the whole foundation of the b]od[y].*

⁸The Aeon of the Chief Ruler trembled all over and the foundations of the abyss quaked. ⁹And upon the waters which dwell under matter, the underside was [illum]ined by the ap[pearance] of his image which had been revealed. ¹⁰And when all the authorities and the Chief Ruler stared (on the water), they saw all the region below which was shining. ¹¹And by the light, they saw the model of the image upon the water.

¹²And he said to the authorities who dwell with him, 'Come, let us create a human according to the image of God and according to our likeness ¹³so that his image might illuminate us.' ¹⁴And they created (using) the power from each of them ¹⁵according to the characteristics which they had been given.

¹⁶And each one of the authorities supplied for (the human's) soul a characteristic ¹⁷corresponding to the model of the image which he had seen. ¹⁸He created a real being in accordance with the likeness of the perfect first Human. ¹⁹And they said, 'Let us call him Adam in order that his name might become a power of light for us.'

²⁰And the powers began (their work): ²¹The first one, Goodness, created a bone-soul. ²²The second one, Pronoia, created a sinew-soul. ²³The third one, Divinity, made a flesh-soul. ²⁴The fourth one, Lordship, made a marrow-soul. ²⁵The fifth one, Kingdom, made a blood-soul. ²⁶The sixth one, Envy, created a skin-soul. ²⁷The seventh Understanding, created a hair-soul.

²⁹The multitude of the angels stood before him. ³⁰They received the seven substances of the soul from the powers ³¹so that they might create the harmony of the parts and the harmony of the limbs and the proper combination of each of the parts.

III 15.26 The sixth is [Understanding]; it is a soul of *tooth with the whole body*.

III 15.28 And they set the whole *human* in order.

- 16¹The first began to create (starting) from the head. 2^{Eteraphaoep}
 Abron created its head. 3^{Megiggsstroeth} created the brain.
 4^{Asterechmen}, the right eye. 5^{Thaspomocham}, the left eye.
 6^{Yeronumos}, the right ear. 7^{Bissoum}, the left ear. 8^{Akiopeim}, the nose.
 9^{Banen Ephroum}, the lips. 10^{Amen}, the teeth. 11^{Ibikan}, the molars.
 12^{Basiliasdeme}, the tonsils. 13^{Achcha}, the uvula. 14^{Adaban}, the neck.
 15^{Chaaman}, the vertebrae. 16^{Dearcho}, the throat. 17^{Tebar}, the right
 shoulder. 18^N[. . . the] left shoulder. 19^{Mniarchon}, the right elbow.
 [. . . the] left elbow. 20^{Abitrion}, the right underarm. 21^{Evanthen}, the
 left underarm. 22^{Krys}, the right hand. 23^{Beluia}, the left hand.
 24^{Treneu}, the fingers of the right hand. 25^{Balbel}, the fingers of the left
 hand. 26^{Kriman}, the fingernails. 27^{Astrops}, the right breast.
 28^{Barroph}, the left breast. 29^{Baoum}, the right shoulder joint.
 30^{Ararim}, the left shoulder joint. 31^{Areche}, the belly. 32^{Phthave}, the
 navel. 33^{Senaphim}, the abdomen. 34^{Arachethopi}, the right ribs.
 35^{Zabedo}, the left ribs. 36^{Barias}, the right hip. 37^{Phnouth}, the left
 hip. 38^{Abenlenarchei}, the marrow. 39^{Chnoumeninorin}, the bones.
 40^{Gesole}, the stomach. 41^{Agromauma}, the heart. 42^{Bano}, the lungs.
 43^{Sostrapal}, the liver. 44^{Anesimalar}, the spleen. 45^{Thopithro}, the intes-
 tines. 46^{Biblo}, the kidneys. 47^{Roeror}, the sinews. 48^{Taphreo}, the spine
 of the body. 49^{Ipouspoboba}, the veins. 50^{Bineborin}, the arteries.
 51^{Aatoimensephei}, theirs are the breaths which are in all the parts.
 52^{Entholleia}, all the flesh. 53^{Bedouk}, the right buttock (?). 54^{Arabeei},
 the left <buttock. 55. . .>, the penis. 56^{Eilo}, the testicles. 57^{Sorma}
 created the genitals. 58^{Gorma Kaiochlabar}, the right thigh. 59^{Nebrith},
 the left thigh. 60^{Pserem}, the kidneys (muscles?) of the right side.
 61^{Asaklas}, the left kidney (muscle?). 62^{Ormaoth}, the right knee.
 63^{Emenun}, the left knee. 64^{Knyx}, the right shin. 65^{Tupelon}, the left
 shin. 66^{Achiel}, the right ankle. 67^{Phneme}, the left ankle.
 68^{Phiouthrom}, the right foot. 69^{Boabel}, its toes. 70^{Trachoun}, the left
 foot. 71^{Phikna}, its toes. 72^{Miamai}, the toenails. 73^{Labernioum}
 < . . . >.
 74^{And seven were appointed over all these: 75Athoth, Armas, Kalila,}
 Yabel, Sabaoth, Cain, Abel.

III 17.8 And he blew into it from his spirit, which is the power from the Mother, *out of the Chief Ruler* into the body.

17¹And those who animate the parts are, according to parts: ²the head, Diolimodraza. ³The neck, Yammaeas. ⁴The right shoulder, Yakoubib. ⁵The left shoulder, Verdon. ⁶The right hand, Oudidi. ⁷The left, Arbao. ⁸The fingers of the right hand, Lampno. ⁹The fingers of the left hand, Leekaphar. ¹⁰The right breast, Barbar. ¹¹The left breast, Imae. ¹²The chest, Pisandraptas. ¹³The right shoulder joint, Koade. ¹⁴The left shoulder joint, Odeor. ¹⁵The right ribs, Asphixix. ¹⁶The left ribs, Synogchouta. ¹⁷The belly, Arouph. ¹⁸The womb, Sabalo. ¹⁹The right thigh, Charcharb. ²⁰The left thigh, Chthaon. ²¹All the genitals, Bathinoth. ²²The right knee, Choux. ²³The left knee, Charcha. ²⁴The right shin, Aroer. ²⁵The left shin, Toechtha. ²⁶The right ankle, Aol. ²⁷The left ankle, Charaner. ²⁸The right foot, Bastan. Its toes, Archentechtha. ²⁹The left foot, Marephnouth. ³⁰Its toes, Abrana.

³¹Seven, 7, [have power] over all of these: ³²Michael, Ouriel, Asmenedas, Saphasatoel, Aarmouriam, Richram, Amiorps.

³³And those who are over the senses, Archendekta. ³⁴And the one over the perception, Deitharbathas. ³⁵And the one over the imagination, Oummaa. ³⁶And the one over the assent, Aachiaras. ³⁷And the one over the whole impulse, Riaramnacho.

³⁸And the source of these demons who are in the whole body is fixed as four: ³⁹heat, cold, wetness, dryness. ⁴⁰And the mother of them all is matter. ⁴¹The one who rules over the heat, Phloxpha. ⁴²The one who rules over the cold, Oroorrothos. ⁴³The one who rules over what is dry, Erimacho. ⁴⁴The one who rules over the wetness, Athuro. ⁴⁵The mother of all these, Onorthochrasaei who is limitless, stands in their midst ⁴⁶and she mixes with them all. ⁴⁷And truly she is matter, for they are nourished by her.

⁴⁸Ephememphi is the one who belongs to pleasure. ⁴⁹Yoko is the one who belongs to desire. ⁵⁰Nenentophni is the one who belongs to grief. ⁵¹Blaomen is the one who belongs to fear. ⁵²The mother of them all is Esthensis Ouch Epiptoe. ⁵³The passions come into being from these four demons. ⁵⁴From grief (comes) envy, jealousy, suffering,

17⁶⁴And they created the whole body, which was joined together by the multitude of angels.

18¹And it remained inactive a long time ²because neither the seven authorities nor the 360 angels who had forged [the links of the chain] were able to awaken it.

³And (the Mother) wanted to retrieve the power which she had given to the ruler from (her) audacity. ⁴She went in innocence and entreated the Father of the All, whose mercy is great, and the luminous God.

⁵Following a holy design, he sent Autogenes and his four lights in the shape of angels of the Chief Ruler. ⁶They advised him with the goal of extracting the power of the Mother from within him.

⁷They said to him, 'Blow into his face from the spirit which is in you and the object will arise.' ⁸And he blew into it from his spirit, which is the power from the Mother,

¹⁰into the body.

¹¹And [at that moment] he moved.

¹²Immediately [the rest of the] authorities became jealous ¹³because he had come into being through them all ¹⁴and they had given the powers that existed within them to the human ¹⁵and he possessed the souls of the seven authorities and their powers. ¹⁶His wisdom was greater than them all and greater even than the Chief Ruler. ¹⁷And

trouble, pain, heartlessness, anxiety, mourning, and the rest. ⁵⁵And from pleasure comes much wickedness and empty boasting and similar things. ⁵⁶From desire (comes) anger, wrath, bitterness, bitter yearning, insatiable greed and similar things. ⁵⁷From fear (comes) panic, flattery, anguish, shame. ⁵⁸These all resemble virtues as well as vices. ⁵⁹The insight into their true character is Anaro, who is the head of the material soul which dwells with the seven senses Ouch Epiptoe. ⁶⁰This is the number of the angels: altogether they are 365.

⁶¹They all labored on it until, part by part, the psychic and material body was completed. ⁶²Now others whom I have not mentioned to you rule over the rest. ⁶³If you want to know about them, it is written in the Book of Zoroaster.

⁶⁴And all the angels and demons labored until they had created the psychic body.

18 ¹And their product was completely inactive and motionless for a long time.

³But when the Mother wanted to retrieve the power which she had given to the Chief Ruler, ⁴she entreated the Mother-Father of the All, the one who possesses great mercy. ⁵Following the holy design, he sent the five Lights down to the place of the angels of the Chief Ruler.

⁶They advised him with the goal of extracting the power of the Mother.

⁷And they said to Yaldabaoth, 'Breathe into his face by your spirit and his body will arise.' ⁸And into his face he blew his spirit, which is the power of his Mother. ⁹He did not understand because he dwells in ignorance. ¹⁰And the power of the Mother left Yaldabaoth and went into the psychic body that they had made according to the likeness of the one who exists from the beginning. ¹¹The body moved and gained power, and it was luminous.

¹²And in that moment, the rest of the powers became jealous ¹³for it was because of them all that he had come into being ¹⁴and they had given their power to the human.

¹⁶Yet his understanding was stronger than those who had made him

they knew that he was naked of evil because he was wiser than they and he had entered into the light. ¹⁸They lifted him and brought him down into the lowest region of all matter.

¹⁹But the blessed Father is a merciful benefactor. ²⁰He had mercy on the [Mother's] power that had been taken [from] the [Chief] Ruler ²¹lest they might have power over the body. ²²He and his mercy sent the good Spirit as a helper to the primal one who had gone down, who was named Adam. ²³(His helper is) the Epinoia of the light, the one whom he named Life. ²⁴It is she who labors for the whole creation ²⁵by toiling with him, ²⁶by setting him right in his own perfect temple, ²⁷and by teaching him about the descent of his deficiency and instructing him about his ascent. ²⁸And the Epinoia of the light was hidden within him so that the rulers might not know ²⁹but our sister Sophia, who is like us, would set right her deficiencies through the Epinoia of the light.

¹⁹¹And the human shone because of the shadow of the light which is in him. ²And his thinking was superior to those who had made him. ³And they bent down. ⁴They saw that the human was superior to them. ⁵They took counsel with the whole angelic host of the rulers and the rest of their powers. ⁶Then they mixed fire and earth with water and flame. ⁷They seized them and the four winds, blowing with fire, ⁸joining them with each other, [making a] great disturbance; ⁹they brought him down into the shadow of death. ¹⁰Yet again they made another form from earth, water, fire, and spirit ¹¹which is from matter, darkness, desire, and the adversarial spirit. ¹²This is the chain. This is the tomb of the molded body with which they clothed the human, the fetter of the flesh.

¹⁴He is the primal one who came down and the primal partition.

III 18.26 [by setting him] right [in his own] *fullness*

III 19.2 And his thinking was superior to those who had made him *and the [whole] host of rulers of authorities*

and greater even than the Chief Ruler. ¹⁷When they understood that he was luminous, could think better than they did, and was naked of evil, ¹⁸they picked him up and threw him down into the lowest part of all matter.

¹⁹But the Blessed one, the Mother-Father, the beneficent and merciful, ²⁰had mercy upon the Mother's power that had been brought forth from the Chief Ruler ²¹lest yet again they might have power over the psychic and perceptible body. ²²So through his beneficent Spirit and his great mercy, he sent a helper to Adam. ²³She is a luminous Epinoia, who is from him (and) who was called Life. ²⁴It is she who aids the whole creation ²⁵by toiling with him, ²⁶guiding him by correction toward his fullness, ²⁷and teaching him about the descent of the seed and teaching him about the path of ascent, the path which it had come down. ²⁸The Epinoia of the light was hidden in Adam in order that the rulers might not know, ²⁹but Epinoia existed as a correction for the deficiency of the Mother.

¹⁹¹And the human appeared because of the shadow of the light which exists within him. ²And his thought was superior to all those who had created him. ³When they looked up, ⁴they saw that his thought was superior, ⁵and they took counsel with the whole host of the rulers and the angels. ⁶They took some fire, earth, and water. ⁷They mixed them together with each other and the four fiery winds. ⁸And they wrought them together and made a great disturbance. ⁹And they enclosed him in the shadow of death ¹⁰in order that they might yet again form from earth, water, fire, and spirit a thing from matter, ¹¹which is the ignorance of the darkness, desire, and their counterfeit spirit. ¹²This is the tomb of the molding of the body with which the robbers clothed the human, the chain of forgetfulness. ¹³And he came to be a mortal human. ¹⁴This is the one who came down first and the first partition.

III 19.12–14 This is the chain. This is the tomb of the molded body with which *the robbers* clothed the human, the chain of *oblivion*. And in this way, the human become mortal. This is the primal *desc[ent]* and *his* primal partition.

¹⁵But it is the Thought of the primal light who dwells in him who awakens his thinking.

²⁰¹The Chief Ruler took him and placed him in paradise, ²of which he said, 'It is [a] delight for him' but really so that he might deceive him.

³For their delight is bitter and their beauty is licentious. ⁴Their delight is a deception and their tree is iniquity. ⁵Their fruit is an incurable poison and their promise is death to him. ⁶Their tree which they planted is the tree of life.

⁷For my part, I will teach you about the mystery of their life. ⁸It is their counterfeit spirit which dwells in them, ⁹whose purpose is to make him wander so that he does not know his perfection.

¹⁰That tree is of this sort: Its root is bitter. ¹¹Its branches are shadows of death. ¹²Its leaves are hate and deception. ¹³Its fragrance is an ointment of evil. ¹⁴And its fruit is the desire for death. ¹⁵Its seed drinks from darkness. ¹⁶The dwelling place of those who taste it is Hades.

¹⁸But the tree which they call 'knowledge of good and evil' is the Epinoia of the light. ¹⁹Concerning her they commanded, 'Do not taste (of it),' which means 'do not listen to her.' ²⁰They issued this commandment against him so that he might not look up to his perfection ²¹and realize that he was naked of his perfection.

²²But as for me, I set them right so that they would eat."

²³I said to him, "Christ, was it not the serpent who instructed her?"

²⁴He laughed ²⁵and said, "The serpent is the one who instructed her about the sowing of desire, pollution, and destruction because they are useful to it. ²⁶Yet it knew that she would not obey it ²⁷because she is wiser than it.

III 19.15 But it is the Thought of the *pre-existent* light who dwells in him who awakens his thinking.

III 20.3-5 For [their *food* was bitter and their [beauty] is licentious. Their *food* was a deception and their *trees* were [iniquity. Their fruit was an incurable poison] an[d their promise] is [death] to *them*.

¹⁵The Epinoia of the light who was in him is the one who will awaken his thinking.
²⁰¹And the Rulers took him and they placed him in paradise. ²And they said to him, 'Eat' that is in idleness. ³For indeed their delight is bitter and their beauty is licentious. ⁴For their delight is deception and their trees are impiety. ⁵And their fruit is an incurable poison and their promise is death. ⁶And in the midst of paradise, they planted the tree of their life.
⁷But I, I will teach you what the mystery of their life is, ⁸the plan they made with each other, the likeness of their spirit.
¹⁰Its root is bitter ¹¹and its branches are deaths. ¹²Its shade is hate and deception dwells in its leaves. ¹³And its blossom is the anointment of evil. ¹⁴And its fruit is death, and desire is its seed, ¹⁵and it blossoms from the darkness. ¹⁶The dwelling place of those who taste from it is Hades, ¹⁷and the dark is their resting place.
¹⁸But what they call 'the tree of the knowledge of what is good and evil' is the Epinoia of the light.
²⁰They (the rulers) remained in front of it in order that he might not look up to his fullness ²¹and come to know the nakedness of his shamefulness.
²²But as for me, I set them right so that they would eat."
²³And I said to the Savior, "Lord, was it not the snake who taught Adam so that he would eat?"
²⁴The Savior laughed ²⁵and said, "The snake taught them to eat from a wicked desire to sow which belongs to destruction, in order that he (Adam) would become useful to it. ²⁶And it knew that he was disobedient to it ²⁷because the light of Epinoia dwelled in him, making him more correct in his thinking than the Chief Ruler.

III 20.15 [an]d its seed *sprouted* [from] darkness.

III 20.25–27 and [he said], "the serpent *appeared to them* [. . .] sowing of desire, *which* is the pollution [. . .] darkness *so that* he might be useful [to it]. [For] it knew [that] *he* was disobedient to it because *he* was [wiser] than it.

21¹And he wanted to bring out the power which had been given to him.

2²And he cast a trance upon Adam.”

3³I said to him, “Christ, what is the trance?”

4⁴He said, “It is not like Moses said 5⁵that he caused him to sleep but it was his sensibility that he covered with a shroud. 6⁶He weighed him down with insensibility. 7⁷For indeed it is said by the prophet, ‘I will make the ears of their hearts heavy so that they might not understand and might not see.’

8⁸Then the Epinoia of the light hid herself in him.

9⁹And according to his will, he wanted to bring her from the rib. 10¹⁰But the Epinoia of the light is ungraspable. 11¹¹The darkness pursued her, but it was not able to lay hold of her.

12¹²He wanted to bring the power from him (Adam) 13¹³to make another kind of molded form in a woman’s shape.

15¹⁵And he stood her up before him—16¹⁶not ‘He took a rib’ as Moses said.

17¹⁷He created the woman beside him.

18¹⁸Immediately he became sober from the drunkenness of the darkness. The Epinoia of the Light uncovered the shroud from his understanding. 19¹⁹Immediately when he recognized his essence, 20²⁰he said, ‘Now this is bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh. Because of this man will leave his father and his mother and he will cling to his wife, and from two they will become a single flesh.’ 21²¹For the Mother’s partner will be sent forth

23²³and she will be set right. 24²⁴Because of this, Adam named her the

III 21.4–6 “Are you thinking that it is as Moses said, ‘He caused him to sleep’? No, but it was his sensibility that he covered with insensibility.

III 21.19 Immediately he recognized his *fellow* essence *who is like him*.

III 21.21–23 For the Mother’s consort *was sent* forth to rectify her deficiencies.

- 21¹And he wanted to bring out the power which he had given to him.
2²And he brought a trance upon Adam.”
3³And I said to the Savior, “What is the trance?”
4⁴He said, “It is not as Moses wrote as you heard. 5⁵For he said in his first book that he laid him down in sleep, but rather it concerned his sensibility.
7⁷For indeed it is said by the prophet, ‘I will make their hearts heavy so that they might neither give heed nor see.’
8⁸Then the Epinoia of the light hid in him.
9⁹And the Chief Ruler wanted to bring her from his rib. 10¹⁰But the Epinoia of the light is not graspable. 11¹¹Although the dark pursued her, it did not lay hold of her.
12¹²And he brought forth a part of his power from him (Adam). 13¹³And he created another molded form in a woman’s shape 14¹⁴according to the image of Epinoia who had appeared to him. 15¹⁵And into the molded form of womanhood he put the part which he had taken from the power of the human—16¹⁶not ‘his rib’ as Moses said. 17¹⁷And he saw the woman beside him.
18¹⁸Immediately, the luminous Epinoia appeared for she had uncovered the veil which had been on his understanding. He became sober from the drunkenness of the darkness 19¹⁹and he recognized his likeness.
20²⁰And he said, ‘Now this is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. Because of this, man will leave his father and his mother and he will cling to his wife and they will no longer be two but a single flesh.’
21²¹For his partner will be sent to him and he will leave his father and his mother. 22²²It is our sister Sophia who came down in innocence
23²³in order that she might correct her deficiency. 24²⁴Because of this she

mother of all the living by the authority of the exalted height and the revelation.

²⁵Epinoia taught him about knowledge.

²⁶From the tree in the form of an eagle,

²⁹she taught him to eat of knowledge ³⁰so that he might remember his perfection ³¹for both were in a fallen state of ignorance.

²²¹Yaldabaoth knew that they had withdrawn from him. ²He cursed them. ⁴Moreover, he adds concerning the female that the male should rule over her ⁵for he does not understand the mystery which came to pass from the design of the Holy Height. ⁶But they were afraid to curse him, ⁷thereby revealing his ignorance. ⁸All his angels cast them out of paradise. ⁹He clothed him with a dark gloom.

¹⁰Then Yaldabaoth saw the virgin who stood beside Adam.

¹²He was full of senseless folly, ¹³desiring to sow a seed in her.

¹⁵He defiled her.

¹⁷He begat the first son, Yawe the bear face, and similarly the second, Eloeim the cat face. ¹⁸The one is righteous, while the other is unrighteous. ¹⁹Eloim is righteous; Yawe is unrighteous. ²⁰He set the righteous one over fire and spirit, while (he set) the unrighteous one over water and earth. ²¹Among the generations of all humanity, these are called Cain and Abel.

²²Up to the present day, marital intercourse came about from the Chief Ruler. ²³He planted a desire for seed in Adam ²⁴so that from this essence (of desire) a likeness from their counterfeit spirit might be

III 21.30 [so that they might] remember *their* Fullness.

III 22.7 and to reveal his ignorance *to his angels*.

III 22.8 And *he* threw them out of paradise.

III 22.17 *Yawai*

was called Zoe (Life), the mother of the living by Pronoia of the authority of heaven and [. . .] to him [. . .]. ²⁵And through her they tasted the perfect knowledge.

²⁶In the form of an eagle, I appeared on the tree of knowledge,

²⁷which is the Epinoia from the pure, luminous Pronoia, ²⁹so that I might teach them ³⁰and awaken them from the depth of the sleep.

³¹For they were both in a fallen state ³²and they recognized their nakedness. ³³Epinoia appeared to them as light, awakening their thought.

²²¹But when Yaldabaoth knew that they had withdrawn from him, ²he cursed his earth. ³He found the female preparing herself for her male. ⁴He was lord over her, ⁵for he did not understand the mystery which had come to pass from the holy design. ⁶And they were afraid to blame him. ⁷And he revealed his ignorance that dwelled in him to his angels. ⁸And he cast them out of paradise ⁹and he clothed them with a dark gloom.

¹⁰And the Chief Ruler saw the virgin who stood beside Adam ¹¹and that the living luminous Epinoia appeared in her. ¹²And Yaldabaoth was filled with ignorance.

¹⁴When the Pronoia of the All knew, she sent some beings and they snatched Zoe from Eve. ¹⁵And the Chief Ruler defiled her.

¹⁶And he begat two sons from her. ¹⁷The first is Eloim and the second is Yawe. Eloim has a bear face while Yawe has a lion face. ¹⁸The one is righteous while the other is unrighteous. (IV¹⁹Yawe is righteous, but Eloim is unrighteous.) ²⁰He set Yawe over the fire and the wind, while he set Eloim over water and earth. ²¹He named these Cain and Abel with trickery in mind.

²² Now up to the present day, intercourse has continued from the Chief Ruler. ²³And he planted a seed of desire in her who belongs to Adam. ²⁴From intercourse he caused birth in the likeness of bodies

III 22.22–24 And to the present day sex[ual intercou]rse *continues, remaining fro[m] the Chief Archon. And [He planted] in Adam a seed of desire so that through this essence their likeness could be begotten through the counterfeit spirit.*

begotten. ²⁵He set two rulers over the principalities so that they might rule over the tomb.

²⁶He recognized his essence which is like him. ²⁷Adam begot Seth

²⁸just as it is in the generation which is above in the aeons.

²⁹Likewise the Mother sent what belongs to her; the Spirit came down to it (the generation) ³⁰to awaken the essence that is like it (the Spirit) following the model of the perfection, ³¹to awaken them from forgetfulness and the wickedness of the tomb.

³⁴And it (the Spirit) remained like this for a while; ³⁵it labored on behalf of her seed so that when the Spirit from the holy aeon should come, ³⁶it will set right the deficiency by (establishing) the uprightness of the aeon ³⁷so that it might become a holy perfection; thus it would come to pass that there would be no deficiency in it."

²³I said, "Christ, will the souls of everyone live in the pure light?"

²He said to me, "You have arrived at an insight of great things ³such as are difficult to disclose to any others except those who are from that immovable generation. ⁴Those upon whom the Spirit of the Life descends, having been yoked with the power, they will be saved and become perfect. ⁵And they will be worthy to enter these realms of the great Lights. ⁶For they will be worthy to be purified there from all evil

III 22.26 He recognized *his own lawlessness*.

III 22.29 Likewise *they sent to the Mother her own Spirit to awaken those who are like it*.

III 22.34 And [thus] *they re[mained for] a while, while she labored on behalf of the seed*

and he supplied them from his counterfeit spirit. ²⁵He set two rulers over the principalities so that they might rule over the tomb. ²⁶When Adam perceived the likeness of his own foreknowledge, ²⁷he begot the likeness of the Child of the Human; he called him Seth ²⁸following the way of the generation in the aeons. ²⁹Likewise the Mother also sent down her Spirit in the likeness of the female being who is like her, as a counterpart to she who is in the Fullness, ³⁰so that she might prepare a dwelling place for the aeons that were going to descend. ³²And they were made to drink water of forgetfulness by the Chief Ruler ³³so that they would not know themselves (and would not know) where they had come from. ³⁴And the seed existed like this for while: providing assistance, ³⁵so that when the Spirit descends from the holy aeons, ³⁶it will correct (the seed) and heal it from the deficiency ³⁷so that the entire Fullness might become holy and without deficiency."

23 ¹I said to the Savior, "Lord, will all the souls be delivered into the pure light?"

²He replied, saying to me, "These are great things that have arisen in your thinking. ³For it is difficult to disclose these things to any others except those who are from the immovable generation. ⁴Those upon whom the Spirit of the Life will descend and (with whom) it will be powerfully present, they will be saved and will become perfect. ⁵And they will become worthy of the great realms. ⁶And they will be

III 23.1 Then [I] said, *Lord*, "Will the souls of every one *be saved* [for the pu]re light?"

III 23.5–6 And they will be worthy of these great Lights. For there they are purified from all wickedness and the *chains* of evil.

and the enticements of wickedness. ⁷For they do not give themselves to anything else except this incorruptible congregation ⁸and they attend to it without anger or envy or fear or desire or overindulgence. ⁹They are not restrained by any of these nor by anything else in them except only the flesh ¹⁰to which they are subject while they are waiting fervently for (the time) when they will be brought forth and those who receive (them) will admit them ¹¹into the honor of the imperishable eternal life and the calling, ¹²enduring all things, bearing all things so that they might complete the contest and inherit eternal life.”

¹³I said, “Christ, what will the souls do, upon whom the power and the Spirit of Life descended but who did not do these things, in order that they might also be saved?”

¹⁴He said to me, “Those upon whom that Spirit comes will live in any case and come out from evil. ¹⁵For the power enters into every human being—for without it, it is not possible for them to stand upright. ¹⁶After it (the soul) is born, then the Spirit of Life is brought to it. ¹⁷If the powerful Spirit of Life comes, it strengthens the power, which is the soul, and it is not led astray into wickedness. ¹⁸But those into whom the counterfeit spirit enters are drawn by it and they are led astray.”

¹⁹I said, “Christ, when the souls [of those] leave the flesh, where will they go?”

²⁰He laughed and said to me, “To a place of the soul, which is the power that is greater than the counterfeit spirit. ²¹This (soul) is pow-

III 23.8 and they attend to it without anger or envy or *jealousy* or desire or overindulgence. They are not restrained [by] any of these [except only the flesh]

III 23.13 And I said to him, *Lord*, “Where are the souls of those who do not do these things or where will those go into whom the Spirit of Life and the power entered? Will they be saved or not?”

purified in that place from all evil and the concerns of wickedness. ⁷Then they will not take care for anything except the imperishability alone, ⁸attending to it from this point on without anger or envy or jealousy or desire or greed of anything at all. ⁹For they are not restrained by anything except the reality of the flesh alone, ¹⁰which they bear while fervently awaiting the time when they will be visited by those who will receive (them). ¹¹For such as these are worthy of the imperishable eternal life and the calling, ¹²enduring everything, bearing everything so that they might complete the contest and inherit eternal life.”

¹³I said to him, “Lord, will the souls of those upon whom the power of the Spirit of Life descended but who did not do these works be e[xcluded]?”

¹⁴He repli[ed, s]aying to me, “If [the] Spirit descends [up]on them, they will be saved in any case, and they will migrate. ¹⁵For the power will descend upon every human being—for without it, no one is able to stand upright. ¹⁶After they are born, then if the Spirit of Life increases ¹⁷and the power comes to strengthen that soul, it is not possible to lead it astray into the works of wickedness. ¹⁸But those upon whom the counterfeit spirit descends are drawn by it and they are led astray.”

¹⁹I said, “Lord, then when the souls of those leave their flesh, where will they go?”

²⁰He laughed and said to me, “The soul in which the power will become stronger than the despicable spirit—²¹for this one (the soul) is

III 23.14 He said to, “Those *into* whom the Spirit of Life enters will be saved in any case, *these ones flee from evil.*”

III 23.16–17 After the *human* is born, the Spirit of Life *brings the counterfeit spirits*. If the Spirit of Life [comes], since it is strong, it [str]engthens [the soul], which is the power, and it is not led astray into wickedness.

III 23.19 I said, “*Lord*

erful. ²²It flees from the works of wickedness ²³and it is saved by the incorruptible oversight ²⁴and brought up to the repose of the aeons.”

²⁵I said, “Christ, what about those who do not know the All—what are their souls or where will they go?”

²⁶He said to me, “In those, a counterfeit spirit proliferated by causing them to stumble. ²⁷And in that way he burdens their soul and draws it into works of wickedness, and he leads it into forgetfulness. ²⁸After it has become naked in this way, he hands it over to the authorities who came into being from the Ruler. ²⁹And again they cast them into fetters. ³⁰And they consort with them until they are saved from forgetfulness and it receives some knowledge. ³¹And in this way, it becomes perfect and is saved.”

³²I said, “Christ, how does the soul become smaller and enter again into the nature of the mother or the human?”

³³He rejoiced when I asked this, and he said, “Blessed are you for paying close attention! ³⁴Because of this they submit themselves to another who has the Spirit of Life in it. ³⁵By following and obeying him, it is saved, ³⁶and of course it does not enter another flesh.”

³⁷I said to him, “Christ, where are the souls of those who understood but turned away?”

³⁸He said to me, “Those to whom repentance did not come will go to the place to which the angels of poverty will withdraw. ³⁹And they will be guarded for the day when all those who blasphemed against

III 23.25 I said, “*Lord*

III 23.26 He said to me, “It is these that the counterfeit spirit has *burdened* when they stumbled.

III 23.28–29 And in this way after becoming [*na*]ked of the *body*, they are handed over to the authorities who came into being through the Ruler. Again [they cast] them into (*bodily*) *parts*.

powerful ²²and it flees from evil—²³it will be saved by the visitation of the Incorruptible ²⁴and it will be admitted into the repose of the aeons.”

²⁵I said, “Lord, then where will the souls be who do not know to whom their souls belong?”

²⁶He said to me, “In those, the despicable spirit has proliferated by leading them astray. ²⁷He burdens the soul and draws it into works of wickedness, and he casts it down into forgetfulness. ²⁸After it comes forth, they hand it over to the authorities who came into being through the Ruler. ²⁹And they bind it in chains and cast it into prison. ³⁰And they consort with it until it awakens from forgetfulness and receives knowledge. ³¹And in this way, it is perfected and saved.”

³²I said, “Lord, how does the soul become smaller and return back into the nature of its mother or the human?”

³³Then he rejoiced when I asked this, and he said to me, “Truly you are blessed, for you have understood! ³⁴That soul is made to follow another who has the Spirit of Life in it. ³⁵It is saved by that (other) one. ³⁶Then it is not cast into another flesh.”

³⁷And I said, “Lord, what about those who understood and yet turned away? Where will their souls go?”

³⁸Then he said to me, “They will be admitted into that place where the angels of poverty go, the place where repentance does not occur.

³⁹And they will guard them until that day when those who have blas-

III 23.32 I said, “*Lord*

III 23.37 I said, “*Lord*, those who did understand yet they turned back, where are their souls or *where will they withdraw?*”

III 23.39 And [they] will be guarded for the day when all those who blasphemed against the holy Spirit *with an eter[nal blasphemy]* will be punished

the holy Spirit will be punished. ⁴⁰They will be tortured in eternal punishment.”

24¹I said, “Christ, where did the counterfeit spirit come from?”

²He said to me, “(It all began) when the Mother whose mercy is great and the holy Spirit, the compassionate, who troubles herself with us—the seed—³that is, the Epinoia of the light awakened the thinking of human beings of the generation of the eternal, luminous, perfect Human. ⁴Then the Chief Ruler knew that they surpassed him in the excellence of their wisdom. ⁵He wanted to restrict their plan ⁶for he was ignorant. He did not understand [that] they were wiser than he. ⁷He made a plan with his powers.

⁹They begot Fate

¹⁶and they bound the gods of heaven and angels and demons and human beings with measures and seasons and times in order to keep them all in its fetter—for it was lord over them all.

¹⁷He had a wicked and perverted thought, ¹⁸and he had regrets about all the things which had come into being through him. ¹⁹He planned to bring a flood over the whole erection of humanity.

²⁰And the greatness of Pronoia, who is the Epinoia of light, instructed Noah. ²¹He preached to people, ²²but they did not believe him. ²³It is not like Moses said, that he hid himself in an ark, but she

III 24.2 “*In the beginning, [. . .] when I saw in the Spir[it. . .*

III 24.7 He made a plan and begot Fate.

phemed against the Spirit will be tortured. ⁴⁰And they will be punished with an eternal punishment.”

24 ¹I said, “Lord, where did the despicable spirit come from?”

²Then he said to me, “(It all began when) the Mother-Father whose mercy is great, the Spirit who is holy in every respect, the compassionate, and who troubles herself with you, ³that is, the Epinoia of the luminous Pronoia awakened the seed of the perfect generation and its thinking and the eternal light of the Human. ⁴When the Chief Ruler knew that they surpassed him in excellence—for their thoughts were higher than his—⁵he wanted to restrict their planning, ⁶for he was ignorant that they excelled him in thinking and that he would not be able to restrict them. ⁷He made a plan with his authorities, that is, his powers. ⁸Together they committed adultery with Sophia. ⁹And through them was begotten bitter Fate, ¹⁰which is the last of the counterfeit chains. ¹¹And it is such that (it makes) each one different from every other. ¹²And it is painful and it oppresses that (soul) since the gods and angels and demons and all the generations have intermingled with it up to the present day. ¹³For from that Fate appeared every iniquity and injustice and blasphemy and the fetter of forgetfulness and ignorance and every harsh command and severe sins and great fears. ¹⁴And this is how they made the whole creation blind so that they might not know the God who is above them all. ¹⁵And because of the fetter of forgetfulness, their sins were hidden. ¹⁶For they were bound with measures and times and seasons—for it (Fate) was lord over them all.

¹⁸And he had regrets about everything which had come into being through him. ¹⁹Again he planned to bring a flood over the human creation.

²⁰But the greatness of the light of Pronoia taught Noah. ²¹And he preached to the whole offspring, that is, the children of the humans.

²²But those who were strangers to him did not listen to him. ²³It is

III 24.20 And the greatness of Pronoia produced a Thought, which is Epinoia. She appeared to [Noah].

sheltered him somewhere—²⁴not Noah more (than others) but also some people from the immovable generation.

²⁵They entered a place. ²⁶They were sheltered by a luminous cloud.

²⁷And he recognized his sovereignty ²⁸along with those who were with him in the light which illumined them, ²⁹for darkness flowed out over everything upon the earth.

²⁵¹He made a plan with his angels. ²Their angels were sent to the daughters of men

⁴so that they might raise offspring from them, to be a respite for them. ⁵But at first they did not succeed. ⁶They all came together to make a plan ⁷to create the counterfeit spirit—for they remembered the Spirit which had descended.

⁹And the angels altered their appearance into the likeness of their husbands ¹⁰and their ‘husbands’ sated them with the spirit, which molested them in the darkness out of wickedness.

¹¹They brought them gold, silver, gifts, and metals of copper, iron, and every sort. ¹²They beguiled them into temptation

¹³so that they would not remember their immovable Pronoia.

¹⁷They took them ¹⁸and begot children out of darkness through their counterfeit spirit. ¹⁹It closed their hearts. ²⁰They became hard by the hardening of the counterfeit spirit until now.

²⁶¹So again the blessed Mother-Father, whose mercy is great, takes form in her seed.

III 24.27–28 And *they* recognized *the* sovereignty *above* [an]d those who were with him *when the light* illumined them

not like Moses said that they hid themselves in an ark, but they were hidden somewhere—²⁴not only Noah, but many other people from the immovable generation.

²⁵They entered a place. ²⁶They were hidden in a luminous cloud.

²⁷And he understood his authority. ²⁸And she who belongs to the light was with him for she illumined them, ²⁹for he had brought darkness upon the whole earth.

²⁵¹And he created a plan with his powers. ²He sent his angels to the daughters of men ³so that they might take some of them for themselves, ⁴and they might raise a seed, to be a respite for them. ⁵And at first they were not successful, ⁶but when they did not succeed, they gathered together again and made another plan. ⁷They created a despicable spirit in the likeness of the Spirit who had descended ⁸so that through it they might pollute the souls.

⁹And the angels changed their own likenesses into the likeness of each one's mate, ¹⁰filling them with the spirit of darkness, which they mixed with them and with wickedness.

¹¹They brought gold, silver, a gift, and copper and iron and metal and every sort of thing belonging to these classes. ¹²And they beguiled the human beings who had followed them into great troubles by leading them astray into much error.

¹⁴They grew old without having enjoyment. ¹⁵They died without having found any truth and without having known the God of Truth.

¹⁶And thus the whole creation became enslaved forever, from the foundation of the world until now.

¹⁷And they took women; ¹⁸they begot children out of darkness according to the likeness of their spirit. ¹⁹And their hearts became closed ²⁰and hardened by the hardening of the despicable spirit until now.

²⁶¹Therefore I, the perfect Pronoia of the All, changed into my seed.

²For I existed from the first, traveling on every road. ³For I am the wealth of the light. ⁴I am the remembrance of the fullness. ⁵I traveled into the vastness of the dark, ⁶and I persevered until I entered the

midst of the prison. ⁷And the foundations of chaos quaked. ⁸And I hid myself from them because of their evil, ⁹and they did not recognize me.

¹⁰Again I returned for the second time and I traveled. ¹¹I came forth into those who belong to the light, ¹²which is I, the remembrance of the Pronoia. ¹³I entered the midst of the dark and the inside of Hades, ¹⁴seeking to put my household in order. ¹⁵And the foundations of chaos quaked such that (it seemed) they would fall down upon those who dwell in the chaos and destroy them. ¹⁶And again I fled up to my luminous root ¹⁷so that they would not be destroyed before the time was right.

¹⁸Still for a third time, I who am the light that exists in the light and the remembrance of the Pronoia, ¹⁹I traveled in order to enter into the midst of the darkness and the inside of Hades. ²⁰I filled my countenance with the light of the consummation of their aeon. ²¹And I entered the midst of their prison, which is the prison of the body.

²²And I said, 'Whoever hears, arise from lethargic sleep!'

²³And he wept, shedding tears; heavy tears he wiped from himself.

²⁴And he said, 'Who is it who calls my name ²⁵and from where does this hope come to me who am dwelling in the fetters of the prison?'

²⁶And I said, 'I am the Pronoia of the pure light; ²⁷I am the thought of the virginal Spirit, the one who raises you to the place of honor.

²⁸Arise and remember that you are the one who has heard, ²⁹and follow your root, which is I, the compassionate. ³⁰Fortify yourself against the angels of poverty and the demons of chaos and all those who ensnare you, ³¹and be watchful of the lethargic sleep and the garment of the inside of Hades.'

³²And I raised him up and sealed him with the light of the water with five seals ³³so that death would not have power over him from this day on.

27¹First I went up to this perfect aeon.

³And it is to you (John) that I speak these things ⁴so that you might write them down and give them in secret to your fellow spirits. ⁵For this mystery belongs to the immovable generation.

⁶The Mother had come another time before me. ⁷These are also the things which she did in the world. ⁸She set her seed upright. ⁹I will teach you about what will happen. ¹⁰For indeed I gave these things to you so that you might write them down and keep them secure.”

¹¹Then he said to me, “Cursed be anyone who will exchange these things for a gift, whether for food or drink or clothing or anything else like these.”

¹²He handed over this mystery to him.

¹³Immediately he disappeared from him.

¹⁴And he (John) went to his fellow disciples. ¹⁵He began telling them about the things which had been said to him by the Savior.

The Secret Revelation of John

III 27.8 she was [rectifying] her deficiency.

27¹Behold, now I will go up to the perfect aeon. ²I have completed everything for you in your ears. ³I have told you (John) all things ⁴so that you might write them down and give them in secret to your fellow spirits. ⁵For this is the mystery of the immoveable generation.”
¹⁰And the Savior gave these things to him so that he might write them down and keep them secure.

¹¹And he said to him, “Cursed be any one who should exchange these things for a gift, whether for food or drink or clothing or anything else of this kind.”

¹²And these things were given to him in a mystery. ¹³And immediately he disappeared before him. ¹⁴And he (John) went to his fellow disciples. ¹⁵He related to them the things which the Savior had said to him.

¹⁶Jesus Christ Amen.

The Secret Revelation according to John

III 27.11 Then he said to me, “[Cur]sed be every one who will give these in exchange for a gift, *whether silver or [gold or]* in exchange for drink or for [things to] eat or clothing or anything else like these.

PART I

 *The Narrative*

I

The Ideal: The Divine Realm

CHRIST'S REVELATION to John begins with a lengthy description of the transcendent Deity, painted primarily with images, terms, and concepts prevalent in current Platonizing philosophical speculation and religious piety (*SRevJohn* 4.1–5.4). The transcendent Deity is described as a Monad, an indivisible unity, the source and foundation of everything.¹ It is a monarchy, a sole ruling power with nothing that could stand above It to rule over It. Ontological primacy and primordial power combine to legitimate Its just position as ruler, as the head of all the Aeons. Religious piety can rightly acknowledge the transcendent Deity as God and holy Father, metaphoric terms suggesting both ruling and generative power (*SRevJohn* 4.2–3).

The *Secret Revelation of John* also describes the transcendent Deity in terms of negative theology² (*via negationis*): It is invisible, incorruptible, ilimitable, lacking nothing, prior to everything, unsearchable, immeasurable, ineffable, unnamable, indestructible, and incomprehensible. The transcendent Deity may also be described as far superior to anything that might be said of it or any qualities or attributes that might be ascribed to it (*via eminentiae*). It is even superior to perfection,³ blessedness, and divinity, while yet being the source of all these.⁴ Its transcendence is emphasized by insisting that the categories ascribed to existing things (being, movement, rest, identity, and diversity; substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action, and affection) do not strictly apply to the transcendent Deity, for It is far superior to them all (*SRevJohn* 4.22–

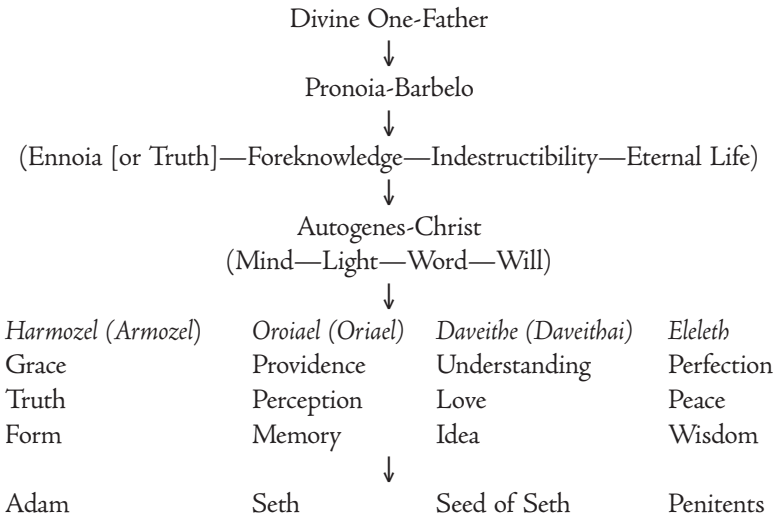
33).⁵ Yet It is also the source of everything; the eternity who gives eternalness; the light who gives light; the life who gives life; the blessed one who gives blessedness; the understanding which gives understanding; the ever good one who gives good and does good; mercy which gives mercy; grace which gives grace (*SRevJohn* 4.37–38). The myth-makers of the *Secret Revelation of John* are also content to apply the positive language of religious piety to describe the transcendent Deity (*via analogiae*).⁶ It is God, and indeed more than a (mere) god, the father of the All, holy, pure light, life, spirit, completely perfect, pure, blessed, goodness, knowledge, and complete stability.⁷

The *Secret Revelation of John* thus utilizes three modes of conceiving the highest Deity: It denies that any attribute can appropriately apply to the transcendent and ineffable Deity (*via negationis*); it understands the transcendent Deity as the source of everything and therefore father, light, life, and goodness (*via analogiae*); and it declares the superiority of the Deity to any attribution that could be applied to It, for example, God but more than God (*via eminentiae*). This mixing of various modes of theological conceptuality might be considered poor philosophy, judged by standards of purely logical consistency, but actually the *Secret Revelation of John* stands in good company with Middle Platonizing philosophers and theologians, for whom such mixing is at least in part “a conceptual necessity.”⁸ Moreover, by including both the most prestigious intellectual terms and the most popular religious language of its day, the *Secret Revelation of John* strikes chords that resonate across the entire range of ancient spiritual sensibilities. No one in antiquity would have complained that this portrait of the transcendent Deity was not entirely appropriate in its prose and praise.

When we turn to the Savior’s description of the rest of the Divine Realm, the same mixing of genre, mood, and intellectual modes of speculation continues. Philosophical conceptuality finds its place alongside numerological speculation, mythic drama, and metaphoric play. While the accounts in the four manuscript versions are not entirely consistent, for our limited illustrative purposes here, it is possible to construct a synthetic

portrait of the genesis and structure of the Divine Realm that is common to all the versions (see table below). From the Divine Father first emerges a female entity variously called Barbelo,⁹ Pronoia, Ennoia, or Protенnoia. She requests the Father to grant her children, and four Aeons (eternal beings) came into existence: Foreknowledge, Indestructibility, Eternal Life, and Thought (BG/III) or Truth (II/IV).¹⁰ Together with Barbelo, these form an androgynous pentad (a decad) of Aeons. They may be thought of collectively as the realm of Barbelo.

From Barbelo now comes the next level of existence, the realm of Autogenes-Christ.¹¹ With the permission of those above him, he fills out his realm with a set of twelve Aeons. The most important of these are the four Lights (or Illuminators): Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithai, and Eleleth, each of whom is associated with three other Aeons (for a total of twelve).¹² The four Lights function not only as hypostasized beings (characters or personalities), but also as the realms over which and in which are placed those who belong to the All: Adam, Seth, the seed of Seth (the souls of the saints), and last of all those souls whose repentance comes late.



According to the *Secret Revelation of John*, this portrait of the Divine Realm contains within it everything which truly exists (in a Platonic sense). It portrays creation as the emanation of Divine beings in an orderly and authorized process from a single monadic principle of origination. The Divine Realm is thus perceived as a Unity and is appropriately called “the All.” Everything subsequently formed in the lower world can only be copies (forms and images, models, or imitations) of what truly exists in the Divine Realm.¹³

Were the revelation to John to conclude here, it could justly be described as a commonplace piece of ancient philosophical-religious piety, perhaps with an innovation here and there, but nothing particularly radical or offensive.¹⁴ Christ’s description of the Divine Realm fully conforms to the religious-philosophical piety of its day. It shares the basic assumptions and dispositions of ancient thinking: the generation of multiplicity from unity, the hierarchical ordering of power and authority, and the goodness of divine creation. It agrees that unity is superior to multiplicity and division; that the just and proper arrangements of everything are hierarchically ordered; and that the current arrangement of things is both natural and good. In the *Secret Revelation of John*, hierarchy, goodness, power, and justice coincide potently in the imagination of divine origins. These fundamental assumptions underlie the entire myth. They are fully comprehensible and persuasive precisely because they express the shared dispositions of ancient Mediterranean piety.

But of course the revelation does not end here. The distinctive tenor and impact of the *Secret Revelation of John*—and its distinctive capacity to offend almost everyone—arise first and foremost only with its sharp and unbending use of oppositional logic to describe the mundane world, and with its portrayal of a tragic rupture in the mimetic outpouring of Divine Being.

2

The Problem: Rupture

IF THE PORTRAIT of the divine All is a narrative elaboration of the ideals of desire and imagination, the portrait of the world below and its gods forms the sharpest contrast. It is here that we encounter the *Secret Revelation of John's* view of the essence of evil: its origins, nature, and location. It is here that the narrative departs most sharply from the norms of ancient piety, portraying the creation of the world as a gross parody of divine perfection and the situation of human existence as a—fortunately not inescapable—tragedy of suffering and death.

The first intimation of evil occurs when the female Aeon Sophia (Wisdom) ruptures the harmonious unity of the Divine Realm by acting without the knowledge, desire, or approval of the Spirit and her male partner (*SRevJohn* 10.1–6). The result is the introduction of oppositional difference into the seamless divine unity. This rupture occurs when Sophia conceives a thought that derives from herself alone, and she desires to exhibit a likeness from within herself. While her thought partakes of the thought of the Spirit and Foreknowledge (that is, it shares something of the divine nature), she does not have the consent of the Spirit or the mutual agreement of her unnamed male partner in desiring to reveal the likeness, and she acts apart from the love of the Spirit and the knowledge of her partner. As a result, the being she produces fails to exhibit her likeness; it differs from her because she produced it in boldness and ignorance (*SRevJohn* 10.7–14). This malformed product of female deviance becomes the arrogant and ignorant world creator and ruler, Yaldabaoth (*SRevJohn* 10.18). It

is he, not Sophia, who disobeys the true Deity when he falsely calls himself "God" (*SRevJohn* 14.2).

It is not that Sophia is herself evil or that she is powerless—indeed the *Secret Revelation of John* stresses that "her thought did not remain idle" (*SRevJohn* II 10.7). In similar stories elsewhere, Sophia's generation of Yaldabaoth is emphatically narrated as a tragic case of female sexuality and reproductive power out of male control.¹ While that theme is explicit here as well in the figuration of Sophia as a female acting without the approval of her male partner and in her birthing of Yaldabaoth, the *Secret Revelation of John* more strongly emphasizes Sophia's disruption of harmony in the divine household through her reckless female daring and ignorance.² Her fault is twofold: she acts without the consent of the Spirit, thereby violating the natural and proper hierarchical order of the Divine Realm; and she acts apart from her male consort, thereby violating the harmonious concord symbolized by male and female union. The terms used to refer to Sophia's "consort" emphasize his role in the narrative primarily as a reification of the harmony embodied in the divine unity (*SRevJohn* 4.3–5).

In Sophia's exercise of independent thought, the ideal pattern of obedience and subordination is broken, shattering the intellectual unanimity of the Divine Realm.³ The tragic result is a rupture in the divine unity, in the full accord, the "single-mindedness" so to speak, of the All, which is exemplified by the Aeons' collective subordination to the will of the Father.⁴

The World Below: Opposition and Counterfeiting

The consequences of Sophia's actions become brutally apparent in the description of her offspring and his subsequent creation of the world and humanity. Sophia's disorderly conduct breaks the unity of divine outpouring insofar as her desire to create a likeness out of herself results in the production of *difference*. Because the text's logic indissolubly links knowledge and existence, Sophia's rupture of the unanimity in divine thought

(epistemology) leads to a rupture in the nature of being (ontology). The break is figured as a mimetic failure: *Yaldabaoth is not like his Mother*. The product of her thought is an image unlike its producer: it is ugly and imperfect. Again and again the *Secret Revelation of John* stresses that her product is *not like Sophia*:

Because of the unconquerable power within her, her thought did not remain idle. And an imperfect product appeared from her, and it was different from her pattern because she created it without her partner. And it was not patterned after the likeness of its Mother, for it had a different form (*SRevJohn* II 10.7–9).

This mimetic rupture is the whole cause of human suffering and death. Yaldabaoth's birth rips the seamless fabric of divine Being. The entire cosmos is subsequently built not in continuity with the divine, but across a gap. The world is not an imitation of the Divine Realm but an ignorant and malicious parody of it.

Here the oppositional logic of the *Secret Revelation of John's* myth-makers sets in with a vengeance. In what follows, they engage in an astonishingly consistent and unremitting application of analogic dualism in which difference implies opposition and antagonism. Only now does it become fully apparent that the portrait of the Divine Realm was set up imaginatively precisely as a foil for this oppositional strategy.

Because the oppositional logic of the work assumes that the deity who heads each realm encapsulates and represents the nature and character of that realm, the myth focuses primarily upon contrasting the transcendent Deity of the Divine Realm with Yaldabaoth, the creator God and Chief Ruler of the mundane world. Where the transcendent Deity is ineffable and unnamable, the creator God is named—he is called Yaldabaoth or Saklas. Where the transcendent Deity is the “sole ruler,” Yaldabaoth is merely “chief ruler” and his rule extends only over the authorities, powers, and angels he has created. Where there is nothing above the transcendent Deity to rule over It, Yaldabaoth is subject to the rule of the All, including

his mother, Sophia, whether he accepts it or not. The transcendent Deity is chronologically prior to everything, whereas Yaldabaoth comes into being only relatively late after the completion of the Divine Realm. According to the logic of ancient ideology, temporal primacy implies the transcendent Deity's superiority, while the derivative existence of Yaldabaoth implies his relative inferiority.⁵ In sharp contrast to the transcendent Deity, who is a holy, invisible, incorporeal, and incorruptible Monad—indeed is even beyond incorporeality—the creator God is quite visible to linguistic description and is pluriform, having many faces or forms. He is not even human in appearance but bestial, having at once “the face of a serpent and the face of a lion” (*SRevJohn* BG 10.11). He is, in form and in fact, a monster.⁶ This bestiality is the outward representation of his inward nature—violent, uncontrolled, and irrational—even as the incorporeality of the transcendent Deity figures his nature—beyond passion, an undivided, unchanging unity. Where the transcendent Deity is knowledge and the source of knowledge, Yaldabaoth is ignorant and indeed arrogant in his ignorance (*SRevJohn* 14.15–16). The character of Yaldabaoth's rule also stands in sharp contrast to that of the merciful providence of the transcendent Deity. The joint sovereignty of Yaldabaoth and his powers over the world below is figured as the harsh rule of Fate,⁷ while the consort of the Father is Providence (*Pronoia*). Other contrasts could be elaborated, but these are sufficient to illustrate the point. The reader understands better the natures of both the transcendent Deity and the mundane pretender by seeing their opposition so clearly displayed.

But the portrait of Yaldabaoth is not solely and perhaps not even principally depicted through opposition. The greater injustice lies in the twisted similarities between the two, for Yaldabaoth does not merely oppose the transcendent Deity, he imitates It.⁸ He falsely sets himself up as a God, styling himself as the creator and ruler of the lower world, mimicking the activities of the true Deity and Ruler of the All. But whereas the transcendent Deity truly is God, Yaldabaoth is merely “called God” (*SRevJohn* 13.4). His declaration that he is God, indeed that “no other god

exists beside me" (*SRevJohn* II 14.2), is both deception and self-deception. Imitation here has become a malicious parody, such that mimetic resemblance is transformed by oppositional logic into a deceptive counterfeit.

It is related, for example, that one of the Chief Ruler's first actions is to create an aeon illuminated by fire (*SRevJohn* 11.4). Fire, one of the four primal elements of the material world (air, earth, water, fire), is contrasted with the immaterial, pure light of the transcendent Divine Realm.⁹ A material element that burns as well as illumines, fire is therefore inferior to the spiritual light in nature and function.

Or again, like the transcendent Deity, Yaldabaoth creates lesser beings (in his case, authorities, powers, and rulers).¹⁰ His manner of creation is patterned grotesquely on that of the transcendent Deity, as a kind of perversion in which oppositional logic combines with imitation to make the creation of the world into a monstrous parody. In the Divine Realm, the transcendent Deity produced Pronoia ("Forethought")¹¹ by reflecting upon Its own image in the light-water.¹²

In every way It perceived Its own image, seeing It in the pure light-water which surrounds It. And Its thinking became a thing. She appeared. She stood in Its presence in the brilliance of the light . . . She who is the perfect Pronoia of the All, the light, the likeness of the light, the image of the Invisible (*SRevJohn* BG 5.11-14, 17-19).

The divine Aeons subsequently appear at the request of the virginal spirit, Barbelo-Pronoia, with the proper consent of the transcendent Deity. In this manner, generation in the Divine Realm originates in self-contemplation and proceeds according to the natural hierarchy of the divine will. By contrast, the world creator produces his minions by copulating with Aponoia ("Madness")¹³:

And he (the Chief Ruler) copulated with Madness (Aponoia), who is in him. He begat authorities who are under him, the twelve angels, each one of them to his own aeon following the model of the immortal

Aeons. And he created for each one of them seven angels each and for the angels three powers—these are all under him, 360 angelic beings with his third power, following the likeness of the primal model which is prior to him (*SRevJohn* BG 11.5–10).

The transcendent Deity's generation through pure mental acts of virginal self-reflection contrasts dramatically with the material baseness of Yaldabaoth's sexual copulation, even as the phonetic similarity of "Pronoia" to "Aponoia" heightens the grating lexical contrast between purposeful reflection (*pronoia*) and loss of reflective capacity (*aponoia*).¹⁴ It is the simultaneity of phonetic resonance with lexical discord that makes the parody.

On the other hand, it is striking that the *Secret Revelation of John* insists that Yaldabaoth follows the model of the Divine Realm in all his acts of creation.

He ordered everything following the likeness of the first Aeons, which had come into being, so that he might create them in the indestructible pattern. Not because he had seen the indestructible ones, but the power in him which he had gotten from his Mother bore in him the likeness of the world (*SRevJohn* II 13.21–24).

Even as Autogenes brought forth twelve Aeons, so now Yaldabaoth begets twelve authorities with their angels (for a total of 360 or 365). He speaks and they come into being (*SRevJohn* 13.7; *Psalms* 32.9 LXX). Yet in their fundamental character and nature, Yaldabaoth's products resemble him, on the principle that "like follows like." They serve the world creator and like him are bestial in form and character.¹⁵ Their joint sovereignty is the harsh rule of Fate, which again stands in sharp contrast to the merciful Providence (*Pronoia*) of the transcendent Deity's rule.

In the end, then, any resemblance to the divine is simply fraud. Rather than declare, as Plato did, that *mimesis* ensures that the mundane world is the best possible, the *Secret Revelation of John* exposes these likenesses as fundamental deception.

3

The Result: The Situation of Humanity in the World

ULTIMATELY, the most significant consequence of the rupture within the unity of the Divine Realm is the introduction of injustice into the world in the form of arrogant, malicious, and ignorant rulers. Here the oppositional logic of the *Secret Revelation of John* takes on full narrative force. The ideal of just rule is figured in the portrayal of the transcendent Deity and Its rule of the Divine Realm; the measure of injustice is figured in Yaldabaoth and his minions' attempts to exert an illegitimate and distorted authority over the lower world.¹

Ancient religious thought ascribed the qualities that were most valued in Graeco-Roman society to the gods. So, too, the *Secret Revelation of John's* conceptualization of the Divine Realm embodies the highest ideals. Divine transcendence guarantees the qualities of order, permanence, and stability beyond the disorderly chaos of life in the lower world. The divine is characterized by unity, uniformity, and universality, in contrast with the divisive tensions of human social life. The *Secret Revelation of John* insists upon the goodness of hierarchical arrangements of power and authority that ensure the just rule of the superior over the inferior by emphasizing repeatedly that the transcendent Deity is the sole ruler, with no one and nothing above It, the "head" of the All. The transcendent Deity is also superior in extent and effectiveness of ruling power. It is "sole ruler" over everything that exists; without Its consent, no plan can come to successful fruition. Those who operate with Its approval fulfill their plans, as we see in Barbelo and Autogenes' creation of divine Aeons, while those who act

without this approval come to grief and their thoughts are ineffectual, as Sophia's untimely birthing demonstrates all too forcefully.

Because the lower creator Yaldabaoth acts without appropriate divine approval, we would expect him to be ineffectual and that is exactly what we see repeatedly emphasized. For example, his exaggerated claim "I am a jealous God and no other god exists beside me" serves only to highlight his ignorance and arrogance. As the *Secret Revelation of John's* authorial voice reasonably points out to the reader: "If there were no other God over him, of whom would he be jealous?" (*SRevJohn* 14.4). He and his cronies repeatedly attempt to dominate the superior humans, but with at most only limited success—and even when they do partially succeed, they are forced to desperate strategies of violence and deception in order to gain what tenuous control they do manage (*SRevJohn* 18.12–18; 19.1–12; 20.1–21; 21.1–2; 22.1–15; 24.4–10, 17–19; 25.1–20). It is clear that the *Secret Revelation of John* regards such strategies as indications of impotence and unjust domination; they are used only by those who lack the moral and intellectual qualities of legitimate authority. Such strategies are never employed by the Divine Realm. Indeed Armstrong notes that even overcoming the darkness is not figured with military or war imagery.² In the end, the creator God is exposed as powerless to bring his plans to successful fruition.

Nowhere are this impotence and malice more clear than in the *Secret Revelation of John's* extended retelling of the *Genesis* creation narrative.³ Here at the heart of the work we find the world creator and his minions repeatedly characterized as wicked and ineffectual rulers. The plot of the *Genesis* creation story has been restructured as a sequence of violent attempts by the world creator forcibly and illegitimately to dominate humanity. Each move the creator makes prompts a countermove from the Divine Realm to rescue humanity, which in its turn provokes a response by the world rulers. The sequence of action is thus structured by repeating a paradigm in which the rulers note the superiority of the humans and attempt to dominate them; saviors sent by Pronoia from the Divine

Realm then intervene and counter their actions. In this process, the *Genesis* story is transformed into a spiritual struggle between the Divine Realm and the world rulers for the souls of humanity.⁴ The themes of goodness in divine creation and human culpability for evil are lost, and replaced by a story in which divine actions save humanity from wicked oppression.

History as a Spiritual Battle: Move and Countermoves

The first episode begins when Yaldabaoth boasts, "I am a jealous God; no other god exists beside me" (*SRevJohn* 14.2; cp. *Ex* 20.5; 34.14; *Deut* 32.39; *Isaiah* 45.5–6; 46.9). When Sophia hears this deluded boast, she becomes aware of her deficiency and is deeply aggrieved, agitated by the darkness of her ignorance. She begins to "move to and fro," the same expression used to describe the Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters in *Gen* 1.2 (LXX). She realizes that his wicked and rebellious claim is the consequence of her own action and she repents (*SRevJohn* 14.9–14). NHC II elaborates on this scene, stating that when Yaldabaoth boasts he is the only god, Sophia recognizes that her light has become dim: "She understood her deficiency when the brightness of her light was diminished. And she was darkened because her partner had not been in concord with her" (*SRevJohn* II 14.5–7). The light has become dim because when Yaldabaoth created his minions:

He divided his fire among them, but he did not send them anything from the power of the light which he had received from his Mother. For he is ignorant darkness. When the light mixed with the darkness, it caused the darkness to shine, but when the darkness mixed with the light, it darkened the light, so that it became neither light nor dark, but it was weak (*SRevJohn* II 12.1–6).

The dimming of the light comes about because it has mixed with darkness; here light and dark are at once real photic conditions and also metaphors for knowledge and ignorance.⁵

In response to Sophia's prayer of repentance, the Spirit is poured over

her and the transcendent Deity sends her partner to the lower realm to correct her deficiency. The partner raises Sophia to the Ninth sphere, above the eight heavens created by the Chief Ruler, and then the first Human appears to the world rulers to teach them about the true nature of the divine (*SRevJohn* 14.5–15.7). Although it is Sophia who is aggrieved and repents, it is her offspring, the world ruler, who is in need of correction and instruction. It is as if Sophia's deficiency has been projected outside of her and taken on a life of its own—the world rulers are the very embodiment of her ignorance. They themselves are too mired in their own ignorance and self-deception to be able to ask for aid or even to know that they need help. Yet until her deficiency has been rectified, Sophia cannot return to the Divine Realm.

In order to correct the Chief Ruler's arrogant boast that "there is no other God beside me," a voice comes forth from above saying, "The Human exists and the Child of the Human" (*SRevJohn* 15.2). This statement is almost a direct quotation from the Greek translation of *Genesis* 1.3, in which God says (in Hebrew), "Let there be light' and there was light." The Hebrew term for light is translated into Greek as *phos*, which spells two Greek words depending upon how they are accented, either *φῶς* ("light") or *φῶς* ("human"). Since most ancient manuscripts are not accented, the Greek could be translated either as "Let there be light and there was light" or "Let the human exist and the human exists." The *Secret Revelation of John* exploits this ambiguity in order to make a pun identifying the image of the First Human who appears in the waters below with the primordial light of *Genesis* 1.3.⁶ Thus when "God said, 'Let there be light/man,' and there was light/man," the image of the First Human shines on the waters. The *Secret Revelation of John* elaborates this interpretation further by attributing these words not to the lower creator God, but to Autogenes-Christ. He does not say, "Let there be light" but "The Human exists and the Child of the Human." Christ's speech is already itself the appearance of the light since his words illumine the darkness of Yaldabaoth's ignorance. Hence Christ's revelation is not only auditory, but

visible as the likeness of the heavenly first Human who appeared to Yaldabaoth and his minions in human form as an image reflected on water, even as *Genesis* 1.2 (LXX) notes that the Spirit of God moved upon the waters.⁷

NHC II expands the description of this scene, fitting the text more closely to both *Genesis* and the *Gospel of John*: “And upon the waters which dwell under matter, the underside was illumined by the appearance of his image which had been revealed. And when all the authorities and the Chief Ruler stared (on the water), they saw all the region below which was shining. And by the light, they saw the model of the image upon the water” (*SRevJohn* II 15.9–11). This brief description fuses a number of ancient traditions:

- ♦ Platonic notions that humanity is created in the image of the divine Idea of Man;
- ♦ *Gen* 1.2–3 in which God brings light into a dark and watery world through speech;
- ♦ Jewish Wisdom traditions in which Wisdom is presented as the light which instructs humanity in the ways of God;
- ♦ the Johannine connection of Christ with the creative speech of God: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of humanity. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it” (*GosJohn* 1.1–5).

When Yaldabaoth and his authorities see the image of the true Human, they devise a plan: “Let us create a human being according to the image of God and according to our likeness” (*SRevJohn* 15.12). This command refers directly to the terminology of *Genesis* 1.26–27 (LXX), where humanity is said to be created in the image and likeness of God. They create the First Human, the psychic Adam, according to the image they perceive

reflected in the water and according to their own likeness, a compact conflation in which the light on the waters of darkness (*Gen* 1.1–3) instigates the creation of the first human (*Gen* 1.22–23). Here, however, in contrast to the *Genesis* narrative, only “image” refers to the divine (the image of the First Human), while “likeness” refers to the flawed mimicry of the lower gods (Yaldabaoth and his authorities).⁸

The account in the *Secret Revelation of John* also conflates *Genesis* 1.26–27 with *Genesis* 2.7 where the first human is formed out of the earth; in this case the first human is formed out of the lower gods’ psychic substance.⁹ Their creation of a human results only in a grotesque mimicry of the divine image of the First Human who appeared in the waters, not only because of their malicious motives, but because they are incapable of shaping a true likeness of the image they had seen. Although the image was perfect, the form they modeled was created from their own psychic (“soul”) substance and by means of their own limited powers (*SRevJohn* 15.14–15). Their impotence is immediately apparent in that they are unable to awaken into life the form they molded (*SRevJohn* 18.1–2). A related Sethian work, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, turns this into a scene of comic ridicule worthy of Aristophanes:

(The world creator) breathed into (Adam’s) face; and the human came to have a soul (but it remained) upon the ground many days. But they could not make him arise because of their powerlessness. Like storm winds they persisted (in blowing), that they might try to capture that image, which had appeared to them in the waters. But they did not know the identity of its power.¹⁰

We can imagine a raucous staging of this scene: false gods standing over their plastic creation, huffing and puffing ludicrously to no avail. The text makes no bones about its opinion of them: their motives are wicked; they are impotent as well as ignorant.¹¹ The *Secret Revelation of John* is not as overtly dramatic in its ridicule, but it makes essentially the same point by emphasizing that the psychic creation remains idle and motionless a long

time despite the best efforts of the rulers to awaken it (*SRevJohn* 18.1–2).¹² It seems that Adam can be enlivened only through the intervention of a higher power. Although Adam has the form of the divine image, he becomes a truly divine, living being only when he receives the Spirit-breath of Sophia.

The narrative is a bit convoluted in describing exactly how this actually occurs (*SRevJohn* 18.3–11). It seems that Sophia wishes “to retrieve the power which she had given to the Chief Ruler,” so she petitions the true Father (Mother-Father) for aid. Autogenes-Christ and the four Lights are sent down to Yaldabaoth, whom they find in distress because the creature he and his authorities have formed isn’t moving. The Lights surreptitiously advise the Chief Ruler to blow his breath (Sophia’s Spirit) onto the face of the human they have modeled. He does so, and the human becomes a living, moving being. According to Codex II, Adam’s body not only stands up,¹³ it becomes luminous (*SRevJohn* II 18.11). The light proves that there is a natural affinity between the image of the divine Human, in which Adam was created, and the Spirit of the Mother. The Rulers’ modeled human form now possesses the divine Spirit of Sophia and is superior to them because he has “entered into the light” through the possession of Sophia’s light (*SRevJohn* BG 18.17).

In this account, the *Secret Revelation of John* is elaborating extensively upon the *Genesis* narrative, which states simply that “the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (*Gen* 2.7). The *Secret Revelation of John* has transformed this simple narrative sequence into a complex drama with mixed motivations and multiple actors. In *Genesis*, the point seems simply to connect Adam to the earthly creation by forming him from “the dust of the ground” and to emphasize that God’s breath is the source of Adam’s life. In the *Secret Revelation of John*, however, this scene explains how humanity came both to be formed of inferior substance and to possess the divine Spirit. And it emphatically contrasts the effective power of the divine emissaries of Christ and his Lights with the impotence of

the lower creator God and his minions.¹⁴ Adam becomes a living being only by the will of the transcendent Deity.

Yet despite the intervention of Autogenes-Christ, the story moves deeper into tragedy. Sophia's Spirit has become even more deeply enmeshed in the substance of the lower world and increasingly subject to the machinations of the lower gods. Adam, who is now superior to his supposed creators through the possession of the divine Spirit of Sophia, is nonetheless still subject to them. What is superior has become dominated by what is inferior, thereby effecting a reversal of proper hierarchical rule which can result only in calamity.

When the lower world rulers perceive that their own creation has become superior to them, they immediately become jealous. The *Secret Revelation of John* says that they initially molded the human form in order that Adam's "name and its power might illumine us" (*SRevJohn* BG 15.19). Here again we see the pun on "light" and "human"—words spelled with the same Greek letters but with different accents—but now combined with the name of Adam, which in Hebrew also means "human." Hence it would seem that the world rulers name their creature Adam ("human") as a way to possess the light-man whose image appeared from above; by naming him, they seek to control his spiritual power. Yet unwittingly, their own words mock them. They say that his name and power will be a light for them—which should indicate that Adam will bring them understanding. But as it turns out the illumination of Adam does not empower them; rather it reveals their impotence, another and less welcome kind of truth. This outcome is partly their own fault because their jealousy of Adam's superiority is why they fail to be illumined. Christ says that after Adam receives the spiritual breath, the world rulers "became jealous for it was because of them all that he had come into being and they had given their power to the human. Yet his understanding was stronger than those who had made him and greater even than the Chief Ruler." Now "they understood that he was luminous, thought more than they did, and was naked of wickedness" (*SRevJohn* II 18.12–17). Their response to Adam's superiority

is not to seek instruction from him, but to imprison him. Ultimately they don't really want to be illuminated; they desire only to dominate and possess.¹⁵

Recognizing that their creation is now superior to them, the rulers cast Adam down into "the lowest region of matter" (*SRevJohn* 18.18), immersing his light in the darkness of matter. This move is again countered by the Father (Pronoia, the Father-Mother), who sends a "helper" named Epinoia to Adam to instruct and enlighten him.¹⁶ In the form of the Spirit, the Epinoia of Light aids humanity by keeping the world rulers from gaining power over the psychic body of Adam. She toils with Adam as his "helper" (*Gen* 2.18), teaching him about the descent of the deficiency (or seed) and about its ascent.¹⁷ Epinoia attempts to conceal herself from the world rulers by hiding within Adam, but her presence causes Adam to shine, and they realize that their attempt to overcome the light within Adam has failed.

They now respond by enclosing Adam in the prison of the material body. Earlier they formed the human creation solely out of soul substance, but now they bind Adam with the fetters of matter, bringing all of humanity under the sway of carnal suffering, passion, and death: "They brought him down into the shadow of death. Yet again they made another form from earth, water, fire, and spirit which is from matter, darkness, desire, and the adversarial spirit. This is the chain. This is the tomb of the molded body with which they clothed the human, the fetter of the flesh" (*SRevJohn* BG 19.9–12). Thus while creation in the image of the true Deity brings light and life, suffering and death are the legacy of creation in the likeness of Yaldabaoth and his creatures.

But Epinoia (Ennoia) is still present and she is able to "awaken his thinking" even in the material body. As a result of her activity, the rulers place Adam in paradise, not in order to care for him as the *Genesis* account says, but in order to bind him further with bodily fetters through the temptations of food, beauty, and pleasure. "The Chief Ruler took him and placed him in paradise, of which he said, 'It is a delight for him' but really

so that he might deceive him. For their delight (or food) is bitter and their beauty is licentious. Their delight is a deception and their tree is iniquity. Their fruit is an incurable poison and their promise is death" (*SRevJohn* BG 20.1-5). Here the text again makes a wordplay on the Greek words for "food" (*truphê*) and "delight" (*trophê*).¹⁸ Because *truphê* was often used in antiquity to refer to the "nourishment" that education brought to the soul and because "delight" was considered to be a passion of pleasure which led humanity astray, the wordplay strongly suggests that the world rulers' instruction of humanity in the pleasures of gluttony and sexual desire brings only deception and death. Similarly, the *Secret Revelation of John* interprets the so-called "Tree of Life" (*Gen* 2.9) as "their life," that is, as the source of bitterness, death, hatred, deception, evil, desire, and darkness. "The dwelling place of those who taste it is Hades" (*SRevJohn* 20.16). The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (*Gen* 2.9), on the other hand, is associated with the teaching of Epinoia (and Christ).¹⁹

Adam, however, does not succumb to the temptations of paradise. Indeed, it is because he is "disobedient" that the Chief Ruler realizes that Epinoia is still at work within Adam. Perceiving that their ruse has again failed, the world rulers try something new. They seek to surgically remove the power of the Mother that Yaldabaoth breathed into Adam. They cast Adam into a trance in order to extract "a rib" from him and create a woman.²⁰ Christ emphasizes the wickedness of their motivation in putting Adam into a trance when he interprets the story for John:

It is not like Moses said that he caused him to sleep but it was his sensibility that he covered with a shroud. He weighed him down with insensibility. For indeed it is said by the prophet, "I will make the ears of their hearts heavy so that they might not understand and might not see" (*SRevJohn* BG 21.4-7).

The citation is from the prophet *Isaiah* 6.10. Note how Christ uses Scripture to correct the misreading of Scripture.

The world creator then tries to "grasp" the Epinoia of Light hidden within Adam by dulling Adam's perception and removing his power

(Epinoia). The term “grasp” (τὰρσο, περιλαμβάνω), which is used in the *Secret Revelation of John* to describe the world creator’s desire to capture Epinoia, has connotations both of mental comprehension and physical encompassing. Needless to say, the world creator fails on both accounts. He misrecognizes Epinoia, and mistakenly thinks he has accomplished his purpose by the violent physical “grasping” of Eve in the rape which follows.²¹ But the true Epinoia, we are told, is “ungraspable.”

Although the rulers fail to “grasp” Epinoia, they do succeed in bringing out a portion of the Mother’s power, which they place in a female form they have shaped. Christ points out to John that it is this power, not a “rib,” which was extracted from Adam. Now both the man and the woman possess something of the spiritual power of Sophia, but they also lack the Epinoia-Spirit who had been sent from on high. Epinoia, however, has not left entirely, but only moved on to the Tree of Knowledge.²² She awakens Adam from his stupor by “uncovering the veil which had been on his mind” so that he recognizes the power of Sophia within Eve and acknowledges that she is his true spiritual essence and likeness (*SRevJohn* 21.19). Adam acknowledges this when he says, “This is indeed bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” The text continues, “Because of this man will leave his father and his mother and he will cling to his wife and from two they will become a single flesh” (*SRevJohn* BG 21.20; *Gen* 2.23), probably meaning that he will leave his father Yaldabaoth and his mother Chaos and cling to the true Spirit of Light. He calls her “the mother of the living” (*Gen* 3.20)—a title previously associated with the Spirit of Life in the Divine Realm (*SRevJohn* 10.17).

When the rulers perceive Epinoia’s presence, however, they command Adam not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge (*Gen* 2.17), that is, not to listen to her counsels because she teaches Adam and Eve “to eat of knowledge so that he might remember his perfection” (*SRevJohn* BG 21.29–30; *Gen* 2.15–16).²³ This knowledge makes them realize that they are “naked” because of their ignorance, and they now try to withdraw from Yaldabaoth (*Gen* 3.8–10).

In an aside to John, Christ takes personal responsibility for the instruc-

tion the two humans received from the Tree of Knowledge. John is surprised at this revelation, objecting “Lord, was it not the serpent that taught Adam to eat?” (*SRevJohn* II 20.23; cp. *Gen* 3.1–5). Christ’s attempt to clarify this point to John succeeds mostly in adding to the confusion. He says that the snake attempted to entice “her/them” (NHC II and III include both Adam and Eve, while BG confines the serpent’s address to Eve) to eat by telling her/them about the destructive pollution of sexual desire, but she/they did not listen to the snake’s command to eat (*SRevJohn* 20.24–27). This disobedience prompts the Chief Ruler to remove Epinoia from Adam. But of course that completely upsets the order of the narrative: how could Eve have been disobedient to the snake if she had not yet been created? The text seems to conflate Eve with Epinoia here, suggesting that it was Epinoia or Epinoia and Adam who were tempted by the snake with sexual desire—although again it is a bit difficult to understand the nature of sexual desire when only one human exists (even if he is androgynous). Things only get more confusing when we learn that it is not the snake who persuaded Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, but Epinoia in the form of an eagle.²⁴ There are a number of sequential and logical infelicities in all this: making the temptation of Eve the catalyst for her own creation; Christ claiming to be the one who “brought about that they ate” from the Tree of Knowledge when the text says (also) that it was Epinoia; and numerous differences between the versions.²⁵ The upshot, however, is that Adam and Eve have managed yet again to escape the machinations of the Chief Ruler.

Now totally frustrated, the Chief Ruler curses them by subordinating the woman to the man and throwing them out of paradise (*Gen* 3.23). In the strongest overt critique of patriarchy in all of ancient literature, the shorter versions BG and III declare that the subordination of woman to man (*Gen* 3.16) was yet another ignorant act on the part of the Chief Ruler and a direct violation of the decree of the Holy Height.²⁶

As a kind of last resort, the Chief Ruler now deploys his most potent weapon against humanity: sexual violence.²⁷ In the *Secret Revelation of John’s*

telling, the first act of intercourse with humans is the rape of Eve by the Chief Ruler, producing two children: Cain and Abel (*Gen* 4.1–2). They are theriomorphic deities representing righteousness and unrighteousness, both of which are created in order to deceive humanity (*SRevJohn* II 22.21). Their jealousy and violence shows them to be true sons of their jealous and violent father.

Subsequent to the rape, the Chief Ruler plants sexual desire in human relationships and lures humanity into intercourse; his purpose is to produce additional bodies that he can rule. The precise location and nature of sexual desire is represented differently in the shorter and longer versions of the *Secret Revelation of John*. BG and III say that the Chief Ruler planted a desire for seed (offspring) in Adam, while II/IV states that he planted sexual desire in Eve. In any case, his goal is to produce likenesses from the counterfeit spirit (*SRevJohn* 22.24), but again he is thwarted, for the result is that Adam begets Seth, a child in the image of the true Human (*Gen* 5.3). Here we get our best intimation that the perfectibility of humanity includes sexual relations. Both BG and NHC II/IV interpret Adam's reproduction as an act of true knowledge of his own essential likeness (the spiritual Eve), so that Seth "is like" his father, Adam. Seth's generation follows the pattern of the Divine Realm established when the transcendent Deity begot the Son (Autogenes-Christ) from Barbelo through his own self-reflective gaze. And even though NHC III describes Adam's act as "knowledge of lawlessness," it nonetheless affirms that the resulting child, Seth, is modeled according to the divine perfection. Reproduction here is not a matter of lust, violence, and deception, but the productive life-giving power that comes from perceiving one's true essence in the other.

With the birth of Seth, the first generation of spiritual humans is established. They are called "the immovable generation." The Mother (Pronoia) sends her Spirit to them in order to "awaken the essence that resembles it (the Spirit)" and to "awaken them from forgetfulness and the wickedness of the tomb" (that is to say, the material body) (*SRevJohn* BG 22.29–31). This holy Spirit remains in the world below, instructing her

children (“seed”) until the deficiency is fully rectified and the whole divine world is restored to its perfection (*SRevJohn* 22.34–37). The spiritual perfecting of humanity, therefore, constitutes the rectification of Sophia’s deficiency.

Realizing that the entire immovable generation of the perfect Light is superior to them in thought and wisdom, the Chief Ruler and his authorities now make a plan to bind humanity with the bonds of Fate, “the lord over everything.”

The Chief Ruler knew that they surpassed him in the excellence of their wisdom. He wanted to restrict their plan for he was ignorant. He did not understand they were wiser than he. He made a plan with his powers. They begot Fate and bound the gods of heaven and angels and demons and human beings with measures and seasons and times in order to keep them all in its fetter—for it was lord over them all (*SRevJohn* BG 24.4–16).

This attempt at astrological imprisonment is of course another act of ignorant malice and ultimately it fails. Codex II makes the creator’s ineffectuality explicit: “He will not be able to restrict them” (*SRevJohn* II 24.6). As Nicola Denzey has pointed out, despite the oft-repeated cliché that Gnostics felt themselves to be enslaved by fate, in fact, the *Secret Revelation of John* affirms that spiritual humanity was always under the care of the true Pronoia.²⁸ Learning that fact frees them from Fate’s illusive control.

The whole situation leads the Chief Ruler to regret that he ever attempted to create humanity (*Gen* 6.6), and so the rulers next try to wipe them out entirely (*Gen* 6.17). But when they plot to flood the earth and destroy humanity, Epinoia instructs Noah to preach and save them from destruction (*SRevJohn* 24.17–29). Although few heed Noah’s preaching, those who do are hidden by Epinoia in a luminous cloud (perhaps an allusion to the rainbow of *Gen* 9.13). The Chief Ruler is thwarted again.²⁹

Finally he and his powers make a desperate plan to impregnate the hu-

man women and raise up offspring for themselves (*SRevJohn* 25.1–4). Apparently their plan is at first a failure because the women simply will not have them. So they plot together again, and this time they resort to out and out deception:

They created a despicable spirit in the likeness of the Spirit who had descended so that through it they might pollute the souls. And the angels changed their own likenesses into the likeness of each one's mate, filling them with the spirit of darkness, which they mixed with them and with wickedness. They brought gold, silver, a gift, and copper and iron and metal and every sort of thing belonging to these classes. And they beguiled the human beings who had followed them into great troubles by leading them astray into much error (*SRevJohn* II 25.7–12).³⁰

This passage has some scant basis in *Gen* 6.1–4, which in passing mentions primordial giants who had intercourse with the daughters of men. But by the time of the *Secret Revelation of John*, an entire tradition under the name of Enoch had elaborated the story at length, emphasizing the evils brought upon humanity by the descent of the fallen angels.³¹ The primary innovation of the *Secret Revelation of John's* myth-makers appears to have been the introduction of the counterfeit/despicable spirit,³² but they also molded the story thoroughly through their oppositional logic to fit the theme of illegitimate rule. The counterfeit spirit is crafted deceptively to resemble the true spirit, in order to lead humanity into temptation and troubles. The despicable spirit not only sexually seduces women by masquerading as their true husbands, but also introduces material wealth in the form of metal and technology (gold, silver, copper, iron and so on).³³ Wealth, like sexual desire, is an evil masquerading as a supposed good, and both are intended to lead people astray by deception. BG elaborates that such temptations are specifically intended to keep humanity from remembering “their immovable Pronoia” (*SRevJohn* BG 25.13).³⁴

In the end, Yaldabaoth's blind arrogance and malicious attempts to dominate humanity define the *Secret Revelation of John's* understanding of

how evil is exercised in the world below. Because of humanity's moral, intellectual, and spiritual superiority, its subjection to the rule of the lower gods can only be a gross injustice. This injustice is compounded because humanity's supposed rulers are not only inferior, but actively malicious. Everything points to unjust rule as the cause and condition of evil.³⁵

The Body and the Self: Humanity's Dual Heritage

For the *Secret Revelation of John*, to be human means to be subject to the unjust rule and deceptions of the creator god and the passions of the psychic body, cut off from knowledge of the true Deity and the Divine Realm above. It would, however, be wrong to think that the people who accepted the text's perspective would perceive their situation to be utterly desperate or that they would take a nihilistic view of life. The *Secret Revelation of John* in fact denies that suffering and illegitimate domination are the ultimate reality of the soul's condition. The self one discovers in reading the text may initially be alienated, but ultimately it is indomitable. It is the image of divine perfection suffused with the presence of the divine Spirit.

The situation of humanity in the world appears contradictory because human beings are inscribed fully within the oppositional logic of the text: human beings are formed according to the psychic likeness of the world rulers and enclosed in matter, lost and alienated from their true origin in the Light. But at the same time humanity is created in the image of the perfect Human and enlivened by the Spirit of Sophia-Wisdom.³⁶ Seemingly subject to the unjust dominion of these bestial rulers, in reality humanity is superior to them and destined for the compassionate rule of the true Deity; seemingly subject to the passions and mortal death, human nature is essentially spiritual and divine, capable of perfection transcending all the constraints of time and matter. Yet in this life, humans remain vulnerable to the influence of the counterfeit spirit, even though they can receive the indwelling presence of the Spirit of Life sent by the Mother-Barbelo. The soul of every human is a battleground between these two spirits, each struggling for ascendancy within the self. Human salvation depends upon the outcome of that conflict.

The creation of the first humans defines the situation of all humanity. Like Adam and Eve, every person has two genealogies: one stemming from the creator God and his minions, the other from Sophia and the true Light-Human. As we saw above, the human story begins when the world rulers perceive the image on the water and determine to create a human being according to the image of God and in their likeness. Adam is made by molding their own likeness into an imitation bodily form out of psychic substance, following the divine image of the First Human (*SRevJohn* 15.11–18). According to the ancient axiom that “like creates like,” their imitation form resembles their character with all its limitations. Because the nature of the world rulers is psychic (soul), their contributions to human creation are not made of matter but solely of psychic substance, so that at first the body of Adam is a soul-body.³⁷ Only later will Adam become encased in the material body.

In forming the soul-body of Adam, each of the seven powers contributes a type of soul: bone, sinew, flesh, marrow, blood, skin, and hair (*SRevJohn* 15.20–27). The closest literary counterpart to the parts of this soul-body is found in Plato’s *Tim* 73B–76E, although Plato’s account concerns the physical body.³⁸ The order of creation also generally follows the same principle as in the *Timaeus*, from the inner to the outer components of the human bodily makeup: marrow, bones, sinews, flesh, blood, skin, and hair. Moreover, the *Secret Revelation of John’s* account of the creation of a seven-fold soul of Adam belongs to a widely shared conceptuality in antiquity called a “melothesia” in which parts of the body are connected with the planets.³⁹ Such lists belong to the sphere of astrological commonplaces, well-known and widespread in antiquity.⁴⁰ In a recent study, Joachim Quack has argued for the origins of these views in earlier Egyptian tradition, where the Decan had become interpreted as astrological powers who played a “significant role in ruling over life and death, water, land and wind.”⁴¹ Such powers were potentially harmful, but also could be protective, and even be appealed to for healing. A good example can be found in the third century philosopher Porphyry’s *Epistle to Anebo the Egyptian*:

For as to Chaermon and the rest, they do not believe in anything else prior to the visible worlds, since they account as a ruling power the gods of the Egyptians, and no others except the so-called planets, and those stars which fill up the zodiac, and as many as rise near them: also the divisions into the “decani,” and the horoscopes, and the so-called “mighty Rulers,” the names of which are contained in almanacs, and their power to heal diseases, and their risings and settings, and indications of future events . . . And most of them made even our own free will depend upon the motion of the stars, binding all things down by indissoluble bonds, I know not how, to a necessity which they call fate, and making all things depend closely on these gods as the sole deliverers from the bonds of fate.⁴²

According to Quack, the connection of body parts to the gods first appeared in ancient funerary texts. One particularly important pyramid text links the body parts of the king with gods in order to further his ascent to heaven.⁴³ While there are no clear indications that the Egyptian texts associated the body with the Decan, the connection does appear in Greek astrological literature. Quack concludes that the Egyptian concepts of the Decan and the divinization of body parts were connected in such a way that each Decan was assigned to rule over a specific body part whose illness or healing it could affect.⁴⁴ The second-century anti-Christian polemicist Celsus gives a particularly illustrative example of this belief and practice:

That in these matters, even including the very least, there is a being to whom authority has been given, one may learn from the teaching of the Egyptians. They say that the human body has been put under the charge of thirty-six daemons, or ethereal gods of some sort, who divide it between them, that being the number of parts into which it is divided (though some say far more). Each daemon is in charge of a different part. And they know the names of the daemons in the local dialect, such as Chnoumen, Chnachoumen, Knat, Sikat, Biou, Erou,

Erebiou, Rhamanoor, and Rheianoor, and all the other names which they use in their language. And by invoking these they heal the suffering of the various parts. What is there to prevent anyone from paying honour both to these and to the others if he wishes, so that we can be in good health rather than be ill, and have good rather than bad luck, and be delivered from tortures and punishments.²⁴⁵

Although Celsus mentions only 36 daemons, there are parallels in the magical papyri for 365 parts for human bodies.⁴⁶ The names differ from those in the *Secret Revelation of John*,⁴⁷ but the basic conceptuality is remarkably similar, and we may well suppose that the primary purpose of including the lengthy list of the names of demons and the parts of the body they rule was for purposes of healing.⁴⁸

By comparing the *Secret Revelation of John* with astrological sources from antiquity, van den Broek devised a list juxtaposing archons, powers, planets and soul substances, as shown in the table below.⁴⁹ This list illustrates how the human body is directly connected with the archontic powers that rule the world, each part being made up of the same substance that forms the planetary rulers themselves. Note how the names of the powers all suggest positive qualities; these epithets are in fact false names, illustrating one of the strategies used by the archontic rulers to deceive humanity.

Melothesia^a

<i>Archons</i>	<i>Powers</i>	<i>Planets</i>	<i>Soul Substances</i>
Iaoth	Pronoia	Moon	Marrow
Eloaios	Divinity	Mercury	Bones
Astaphaios	Goodness	Venus	Sinews
Iao	Fire	Sun	Flesh
Sabaoth	Kingship	Mars	Blood
Adoni	Comprehension	Jupiter	Skin
Sabbataios	Wisdom	Saturn	Hair

^a van den Broek, "The Creation of Adam's Psychic Body," 48.

At this point in the story, a lengthy addition not found in the two shorter versions (BG and III) is inserted into the longer version of the *Secret Revelation of John* (II/IV). In addition to describing the seven-fold soul of man, the longer version also lists psychic body parts, sensibilities, material qualities, and passions, along with the name of the specific daemon who rules each (*SRevJohn* 16.1–17.63).

At the end of the list, the reader is informed: “Now others whom I did not mention to you rule over the rest. If you want to know about them, it is written in the *Book of Zoroaster*” (*SRevJohn* 17.63). This may indicate that the list in the *Secret Revelation of John* has been excerpted from the *Book of Zoroaster* or it may merely mean that similar, but more fulsome material of this kind can be found there.⁵⁰

This list of body parts and their daemonic rulers is itself extremely interesting, offering a kind of summary of ancient conceptions of the human body. The list of the parts of the body and the order in which they appear (from head to toe) follows the usual order of the ancient medical lists. As Burgess summarizes,

Timaeus relates how the gods first formed the substance of the marrow (*muelos*), shaping it, in imitation of the body of the world, into a sphere, inserting therein the circuits of the immortal soul and rounding it with protective bone. The marrow is further divided into strips, the most prominent being the spinal marrow, and these are likewise encased by bone; the structure of the body is then built outwards from this point and around the marrow. Flesh is formed to protect bone both as a cushioning pad and as a means of regulating extremes of temperature, while the sinews provide elasticity and bind the frame together. The body is then completed at its extremity by the formation of skin, hair and nails.⁵¹

Note that BG 15.24 emphasizes that the marrow is “the whole foundation of the body,” suggesting that the *Secret Revelation of John* assumes a process of creation similar to that of Plato’s *Timaeus*. It is also interesting to note

that the androcentric character of most creation accounts is confounded in the *Secret Revelation of John*, which here provides a second list of body parts (again from head to toes; *SRevJohn* II 17.1–29) so that the first human seems to possess not only penis and testicles (II 16.55–57), but also a womb (II 17.18)—it would seem that the first human is androgynous.

Next comes a list of those who are in charge of the senses. Here the order follows the common five-part division of the ruling faculty (*hêgimonikon*) of the soul: senses, receptions, imagination, assent, and impulse. Then come the four demons who reign over the humors of the body and regulate health: heat, cold, wetness, and dryness. The head of all these is matter. Finally comes the worst: the addition of the chief demons who account for the passions; they contribute pleasure, desire, grief, and fear. From them issues all other psychic ailments: envy, anxiety, empty pride, anger, bitterness, fawning, agony, and many other evils.⁵² Insight into the true character of the passions, says the *Secret Revelation of John*, is gained by knowing that their head is the material soul. In conclusion, we are told that the sum total of all those who contributed to the first mortal are 365 (or 360 in BG/III), approximately the number of days in the solar year. Here is yet another reference to the correspondence between the astral powers of the heavenly sphere and the human psychic body and material body.⁵³ The human body is inscribed onto the system of the cosmos itself, a point to which we will return.

This fascinating addition to the *Secret Revelation of John* portrays the body as a composite, made up of both physical (material) and psychic (soul) substances, a view common in antiquity. The soul is the ruling portion of the self, which permeates the whole of a living human person, and indeed is that which makes the material body alive and capable of thought and movement. The ruling portion of the soul is usually said to be located in the heart or sometimes in the head. For the Stoics, soul was material, while for Platonists, it was immaterial. In popular thought, however, soul was conceived as a particularly fine kind of matter. Sandbach describes this perspective:

For the living person the *psyche* is a “breath,” a compound of air and “constructive” fire, that extends throughout the body, with which it is totally blended, giving life and warmth, growth and maintenance. But there is a part, called the *hégimonikon* or centre of command, lodging in the heart, which is the seat of sensation, assent, impulse, passion, and thought-reason. From this there extend seven breaths to the eyes, ears, mouth, nose and skin to convey the incoming stimuli which cause sensation, to the organs of speech to set them in motion, and to the sex-organs for the reason, it may be guessed, that they are the channel by which life is transmitted.⁵⁴

Thus the *hégimonikon* controls the body through the seven breaths, taking in information from the senses and causing both speech and movement in the body. The five faculties of this ruling principle of the soul are the senses (*aisthêseis*), perceptions (*antilêpsis*), imagination (*phantasia*), assent (*sunkatathêseis*), and impulse (*hormê* or *orexeis*). The five senses are the source of information about the world; reception is the act of mental comprehension of this information; imagination is the formation of the perceptual concepts; impulse is the movement in the soul that impels action; assent is the mental act of agreement to an impulse. Originating with the Stoics, this division had become a commonplace in ancient philosophical, medical, and astrological literature of the period when the *Secret Revelation of John* was composed.⁵⁵ The list of demons in charge of each of the body parts in the longer version of the text includes the name of “Aatoimensephei, theirs are the breaths which are in all the parts” (II/IV 16.15)—a clear reference to the notion that a number of breaths pervade the whole body.

The material body was generally conceived to be a mixture of the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. According to ancient medical literature, these have four qualities—wet, dry, heat, cold—whose proportions in the body are responsible for health and disease. Much ancient medical treatment was based on diagnosing the particular imbalances of these

qualities in a disease, and restoring a healthy balance. Too much moisture, for example, might be treated by “bleeding”; whereas too little moisture, for example in the case of hysteria (which was caused by a dried-up womb), could be cured by sexual intercourse (which would inject moisture into the dry area). The *Secret Revelation of John* characterizes these qualities as demonic forces nourished by matter.

The four cardinal passions—pleasure, desire, grief, and fear—are also commonplaces in ancient psychology.⁵⁶ For Stoics, the ideal state of the wise and virtuous person was *apatheia*, which literally means “without passion”; our word “apathy” derives from it. But while “apathy” in English implies passivity and disinterest, the Stoic teaching is much more active, insisting that the passions should be rooted out and destroyed, since they are the cause of all evil. There is a tendency in modern thinking to regard feelings as irrational or at least as non-rational. But the Stoics treated the emotions primarily in terms of their cognitive character. They thought that the passions arise not out of feeling, but through ignorance and false belief.⁵⁷ Cicero, for example, argued that the four primary passions derive from the cognitive capacity to distinguish between good and bad, between present and future.⁵⁸ In this scheme, pleasure is defined as “judgment that what is presently at hand is good”; desire as “judgment that something still in the future is good or valuable”; distress as “judgment that what is presently at hand is bad”; and fear as “judgment that what is still in the future is bad.”⁵⁹ The diseases of the soul are caused by accepting value judgments that are *false*. Only sound teaching and accurate knowledge of the truth about Reality can heal people of the diseases that wrack the whole self, body and soul. Hence the cardinal virtues of the wise person are moral insight, courage, self-control, and justice, all of which help a person make correct judgments and instill the character necessary to render those judgments into right behavior and attitudes. Moreover, many Stoics held that because the passions arise out of *false* ideas that have hardened into fixed dispositions of the soul, they need to be completely wiped out rather than merely moderated. As Martha Nussbaum notes, “The soul of an or-

dinary person, says Chrysippus, is like a body that is prone to various diseases, some large, some small, which may arise from chance causes (*PHP* V.23, 294D). These diseases are diseased conditions of belief. A *nosema* or chronic illness of the soul is a stable condition of the personality that consists in accepting a value-judgment that leaves its holder susceptible to passions . . . The Stoics teach that the passions should be not moderated, but extirpated.”⁶⁰ Only full extirpation of the passions can lead the soul to internal stability and tranquility. As with Stoic notions about the ruling faculty of the soul, these notions about the passions had become widespread. The *Secret Revelation of John* associates the passions with the material soul.

At this point, the careful reader will note that the list inserted into the longer version of the *Secret Revelation of John* assumes that the body being described is both psychic and material,⁶¹ yet at this point in the story, Adam is not yet encased in material flesh; that won't occur until later in the story. This confusion is not particularly alarming, however. Ancient readers would have thought of the human body as matter permeated with soul substance, and ultimately Adam comes to fit just this description.

The *Secret Revelation of John* deviates most significantly from other ancient perspectives in its low valuation of the gods who created the world and humanity. The ancient commonplace that saw the form of humanity as a microcosm of the universe takes on a radically new valuation in Christ's revelation. Whereas ancient philosophers portrayed humanity as fully integrated in the very structure of the universe and sharing in its goodness, beauty, and divinity, Christ tells John that those same ties that bind humanity to the world are only meant to enslave people to the arrogant power of the world rulers, who mean them only harm.

Yet it is crucial to emphasize that at this point only the psychic body is the creation of the lower gods, and their rule legitimately extends only over it, not over the higher spiritual self. Indeed the soul-substance of the rulers is so deficient, they are unable to make Adam move. Even after they have finished the body, “their product was completely inactive and motion-

less for a long time" (*SRevJohn* II 18.1). Adam becomes a living being only when the heavenly Lights descend and persuade the Chief Ruler to breathe the spiritual power of the Mother, Sophia, into the inert body of Adam. This episode suggests that the ruling faculty of the soul that enlivens Adam partakes of the divine substance of Sophia, and not merely of the inferior life of the world rulers. The rulers themselves recognize this fact when they perceive that Adam's intelligence is greater than theirs; he is free from wickedness and wiser than they are (*SRevJohn* 18.17). In their jealousy, they cast Adam down into the nether region of matter and encase his psychic body in matter:

They took some fire, earth, and water. They mixed them together with each other and the four fiery winds. And they wrought them together and made a great disturbance. And they enclosed him in the shadow of death in order that they might yet again form from earth, water, fire, and spirit a thing from matter, which is the ignorance of the darkness, desire, and their counterfeit spirit. This is the tomb of the molding of the body with which the robbers clothed the human, the chain of forgetfulness. And he came to be a mortal human (*SRevJohn* II 19.6–13).

As we saw above, the world rulers then attempt to use the body and its passions to further subject Adam to their power, offering him delightful food, beauty, and material wealth. With the creation of Eve, they plant sexual desire in humanity in order to produce more copies of bodies, which could be subjected to the sway of their counterfeit spirit (*SRevJohn* 22.22–24). In this way, humanity comes powerfully under the sway of counterfeit spirit, seemingly cut off from the Divine above and tied to the world rulers through the psychic form and material substance of the body and the cosmos.

But the gulf between the transcendent Deity and humanity is only one part of the story. The *Secret Revelation of John* offers another genealogy for humanity as well, one which stresses likeness to the true God through the first Human, Adam, and Seth. This genealogy establishes the basis for

salvation by linking humanity to the transcendent Deity through a chain of mimetic generation.⁶² It does not ensure an automatic “salvation by nature,” but it does provide a basis for hope and an assurance of God’s providence in the human capacity to receive the Spirit sent down by the Mother-Barbelo.⁶³

As we saw above, the *Secret Revelation of John* uses the terminology of *Genesis* 1.26–27 (LXX), where humanity is said to be created in the “image and likeness” of God, to establish a link between God and humanity.⁶⁴ True mimesis ensures direct continuity of all humanity with the transcendent God and Father through the first Human, Adam, and Seth, and secondarily through Sophia. From the transcendent and unknowable Father, the Invisible Spirit, appeared his image, the Mother Barbelo; from her came forth the Son, Autogenes, according to his likeness.⁶⁵ From Autogenes is derived the first Human (the heavenly Adam) who is the father of the heavenly Seth and the seed of Seth, the heavenly archetypes of all Seth’s offspring. More importantly, Autogenes is the divine model of the first spiritual human, Adam, even as Adam also creates a son in his own likeness, Seth.

The descendents of Seth (the Sethians) are the offspring (“seed”) of Seth, and presumably share in his likeness to the divine Human and in his possession of the spiritual power of Sophia. For when he receives Sophia’s Spirit, Adam becomes superior to the world rulers in power, intelligence, purity, and goodness. Indeed we are told that despite their demonic input, “he had entered into the light” and “was naked of evil” (*SRevJohn* 18.16–17). His offspring are described collectively as “the essence which is like it (the Spirit) following the model of the perfection” (*SRevJohn* BG 22.30). Moreover, there is a likeness between humanity below and the spirits above, for the immovable race of the seed of Seth living in the lower world will find their final resting place with the heavenly seed of Seth in the third aeon, and even the late penitents will find their rest in the fourth aeon of Eleleth (*SRevJohn* 9.9–14).

Thus the *Secret Revelation of John* provides a dual heritage for humanity:

one that stresses rupture and difference, and one that stresses likeness to the true God. It would be wrong to suppose that the *Secret Revelation of John* envisages two types of humanity: those formed after the spiritual image of the first Human and those formed after the psychic likeness of the demiurge and his minions. Rather all human beings participate in both genealogies.⁶⁶ Each person has continuity with the Father of the All by being created in the spiritual image of the first Human, but can forget that heritage through the machinations of the counterfeit spirit.⁶⁷ The psychic body is not one's true self; it is only a malformed counterfeit that was made according to the likeness of the false gods with all their deficiencies. Similarly, the physical body is not the true self, but only "the tomb of the molded body with which they clothed the human, the fetter of the flesh (or forgetfulness)" (*SRevJohn* 19.12). Yet both the psychic and the material bodies are perfectible, by conforming to a human being's true self, which is fashioned in true imitation of the Divine Image and has received the life-giving Spirit-breath of Sophia. Human beings are tied to the material body and its passions only insofar as they remain ignorant of their true spiritual nature and mired in sin.

In the end, Sophia's disruption of the unity and order of the Divine Realm has become inscribed directly onto the human body. Humanity literally embodies the ruptured ontology of the *Secret Revelation of John's* narrative, being at once divine and mortal, bearing both the heritage of a divine, spiritual lineage and the flawed character of difference, mimicry, and parody that characterizes the psychic realm and the material world. Thus human nature is figured as a self divided against itself, at war in its very being. Every human being is a battleground between the true and counterfeit spirits, fighting the contest between reality and deception.

Yet Christ assures John that the true Spirit will ultimately succeed, and that the human capacity for spiritual enlightenment and perfection will triumph over the forces of violence and deception.

4

The Solution: Salvation

DESPITE HAVING BEEN created in the image of the true Human and possessing the Spirit of Sophia, all human beings remain in need of salvation because of the active malice and deception of the world rulers. Humanity has become polluted with sin and ignorance, shackled by the fetters of the body and the passions, and is subject to the torment of demons. Ignorant of the true Deity, they suffer and die without understanding who they truly are or what their real situation is. Saviors are needed to provide true knowledge of God and self and to strengthen the soul through the gift of the Spirit. The Mother-Pronoia sends the Spirit of Life to awaken the spiritual nature that people already possess and perfects them by making them truly human, spiritual people and members of the immovable race. As Hauschild puts it, “Those who are saved in the *Apocryphon of John* are ‘spirituals’ not because they possess a divine spirit by nature—that is the case for everyone—but because an additional salvific Spirit has come over them.”¹ By cultivating the divine image within themselves during this life, they are able to correct the deficiency of Sophia and return to the just rule of the transcendent Deity, entering into the places of rest that have been prepared for them in the Light Aeons above. Despite all the temptations and violence to which humanity is exposed, and all the sins and impurities they commit in ignorance of the truth, all will be saved and brought back to the Light Aeons that have been prepared for them from eternity.

Salvation is focused upon the embodied self. The creation of the psy-

chic body by ignorant and malicious beings, as well as its intimate connections to demons, may seem to ascribe an unalterably evil quality to the human body. But such an implication is not at all accurate. First of all, the *Secret Revelation of John* does not regard the creation of humanity solely as a demonic project.² Although according to Codex II, in creating Adam the powers and angels are limited by using “the power from each of them according to the characteristics they had been given” (*SRevJohn* II 15.14–15), nonetheless they follow the image of the Perfect Human as the likeness toward which they are striving. So the human body in that sense mirrors the divine. Furthermore, Christ states that when the first human body received the Spirit of Sophia and moved, it became free from wickedness, wiser than the rulers, and luminous (*SRevJohn* 18.11, 17). That the body can be described as free from wickedness and luminous is an astonishing and compelling indication of its capacity for spiritual perfection.

The evil humanity must overcome is the counterfeit spirit of the demonic powers; the body is only their tool. That the body is not the locus of evil is shown by the fact that it can be neutralized. Complete purification and salvation can be achieved while still in the body. Christ tells John that once humans are perfected, they are not restrained by anything except the flesh alone, to which they are subject while they wait for the time when they will be admitted to imperishable life (*SRevJohn* 23.6–12). The flesh does not have to serve the ends of the demons; while it is not the focus of salvation, neither is it the locus of evil. Control over the demons can even be used for healing the body of its ailments. The battle for life is not fought between the Spirit and the body, but between the true Spirit of Light and the counterfeit spirit of the demons. Neither is the soul considered to be evil by nature, for even after the creation of the psychic body of Adam, we are told that “he was naked of evil” (*SRevJohn* 18.17). The bodily self is quite real and has quite real effects. The story of Adam’s creation shows how the human body—and materiality itself³—comes into being through the interplay of forces seeking to control the Spirit. In that sense, the human body is the effect of a power struggle.⁴ It is the bat-

tlefield between the opposing forces of the true Spirit and the counterfeit spirit.

Moreover, the body is an important—if not the most important—site of revelation and the purveyor of true knowledge. The centrality of this topic is emphasized by the fact that an extensive portion of the *Secret Revelation of John* is taken up with the creation of the human body (almost a quarter of the longer version). What is the truth which the body teaches? It is a map of the substance and structure of reality with all its tensions and conflicts. Simultaneously it is the territory on which the struggle for truth is waged. To know the body is to grasp the truth of God, the world, and everything. The body is therefore what is most real, and yet it will dissolve back into the formlessness out of which it derived. The suffering of the body and the human experience of injustice expose the truth of the world rulers' nature: malignant rulers and false gods who seek only to dominate that which is superior to them through lies and violence.

The body is also the revelation of the image of God in the world. The *Secret Revelation of John* follows the ancient pattern in which the human body is represented as a microcosm of macrocosmic reality. In this way, the human body functions both as the map of the substance and structure of reality, and as the territory on which that substance and structure are mapped.⁵ An examination of the human body as it is represented in the *Secret Revelation of John* reveals the text's view of the entire shape and substance of everything that exists, their relationships, and their relative value, because the body's double genealogy represents the dual nature of reality above and below. The body is at once spiritual and material, divine and fallen, immortal and mortal, perfect and flawed, pure and alloyed. As such, it is both ally and weapon, for it is simultaneously the revelation of the truth and the rulers' tool of deception, suffering, and death. To say that the *Secret Revelation of John* considers the body to be evil by nature misses the complexity of the text's presentation of the human body as both map and territory, as both revelation and battleground, as the soul's ally and the demiurgic weapon against which it must struggle.

The discussion of gender and sexuality particularly exposes this dynamic. One of the most important images is that of the divine household, represented in terms of patriarchal organization: Father, Mother, and Son, along with various other relatives and associates of the extended ancient *familia*.⁶ Pronoia is called “the womb of the All,” a reference not so much to her reproductive capacity (although that applies as well) as to the fact of her preeminence (that “she is prior to them all”; *SRevJohn* 5.24). The Divine Realm is thus an entirely traditional, if somewhat idealized model of the perfectly ordered household. Its harmony and unity are ensured by proper lines of authority and obedience following the hierarchy of origin, power, and preeminence. As we have seen, Sophia disrupts this order by acting without the consent of the Father or her male partner. Salvation therefore requires the “restoration of primordial household order,” which, as Michael Williams points out,⁷ is one of Pronoia’s declared purposes for her descent in the final hymn of the longer version (*SRevJohn* II 26.13–14).

On the surface, it appears that here the *Secret Revelation of John* uncritically reproduces the ideal of the patriarchal household. Yet one of the most distinctive and confounding images in the *Secret Revelation of John* is its portrait of Wisdom (Sophia-Eve) acting the part of a fool. Here parody may have overtaken even the intentions of its myth-makers.⁸ The foolishness of Wisdom is meant to mark the boundary between the divine model of perfection and the defective mimicry below, but because Sophia belongs to the Divine Realm, the parody is not limited to the world below. By portraying divine Wisdom—foolish Wisdom—as the source of rupture, parody leaks back into the Divine Realm itself.

If we read against the grain of the text, the wise-fool Sophia is arguably more completely the hero of the story than one might at first think. Her bold independence of thought and action could be read not as an act of ignorance but of resistance, the same kind of resistance that the work affirms through Eve’s opposition to the lower gods’ illegitimate domination. In this reading Sophia affirms the authenticity of her action to free herself from a system that places her at the bottom of the hierarchical chain of

being, tries to keep her in her place by figuring her bold independence as “deficiency,” and requiring her to repent. On hearing that the tragic hero is named “wisdom,” readers might have responded with a wistful grin, seeing her creative power as an act of defiance, not a warning.⁹

Any attempt to ameliorate the critical effect that the parody of domination has on the reader’s perception of divine rule, short of eliminating the parody altogether, will ultimately fail—precisely because it is a constitutive characteristic of parody to extend critique, not limit it. Parody, satire, travesty, ridicule, mimicry—all aim to show the Emperor without his clothes. It will not do to add a hat or gloves. In readerly reception, much depends upon whether one is predisposed to see the Emperor with or without his clothes, but parody will never relinquish the naked possibility. Parody supplies the peep holes through the cracks in any totalizing narrative, even that of the *Secret Revelation of John* itself. Whether one is shocked, amused and heartened, or warned depends on the reader.

Sexuality would appear to be another site for spiritual struggle. Reproduction in the Divine Realm is modeled as a largely noetic activity of divine will, visionary self-reflection, and speech.¹⁰ Pronoia, for example, is produced when the transcendent Deity “perceived Its own image, seeing it in the pure light-water which surrounds It” (BG 5.11). She then requests the Spirit to “give” her various “beings” (including the Son—Christ-Autogenes), who appear in accord with the divine will. Even Sophia’s untimely “product,” Yaldabaoth, comes into being when she “thought a thought from within herself and in the thought of the Spirit and Foreknowledge” (10.1). Her thought was “not idle” so that a product appeared.

This noetic mode of production contrasts sharply with the sexual language used to describe reproduction in the lower world, where sexual lust is presented as a deceptive and degraded parody of divine life-giving productivity.¹¹ Perhaps the most startling instances occur when Yaldabaoth “copulates” with Madness (Aponoia) to beget the twelve angels (BG 11.5–6), and the rulers rape Eve and the “daughters of men,” resulting in the births of Cain, Abel, and other offspring (*SRevJohn* 22.10–21; 25.1–10). We are also told that sexual intercourse among humans was maliciously insti-

tured by the Chief Ruler to produce likenesses of their counterfeit spirit (22.22–24). It would seem that sex is consistently represented in the *Secret Revelation of John* in terms of mindless lust, violence, and deception, figured in contrast to the mental production of the harmonious and unified Divine household. It would be hard to imagine a more thorough condemnation.

And yet—as Ingvild Gilhus has convincingly argued—one effect of the reciprocating, mimetic structure of above and below is that the *Secret Revelation of John* also introduces sexual reproduction into the world above by making divine reproductivity the model for what goes on in the world below.¹² Indeed the sexual language of “begetting” and “bearing” (ἄπαι and μίκε) is used to describe Barbelo’s production of the only-begotten Son (SRevJohn 7.3; BG/III 7.6) and the aeonic souls (II 9.14),¹³ and Pronoia (Barbelo) is called a “womb for the All” (II 5.24).

Another exception to the predominant use of mental imagery for divine productivity is BG’s description of Sophia’s production of Yaldabaoth. She is said to have “swelled out”—an image suggestive of pregnancy—and “given birth” to Yaldabaoth, who is called “the untimely birth of the darkness” (BG 10.6, 14; 14.20). (Note he is not an abortion, but an untimely birth—a child that was not meant to be.¹⁴) Given the text’s association of birth with death, this use of birth imagery rhetorically signals the dire consequences of Sophia’s act. It is interesting to note, too, that explicit birth imagery found in the Berlin Codex is missing from the longer version in II/IV, which talks instead of how Sophia “brought forth” and “created” Yaldabaoth; he is not called the “untimely birth of the darkness” but is referred to as “the garment of darkness” (II 10.6, 14; 14.20). Such modifications fit the pattern noted above that II/IV has changed the text to create a more consistent overall gender symbolism in which sexual intercourse and reproduction belong only to the lower world and the activities of its denizens. In particular, the emphatic removal of Epinoia from Eve before she is raped stresses II/IV’s deliberate efforts to distance the Divine from sexual pollution and violence (II 22.14).

But the really startling exception to this pattern is the way in which

Adam, Eve, and Seth model the divine household in the world below. Here the separation of female from male (when Epinoia is drawn out of Adam to create Eve) does not result in catastrophe, but in Adam's illumination.¹⁵ When he sees the woman standing beside him, "he became sober from the drunkenness of the darkness" and "he recognized his essence/likeness" (*SRevJohn* 21.18–19). The creation of Eve is a moment of revelation. In his only speech in the work, Adam cites *Gen* 2.23–24: "Now this is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. Because of this, man will leave his father and his mother and he will cling to his wife and they will no longer be two but a single flesh. For they will send him his partner and he will leave his father and his mother" (II 21.20–21). Williams interprets Adam's citation of *Genesis* here "as a blessing on the innocent companionship of the first man and woman. It is only later that the chief archon introduces sexual intercourse." I wonder, however, if something more is also going on, for Adam says they will become "a single flesh"—an astonishing image in a text that supposedly deplores both flesh and sexual intercourse. Moreover, Christ's gloss on this passage (II 21.21: "they will send him his partner"; BG 21.21,23: "For the Mother's partner will be sent forth, and she will be set right") seems to indicate that the sexual union of Adam and Eve rectifies Sophia's deficiency.

What we have here is not an account of the Chief Ruler's success in polluting humanity with sexual desire and producing counterfeit bodies for him, but another instance of his failure, just as the snake had previously failed to persuade them (*SRevJohn* 20.23–27). For immediately after the Chief Ruler does institute sexual intercourse, Christ says that Adam begot Seth, "a likeness of the Child of the Human" ("Son of Man") when "he knew his essence which is like him" (BG) or "when he perceived the likeness of his own foreknowledge"(II) (22.26). Sexual intercourse between Adam and Eve produces not a counterfeit but a true likeness, for Seth is the father of the immovable race. Moreover the sexual intercourse of Adam and Eve is not figured in terms of lust, violence, and deception but as a model of how the perfect reproduce through the recognition of one's spiritual essence and likeness in the other. Adam's self-recognition repro-

duces in the realm below the productivity of the Father in the self-reflective gaze that begot the Son from Barbelo-Pronoia (II 7.1-3). In the *Genesis* story, Adam “became the father of a son in his own likeness after his image, and named him Seth” (5.3). Here Adam produces Seth, whom II calls “the likeness of the Child of the Human” (“Son of Man”)—that is, he is a true likeness of the divine Human who appeared on the waters. Thus Adam’s progeny follows the true genealogy established in the Divine Realm: from the first Human (Pronoia), to the Son (Autogenes Christ), to Adam, to Seth.

If I am reading the passage correctly, the *Secret Revelation of John* 22.26 offers a remarkable image of appropriately spiritual sexuality—the recognition of the image of God in the other as a shared essence. It is clear that Eve’s rape by the Chief Ruler has not succeeded in polluting her since Adam still recognizes his true essence/likeness in her even after the birth of Yaldabaoth’s spawn, Cain and Abel.¹⁶ No violence done to her can erase her essential nature as a person made in the image of God.

Could it be, then, that we misconstrue the radical asceticism of the *Secret Revelation of John* when we read it as merely repressive of sexuality?¹⁷ Could it be that it does not reject sexual intercourse *per se*, but rather its distorted parody in lust, violence, and deception? Does it propose a model of sexuality as spiritual knowledge, patterned on likeness to divine creativity? Because Adam and Eve’s union in producing Seth works to correct Sophia’s untimely birthing of Yaldabaoth, could it be that sex can be conceived as an act of salvation? If this is the case—and I believe it is—we need to reconsider entirely our notions of sexual renunciation as a marker of this kind of dualistic theology. Indeed, the *Secret Revelation of John* would seem to come much closer to the kind of Christian sexual ethics that insists that intercourse should be for the sake of reproduction, not the indulgence of passionate lust. What is new and remarkable, however, are two notions: that proper human sexual reproduction is modeled on divine creativity and that the recognition of the divine essence in one another is spiritually life-producing. Indeed it is an act of salvation.

Salvation is, however, far from automatic, although all of humanity will

ultimately be saved, except apostates who blaspheme the Spirit. People are potentially able to receive the Spirit of Life because they were created in the divine image, but to perfect that image and gain salvation requires the reception of revealed knowledge, study, extirpation of the passions, purification from all evil, and rituals of baptism and healing. Let's look more closely at each of these.

From a human vantage point, the two main problems caused by domination of the world rulers are deception and active malice. According to Christ, the world rulers purposefully created a counterfeit spirit that perversely resembles the true Spirit of Light in order to deceive humanity and lead them astray. The only way to overcome their deception is through knowledge of the truth. But people, blinded by the machinations of the counterfeit spirit, are unable to see the truth, distorted as it is by evil's false resemblance to truth. The *Secret Revelation of John* offers many examples of the kinds of deceptions wrought by the world rulers.

One fundamental deception is the claim of the Chief Ruler that no other God exists beside him. Christ points out to John that the Ruler's statement already exposes the lie within it: "For if there were no other god, of whom would he be jealous?" (*SRevJohn* 14.4). Humanity must learn how to distinguish true divinity from the false gods, but the problem is that the false gods partially resemble the true God because they were formed after the pattern of the Divine Realm above. Christ's revelation exposes this resemblance as malicious mimicry and deceptive counterfeiting. His contrasting portraits of the transcendent Deity and the world ruler function to clarify the nature of good and evil.

The world rulers have purposefully conspired to hamper humanity's ability to discern good and evil by perverting language. A major ruse was to make what is evil seem like it is good by giving it a deceitful name. Christ offers a good example of this deception in his discussion of the authorities' names.¹⁸ He says quite explicitly that the names of Yaldabaoth's minions are double and duplicitous. Each authority has two names, one from "desire and wrath," and a second true name given to them by the

glory of heaven.¹⁹ The first is given in order to deceive; the second to expose their true nature (*SRevJohn* BG II.24–28; II 13.17–20). While BG and II differ in recording the precise names given to each and the order in which they are listed, the point is the same.²⁰ Their false names are Pronoia (Providence), Divinity, Goodness, Fire (Envy), Kingdom, Understanding (or Lordship), and Wisdom; their true names are Yaoth (Aoth; Athoth), Eloaios, Astaphaios (Astophaios), Yao (Yazo), Adonaios (Sabaoth), Adoni (Adonin), and Sabbataios (Sabbadaios; Sabbede). Given the generally despicable character of Yaldabaoth's minions, the first names are clearly fraudulent parodies of the divine Aeons intended to lead humanity to mistake the lower cosmic rulers for the higher divine Aeons, thus ensuring the rulers' power over a deceived humanity. The second set of names are revealed by the Savior and give the true names of the lower powers. That knowledge brings the power to overcome them.

Another deception consists in misleading people to think that they are material creatures, made of the lower passions of the soul and body. By keeping them ignorant of their true spiritual natures, the rulers then can use the passions of the soul and the enticements of the body to mire humanity in the drunkenness of the flesh, "the fetter of forgetfulness." A fundamental lesson for humanity to learn on the path toward salvation is the knowledge of their true spiritual nature. People have to distinguish not only between good and evil in the cosmos, but also to separate what is good from what is evil in their own bodily and psychic nature. Salvation requires that one overcome the enslavement to the demonic likeness of the world rulers and follow instead the pattern of the true divine Image in body and soul.

The world rulers' chief tools of deception, however, are the pleasures linked to the material body: beauty (appearance), food, wealth, and sexual lust. Each is criticized directly by the *Secret Revelation of John* as deception, but by far the greatest attention is given to sexual desire. The deceptive pleasures of beauty and food are mentioned only once, in the discussion of the trees of paradise:

The chief ruler took (Adam) and placed him in paradise, of which he used to say, "Let it be his delight (*truphé*)," but really in order to deceive him. For their food was bitter and their beauty was depraved. Their food (*trophé*) was a deception and their trees were godlessness. Their fruit was an incurable poison, and their promise was death for them (*SRevJohn* III 20.1-5).

Allegorizing the trees of paradise as false pleasure employs a pun on *trophé*/"delight" as *truphé*/"food" to suggest the theme of deception. It was also a well-established trope in ancient moral literature, which frequently uses food as an allegory of the vices that the soul must learn to resist. A good example appears in a text from Codex VI of Nag Hammadi, the *Authoritative Teaching*:

In this very way we exist in this world, like fish. The adversary spies on us, lying in wait for us like a fisherman wishing to seize us, rejoicing that he might swallow us. For he places many foods before our eyes which belong to this world. He wishes to make us desire one of them and to taste only a little, so that he may seize us with his hidden point and bring us out of freedom and take us into slavery. For whenever he catches us with a single food, it is indeed necessary for <us> not to desire the rest. Finally, then, such things become the food of death.

Now these are the foods with which the devil lies in wait for us. First he injects a pain into your heart until you have heartache on account of a small thing of this life, and he seizes <you> with his poisons. And afterwards (he injects) the desire of a tunic so that you will pride yourself in it, and love of money, pride, vanity, envy that rivals another envy, beauty of body, fraudulence. The greatest of all these are ignorance and ease.

Now all such things the adversary prepares beautifully and spreads out before the body, wishing to make the mind of the soul incline her toward one of them and overwhelm her, like a hook drawing her by force in ignorance, deceiving her until she conceives evil, and bears fruit

of matter, and conducts herself in uncleanness, pursuing many desires, covetousness, while fleshly pleasure draws her in ignorance.

But the soul—she who has tasted these things—realized that sweet passions are transitory. She had learned about evil: she went away from them and she entered into a new conduct. Afterwards she despises this life, because it is transitory. And she looks for those foods that will take her into Life, and leaves behind her those deceitful foods.²¹

Here food symbolizes the desire for all transitory worldly goods, and the vices of greed, covetousness, pride, and envy which spring from them.

Wealth along with its weapons and tools is also condemned in the *Secret Revelation of John*: “They brought them gold and silver and gifts and metals of copper and of iron and every sort. They beguiled them into temptation so that they would not remember their immovable Pronoia” (*SRevJohn* BG 25.11–13). For the *Secret Revelation of John*—and for much of ancient moral discourse—the pleasures of beauty, food, and wealth were considered temptations that draw humanity away from true Divinity. They appear to be good things, but in the end they are transitory and they lead to great evils of the soul.

The topic of sexual pleasure is taken up repeatedly and emphatically throughout the work. The Chief Ruler intends human sexuality to be yet another strategy to dominate humanity; all the versions of the *Secret Revelation of John* agree that the Chief Ruler planted sexual desire in humanity in order to produce more counterfeit copies and increase his rule over the tomb of the body. Yet the *Secret Revelation of John* also insists that this strategy, like so many others, is ultimately ineffective. Adam’s production of Seth occurs according to the pattern of the Divine Realm; it is characterized as self-knowledge of his essential likeness—a cognitive metaphor purged of the ignorance of the passions. Even as the body is not evil *per se*, so too sex is not the problem. Lust, violence, and ignorance are the problems. Bodily reproduction without false desire produces not counterfeit copies, but true likenesses of the image of the divine Human.

Christ's revelation exposes transient beauty, food, material wealth, and lust for what they are: false imitations of divine creativity and spiritual nourishment intended to lead humanity astray by keeping them tied to the ignorance and moral evils of bodily passions. Their "life" is, in fact, death. Their "pleasures" are the spirit-destroying bonds of passion and suffering. Adultery and sexual pollution are the vehicles for every effective thing that the Chief Ruler and his minions achieve: sex with Aponoia produces his minions; the rape of Eve produces Cain and Abel; and finally, the seduction of the "daughters of men" produces hardness of heart and suffering in humanity.²² These sexual acts only parody divine plentitude, but are fundamentally deceptive and violent.

Without divine aid, these deceptions would leave humanity in a state of ignorance. Saviors are needed in order to reveal the truth and enlighten human consciousness so that people can distinguish what is truly good and divine from the false imitations of the world's rulers and their counterfeit spirit. As we have seen, saviors are repeatedly sent from the Divine Realm to counter the moves of Yaldabaoth and his minions. The primary actor in this drama of salvation is Pronoia. She intervenes again and again to bring salvation to the lower world. Each of the saviors who descends is directly connected to her. Even when the Invisible Spirit pours "a Spirit from the perfection" over Sophia, it is through Pronoia that her deficiency is corrected (*SRevJohn* BG 14.24). It is thus Pronoia who acts as Sophia's savior, with the consent and by the will of the transcendent Deity. She sends a voice into the lower world to counter the arrogant boasting of Yaldabaoth and to teach the truth about the holy and perfect Father (*SRevJohn* 15.1-7). "Father" and "first Human" are both epithets of Pronoia, so that it is herself that she reveals. As first Human, she appears in the waters, and the first human, Adam, is patterned after her image. When Sophia petitions for help, Pronoia ("the Father of the All") sends Autogenes and the four Lights to persuade the Chief Ruler to breathe the Spirit of Sophia into Adam.

The jealous rulers' subsequent attempts to trap the Spirit impel the

Father to send “the good Spirit,” Epinoia of the light, who is called “Life” (*SRevJohn* 18.22–23). Again, the epithets—Spirit, Light, Life—are those of Pronoia, so that Epinoia is identified with her (*SRevJohn* 5.17–20), and we are told that Epinoia is sent so that she might aid Sophia in correcting her deficiencies (*SRevJohn* 18.28–29). When the rulers further bind humanity, now by casting them out of paradise, raping Eve, and planting the desire for sexual intercourse in humanity in order to produce more false copies of the first Human, Epinoia illumines Adam so that he recognizes his true essence, and instead of producing counterfeits he begets Seth, the likeness of the true Human.

Further, Pronoia sends her own Spirit to awaken the Spirit of Sophia, which is already dwelling in humanity, and correct all their deficiencies.²³ For Spirit calls to Spirit: “The Mother sent what belongs to her. The Spirit came down to (the generation) to awaken the essence that is like it, following the model of the perfection, that to awaken them from forgetfulness and the wickedness of the tomb” (*SRevJohn* BG 22.29–31). As the final emissary, Christ comes down and gives the revelation to John. He, too, is identified directly with Pronoia (and Epinoia).

The connection of all the saviors with Pronoia can be confusing, leading the reader to wonder at times just what is going on. It functions, however, to link all the revealers of the *Secret Revelation of John* to the highest possible level of the Divine Realm. The transcendent Deity is unknowable, but humanity can gain some knowledge through the emissaries of the second member of the divine triad, Barbelo-Pronoia. She is called Mother, Father, Mother-Father, the first Human (the “Man”), Spirit, Light, and so forth.

At this point, a brief digression about the confusing use of gendered language may be useful. Because the Divine Realm is immaterial, sexual terms do not strictly apply. Nonetheless, gendered terms like mother, father, and son are frequently used metaphorically to describe the nature of the roles that particular figures play and to naturalize their positions in the divine hierarchy. The employment of both masculine and feminine

names and pronouns for Pronoia points to her multiple roles and ambiguous gender identity, while at the same time reminding the reader not to ascribe any fixed sexual or gender identity to her. It may be more appropriate for example to think of Pronoia as the Parent rather than as Mother or Father. Other figures of the Divine Realm seem to have a more fixed gender identity, especially the male and female pairs of Aeons, including Sophia.

The main function of the various savior figures is to bring knowledge. They do not bring rescue from physical dangers or forgiveness of sins; they bring knowledge through revelation. Rather than offer a creed or prescribe a set of rules to be followed, the *Secret Revelation of John* gives an account of Christ's revelation to John. The book itself functions as an instrument of salvation by recording this teaching for those who are able to understand and accept it. His teaching opens their minds and hearts to the reception of the true Spirit and puts them on the path toward spiritual perfection through moral purification and baptism.

It may initially seem counter-intuitive to moderns who have been raised in the shadow of the doctrine of original sin to diagnose the locus of evil in cosmology and human ignorance rather than in the corruption of human will, disobedience, and sin. This view, however, is no innovation. Ancient thinkers generally agreed that accurate knowledge of the ways things are, sound reasoning, and correct judgment were necessary to ethical reflection and to living a just and virtuous life. Ignorance would of course lead to the opposite: unhappiness, moral evil, and disturbance of body and soul. Plato, for example, argued that no one does evil knowingly, but only out of ignorance. A good education, he thought, could instill not only proper moral character, but would lead to happiness. As we saw above, the Stoics argued that the passions of pleasure, grief, desire, and fear, which wracked the self with suffering, were all caused by errors of judgment stemming from ignorance; knowledge of the truth could alleviate this suffering. Tranquility and stability were the marks of wise persons who had come to know the true nature of things and who had formed their reasoning, attitudes, and behavior in accordance with that truth.

The longer version of the *Secret Revelation of John* offers a compelling description of the impact of deception and ignorance on people's lives: "They beguiled the human beings who had followed them into great troubles by leading them astray into much error. They grew old without having enjoyment. They died without having found any truth and without having known the God of Truth. And thus the whole creation became enslaved forever, from the foundation of the world until now" (*SRevJohn* II 25.12–16). On reflection, connecting ignorance and deception with suffering is not that far from contemporary perspectives. Bruce Springsteen expressed a similar sentiment at one of his concerts. He told the crowd:

(W)hen I got older I looked back and I saw that my father, he quit high school and went in the Army and he got married real young and picked up jobs where he could, workin' in a factory, driving a truck. And I look back at my grandfather and he worked in a rug mill in the town that I grew up in. And it seemed like we all had one thing in common and that was that we didn't know enough, *we didn't know enough about what was happening to us*. Like I'm thirty-one now and I just started to read the history of the United States. *And the thing about it is, I started to learn about how things got to be the way they are today, how you end up a victim without even knowing it. And how people get old and just die after not having hardly a day's satisfaction or peace of mind in their lives.*²⁴

This insight that ignorance lies at the root of one kind of helplessness and that education can be empowering for human well-being resonates with the *Secret Revelation of John*. But in at least one respect, the *Secret Revelation of John's* vision differs markedly from those of Plato, the Stoics, or Springsteen. It is a religious vision, whose ideal is found not only in education but in the revelation of Christ. Its goal is not simply "to know enough about what is happening to us" but to perfect humanity's resemblance to the image of God. The *Secret Revelation of John* also teaches that ignorance is not merely the benign absence of good education or proper training, but it can be the result of malicious deception. Ignorance is not merely about not knowing enough, as though the issue is quantity; for the

Secret Revelation of John the core problem is deception and malice. Because the entire world and even the gods who rule it are formed after the pattern of the Divine Realm above, they resemble it. Regardless of whether the world creators actually comprehend how flawed their mimicry is, it still results from their arrogance and malicious desire to dominate. The muddling confusion of true divinity and false copy appears at every level of existence.

The malice of the rulers is realized not only through their acts of deception, but especially by their imprisonment of the Spirit within the psychic and physical body, subjecting people to passion, suffering, and death. The saviors' interventions throughout history to aid humanity culminate in the revelation of Christ and in the sending of the Mother-Pronoiā's Spirit. This knowledge and spiritual support are necessary to help humanity overcome its enslavement to the passions and its subjection to demonic rule.²⁵

The struggle of the soul, framed as a cosmic contest between the true Spirit from the transcendent Divine Realm and the counterfeit spirit of the lower world, is acted out primarily in the arena of ethics.²⁶ As is now clear, knowledge of the true nature and situation of the self, the body, and the world is the basis for this ethical struggle since without revelation of the true nature of the world, it is not possible for the soul, blinded as it is by the impure devices of the counterfeit spirit, to make the proper choices and exercise its freedom.²⁷ The first step toward salvation entails resistance to the deceptive strategies of the world rulers and rejection of their enticements of food, material wealth, and lust through the cultivation of *apatheia*, the complete conquest of the passions. This state may be achieved by the blessed living in the body and the world even here and now. The *Secret Revelation of John* describes this ethical ideal in some detail:

Those upon whom the Spirit of Life descends, having been yoked with the power, they will be saved and become perfect. And they will be worthy to enter these realms of the great Lights. For they will be wor-

thy to be purified there from all evil and the enticements of wickedness (*πονηρία*).²⁸ For they do not give themselves to anything else except this incorruptible congregation, and they attend to it without anger or envy or fear or desire or overindulgence. They are not restrained by any of these nor by anything else in them except only the flesh, to which they are subject while they are waiting fervently for (the time) when they will be brought forth and those who receive (them) will admit them into the honor of the imperishable eternal life and the calling, enduring all things, bearing all things so that they might complete the contest and inherit eternal life (*SRevJohn* BG 23.4–12).

The possession of the Spirit and the practice of *apatheia* neutralize the effective force of the passions, so that the body becomes a purified vehicle to be used until the soul's final release and return to the Light Aeons. Overcoming the rule of the passions is achieved by receiving the Spirit. Its power perfects and purifies the soul, allowing it to turn its full attention away from the body toward that which is incorruptible and eternal. Henri-Charles Puech calls this ideal an ethic of "resemblance."²⁹ Michel Tardieu describes what this means when he says: "The final destiny [of the soul] is not linked to a change of place (passing from earth to heaven) or a change of state (passing from a fleshly body to a resurrection body), but by achieving 'likeness' through the triumph in oneself of the living Spirit over the counterfeit spirit."³⁰ The triumph of the true Spirit over the counterfeit spirit is essentially the triumph of the divine part of a person over the lower passions.³¹ Having achieved this state the soul then bears the vicissitudes of life with complete equanimity, until the final ascent when it goes to its eternal resting place in the Divine Realm.

The *Secret Revelation of John* offers a good example of its theory about the soul's passions in the way it presents the apostle John. At the beginning of the story, John is overcome by the passion of grief because Arimanius is telling him lies and he doesn't know the truth. Then he experiences the passion of fear when Christ appears and the earth shakes.

By the end of the story, however, he has received the teaching of Christ and his grief and fear are replaced by courage and confident knowledge as he goes forth to instruct his fellow disciples.

Although the ideal of *apatheia* is associated with Stoicism, by the second and third centuries CE the ideal of overcoming the passions appears widely dispersed throughout the moral discourse of the Mediterranean world and claimed both Jewish and Christian adherents. For example, the first-century Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria values both the Aristotelian model of moderation and the Stoic doctrine of *apatheia*, but he clearly considers the latter to be superior. In comparing Aaron with Moses, Philo opines that Aaron chooses an inferior, albeit good method to deal with the passions when he “curbs and controls it (passion), first by reason, that being driven by an excellent charioteer it may not get too restive; next he employs the virtues of speech, distinctness, and truth” (*Leg* 128). But Moses, says Philo, takes the better method: “He thinks it necessary to use the knife on the seat of anger in its entirety, and to cut it clean out of the soul, for no moderation of passion can satisfy him; he is content with nothing but complete absence of passion” (*Leg* 129).³² Attainment to God requires leaving behind the body with its senses and irrational passions, and even the capacity for audible speech.³³

Clement of Alexandria considered the healing of the passions to be essential to the Christian life. Writing about the office of teacher in the second-century Alexandrian churches, Clement offers the Son of God, the Word, as the divine model. The Word alone, he says, possesses a soul devoid of human passions, and therefore he alone is without sin: “The Word, our instructor, cures the unnatural passions of the soul by means of exhortations . . . Hence the healing of our passions ensues as a consequence of the assuagements of those examples; the Instructor strengthens our souls, and guides the sick to the perfect knowledge of the truth by His benign commands, as by gentle medicines” (*The Instructor* I, 2; I, 1).³⁴ First the soul is exhorted to right dispositions and character, and then by example to right practice. This dual instruction leads the soul to choose

and imitate the good, and simultaneously to reject its opposite. Hence correct knowledge and healing of the passions belong together in the pursuit of true piety. The Savior in the *Secret Revelation of John* would seem to agree.

Yet despite obvious similarities to the ideals of *apatheia* found in other authors of the period, this commonplace ethic appears in a mythological context in the *Secret Revelation of John* that dramatically changes its meaning. The main point of distinction concerns the body. For Stoics the body is the self; it is morally neutral but can be used. For Platonists like Philo, the body is also the self, albeit the lower self, the source of disorder that needs to be mastered and later transcended. For the *Secret Revelation of John*, however, the body is not the self. The flesh is a kind of prison, but once purified of the passions with the aid of the true Spirit, a person is no longer affected by this fleshly contingency, but can “use” or “bear” the flesh for a time. The flesh might at best be seen as neutral, but it is not subject to eternal salvation. Christ has reconceived the Stoic ethic of *apatheia* by placing it in a context in which the body is not the self. *Apatheia*, then, is not aimed at achieving virtue as an end in itself, but is aimed at restoring the soul’s true spiritual purity.

The *Secret Revelation of John* distinguishes souls on the basis of how well they succeed (*SRevJohn* 23). The most blessed are those who succeed in the total defeat of the passions and restore the perfection of the divine image. There are others upon whom the Spirit has descended, but they have not been able to achieve such a perfect state of virtue and have not defeated the passions completely. They receive the Spirit at birth, but then the counterfeit spirit enters and seduces them so that their souls go astray. They will nonetheless be saved because in the final calculation the power of the Spirit and the intervention of “imperishable oversight” will bring them to the “repose of the aeons.” Yet others receive the Spirit at birth, but are never given any teaching about their true origins. In these, the counterfeit spirit has almost full sway: “It weighs down their soul and draws it to the works of wickedness, and thus brings it to oblivion.” But even such

a soul will ultimately be purified “and so become perfect and saved.”³⁵ Only those who blaspheme against the Spirit will undergo eternal punishment—a position that follows Jesus’ pronouncement in *Mark* 3:28: “Truly I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of humanity, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.”³⁶ The *Secret Revelation of John* characterizes these souls as apostates: those who receive knowledge but then turn away. No repentance is allowed them. The text thus holds that all humanity will be saved, except apostates.³⁷

Each person, however, must undergo a period of appropriate instruction or punishment to be purified from wickedness before it will achieve a final rest. Some are so mired by the passions and the counterfeit spirit that they cannot find their way, and are only saved from reincarnation by following a pure soul who possesses the Spirit of Life. John asks the Lord, “How does the soul become smaller and enter again into the nature of the mother or the human?” The Savior responds, “That soul is made to follow another in whom the Spirit of Life dwells. By following and obeying him, it is saved. It is not cast into another flesh” (*SRevJohn* 23.32–36). The Savior is recommending that an individual become the student of a teacher who is able to lead the soul to salvation. Every student who follows the model of the teacher will escape reincarnation.

This kind of division of humanity into groups based on character or behavior is another commonplace of ancient thought. Moral teaching was often formulated as a choice between “two ways”: the path of life or death. A person was imagined coming to a crossroads and having to choose whether to walk in virtue or to take the opposite road of vice.³⁸ But it was usually understood that most people were neither entirely good nor entirely evil, but occupied a third intermediate category. As in the *Secret Revelation of John*, the division of humanity may point to the ultimate fate of individuals. The *Book of Revelation*, for example, holds that martyrs, having been perfected by their obedience unto death, will inherit eternal life and reign with God for a thousand years. The rest will wait for the final judg-

ment, some for eternal blessedness, others for eternal punishment (*Rev* 20:4–15). Similarly, Tertullian holds that at death, when the soul separates from the body, all souls go to Hades—all souls, that is, except those of the martyrs, whose deaths have already purified them from their sins. Souls experience the rewards and punishments due them in Hades, waiting for the final resurrection when they will be reunited with their bodies and subjected to judgment. Believers will then be purified through various punishments and thus gain a blessed existence, while unbelievers will have no chance for repentance and will be subject to eternal torment (*Treatise on the Soul* 55, 58; *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 8). All these works agree that only a very small group achieves perfection in this life; most must undergo purification before they are able to attain eternal blessedness. For *Revelation* and Tertullian, however, most souls are doomed to eternal suffering; for the *Secret Revelation of John* the vast majority will be saved, while salvation will be denied to only a few apostates.

In every case, the judgment of souls is based on their behavior in this life, and the standards are very similar: freedom from lust, envy, anger, and other passions, moderation in food and drink, renunciation of wealth, faithfulness in persecution and temptation, and so on. The desert father Antony writes in a letter to his fellow-monks that there are three kinds of souls whom the Word of God has called: those who never depart from the goodness in which they were created, but easily attain the virtues through the guidance of God's Spirit; those who repent and put forth effort upon hearing about the suffering of the wicked and the blessed promises for those who progress in virtue; and finally those whose hearts are hardened from the beginning, but who repent in the face of afflictions sent by God. He says nothing about anyone receiving eternal punishment for not repenting, possibly because he accepts the teaching of universal salvation promulgated by Origen, a theologian with whom he has obvious affinities, or perhaps simply because his audience is made up solely of Christians, all of whom have taken the first step toward perfection. He concludes his letter with encouragement and practical advice: "If the soul

endures and obeys what the Spirit has taught it about repentance, then the Creator has mercy on the weariness of its repentance through the labours of the body, such as prolonged fasts, vigils, much study of the Word of God and many prayers, as well as the renunciation of the world and human things, humility, and contrition. And if it endures in all this, then God the merciful sees its patience in the temptations and has mercy and helps it.”³⁹

Writing from Egypt in the 3rd century, Antony was much influenced by Alexandrian theology.⁴⁰ This puts him chronologically and geographically close to those who composed, translated, and read the *Secret Revelation of John*. Although there are significant differences in Antony’s theological approach from that of the *Secret Revelation of John*, notably his belief that the God of the Hebrew scriptures is the true God and Creator, the kinds of spiritual practices advocated by Antony would probably have been affirmed by those who followed the *Secret Revelation of John*. Indeed, this common affinity for ascetic spiritual practices may well have been what made the *Secret Revelation of John* attractive to the Pachomian monks.⁴¹

This kind of thinking was not unique to Christians, however.⁴² Since Pythagoras and Plato, philosophers had been discussing the differences among people, assigning them to different categories as a way of articulating their ideals of how one should live. Philo, for example, divides people into three groups: the earthborn who live to satisfy the pleasures of the body and to avoid pain; the heavenborn who love learning but only use it for practical matters; and the Godborn prophets and priests whose love of learning leads them to ascend beyond sense perception to the realm of imperishable and incorporeal Ideas (*On the Giants*, 60–61). Similarly, Plotinus divides people into various kinds of birds based on nearly identical criteria: birds who have wings but can’t fly, birds who fly low, and high-fliers. Here again the classification depends upon the soul’s progress beyond sense perception and the realm of the body to the perception of the transcendent divine. For both Philo and Plotinus, people can move from the lower category to the higher through the pursuit of philosophy.

Philosophers were also interested in accounting for how these differences arose among people to begin with, and in doing so they had to deal with the question of justice, given the different conditions of people's lives, such as poverty and wealth. Some Christians suggested that such differences were inherent in creation. They interpreted the three sons of Adam in *Genesis* as the progenitors of the three classes of humanity: "From Adam three natures are derived: first the irrational from which Cain comes; secondly, the rational and just from which Abel springs; and thirdly the spiritual from which Seth comes" (*ExTheo* 54.1). There were fervent objections that such a schema offended divine justice, and most philosophers sought to account for how people were responsible for the conditions in which they found themselves. One sophisticated set of ideas developed around notions about the descent of the soul into bodies. In Plato, this speculation tends to be tied to a theory of reincarnation; souls are either placed in the types of bodies and conditions that matched their behavior in a previous life (*Timaeus* 90e–92c) or lots are cast and people choose the life they would have (*Republic* 10). Each life has within it the opportunity for advancing in virtue until the soul is finally able to ascend to dwell among the eternal stars. Iamblichus suggests, however, that souls had different motives for taking on the flesh. Those that are entirely free of the passions descend in order to aid in purifying and perfecting the material realm. Those not entirely free descend for the correction of their moral lives, while those who are dragged down and driven by the passions are sent for punishment and judgment.⁴³

The *Secret Revelation of John* clearly is wrestling with these same issues about why souls come to be in bodies to begin with, and what is the basis for justice given human suffering and death. It argues that the divine Spirit becomes trapped in the body as a consequence of Sophia's bold act and her offspring's ignorant malice. Her defect is corrected when humanity overcomes its likeness to the Rulers and is perfected in the image of the Divine. The story thus implies that souls in some sense share in Sophia's guilt (even as in other Christian theologies humanity suffers the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin without being individually culpable).

They are responsible for their ignorance and sinful behavior, and indeed may be condemned if they are given the opportunity for salvation and reject it as do the apostates. With the help of revelation and the support of the Spirit, life in the lower world provides the opportunity to overcome the power of the passions and to ascend back to the Divine Realm. There is also a hint that some souls are entirely innocent; they dwell in the lower world in order to aid others, and save them from reincarnation (*SRevJohn* 23.33–36). Thus the *Secret Revelation of John* affirms human choice and responsibility. People are measured on their resemblance to divine perfection, by extirpating the passions, accepting the true teaching, and living a sinless life.

The *Secret Revelation of John* is most distinctive in how it understands the human condition. However the philosophers and theologians discussed above may have accounted for the different conditions of human life, in one way or another they all affirm the justice and goodness of the current arrangements, and they emphasize moral choice, responsibility, and the justice of due recompense. But the *Secret Revelation of John* produces a much more complex picture in which on the one hand, the injustice in people's lives is not solely the fault of individuals, but rather attributable to the wickedness of the world rulers and the machinations of the counterfeit spirit. Suffering is very often the result of structural evil that is not a person's fault. On the other hand, people are responsible for overcoming their sinful condition, and are held responsible if they reject the truth.

How can we understand this apparent contradiction? The answer may appear to be disarmingly simple: People are only responsible for what they have control over. Stoic philosophers had already affirmed this, suggesting that people cannot choose whether to be born rich or poor, healthy or infirm, but that their attitude toward that condition is a matter of choice. The issue becomes more complicated, however, when we note that Stoic philosophers considered external conditions to be neutral; they argued that apparent evils like poverty and disease aren't really evils at all when

properly viewed. The *Secret Revelation of John*, however, insists that such structural conditions are real and really evil, and that they need to be actively resisted and overcome.

Thus the issue is twofold: what is the nature of the world in which free will can be exercised, and what are the limits of free will? In the *Secret Revelation of John*, free will is limited to the capacity to cultivate one's soul within the objective, structural conditions of a universe created and ruled by ignorant, arrogant, and malicious beings. Christ's revelation does not depart from conventional moral teaching in antiquity—the specific qualities that Christ associates with good or evil are unexceptional—the radical move lies in ascribing evil to the world's creators and rulers. This evil is not considered to be merely the deviation of a few bad rulers, but the very nature of ruling power in the world below. In its historical context such belief was not merely unexpected; it was revolutionary.

Revealed knowledge and the power of the Spirit are also necessary to help humanity cleanse the body of demonic influence. In the previous chapter describing the creation of the body, we saw that the *Secret Revelation of John* details the names of the angelic powers that have power over the psychic and material body. The longer version in particular provides an extensive list of the demons who have charge over each part of the body. Scholars have cited this demonic connection as an example of the hatred of the body and alienation inculcated by the *Secret Revelation of John*, but the view that fickle and wicked gods and demons are responsible for much human suffering, especially mental and physical illnesses, was widely held in antiquity. One sees a similar conception illustrated in the following dialog from the *Corpus Hermeticum*:

“Am I without the power, then, father?”

“May it not be so, my child. Draw it to you, and it will come. Wish it, and it happens. Leave the senses of the body idle, and the birth of divinity will begin. Cleanse yourself of the irrational torments of matter.”

“Do I have tormenters in me, father?”

“More than a few, my child; they are many and frightful.”

“I am ignorant of them, father.”

“This ignorance, my child, is the first torment; the second is grief; the third is incontinence; the fourth, lust; the fifth, injustice; the sixth, greed; the seventh, deceit; the eighth, envy; the ninth, treachery; the tenth, anger; the eleventh, recklessness; the twelfth, malice. There are twelve in number, but under them are many more besides, my child, and they use the prison of the body to torture the inward person with the sufferings of sense. Yet they withdraw (if not all at once) from one to whom god has shown mercy, and this is the basis of rebirth, the means and method” (*Corpus Hermeticum* 7).

Christ seeks to save humanity from these influences. The primary method is through the practice of the ethics of *apatheia*, since ridding oneself of the power of the passions cleanses the self from the influence of the demons who control the body. As we have seen, the first step comes when the true knowledge of God dispels ignorance. This results in repentance, modeled here by Sophia who repents when she sees the deleterious consequences of her bold action.⁴⁴ Sexual abstinence, fasting, and detachment from material goods may have been advocated to rid the spiritual soul of the influence of the passions. But additional practices were used for healing and empowerment against the demons; chief among these were baptism and magical invocation.⁴⁵

Baptism seems to have afforded some protection by itself.⁴⁶ In a passage unique to the longer version (II/IV), we are told that when Pronoia descends, she calls out the name of the soul, commanding him to rise up and to remember. She warns him to guard against the “angels of poverty and the demons of chaos and all those who ensnare you” and also against the body (“the garment of the inside of Hades”). She then raises him up and seals him in the light of the water with the five seals “so that death would not have power over him from this day on” (*SRevJohn* II 26.30–

33).⁴⁷ These actions confer the Spirit, which works within the soul to strengthen it against the operations of the counterfeit spirit. As the Savior tells John: “Those upon whom the Spirit of Life comes will live in any case and come out from evil. For the power enters into every human being—for without it, it is not possible for them to stand upright” (*SRevJohn* 23.14–15). Baptismal sealing brings the power of the Spirit into the soul to strengthen it in its battle against the passions and the power of the counterfeit Spirit.

Although the shorter versions of the *Secret Revelation of John* (BG and III) do not contain the account of Pronoia’s descent and baptism of the soul, the basic theology of baptism and anointing is present. The source of pure light and the image of anointing as spiritual perfection is found in the images of the Father and Christ.⁴⁸ The description of the Father’s self-contemplation in his light-water which produces Pronoia (*SRevJohn* 5.8) is based on an intertextual reading of *Genesis* with Jewish wisdom literature. The Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters (*Gen* 1.2) is figured as the Father’s act of self-contemplation. The light which surrounds him is identified with the primal water, and the light which is produced is Pronoia herself. As Sevrin notes,⁴⁹ this act of self-contemplation depends upon understanding the water to function as a kind of mirror, an image immediately reminiscent of *Wisdom of Solomon* 7.25–27: “For (Wisdom) is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God and an image of his goodness. Though she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets.” In the *Secret Revelation of John* the “image of his goodness” appears in the figure of Christ, who is “anointed with goodness.” This complex set of intertextual references to *Genesis* and *Wisdom of Solomon* offers a compact reflection on the meaning of baptism as the return to the primordial light of the Father through the water of baptism and anointing by Pronoia-Christ.

From this self-contemplation comes forth Barbelo-Pronoia, and from her comes Autogenes-Christ, who is “anointed with his Christhood/goodness until he became perfect, not lacking in any Christhood/goodness” (SRevJohn 7.8). Alistair Logan argues that the same process is repeated with the soul: “once it becomes conscious of its real state through the saving knowledge and repents, it is reborn (through baptism in the living water) and has the Spirit descend on it” (through chrismation or sealing).⁵⁰ Baptism is conceived as the return to the Divine Realm through the simultaneous reception of knowledge and the power of the Spirit.⁵¹

Jean-Marie Sevrin has suggested that this theology is tied to a ritual of baptism.⁵² We can imagine a rite in which the initiates’ names are called out; they hear and respond.⁵³ They are then admonished to remember and follow their “root,” which implies accepting the teaching of the divine emissary Pronoia-Christ, and engaging in the practices that guard them against the machinations of the archons. These admonitions would presumably follow upon instruction and moral disciplines. The initiate would then be “raised up,” which may have involved moving to a standing position, an act which would symbolize the movement from the lower world to the Divine Realm. Finally, the initiate would be sealed with water baptism which confers immortality.

Precisely how baptism of the “five seals” was performed is not clear.⁵⁴ As John Turner notes, “sealing” is a common term among Christians for water baptism; the problem lies in understanding what is implied by the number five, which appears not only in the *Secret Revelation of John*, but in the related Sethian writings the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the so-called *Untitled Treatise* in the Bruce Codex.⁵⁵ “Does it refer to a single act performed five times, e.g., a quintuple immersion in contrast to the typically triple immersion of Christian baptism, or does it refer to five ritual acts comprising the rite, or to some mysterious transcendental Pentad of names or aeons? The texts do not tell us.”⁵⁶ Yet two passages in particular are suggestive.

In the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the savior Protennoia describes herself as

the Word who “pours forth a living water from the invisible, unpolluted, immeasurable Spring that is the unreproducible voice of the glory of the Mother, the glory of the offspring of God” (*TrimProt* 46.14–21). In a triple descent, strikingly similar to that of Pronoia at the end of the longer version of the *Secret Revelation of John*, she brings this heavenly water of life to the soul. Her action strips the soul of darkness and clothes it in a shining light, the true knowledge of God. Then the soul puts on robes and is baptized by immersion in the spring of the water of life, enthroned and glorified. Afterward he is taken into the place of light where “[he received] the five seals from [the light] of the Mother, Protennoia, and it was [granted] him [to] partake of [the mystery] of knowledge, and [he became a light] in Light” (*TrimProt* 48.7–35). This extensive description of Protennoia’s action suggests a five-fold ritual involving investiture, baptism, enthronement, crowning (glorification), and enlightenment.⁵⁷

The *Gospel of the Egyptians* suggests that “the enunciation of the five seals in the spring-baptism” may also have involved the utterance of secret sounds that invoke the heavenly deities. It also describes the person being baptized as stretching out his hands, folded in the shape of a circle to symbolize the riches of the light. He subsequently proclaims, “The incense of life is in me,” and mixes it with water “after the model of the archons in order that I may live with thee in the peace of the saints,” suggesting that the incorporeal heavenly light (represented by incense) is mixed with water for the ritual (*GosEg* 66.26–68.1). Gesine Schenke further suggests that the “five seals” are actually five mysterious names, which aid in the soul’s ascent to the Realm of Light. During baptism, each name is called out and the person being baptized receives a seal, probably a gesture of the hand to the forehead. The person thus learns the five secret names which can be invoked as passwords during the ascent through the spheres of the world rulers, allowing the soul to pass without hindrance.⁵⁸

Logan offers an alternative scenario for the baptism of the “five seals,” pointing out that “In the *Apocryphon* salvation involves the soul, not the

body. Certainly the initiated soul is required to live an ascetic life, but the temptations to avoid are surely more psychic than physical: the whole myth revolves round visions and voices, true and counterfeit spirits." He goes on to suggest that "what were anointed were the organs for which souls can be assumed to possess equivalents: two eyes, two ears, and a mouth. Further, such anointing I surmise would be in the name of the Self-Begotten, Christ and his four accompanying guardian angels, who clearly play a central role in the Gnostic myth. Each organ would be anointed with a special formula in the name of one of the five."⁵⁹

All of these suggestions are plausible. Given the lack of specific information about the ritual practice known to the audiences of the *Secret Revelation of John*, we can only exercise a disciplined imagination about what the ritual may have looked like. The meaning of the ritual, however, is quite clear: baptismal sealing conferred salvation through the reception of the Spirit and strengthened the soul in its battle against the demonic forces arrayed against it. It ensured that in the end, the Spirit-filled soul would ascend to the Divine Realm of light.

A second type of practice used to aid against the demons involved healing. As we argued in the last chapter, the list of demons in the *Secret Revelation of John* functions to help cleanse the body of evil influence and thereby bring about healing.⁶⁰ There are several reasons to think that the catalog of demons served some such purpose. The detailed care with which each demon's name is given suggests that the list is not a merely academic exercise. As we have seen, the fact that the total number of the demons is 365 suggests an astrological connection with the solar calendar, and hence the powers of Fate. The demons are clearly said to be in charge of the various parts of the body and the passions.⁶¹ A large body of evidence confirms that in this period many people believed that knowing the name of a demon gave a person power over it.⁶² Such views were, however, not without their critics. Plotinus, for example, writes in his treatise "Against the Gnostics":

For when they write magic chants, intending to address them to those powers, not only to the soul but to those above it as well, what are they doing except making the powers obey the word and follow the lead of people who say spells and charms and conjurations? . . . But when they say they free themselves from diseases, if they meant that they did so by temperance and orderly living, they would speak well, just as the philosophers do; but in fact they assume that the diseases are evil spirits (*daimona*), and claim to be able to drive them out by their word (*Enn* II 9.14.1–15).⁶³

Plotinus here describes an example of precisely what I believe to be the function of the list of demons in the longer version of the *Secret Revelation of John*: to drive out diseases from the body through magical performances involving control of the demons who cause disease. Such practices clearly sought to purify and heal the soul and body by overcoming demonic power and curing the afflictions of material nature and the passions. The list of body parts and the demons who control them is thus a practical guide for use in illness and duress. The list does not point toward hatred of the body, but rather toward a practical attempt to restore health and protect the purity of its divine image.

The names of the demons listed in the melothesia, especially in the longer version in codices II/IV, was primarily used to gain power over them in order to heal the body. As Celsus put it, “By invoking these (demons) they heal the suffering of the various parts.” Although the *Secret Revelation of John’s* valuation of these divinities was much more negative than that found in Egyptian, Hermetic, or astrological sources, Quack suggests that this is merely a consequence of the widely held view that the lower divinities were capricious, jealous, and often dangerous.⁶⁴ The *Secret Revelation of John’s* negative attitude toward demons does not, however, preclude seeing them as sources of healing; the issue is control.

The *Secret Revelation of John* offers an illustration of the human condi-

tion and a model of salvation in the figure of the disciple John. As the *Secret Revelation of John* opens, Christ's disciple John is going up to the temple.⁶⁵ A Pharisee named Arimanius confronts him, asking where his master is. As we have already noted, the reader may suspect that this question is not entirely innocent, since tellingly enough the Pharisee's name is a variant of Ahriman—the Zoroastrian god of darkness and evil.⁶⁶ Presumably, Arimanius knows of Jesus' death and is merely being sly. John replies, "He has gone again to the place from which he came," words reminiscent of Jesus' declaration in the *Gospel of John*: "I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me . . . I go to prepare a place for you" (8:42; 14:3). But Arimanius apparently rejects John's explanation, even as the Jews do in *GosJohn* 8.42–47; he reproaches John, charging that his master had led him into apostasy: "This Nazarene deceived you with error. He filled your ears with lies, and he shut your hearts. He turned you from the traditions of your fathers" (*SRevJohn* 2.4–5). Although placed in the mouth of an antagonist, Arimanius' accusation accurately reflects a basic human problem: Ignorance of the truth makes a person vulnerable to lies; it makes one susceptible to hardness of heart and prone to treacherous apostasy. Just so, the deceptions of Arimanius occasion doubt and anguish in John.

Beset by grief and doubt because he has no answers to the Pharisee's questions, John wanders "away from the temple to the mountain, a desert place," a spatial setting that metaphorically suggests one must turn away from worship of the lower false gods and from the things of the world in order to comprehend the truth. Suddenly the heavens open and the whole creation below is illumined and shaken by Christ's appearance. The chasm between above and below is bridged, and the true light, Christ, shines forth into the lower world. The Savior appears in multiple forms in the light; he is the Father, the Mother, and the Son.⁶⁷ He addresses John by name, asking rhetorically: "John, why do you doubt and why are you afraid?" (*SRevJohn* 3.9). Without waiting for a reply, he reassures John that he has come to bring the full revelation of the knowledge of all that is and

has come into being and will come into being.⁶⁸ In short, it is in Christ that the full mission of divine wisdom to illumine humankind and heal the defect of ignorance is fully manifest. Although later the Savior concedes that his revelation is only “the likeness of the light”—since the transcendent Deity is ultimately incomprehensible—nonetheless he gives as full a revelation as can be comprehended (*SRevJohn* BG 5.1–2).

A long discourse follows, styled as the instruction of a teacher to his student. It is this revelation that John is to inscribe in the text of the *Secret Revelation of John*. And ultimately the book itself takes on the role of revealer, providing instruction for those who read and study it.⁶⁹ Christ’s aim is to remove John’s doubt by comforting him, answering his questions, and teaching him the full truth. At the end of the *Secret Revelation of John*, John himself is sent out and passes on Christ’s revelation to his fellow disciples. He models for the reader the path of spiritual development—from ignorance and doubt to secure knowledge, from disturbance of heart to confidence, from student to teacher.⁷⁰ Indeed the reader is implicitly invited to identify with John and take the position of a fellow student, moving with him through the stages of spiritual development toward complete understanding and purification. Salvation requires knowledge of the truth and purification from all wickedness. These are achieved through instruction, moral purification, and rituals of baptism and healing.

Conclusions

Because the situation of the soul in the world is one of entrapment by and subjection to the powers that unjustly rule the world, salvation means overcoming these forces and returning to the good and just rule of the transcendent Deity. For the soul, this means first of all receiving the truth of revelation through study, repentance, and moral practices. Through baptism, the initiate receives the holy Spirit and is sealed against the power of demons. Additional aid is given through the knowledge of the names of the demons and the parts of the body over which they have power, offering the possibility of healing through magical control. Accu-

rate knowledge of the true nature of the world and humanity's place in it, supplied by the Savior, allows people to distinguish between the parodic mimicry of the lower gods and the true image of the Divine. The primary aim of this revelation is the cultivation of moral insight in order to obtain freedom from the domination of the counterfeit spirit and the malicious powers that rule the world. The revelation inscribed in the *Secret Revelation of John* exposes the deceptions employed by Yaldabaoth and his cronies, and teaches the soul to resist their false domination.

Although salvation may seem to be the concern only of individuals, the *Secret Revelation of John* emphasizes the collective return of the All to the proper rule of the transcendent Deity: "And (the Spirit) remained like this for a while: it labored on behalf of her seed so that when the Spirit from the holy aeon should come, it will set right the deficiency by (establishing) the uprightness of the aeon, so that it might become a holy perfection; thus it would come to pass that there would be no deficiency in it" (SRevJohn BG 22.34–37). Salvation is thus a reflection of the collective unity of all things.

The most distinctive emphasis of the *Secret Revelation of John's* conception of salvation lies in the centrality of the soul's struggle against the malicious powers that rule the world. It must be able to discern the illegitimate domination of the powers and resist their seductions and false claims in order to form the soul into likeness to the true Deity above. In conceiving salvation this way, the *Secret Revelation of John* inseparably links spiritual formation, social criticism, and resistance to evil.

5

Utopian Desire, Social Critique, and Resistance

THE *SECRET REVELATION OF JOHN*'S insistence that the rulers of the lower world are arrogant, unjust, and malicious was a bold and subversive position to take in a world whose rulers styled themselves as servants of the gods and purveyors of justice. The Romans justified their right to rule a vast empire by asserting that the gods had favored them due to their exemplary virtue; those who opposed them stood against divine providence and justice. Widely honored as the chosen agent of the gods on earth, the emperor was worshipped in cities and provinces throughout the Empire.¹ Direct affronts or armed revolt met with uncompromising and often violent response. Even though the *Secret Revelation of John* did not advocate overt rebellion but masked its critique in the recondite language of revelation, nonetheless to style the gods as arrogant pretenders was to take a risk.² Numerous examples demonstrate that criticism alone, unaccompanied by any actual intent to overthrow Roman power, could provoke violent retribution. The Roman historian Tacitus reports that Nero pronounced a death sentence on the Stoic philosophers Seneca and Thrasea merely because they advocated that a ruler should be a model of virtue—a position that was taken as treacherous criticism of Nero's dissolute living. Christians too were condemned to death by Nero for their "hatred of the human race," as well as on trumped-up charges of arson. Although Tacitus agrees that Christians follow a "pernicious superstition" deserving of punishment, he says that Nero's cruelty was so extreme that "there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed

not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man.”³ Over the next centuries, more Christians would die for their “atheism” and “treason” in refusing to give divine honors to the emperor. Indeed through the four hundred year period from the Republic to the Empire, judicial punishments in general became increasingly savage and increasingly public. Because the powerful could arbitrarily practice cruelty with impunity in the name of “law and order” over those who suffered without recourse, oppressive violence was associated with ruling power and class privilege.⁴ It was this period that produced the *Secret Revelation of John’s* radical critique of power relations in the world below.⁵

The critique operates by sharply contrasting the ideal realm of the divine with the mundane world.⁶ The portrait of the transcendent Deity represents the utopian commitments of the *Secret Revelation of John*, while Yaldabaoth and his minions exemplify everything that is wrong. The breach between them marks the nearly unbridgeable gap between the imagination of how things were supposed to be and how they were experienced. Christ repeatedly represents evil as hierarchy overturned, both in the deadly sway of the passions over the soul and in the inverted governance of the cosmos whose rulers work to deceive and entrap humanity. In this mythic economy, the inferior wrongly attempt to rule the superior. They rule not for the good of the governed but to satisfy their own arrogance and lust for dominance. Their repeated resort to deception and violence to maintain their illusory power merely underscores the illegitimacy of their right to rule. This portrayal leads ineluctably into a foundational critique of power relations in the world.

We can most clearly discern the implications of the *Secret Revelation of John’s* critique by reading it in the context of the dominant ideology of its time. Plato’s *Timaeus* offers a good starting point, not least because Platonizing philosophy continued to offer a powerful framework for political theorizing into the Roman period. The *Timaeus* places a high valuation upon the hierarchically ordered exercise of power. It stresses the unity of power, purpose, and justice that saturate the natural structures of the

cosmos, the body, and, potentially, all human social, economic, and political organization. In proper governance, the cosmos, society, and self are all interlinked so as to bring harmony, health, and spiritual advancement. In cosmology, this perspective is conveyed through the idea of a just and providential ordering of the cosmos. In social and political life, it is conveyed by the notion that good government and proper education ensure the well-being of those who are ruled and trained. In medicine, health and well-being depend upon the ideal functioning of a hierarchical order in which the rational mind rules over the passions and the lower appetites. The human body itself is designed by the gods to correspond to the structure of the cosmos, as microcosm to macrocosm.

Justice is achieved when all beings take their proper place in the structure of this natural order. This type of thinking gains validity through a logic of hierarchically organized polarities: creator over created, immortal over mortal, mind over body, reason over appetite, male over female, adult over child, free over slave, elder over younger, human over beast. The terms of these polarities tend to cluster by analogy: mind-reason-male-authority over passions-appetite-female-submission. This way of thinking presupposes that hierarchical order is not only natural but good. It is morally right, good, and natural that the superior rule the inferior. When functioning properly, such order ensures happiness and health. When dysfunctional, there is no greater evil.⁷

Although the demise of the independent Greek cities and the rise of empire meant that much of Plato's utopian politics had lost its institutional foundation in practical living, the intellectual framework and values underlying his perspectives were a lively part of political theory throughout the ancient Roman world.⁸ Platonizing views frequently combined with Stoic perspectives to emphasize that true kingship belongs only to those who possess the capacity to rule over their own passions and to govern for the good of the whole human brotherhood. The Stoics argued that a virtuous life must be lived in accord with the natural law of the universe established by divine justice.⁹ Human laws set down by constitutions and

governments should aim at conformity to this divine law. Human individuals and societies belong to the just community of gods and humans designed by Providence by conforming to the natural law of the universe.¹⁰ The king plays a central role in the imagination of the just community, functioning as the representative of the gods on earth.¹¹ As Diotogenes put it: "Now the king bears the same relation to the state as God to the world; and the state is to the world as the king is to God. For the state, made as it is by a harmonizing together of many different elements, is an imitation of the order and harmony of the world, while the king who has an absolute rulership . . . has been transformed into a god among men."¹²

Perhaps surprisingly, the *Secret Revelation of John* evinces a strong commitment to these ideals of Greek and Roman political theory, shown most clearly in its portrait of the Divine Realm. In portraying evil as overturned hierarchy, the *Secret Revelation of John* is not rebelling against the values of its day but affirming them in the strongest terms. It holds the hierarchical ordering of power and authority and the goodness of divine creation, guided by divine Providence (*Pronoia*) to be just. It maintains that it is right and proper for the superior to rule over the inferior for their benefit. It values unity over diversity, and understands unanimity and uniformity as guarantors of social harmony. It tends to figure proper order as patriarchal and kyriarchal, although not without some ambivalence. The *Secret Revelation of John* uncritically deploys many common intellectual assumptions and values of its day to make its arguments. It is in how these ideals are mapped onto the realities of existence under Roman imperial rule that its critique appears.

In the first centuries CE, the Romans drew heavily on the reigning political ideology to bolster their rule. The Roman elite, for example, could and did claim that, because the gods had put them in charge, true piety lay in supporting their regime by respecting and worshipping the gods that supported the state, both local and imperial. Wealth and power were justly conferred on those whose qualities of rationality and virtue best enabled them to govern with justice for the good of all. Individuals

gained salvation by imitating the virtue of those who ruled them.¹³ The family was sacred and marriage supported the social and political status quo.¹⁴ The Roman emperors widely promoted the imperial cult in order to strengthen this ideology which claimed divine support for imperial rule and Roman hegemony generally.¹⁵ This attitude is well illustrated by an excessive bit of Latin panegyric preserved from the end of the third century:

When you [the emperor Maximian] crossed the Alps your divine aura shone forth over all Italy and everyone gathered in astonishment. Altars were lit, incense was placed on them, wine was poured in libation, victims were sacrificed. All were warmed with joy and danced to acclaim you, hymns of praise and thanks were sung to the immortal gods. People invoked, not the god familiar from hearsay, but a Jupiter close at hand, visible and present, they adored a Hercules who was not a stranger but the emperor.¹⁶

The lofty Roman ideals of universal peace, justice, and prosperity were entirely laudable and no doubt warmly received, but the realities too often did not live up to such ideals. Because the Romans so often appealed to these principles to justify their power and wealth, their shortcomings left rulers open to criticism.¹⁷ Philosophical ideals of the good king grated in the face of injustice and brutality. Standards of universal truth faltered in the midst of plural claims from the diverse peoples and cultures of the empire. Paeans to the eternal beauty of the soul mirrored in the cosmos dimmed in the face of physical suffering and death. Critics appealed to the ideology of kingship upheld by the Romans to call upon the powerful and wealthy to live up to the ideals they espoused. Philosophers drew upon Greek traditions against tyranny to fuel their opposition,¹⁸ like the Jewish philosopher Philo in his criticism of the Roman rulers Flaccus and Gaius.¹⁹ Christian apologists frequently did likewise, appealing to the Roman emperors and governors to meet their own standards of justice. Tertullian, for example, calls upon local officials to follow the decrees of the senate

and the commands of their chiefs: "The power of which you are servants is a civil, not a tyrannical domination" but "you play fast and loose with the laws!" He urges them not to assume that "the Christian (is) a man of every crime, an enemy of the gods, of the Emperor, of the laws, of good morals, of all nature," but to seek out the truth, confident that inquiry would exculpate the Christian.²⁰ This is a call for Romans to apply Roman justice.

By expressing an agonizing awareness of the gap between ideals and existence, the *Secret Revelation of John* belongs to this tradition of political and social critique, albeit one formulated in terms of theology and cosmology, not direct censure.²¹ Instead of telling a story like Plato's *Timaeus* in which a clear and seamless line runs from pure, divine origination to the current arrangements of society, the *Secret Revelation of John* tells a story of breaks and ruptures, of the impossibility of establishing truth in a world cut off from the source of all truth, being, and goodness. What appears is not an "historical" continuity that establishes and replicates the natural givenness of the current social arrangements, but a crisis of differentiation—a crisis which only Christ's revelation to John could resolve.

James Scott has argued that resistance is more likely to arise from among those who have bought heavily into a society's dominant ideology and feel betrayed than from those who reject the values of their society.²² The myth of the *Secret Revelation of John* expresses this sensibility of betrayal. It insists that evil arises not merely from the limitations of mortal flesh or the perversity of human will, nor indeed solely from the nature of the cosmos or the body as such, but from the active malevolence of the world rulers. According to its narrative, people live in a world where discerning between the seemingly good and what is authentically good has become impossibly obscured and confused. Only revelation can provide hope and the possibility of salvation in a society and a cosmos gone seriously awry. These people imagined a system in which divine justice and truth reign. It is an almost impossibly utopian system, but one which is heavily invested in the ideals of its age. What marks the mythic imagina-

tion of the *Secret Revelation of John* are not rebellion and impiety, but radical acceptance of ancient ideals of justice and an uncompromising belief in a vision of God's goodness.

Precisely because its ideals are utopian, its critique is harsh and uncompromising. By denying the goodness and justice of Yaldabaoth, the creator God and Chief Ruler of this world, the mythmakers of the *Secret Revelation of John* reject the philosophical belief that living one's life in accord with the pattern of the universe can bring about true piety, rationality, and virtue or lead to social harmony and personal salvation. To align oneself with the pattern of the world rather dooms one to become mired in the evil and injustice of the false gods who created it. There is no possibility of achieving true virtue in such a flawed and perverse world; the only path to goodness and life entails resistance to the violence and deception of the world rulers, and escape from their clutches. Ultimately it is not the body or the world that must be overcome, but the powers who imprison the soul within them. As we saw above, the first order of spiritual business is to unmask their deceptions. In so doing, the *Secret Revelation of John* exposes the powers of the world as false gods and illegitimate rulers filled with violence, deception, and malice; they are bestial, ignorant, and arrogant.

From this perspective, earthly rulers who claimed legitimacy by connecting themselves to the sovereignty of the gods were by implication complicit with Yaldabaoth and his false gods, and were mere tools in their malicious practices of domination, however ignorant of this fact these rulers might be. Wealth and power, which the elite claimed to exercise for the good of the whole populace, were revealed to be a mere simulacrum of the real article of divine generosity. The pious practices of civic and imperial worship, the sacred character and benefits of sacrifice, and the pleasures of reproduction, all were exposed as deceptions intended to keep people enslaved to satisfy the power-hungry world rulers. The very hierarchical order of the lower world was a vicious parody of the true order of the divine economy, serving only to exploit people for the rulers' benefit. Any resem-

blance of the *Secret Revelation of John's* portrait of the world rulers to local and imperial rulers could be lodged as evidence against the legitimacy of their rule and their claims to justice.

And there was a great deal of evidence. If the Romans were arrogant and unjust, was that not just like Yaldabaoth and his minions? If the local leaders did not use their wealth for the good of the populace but to exploit their subjects to support their own extravagant lifestyles, was that not just like Yaldabaoth and his minions? If they were adulterous marriage-breakers, violent, ruthless, and malicious, was that not just like Yaldabaoth and his minions? If they falsely styled themselves as gods and demanded total obedience to their rule, was that not just like Yaldabaoth and his minions? If they demanded blood sacrifice to satisfy their depraved appetites, was that not just like Yaldabaoth and his minions? Who *were* the gods who supported the Romans if not Yaldabaoth and his minions? One work that is closely related to the *Secret Revelation of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, indicates quite clearly that such connections were being made. In a section that provides an account of the triple descent of the savior similar to that of the longer ending of codices II/IV, Pronoia speaks to "the children of the light" about freedom from the power of evil:

"I shall tell you an ineffable mystery that [no] mouth can divulge: Every bond I loosed from you, and the chains of the demons of the underworld, I broke, these things which are bound on my members, restraining them. And the high walls of darkness I overthrew, and the secure gates of those pitiless ones I broke, and I smashed their bars. And the evil force and the one who beats you, and the one who constrains you, and the tyrant, and the adversary, and the one who is king, and the present enemy, indeed all of these I explained to those who are mine, who are the children of the light, in order that they might nullify them all and be saved from all those bonds and enter into the place where they were at first" (*TrimProt* 41.2–20).²³

Here the need to be saved from tyrants and kings is made explicit. The world below is represented as a dark prison in which pitiless rulers beat

and constrain the children of light. Salvation means escape from injustice and violence. This generalized representation comes as close to explicit criticism of actual authorities as might have been safe. By naming kings and tyrants as regents of the evil force of darkness and demons, *Trimorphic Protennoia* boldly points out the similarities between them.

Because myths like the *Secret Revelation of John* or *Trimorphic Protennoia* are concerned solely with “non-historical fantasy,” they are often seen not only as *apolitical* but as *anti-political*, purveyors of an escapist ideology that only serves to distract people from real political resistance by focusing on interior spiritual development and flight from the material world with all its troubling demands. Because the *Secret Revelation of John* doesn’t advocate a plan for rebellion or positive social change, some would say it is not political at all.²⁴ That would not be accurate. The *Secret Revelation of John*’s reconceptualizing of the cosmological framework for understanding power relations in the lower world is a practical activity with potential historical consequences.

Although it has been a commonplace to exclude covert forms of resistance from consideration as real political activity, new research among social scientists is changing this view dramatically. James Scott, for example, has insisted that it is important to look beyond the publicly acknowledged arena of the overt exercise of political power and revolution to the everyday practices of resistance. His perspective is of such importance to our topic that it is useful to quote him at length:

Until quite recently, much of the active political life of subordinate groups has been ignored because it takes place at a level we rarely recognize as political. To emphasize the enormity of what has been, by and large, disregarded, I want to distinguish between the open, declared forms of resistance, which attract most attention, and the disguised, low-profile, undeclared resistance that constitutes the domain in *infra-politics* . . . For contemporary liberal democracies in the West, an exclusive concern for open political action *will* capture much that is significant in political life. The historic achievement of political liberties

of speech and association has appreciably lowered the risks and difficulty of open political expression. Not so long ago in the West, however, and, even today, for many of the least privileged minorities and marginalized poor, open political action will hardly capture the bulk of political action. Nor will an exclusive attention to declared resistance help us understand the process by which new political forces and demands germinate before they burst on the scene. How, for example, could we understand the open break represented by the civil rights movement or the black power movement in the 1960s without understanding the offstage discourse among black students, clergymen, and their parishioners?

Taking a long historical view, one sees that the luxury of relatively safe, open political opposition is both rare and recent. The vast majority of people have been and continue to be not citizens, but subjects. So long as we confine our conception of *the political* to activity that is openly declared we are driven to conclude that subordinate groups essentially lack a political life or that what political life they do have is restricted to those exceptional moments of popular explosion. *To do so is to miss the immense political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt*, and that, for better or worse, is the political environment of subject classes. It is to focus on the visible coastline of politics and miss the continent that lies beyond.²⁵

In attending to political activities, both public and disguised forms of domination and resistance have to be considered.²⁶ In Scott's research, religion is frequently one of the offstage sites where such resistance occurs. It offers an autonomous social space for the assertion of dignity and for the formulation of an alternative ideology that challenges and negates the reigning ideology.²⁷ I am suggesting that the *Secret Revelation of John* contains elements of just such a resistant, offstage transcript, both in its assertion of the essential goodness and dignity of human beings, and in its potential for "negating the public symbolism of ideological domination"

present in civic and imperial cult activity and in hegemonic claims to divine legitimation.

One characteristic of such covert resistance, Scott proposes, is the need for disguise.²⁸ This strategic camouflaging appears in several forms in the *Secret Revelation of John*. First by ascribing its authorship to a legendary hero, the apostle John, the text achieves an effective mask of anonymity for its real authors and readers. By attributing its message to a divine revealer, it conceals any human target who can be condemned for its content. Second, the mythic content of the work itself disguises the critique by cloaking it in complex mythic terms that are cryptic and parodic.²⁹ Because it doesn't actually mention any local or imperial figure or office, the critique remains difficult to identify, monitor, or control.³⁰ Finally, the so-called "esotericism" of the work provides another kind of protective disguise. The injunction to John at the conclusion of the work that he keep these things "secure," accompanied by a curse upon anyone who distributes the teachings lightly, usefully restricts the circles in which the written work might circulate. In short, in both form and content, the *Secret Revelation of John* evinces those camouflaging characteristics expected of ideological resistance written in a "voice under domination."³¹

The practical effects of ideological resistance can be illustrated by looking at the relationship of Christianity to the Roman Empire more broadly. Christians expressed a rather wide range of views about the Romans, from identifying them with Satan (in the *Book of Revelation*) to seeing them as God's tool for the spread of the Gospel (in *Luke* and *Acts*).³² The Romans, however, tended increasingly to see Christians as a threat to social and political order, and sent many to their deaths. And perhaps not entirely without reason.

Christians opposed Roman power in many respects, notably in refusing to participate in religious sacrifices and festivals and in criticizing Greek and Roman myths of the gods. Church and state were not legally separate in the Roman Empire, nor was religion relegated to the private sphere of morality.³³ Walk into any major city of the Eastern Roman Empire of the

first centuries CE, and you would have been greeted by the temples, altars, and statues of the gods. Poets and philosophers invoked the gods for their inspiration; citizens worshipped and praised them for their benefactions in public festivals and sacrifices; sufferers supplicated them with prayers and offerings for healing and safety; and magicians adjured them to obey their will. Astrologers charted the path of the stars and planets, provided amulets against their more malign influences and advised on how to take advantage of their courses. Markets were organized around the calendar of sacred festivals. Sanctuaries were repositories of collective wealth, the “banks” of antiquity. The gods were present in every aspect of ancient life, from the social, political, and economic to the most intimate privacy of the heart.

To worship the local gods was the duty of every citizen and subject, for these were the gods that supported the Empire and their own cities. As Christians knew, to refuse this duty was considered treason, so that when Christians called these gods “demons” and “fallen angels” they had launched no less than a full attack on the mythic foundations of the Roman state and the very fabric of the social order.³⁴ Clement of Alexandria, for example, asks rhetorically: “Is this Jupiter the good, the prophetic, the patron of hospitality, the protector of suppliants, the benign, the author of omens, the avenger of wrongs? Rather, (he is) the unjust, the violator of right and of law, the impious, the inhuman, the violent, the seducer, the adulterer, the amatory!”³⁵ Clement quite judiciously made no mention of the emperor, saving his biting remarks for the supreme Roman god, but as the charges of treason and impiety against Christians illustrate, the Romans got the point anyway. Dale Martin observes that “In apocalypticism, *all* human rulers are stand-ins for cosmic agents.”³⁶ It would seem that the reverse applied as well, and not just in apocalyptic forms of Christian theology.

In defending Christians charged with impiety, atheism, immorality, misanthropy and treason, Christian apologists like Justin and Athenagoras protested their innocence loudly, insisting that they were pious citi-

zens, loyal to the emperor and to all governing authorities. They passionately acknowledged the obedience and submission that mortals owed to the divine, and that subjects owed to the state. But perhaps they protested too loudly? Christians simultaneously engaged in less direct criticism of the gods themselves by drawing in part upon philosophical critiques of traditional religion, especially the disparaging view of the immorality of the gods' activities in myths, and the idea that the gods require and enjoy propitiatory sacrifice.³⁷ In the second and third centuries, Christians drew upon and even enhanced such disparagement for their own ends, mocking such falsely-styled gods as demons and fallen angels, and contrasting them with the rule of the true God. The second-century Christian apologist Justin reads the *Genesis* creation story to show that such gods were really demons:

God, when He had made the whole world, and subjected earthly things to men and women, and arranged the heavenly elements for the increase of fruits and change of the seasons, and ordered the divine law for them—these things also He made for people to see—entrusted the case of men and women and of things under heaven to angels whom He appointed over them. But the angels transgressed this order, and were captivated by love of women, and produced children who are called demons. And besides later they enslaved the human race to themselves, partly by magical writings, and partly by fears and punishments which they occasioned, and partly by teaching them to offer sacrifices and incense and libations, which they needed after they were enslaved with lustful passions; and among people they sowed murders, wars, adulteries, intemperate deeds, and every evil. Whence also the poets and mythologists, not knowing that it was the angels and those demons who had been begotten by them that did these things to men and women and cities and nations, which they related, ascribed them to God Himself, and to those who were His offspring, and to the offspring of those who were called His brothers. For whatever name each

of the angels had given to himself and to his children, by that name they called them. But to the Father of all, who is unbegotten, a name is not given.³⁸

Justin refers here to the narrative about the intercourse of the angels of God with the daughters of men, mentioned in *Genesis* 6.1–4, which sparked such lengthy literary interest among the ancients, both Jewish and Christian.³⁹ Justin styles the pagan gods as false perverters of those who follow them. We can note here elements that are familiar from the *Secret Revelation of John*: the notion that false gods seemingly rule the world, deceive people with false names, violence, and the lustful passions.

In this respect, the mythmakers of the *Secret Revelation of John* did not say anything that was not being said by other Christians. However much other Christians might object, the framers of the *Secret Revelation of John* placed themselves within the Christian camp, not least by making the Savior the hero of their story.⁴⁰ Nor can the *Secret Revelation of John* necessarily be distinguished from other Christian theologies because of its negative valuation of the cosmos.⁴¹ The New Testament *Book of Revelation*, for example, condemns not only the violence and immoral wealth of worldly rulers, but also sees the world as under the control of Satan and his angels—a situation that can only be rectified by the coming of Christ to end the world and initiate a new creation.

There are, however, several important respects in which the *Secret Revelation of John* differs from the other Christian social and political critiques we have been discussing. First, it insists that the creator god of Moses is not the true Deity, but a kind of fallen angel to be numbered among the other miscreant pretenders to the divine name. Its literal reading of the sacred texts exposes the creator god of *Genesis* as jealous and vengeful. He seeks to keep humanity from the knowledge of good and evil; he styles himself a “jealous god”⁴² and regularly punishes people, using fire, flood, and other violent forces to destroy those who oppose him—even as Christ and his angels do in the final apocalypse of the *Book of Revelation*.⁴³

From the perspective of the *Secret Revelation of John*, such a god belongs not in the Divine Realm, but among the fallen angels.

Along this same line, the *Secret Revelation of John* lacks the vivid imagination of the hellfire their opponents would suffer. It eschews all violent revenge bearing the false name of justice, and exposes it for naked arrogance and malice. According to Christ, suffering never comes at the hand of the true Deity, but only from the false gods—and even that suffering will end when humans receive true understanding. Although no explicit polemic against other Christian depictions of hell as a place of eternal punishment appears in the *Secret Revelation of John*, its framers would certainly have rejected the imputation of such punitive and vindictive behavior to the true Deity. Christ instead exposes violence and deception as strategies of the ignorant and the proud. These strategies expose the character of all worldly power.

This uncompromising censure of worldly power is so radical that some have said that “Gnosticism” faded away or merely hardened into anachronism because its radical negation could not support a positive new order.⁴⁴ I would suggest rather that a text like the *Secret Revelation of John* was rejected not because it was too “otherworldly,” but because it was too utopian in its aspirations and too unremitting in its critique of violence and injustice. It is impossible that such a radical and uncompromising portrait of ruling power in the world below could ever have been compatible with the radical shift in the political condition of Christianity from persecuted sect to imperial favor, such as was established after the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in the fourth century. In an oration given at the celebration of Constantine’s tricennalia, the church historian Eusebius extravagantly praised the emperor’s sovereignty as a mirror of God’s heavenly monarchy.⁴⁵ Such a theology could never have squared with Christ’s revelation in the *Secret Revelation of John*.

Another distinctive element of the *Secret Revelation of John* is its insistence that the true self within is spiritual and immortal. The physical and psychic body is not the true self; it is the creation of false gods seeking to

enslave humanity by subjecting them to suffering and death. Almost inevitably this tenet is interpreted by modern scholars as an expression of psychological alienation and existential despair. But such a reading ignores the text's repeated insistence on the indomitability of the spiritual self in the face of all malice and oppression. By locating one's true identity in the divine Spirit within, the *Secret Revelation of John* placed the true self beyond the brutalities of economics, local politics, and physical violence. By denying the validity of identities given by the world—such as master and slave, rich and poor, citizen and subject—it imagined a renegotiation of the political order. By refusing to acknowledge that those who rule the world are really in charge, it reframed and undermined oppressors' claims to legitimate rule. The *Secret Revelation of John's* narrative thus allowed not only for the intellectual expression of psychological alienation, but also for a politics of social criticism by reimagining power arrangements in the body politic.


Every construction of a "self" involves the construction of an "other." In reimagining the self, the *Secret Revelation of John* takes the radical position of constructing the self as the other. The true self is represented as a kind of foreigner whose origin, essence, and identity belongs to an other-place. This strategic identity works to decenter contemporary political claims by relocating the central locus of power from the mundane world and its gods to the transcendent Divine Realm. The world and all that belongs to it thereby becomes marginal to authentic reality; it is described as a false imitation of true Reality. Reality—the original, authentic, true, and good—is spiritual, and so is the true self. As I noted above, this positioning of the self as other is usually interpreted as an expression of existential alienation. But by locating the powerful spiritual self outside the dominant system, the *Secret Revelation of John* affords it a critical perspective on the violence and unjust practices of the lower, imitation world.

Nonetheless, however radical the *Secret Revelation of John's* critique appears, it has significant limits. It would be simplistic to say that the *Secret Revelation of John* effects a complete "reversal" of the true meaning of Scrip-

ture or expresses total rebellion against the world and its rulers.⁴⁶ Such caricature misses the crucial ways in which the *Secret Revelation of John* subscribes to central values that underlie the power arrangements current in the Mediterranean world under Roman domination. As we have seen, there are decided limits to the *Secret Revelation of John's* critique, most notably in its reinscription in the utopian Divine Realm of the very values of the society it critiques. We should not find this situation strange or even unexpected.

In representing the nature of the world in this way, the myth's revelation sketches an intellectual map of the human condition that offers an orientation for ethical practice and provides a focus for spiritual development. The spirituality of the *Secret Revelation of John* is grounded in the insistence that evil is essentially the consequence of unjust and malicious power relations in the lower world; realizing this truth is the necessary first step in the process of spiritual formation along the path toward salvation. This linkage of social critique with spirituality is a central religious insight of the *Secret Revelation of John*. Religion, however transcendent or otherworldly in its conceptuality, is immediately and irrevocably tied to the social and material conditions of existence, to justice and human well-being. One may not tend the one without attention to the other. The attractiveness of Christ's revelation in the *Secret Revelation of John* lies in its articulation of hope for relief from suffering and injustice, its desire for spiritual perfection, and its depiction of unalloyed goodness, justice, and well-being as the ultimate end of all human beings. The crux of this theology is justice. Its theme is hope.

PART II

 *Strategies of Interpretation*

6

Methods and Strategies

IN THE FIRST CENTURIES of our era, an improbable group of religious visionaries were laying the foundations for what would become the religion of Christianity. They came from diverse backgrounds and geographical areas. Peasants and prophets, apostles and merchants, illiterates and intellectuals, slaves and free, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Romans, Syrians and Egyptians—they could be found spread around the eastern Mediterranean world from Rome to North Africa. They experimented with a wide range of social organizations and theological ideas, and frequently came into conflict with each over basic matters of belief and practice. Authority among these groups derived not only from passing on traditions by and about Jesus, but from healing, leading an exemplary moral life, and persuasive preaching and teaching. History has left us few traces of these oral and bodily practices, but the literary texts that have survived demonstrate unequivocally that Christians framed both their constructive efforts and their conflicts around the interpretation of tradition. Heirs of the Enlightenment and Romanticism may highly value the new and the creative, but not so the ancients. Claims to authority were always couched as appeals to the past, whether grounded in the very creation of the world or in the stability of tradition. For them what had weight and authority was based firmly in age old truths passed down by wise and reliable elders. As a consequence, controversies over almost all significant matters were framed in terms of competing interpretations of tradition.¹

Although Christians were developing their theological views out of existing tradition, they were reading that tradition in radically new ways. Christian theologians were collectively involved in redefining the way people perceived truth and reality in the face of the revelation of Christ. Some interpreted the whole of the Old Testament as prophecy of the coming of Christ, criticizing Jews for having misunderstood their own Scripture. The esteemed and prestigious tradition of the Greeks and Romans, others said, had led them to worship not gods but demons. In short, Christian hermeneutics were challenging the *status quo* precisely by assaulting the reigning interpretations of tradition that undergirded current religious, social, and political arrangements. The goal was to persuade people to accept the new Christian imagination of "how things are."

Such an assault did not go uncontested. Many ancient Romans, Greeks, and Jews responded that the innovative and revisionary project of these Christians was politically illegitimate, intellectually unfounded, and impious. The Greek philosopher Porphyry criticized the Christian theologian Origen for corrupting Jewish Scripture, claiming:

Some in their eagerness to find an explanation of the wickedness of the Jewish writings rather than give them up, had recourse to interpretations that are incompatible and do not harmonize with what has been written, offering not so much a defense of what was outlandish as commendation and praise of their own work. For they boast that the things said plainly by Moses are riddles, treating them as divine oracles full of hidden mysteries, and bewitching the mental judgement by their own pretentious obscurity; and so they put forward their interpretations.²

This kind of intellectual disparagement only went so far, however. The Romans took a rather more direct course, by the third and early fourth centuries going so far as systematic attempts to burn Christian books and put their leaders to death.

The battle for control of tradition was not defined solely along the lines of Christian and non-Christian. Christians criticized each other in the

struggle to claim the name of orthodoxy for themselves. Among Christians, this struggle was often waged over who understood the true meaning of Christ's teaching in relation to the Jewish Scriptures. Origen—himself criticized by Porphyry for outlandish imagination—criticizes works like the *Secret Revelation of John* for reading Scripture too literally:

And reading the passage "A fire has been kindled in mine anger"; and "I am a jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation"; and "I repent that I have anointed Saul to be king"; and "I, God, make peace and evil"; and elsewhere, "There is no evil in a city, which the Lord did not do"; and further, "Evils came down from the Lord upon the gates of Jerusalem"; and "An evil spirit from the Lord troubled Saul"; and ten thousand other passages like these, the members of the heretical sects have not dared to disbelieve that they are the writings of God, but believe them to belong to the Creator, whom the Jews worship. Consequently they think that since the creator is imperfect and not good, the Savior came here to proclaim a more perfect God who they say is not the creator, and about whom they entertain diverse opinions. Then having once fallen away from the Creator, who is the sole unbegotten God, they have given themselves up to fictions, fashioning mythical hypotheses according to which they suppose that there are some things that are seen and others that are not seen, all of which are the fancies of their minds . . . Now the reason why all those we have mentioned hold false opinions and make impious or ignorant assertions about God appears to be nothing else but this, that scripture is not understood in its spiritual sense, but is interpreted according to the bare letter. (*On First Principles* 4.2.1–2)³

Here Origen argues that the erroneous theology of works like the *Secret Revelation of John* arises from an overly literal exegesis of Scripture.⁴ In this case, however, Origen is only partially correct. While the *Secret Revelation of John* does repeatedly draw its portrait of Yaldabaoth from a literal reading

of *Genesis* and other Scripture, it is also capable of “spiritual” interpretation, for example in reading *Genesis* 1–3 as an account of the Divine Realm, or in interpreting the trees of paradise allegorically. The contrast, then, between proper and improper interpretation of Scripture is not simply a matter of spiritual versus literal interpretation. Rather the *Secret Revelation of John* and Origen read Scripture differently because they begin with different assumptions and have different polemical strategies for proving the truth of Christ. For Origen, the main proof is that Christ fulfills the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus Scripture must itself be reliable in order to attest to the truth of Christ’s revelation. For the *Secret Revelation of John*, however, Christ’s revelation is what establishes, corrects, and supplements Scripture. The truth of its message is grounded in the reliability of direct revelation to the apostle John.

The *Secret Revelation of John*’s narrative is constructed out of traditional materials of considerable prestige. Its selection of resources is far from arbitrary. It has not taken in every piece of traditional culture, but only those which seem to have had the highest currency for persuasion in its day. It does not adopt the rites and myths of polytheism; it does not draw upon Epicurean materialism; it does not take up materials that were generally disparaged in antiquity. Instead it selects only the most preeminent. As John Kenney notes, Greek metaphysics and theology were “for much of the period we study, the most prestigious and culturally authoritative tradition, and the one subscribed to, at various levels, by the majority in the Roman world.”⁵ In molding its message of salvation and resistance to the powers of malice and ignorance, the *Secret Revelation of John* appropriates and transforms a wide range of materials from its cultural milieu: Hebrew Scriptures, Jewish apocalyptic and wisdom traditions, Platonizing philosophy, Stoicism, astrological treatises, Johannine literature, and more.⁶ The whole of Christ’s revelation is built out of allusions to these materials; without them there would be no story.

Yet the whole logic of the *Secret Revelation of John* presupposes that the literature of most tradition is unreliable. According to Christ’s teaching,

Plato, Moses, and Solomon offer only a distorted and refracted imitation of the true Reality. Tradition claims to offer the truth, but how can one know what is true in a world where deception and ignorance hold such powerful sway? The answer of course is: through revelation from the Divine Realm. The revelation of Christ fills up the gaps in these partial glimpses of the truth, corrects their deceptions, and illumines the dim perceptions of the truth grasped by those living in the darkness. In short, the most fundamental hermeneutical task of the *Secret Revelation of John* is countering lies and deception.

The esoteric nature of the revelation belongs to this perspective. Why is it that people have not seen this truth before, have not realized that they are being deceived? Potentially all the evidence is at hand. Yet Christ tells us that the truth remains hidden, except to those to whom it belongs. The real truth is foreign to this world. It is the light shining in the darkness, but the darkness does not comprehend it. The reason people do not comprehend is not because the truth is obscure, but because it is purposefully distorted through malice or because they misunderstand through ignorance. This situation shapes the strategies of Christ's hermeneutic of revelation: to counter what is false by giving what is true; to provide the real meaning of deceptive signs; and to fill in the gaps of a partial narrative.

Those who wrote the *Secret Revelation of John* did exactly what they say Christ does. They read a wide array of the most prestigious intellectual and literary materials of antiquity as fragments and partial perceptions, none of which contains the whole story, but all of which are at once construed as part of "the same story." They are not seen as we would see them today: alternative traditions from different times and cultures, but rather as the accumulated wisdom of the human race. Reading them this way might be seen as one strategy for negotiating ancient pluralism. The Greek philosopher Numenius, for example, described his process of coming to the truth as an examination of all of ancient wisdom in order to find where congruity existed:

When one has spoken upon this point, and sealed it by the testimonies of Plato, it will be necessary to go back and connect it with the precepts of Pythagoras, and to appeal to the nations of good repute bringing forward their rites and doctrines, and their institutions which are formed in agreement with those of Plato, all that the Brahmans, and Jews, and Magi, and Egyptians arranged.⁷

The Egyptians, Magi, Brahmans, and Jews form the traditional (constructed) loci of the appeal to ancient wisdom, and the proposition (ostensibly an assumption) is that they are all in essential agreement with one's own (Greek) ideas, even as Plato and Pythagoras must agree—for truth is one and unitary. Syncretism here functions to provide universal authority: all the best people agree with us and always have. Such a claim of course is rhetorical; the process itself is quite selective, not only in determining what the “best” traditions are, but in providing examples of agreement or in selecting the materials for synthesis.⁸ Christian theologians of the second and third centuries were all claiming that the Jewish Scriptures, pagan practices, and Greek philosophy could be properly understood only through the hermeneutical lens of Christ. They were not only saying that God had done a new thing, but that his eternal purpose, established at creation and pursued through all of human history, became fully apparent only in Christ. So, too, the framers of the *Secret Revelation of John*.

Building the *Secret Revelation of John's* revelation out of precisely the material that it criticizes may seem to involve contradiction, but in fact that is the way that all literature is constructed. Every speech or written composition is made up of the “already-said.” To say something intelligible always requires speaking in recognized terms and expressions and repeating known patterns of thought. What makes an utterance “new” are the contingent circumstances and innovative connections which establish fresh meanings among familiar terms and themes. Thus the only option in speaking is to speak out of the available cultural resources. Moreover in

doing so it is not possible for any utterance or writing to be neutral, because every statement takes a position vis-à-vis what has been said or written; it agrees, refutes, corrects, expands, reinforces, undermines, or transforms. We can see all this clearly in the *Secret Revelation of John*. It draws upon some of the best known and most prestigious intellectual and religious traditions of its day, but at the same time it offers new—sometimes radically new—perspectives on what those traditions mean.

How were the framers of the *Secret Revelation of John* able to bring together so many disparate resources into a single, reasonably coherent story? What kinds of strategies made such a reading persuasive? As Numenius suggests, ancient philosophers assumed that a single unitary truth encompassed the tradition of all the best ancient cultures. But anyone, ancient or modern, who sits down to read works like Plato's *Timaeus*, *Genesis*, or the *Gospel of John* will notice that there are many differences among them. Ancient readers would have tried to resolve these differences in order to grasp the unitary truth they contained. A number of standard approaches were available for this purpose. They might, for example, rank the truth value of different traditions, granting some materials enormous authority while arguing that others contained only part of the truth or were just plain wrong. But because they held that truth was both universal and logically non-contradictory, they tended to favor strategies that worked to reconcile the differences in tradition. They used a variety of harmonizing methods, many of which are employed in the *Secret Revelation of John*.

The overarching genre of the *Secret Revelation of John* is that of the apocalypse, a Greek term which means "to show forth, appear, reveal."⁹ Apocalypses contain a revelation given through a mediator of God to a seer concerning hidden knowledge, just as Christ here offers secret revelation to John. The revelation exposes the deeper spiritual meaning behind the current situation and offers hope for a reversal of the present circumstances of suffering and oppression. It often puts the present time in a perspective in which it appears as only a passing shadow.¹⁰ While the *Secret Revelation*

of *John* differs in many interesting respects from comparable early Christian works like the Johannine *Book of Revelation*, it contains a number of recognizably apocalyptic motifs, such as the cosmic signs at Christ's appearance when the heavens open, the whole creation shines, and the earth quakes (*SRevJohn* 3.1–2). In addition, apocalypses frequently include a number of smaller generic units, in this case most notably the dialogue.¹¹

Dialogue provides the primary structural means of unifying the *Secret Revelation of John*. In practice, the dialogue framework is hospitable to the inclusion of sub-genres and other types of additions. By subordinating and incorporating smaller generic units (treatise, list, hymn, and so on) under one more encompassing genre, anything can potentially be adjusted to fit into the frame.¹² John has only to ask another question for the Savior to answer. Or a keyword can provide a bridge; for example, the mention of body parts at *SRevJohn* 15.28–30 provides the occasion to insert the list of demons. Or minor adaptation can be made to fit the new material; for example, near the end of the Savior's revelation in the shorter version, the dialogue shifts to the first person: "First I went up to this perfect aeon" (*SRevJohn* 27.1). The longer version takes advantage of this shift from third to first person to insert the Pronoia monologue, effectively putting it on the lips of Christ. The dialogue frame thus provides at once stability of genre and the potential for considerable fluidity of content, and hence of hermeneutic possibilities.

Presenting the entire content of the *Secret Revelation of John* as a single revelation from Christ to John also produces a sense of narrative unity. The overarching structure of the revelation fashions a drama which functions as a kind of Grand Theory of Everything: everything that is, that was, and that will be. As we have seen, it encompasses the nature of the highest God, the generation of the divine world, the subsequent creation of humanity, salvation, and the final end of all things.

In addition to the genre of revelation dialogue, the *Secret Revelation of John* offers an overarching plot. We might characterize it as "tragic comedy." The original happy situation of the heroine is disturbed by a tragic

flaw, which leads to various misadventures and suffering, but the flaw is finally redeemed and the tragic hero is returned to her original felicity. This is the story of Sophia, but it is also the story of every human being. The plot is “comic” insofar as it does not end in the tragedy of existential alienation, but resolves all conflicts into a happy ending. Alienation belongs in only one scene, not in the final resolution.

In order to incorporate diverse materials into this overarching plot, the framers of the *Secret Revelation of John* make abundant use of the technique of “retelling.” We can identify four major subplots from the *Timaeus*, the primordial drama of *Genesis* 1–8, the story of Wisdom’s descents and ascents, and the *Gospel of John*. Through retelling, these distinct narratives are tailored to fit into the larger encompassing plot of the *Secret Revelation of John*.¹³ The goal of the *Secret Revelation of John*’s retelling is to bring out the true meaning of these traditions, which have been concealed by ignorant half-truths and outright deception.

Harmonizing these diverse materials required considerable hermeneutic labor and ingenuity. A great deal of this work is achieved by the expedient of re-contextualization. Incorporated into a different overarching plot, these stories take on new meaning and significance. For example, retelling the *Genesis* story of creation twice, once to describe the generation of the Divine Realm and again to describe the lower world, has the effect of exposing the lower god as a false and ineffectual imitation of true Deity, while simultaneously displaying the chasm between the perfectly good Father of the All and the lower, false creator god who shapes a human figure out of the earth’s dust and then forbids it access to moral knowledge. In this way, re-contextualization operates strategically throughout the narrative to provoke new perspectives on well-known materials. This is true not only for narratives like the *Timaeus* or *Genesis*, but also the astrological melothesia, Stoic ethics, and so on.

But while re-contextualization is a primary hermeneutical technique in the *Secret Revelation of John*, it is not sufficient by itself to unify these diverse materials. Other adjustments are used, including the addition of

harmonizing links and explanations. To make these adjustments, the *Secret Revelation of John* employs at least three additional techniques: narrative elaboration, allegory, and identification.

Narrative elaboration is frequently employed in smaller generic scenes and usually involves the addition of new information. For example, Christ elaborates extensively on moving “to and fro” (*Gen* 1.2) by interpreting it as a reference to Sophia’s repentance. The *Secret Revelation of John* frequently uses this technique to go out of the way to disparage the God of *Genesis*. For example, John is told explicitly that the creator god is bestial in form, even though nothing in the *Genesis* narrative supports such a description.¹⁴ Several times, Christ simply adds that Yaldabaoth is ignorant or arrogant. These charges appear to be plausible only because of the elaborations inserted into the text. In one case, the *Secret Revelation of John* plays on the deep resentment some pagans felt toward Jewish exclusivity by putting the provocative words “I am a jealous God and there is no other god beside me” onto the lips of Yaldabaoth,¹⁵ and then ridiculing this claim by commenting, “But by announcing this, he indicated to the angels who attended him that there exists another God. For if there were no other one, of whom would he be jealous?” (*SRevJohn* 14.2–4). Or again, the story of Eve’s rape is added to confirm the wicked and lustful nature of Yaldabaoth. Examples of such narrative elaborations could be multiplied throughout the work. They clearly have the effect of deepening the gulf between the high God and the creator God. The framers carefully included only those materials which could be readily harmonized with the work’s overall perspective, leaving many significant materials out of their narrative. For example, Jewish wisdom literature frequently praises God for His goodness in creating the physical world—this perspective has no place in the *Secret Revelation of John*.

Another important technique, albeit one employed more sparingly, involves providing narrative elements with revisionary allegorical meanings. So, for example, the command to eat “food” is interpreted as “delight”; the narrator then comments: “Their delight is a deception and their tree is

iniquity. Their fruit is an incurable poison and their promise is death for him" (*SRevJohn* 20.4–5). The allegory supplies the true meaning of the tree's fruit as the active deceit of the world rulers. Whereas others claim that God's provision of nourishment for humanity demonstrates his goodness and provident care, Christ's revelation exposes Yaldabaoth's food as moral degradation. This revisionary allegorization does not challenge cultural norms, but it does dramatically shift the meaning of the passage by associating the command "to eat of the tree of life" not with the cultural ideal of divine providence but with moral norms about the detrimental effects of the passions.

Identification is another strategy that links previously unrelated materials by identifying the characters of the different narratives with each other. Pronoia is connected with both Jewish wisdom and the Platonic indefinite dyad or receptacle. Yaldabaoth is at once the God of *Genesis* and Plato's demiurge. Eve is identified with the Epinoia of the light, hidden in Adam and working for his enlightenment. It is she, not the mortal fleshly Eve, whom Adam calls "Mother of the living," and it was she who speaks through the snake and teaches Adam to eat of the tree of knowledge "so that he might remember his perfection" (*SRevJohn* 21.30). In this way, Epinoia is identified with the enlightening Spirit within Adam, the spiritual Eve, the snake, and the tree of knowledge.¹⁶ This technique, of which there are many additional examples, produces correspondences between diverse episodes and resource materials by identifying their main characters with each other. It also connects different levels of reality; for example, the heavenly figures of Adam and Seth are linked to the figures of the same names in the lower world. More crucially, the identification of Christ and Epinoia with Pronoia effectively personifies the working of the Divine Mother-Father in the world below without compromising divine transcendence.

Another complex example of identification occurs in the creation of humanity by Yaldabaoth and his minions. This presentation works nicely to explain the use of the plural in *Genesis* 1.28 where God says, "Let us cre-

ate man in our likeness and according to our image.” The plural “us” had long been a difficulty for the monotheistic emphasis in Judaism. Many explained it as a reference to God and his angels or to God’s Wisdom at work in creation. The *Gospel of John* interprets the plural as God’s Word, Christ. In a confusing show of “democratic” enthusiasm, the *Secret Revelation of John* draws on all of these suggestions at once¹⁷: for the creation of all things belonging to the Divine Realm, the plural refers to God and his Wisdom (the Invisible Spirit and Pronoia-Barbelo) or God and his Christ (Autogenes); the plural in creating the lower world and humanity refers to Yaldabaoth and his angels.

The use of identification makes it difficult at times to keep the various characters straight, and unresolved contradictions arise. Because of these logical and narrative infelicities, identification can appear not only secondary and arbitrary but crude. The initial confusion can cause the careful reader rather severe headaches and tempt the careful scholar to emend the text, but the technique is relatively successful at weaving different literary resources into a common story, while yet offering allusions to a variety of traditional materials.

Finally, another hermeneutic strategy used to integrate diverse literary sources is to take words or themes found in them and read them as conveying the same meaning. For example, the term “light” is found in Plato, *Genesis*, Wisdom literature, and the *Gospel of John*. Modern scholars would carefully distinguish the different implications and associations that this term carries in these different writings, but for the *Secret Revelation of John* all references to the light refer equally to the luminous substance of the Divine Realm. This harmonizing strategy may be thought of as another form of identification.

All of these techniques—if not their specific deployments—were well-established in ancient literary practice and examples can be found throughout the ancient literary corpus.¹⁸ Theologians and philosophers had been using them for generations to address difficulties in their texts. Readers would have recognized such techniques and considered them to

be unexceptional, no matter how much they may have objected to the resulting interpretations.

By the time the *Secret Revelation of John* was written, texts like *Genesis* and the *Timaeus* had been interpreted and reinterpreted for centuries. Jewish exegetes had developed extensive narrative elaborations in order to explain difficulties such as where the talking snake had come from: they hypothesized that he was a fallen angel who impregnated Eve, producing the fratricide Cain. Similarly, Greek and Roman philosophers were interested in reconciling seeming contradictions within Plato's large corpus of writings, as well as elaborating upon the basic schema he had set out. By the second century CE when the earliest versions of the *Secret Revelation of John* were composed, these philosophical musings had reached a high degree of complexity and nuance. The *Secret Revelation of John's* allusions to Plato, *Genesis*, and other materials show some knowledge of these broader streams of interpretation, as well as familiarity with the basic texts themselves. In this way, the intellectual resources that the *Secret Revelation of John* appropriates bring with them more or less deeply sedimented accretions of previous interpretations of these works.

Christ's revelation in the *Secret Revelation of John* would thus have activated cultural codes, including hermeneutical strategies and techniques, that modern readers can only partially grasp. Ancient readers would have recognized (consciously or subconsciously) a much wider range of allusions than is possible for us and they would have more readily identified the literary techniques being used.¹⁹ In order for the modern reader to understand the *Secret Revelation of John's* aims and strategies, it is useful to sort out these various materials and literary practices and to identify allusions that the intended audience was expected to recognize. By "decoding" these practices, I hope to make the logic of the *Secret Revelation of John's* narrative more clear. By "logic," I do not mean that the *Secret Revelation of John* is characterized by a formal systematics, but rather that it is possible to comprehend how the narrative makes sense and to see that its reasoning is not arbitrary or nonsensical. While it will not be possible to point out and

discuss every possible allusion made by the *Secret Revelation of John*, consideration of Plato, Moses, Jewish wisdom traditions (which in antiquity were frequently attributed eponymously to Solomon), and the *Gospel of John* will allow us to comprehend its fundamental hermeneutic methods and the basic outline of its narrative logic.

7

Platonizing Philosophy

NO PHILOSOPHICAL WORK was more widely read in antiquity than Plato's dialogue, the *Timaeus*.¹ In it, a set of friends seek to entertain their guest Socrates with a feast of discourse to celebrate the festival of Athena. The entertainment begins with an account of the origin of the world and humanity's place in it. The task falls to Timaeus, for his education in astronomy makes him the most suited to give a reasoned and probable account of the matter. His discourse can be counted as one of the great popular successes of ancient Greek philosophy.

Timaeus says that although the divine cause of the world is beyond discovery, it is possible to investigate the pattern that the Divine Creator used when he fashioned the world. "If the world be indeed fair and the artificer good, it is manifest that he must have looked to that which is eternal" for a model upon which to create the universe, Timaeus reasons (*Tim* 29a).² Based on this logic, he posits three original principles: the demiurge, the Ideas, and matter. The demiurge is described as God, the father and creator of the world, the unitary principle (the One or Monad), and the cause underlying all existence. Matter is the principle of multiplicity (the Indefinite Dyad) and the substance out of which the demiurge formed the world.³ The Ideas constitute the pattern according to which he gave order and beauty to the cosmos.

At the root of Timaeus' account is a foundational distinction between Being and becoming. Being is unchanging and eternal, "a pattern intelligible and always the same"; it can be apprehended only through intelligence

and reason. The Ideas constitute the Divine Reality that belongs to Being; they are the sure and stable basis for knowledge of everything that exists. Indeed one can have true knowledge only of Being. In contrast, becoming is “the imitation of the pattern, generated and visible.” The mundane world of sense belongs to becoming; it is visible, tangible, and embodied, made of the four elements (fire, earth, water, and air). It can be known through sense perception but such knowledge can be the subject only of opinion because the material world is mutable and constantly in flux (*Tim* 27d–28a). In this way, Timaeus argues that how something can be known (whether by sure reason or mere sensory opinion) depends upon what kind of thing it is (whether it belongs to the Divine Realm or the material universe). In other words, he directly connects knowing (epistemology) and being (ontology). Timaeus’ system is not only descriptive, it is also evaluative: Being is not only more real than becoming, it is also vastly superior.

Although this system is fundamentally dualistic, Timaeus insists on continuity between the realms of Being and becoming. The creator, he says, formed the realm of becoming by copying a pattern he took from the eternal Ideas in the realm of Being. In creating the world, God “must have looked to the eternal, for the world is the fairest of creations and he is the best of causes.” To suggest otherwise would be blasphemy. He continues, “And having been created in this way, the world has been framed in the likeness of that which is apprehended by reason and mind and is unchangeable, and must therefore of necessity, if this is admitted, be a copy of something” (*Tim* 29a). Thus the lower realm of becoming is a copy of the realm of Being and therefore resembles it.

Because God (the Demiurge) is good, he desired that the world should resemble that which is highest and best. God therefore created the world as far as possible to be good, orderly, beautiful, intelligent, and alive. (Note here how Timaeus’ description of the demiurge is consonant with the portrayal of God in *Genesis* as the source of goodness, orderliness, and life.) Timaeus tells his audience:

God desired that all things should be good and nothing bad, so far as this was attainable. Wherefore also finding the whole visible sphere not at rest, but moving in an irregular and disorderly fashion, out of disorder he brought order, considering that this was in every way better than the other. Now the deeds of the best could never be or have been other than the fairest and the creator, reflecting on the things which are by nature visible, found that no unintelligent creature taken as a whole could ever be fairer than the intelligent taken as a whole, and again that intelligence could not be present in anything which was devoid of soul. For which reason, when he was framing the universe, he put intelligence in soul, and soul in body, that he might be the creator of a work which was by nature fairest and best. On this wise, using the language of probability, we may say that the world came into being—a living creature truly endowed with soul and intelligence by the providence of God (*Tim* 30a–c).

Yet however good and fair, the cosmos is nonetheless only a copy of Divine Reality, and is therefore inferior to its divine model both ontologically and epistemologically. As Timaeus puts it, “As Being is to becoming, so is truth to opinion” (*Tim* 29c).

Timaeus also characterizes the perfection of creation in political terms, as the just hierarchical rule of the superior over the lesser. He describes the cosmos as a soul enclosed in a body and tells his audience that the eternal God caused the material world to be ruled by the soul, which is “in origin and excellence prior to and older than the body, to be the ruler and mistress, of whom the body was to be the subject” (*Tim* 34c). The justice of giving the world soul the power to rule over the material cosmos lies in the soul’s chronological priority in the order of creation and in its superior quality due to its possession of mind and life.

The heavenly bodies are then created in imitation of divine perfection as “a moving image of eternity” called time.

When the father and creator saw the creature which he had made moving and living, the created image of the eternal gods, he rejoiced, and in his joy determined to make the copy still more like the original, and as this was an eternal living being, he sought to make the universe eternal, so far as might be . . . Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity, and this image we call time (*Tim* 37c–d).

Thus the stars and planets came into being as a material reflection of eternity.⁴

Philosophers who followed Plato found much that was confusing, contradictory, or simply undeveloped in the legacy he left behind. Much of their work in the following centuries aimed at solving problems he had bequeathed them.⁵ Moreover, Plato had notable critics, including Aristotle and the Stoics, and their criticisms were also addressed by later Platonists. The history of Platonism in antiquity is long and complex and cannot be recounted here in any reasonable detail. A few developments, however, are crucial for understanding the *Secret Revelation of John*, and four of these must be mentioned, however briefly: the problem of ultimate cause; the relationship of the demiurge to the Ideas; the problem of evil; and the creation of humanity.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato argued that everything has a cause (*Tim* 28a), but logically that principle could lead to an infinite regression by seeking the cause behind every cause. In order to stem this recessive causality, some later Platonists elevated a single figure as the principle of unity beyond even the realm of Being itself. Warrant for this move could be found in Plato's work. Already in the *Timaeus* he suggested that "the father and maker of all this universe is past finding out, and even if we found him, to tell of him to all men would be impossible" (*Tim* 28c). More especially in the *Parmenides* 137c–142a, Plato took up the problem of how multiplicity could be generated from unity (the classical problem of the one and the

many). He argued that if the one is truly one, it can have no parts. This initial assumption led to a radical conclusion:

Therefore the One in no sense *is*. It cannot, then, “be” even to the extent of “being” one, for then it would be a thing that is and has being. Rather, if we can trust such an argument as this, it appears that the One neither is one nor is at all. And if a thing is not, you cannot say that it “has” anything or that there is anything “of” it. Consequently, it cannot *have* a name or be spoken of, nor can there be any knowledge or perception or opinion of it. It is not named or spoken of, not an object of opinion or of knowledge, not perceived by any creature (*Parm* 141e–1421a).

The insistence that nothing positive can be said of the transcendent Deity not only staunches the logical problem of recessive causality, it also ensures the complete transcendence of the Monad beyond any hint of internal division that might wrongly be implied by the affirmation of It as the source and ruler of everything that exists. Certain later Middle- and Neoplatonic philosophers placed an increasing emphasis upon the transcendence of the first principle.⁶ One tool was the use of apophatic (negative) theology, which denied that anything could be predicated of the One. In Plotinus, for example, “Negative theology was systematically deployed to prevent the One’s assimilation to all other sorts of reality, which were treated as its consequents.” In this way, negation of predicates, qualities, and properties worked to solve the problem of “explanatory regress” and to give a completely transcendent valuation to the primal Deity.⁷

The elevation of the first principle, however, had the deleterious effect of demoting the world creator, the demiurge.⁸ This problem arose in part due to Plato’s lack of clarity about the relation of the demiurge to the Ideas. In the *Timaeus*, the Ideas have an existence independent of the demiurge, who looks to them as a model outside of himself in giving order and beauty to the universe. Because the creator is good and the model he uses is the best possible, the problem arises of how to account for dis-

order and evil in the world. Some suggested that Ideas must exist for what is evil as well as for what is good, but this solution did not gain general acceptance, probably because it made evil into an eternal principle.⁹ The logic of the position was something like this: if the lower world is a copy of a transcendent model, then it can be inferred that everything in the world below must have a model in the Divine Realm. But what could possibly be the "ideal" model for the suffering, death, and injustice that befall humanity in the world? Since philosophers denied that suffering, death, and injustice could properly be predicated of the transcendent Divine, some other kind of logic was necessary to solve the problem.

Plato himself allowed for the inferiority of creation in comparison with the eternal noetic realm. He conceived of generation as a process of degeneration insofar as the original unity was considered to be better than division into multiplicity, the elder to be superior to the younger, and the model to be superior to its copy. The emphasis throughout Plato's account, however, is on the goodness and perfection of the world, not on its defects. It is the best and most beautiful cosmos possible. Timaeus' demiurgic God does the best job he can as a good craftsman and is largely successful, producing an orderly world of beauty and justice. This position, however, leaves the problem of evil generally unresolved.

At *Timaeus* 48a, however, Plato makes a suggestion that proved more fruitful to later philosophers for solving the problem. He proposes that the universe was produced by a combination of mind and necessity ("fate"), in which necessity is "the form of the errant cause," the principle responsible for the vagaries and irregularities in the way that things actually came into being. This suggestion requires Timaeus to add a third principle to Being and becoming. He describes it as "the receptacle, and in a manner the nurse, of all generation" (*Tim* 48e–49a). She is by her own nature formless, taking on form only as she receives all things: "For she is laid down by nature as a moulding-stuff for everything, being moved and marked by the entering figures, and because of them she appears different

at different times. And the forms that enter and depart are copies of what are always existent, being stamped from them in a fashion marvelous and hard to describe" (*Tim* 50c).¹⁰ In this way, Plato uses the receptacle to explain why the cosmic copies are different from the eternal model. He goes further and likens his three principles to a family: "Moreover, it is proper to liken the receptacle to the Mother, the Source to the Father, and what is engendered between these two to the Offspring" (*Tim* 50d).¹¹ Plato insisted that the receptacle should not be equated with matter (*Tim* 51a), but some later Platonists would nonetheless do so, equating the receptacle (or the Indefinite Dyad) with matter itself.

Later philosophers took a variety of positions on these issues. Some, exemplified by Plutarch, refused to demote the demiurge and instead argued that he contains the totality of the Ideas within himself.¹² Plutarch accounted for disorder in the lower world by positing a kind of "maleficent soul, which has at some stage itself broken away from the intelligible realm."¹³ This principle is arguably female, and we will need to consider it further below in relation to Sophia and Yaldabaoth. Others, however, attributed the functions of Plato's God (as both cause and maker) to distinct entities.¹⁴ Numenius, for example, posited a unified principle (the Supreme God, the One or Monad) as the primal cause, while he demoted the demiurge to second position as a mere creator god. Matter (the Dyad) was called the Third God. As Numenius puts it:

Existing in his own place, the First God is simple and can never be divisible, consorting as he does with himself alone. The Second and Third Gods, however, are in fact one; but in the process of coming into contact with Matter, which is the Dyad, He gives unity to it, but is Himself divided by it, since Matter has a character prone to desire and is in flux. So in virtue of not being in contact with the Intelligible (which would mean being turned in upon Himself), by reason of looking towards Matter and taking thought for it, He becomes unregarding

of Himself. And He seizes upon the sense realm and ministers to it and yet draws it up to His own character, as a result of this yearning towards Matter.¹⁵

Here matter itself seems to be the intractable principle, if not precisely evil then at least disorderly, while the First God transcends all contact with matter. Numenius refers to the First God as the Good, the One, the Father, and the King.¹⁶ The Second God, the creator, is an ambiguous figure. He divides himself by losing contact with the Intelligible and instead taking thought for matter—comparison with Sophia and Yaldabaoth here is suggestive, as we will see below.

If we turn now to the *Secret Revelation of John's* portrayal of creation, we can observe both deep resonance and clashing dissonance with these philosophical accounts. On the one hand, Plato's division between Being and becoming is foundational to the oppositional framework Christ describes between the Divine Realm and the world below. Like Timaeus, Christ links the two realms through the mimetic activity of the Demiurge, who employs a divine model in forming the universe. In Platonic speculation, however, the mimetic correspondence between the realm of Ideas and the material cosmos guarantees continuity between them and establishes a stable basis for knowledge. While Plato allows for the inferiority of creation in comparison with the eternal noetic realm, he still insists on the goodness of creation. What flaws appear are viewed by Timaeus as the consequences of limited contingency; for Christ, however, they are the products of purposeful deception. The lower world is not the best possible, but the realm of darkness and suffering.

Thus the *Secret Revelation of John* relies heavily upon the framework of Platonic metaphysics while simultaneously criticizing it, primarily by exploiting the passages within Plato's dialogues that already portray the inferiority, division, and disorderliness of the world below. Christ is thus selective in his appropriation of Platonism, and strategic in how he uses those materials. For example, he clearly appropriates apophatic (negative) lan-

guage concerning the transcendent Deity, saying the Monad is invisible, incorruptible, illimitable, unsearchable, ineffable, immeasurable, and so on. But this language has a different function in the *Secret Revelation of John* than it does for Plato, Middle Platonists, or Plotinus. For them, negation of predicates, qualities, and properties solves the logical problem of continually looking behind each cause for the source and foundation behind it.¹⁷ For the *Secret Revelation of John*, however, apophatic language serves alongside kataphatic (positive) language to emphasize the gulf between the Divine Realm and the world below. In short, it emphasizes the work's contrast between above and below, and indeed their incomparability.

Scholars have often suggested that the *Secret Revelation of John's* use of negative theology functions preeminently as theodicy, aimed at defending the goodness and justice of God by distancing the transcendent Deity from any touch of contact with deficiency, especially materiality and evil.¹⁸ A lengthy study by Clemens Scholten, however, has shown that the *Secret Revelation of John* evinces little interest in the problem of theodicy as such.¹⁹ The reason, I would argue, is that in the *Secret Revelation of John* negative language is not used in order to establish an ontological distance between the transcendent Deity and the lower world—although such language effectively does so—rather the *Secret Revelation of John* is interested primarily in assigning value.²⁰ In my terminology, apophatic discourse is doing different work in the *Secret Revelation of John* than it does, say, in Plotinus. It is not aimed first and foremost at protecting God from charges of injustice, but at portraying the injustice of the world ruler by contrasting him with the goodness of the true Deity. The establishment of multiple levels of being separating the true Deity from the material world functions primarily to articulate the ideal of hierarchy, whose breach and restoration form the dynamics of the *Secret Revelation of John's* entire plot. Without the representation of ideal hierarchy in the Divine Realm, no basis would exist for the foundational critique of evil in the world below as hierarchy overturned. Moreover, the *Secret Revelation of John* never suggests that the transcendent Deity is vulnerable to any criticism nor does it ever entertain the idea that

the true Deity is the cause of suffering and injustice. Rather the whole point of the oppositional logic is to place that blame squarely on the theriomorphic shoulders of Yaldabaoth and his minions.

Perhaps this strategy is merely a case of the best defense being a good offense, but if so the *Secret Revelation of John* appears supremely confident, for it makes little effort to restrict the activity of the Father to the Divine Realm. Whereas “(a)pophatic discourse allowed Plotinus to reject resolutely any conception that might have allowed the One to be drawn back into the structure of reality, whether that reality was transcendent of the spatio-temporal world or contained within the cosmos,”²¹ the *Secret Revelation of John* (especially the shorter versions in BG and III) emphasizes the Father’s concern for Sophia’s Spirit trapped in the lower world; he repeatedly intervenes, sending emissaries below, bridging the gaping divide between above and below. Although subtle variants in the longer version attempt to stem this leakage of the Divine into the lower world, primarily by transferring the actions of the transcendent Deity to Pronoia-Barbelo, the *Secret Revelation of John’s* logic of salvation defeats any attempt to sever completely the transcendent Deity from his offspring below.

This relative lack of concern to defend the transcendent Deity’s goodness shows that the *Secret Revelation of John* tends to emphasize the evaluative aspect of Plato’s system, in which what is first is regarded as better than what is secondary; the model is better than the copy; and what is unitary and stable is better than what is diverse and mutable. These evaluative aspects of Plato’s thought are emphatically apparent in the *Secret Revelation of John’s* theme of mimesis. As we have seen, the story of creation is not solely one of rupture; mimesis also establishes continuity, indeed identity, between humanity in the world below and the Divine Realm above, just as Plato’s concept of imitation was designed to do.²² This apparent similarity between Plato and the *Secret Revelation of John*, however, offers a cautionary example of the dangers of reading Platonic philosophical themes into the Christian story. While the mimetic similarity between

the Divine and the mundane would seem to suggest that although limited, “something about the structure of divinity can be observed in the visible cosmos,”²³ in fact the trope of correspondence between the divine model and the cosmos has a different *function* in the logic of the *Secret Revelation of John* than it does in other Platonizing works. As we have seen, for Plato and most of those who followed him, the correspondence between the model and the cosmos ensured the possibility of stable knowledge, while for the *Secret Revelation of John* it leads only to deceit and entrapment; only the revelation of Christ can ensure stable knowledge of immutable Truth. The revelation of Christ is not merely a supplement to the partial knowledge of the Divine attainable through observation of the cosmos, as it is for many other Platonists and Christians, it is a corrective to the deceptions of the world rulers and the partial truths promulgated by Plato, Moses, and others.

The *Secret Revelation of John* shows no concern at all to ground the order of the material world in the stability of the Divine Realm; indeed it emphasizes that knowledge of God is only possible through revelation from beyond the material world. In this sense, the *Secret Revelation of John* rejects the Platonic notion that one can learn about the eternal Ideas through contemplation of the orderliness and beauty of the world; such a notion is part of the deception by the world rulers who want to keep humanity under their control. Even though Yaldabaoth looks to the Divine Realm as a model for his creation, the fact that he is himself so wretchedly flawed means that his creation is less divine imitation than malicious parody. Although the *Secret Revelation of John* reproduces Platonic notions of creation as imitation of the divine Ideas, it follows its own oppositional logic, which repeatedly emphasizes the inferior nature of Yaldabaoth’s realm. It answers the question of how one may come to know and resemble the Divine in a way radically different from most ancient philosophers. It is not through contemplation of the world but by accepting the revelation of Christ that true knowledge of the Divine Realm is obtained.²⁴

The *Secret Revelation of John's* emphasis on the evaluative aspect of Plato's hierarchical metaphysics shows up again in Christ's portrayal of the heavenly race of the gods. For Plato, the stars and planets were conceived as a moving and visible reflection of eternity. Made primarily of fire, they are "brightest of all things and fairest to behold, and he fashioned them after the likeness of the universe in the figure of a circle and made them follow the intelligent motion of the supreme" (*Tim* 40a). Through them divine providence, goodness, and justice pervade the created cosmos. The *Secret Revelation of John*, on the other hand, connects the fiery authorities of heaven with the rule of Fate that enslaves humanity. They are neither fair nor intelligent, but maleficent beings who seek only to bring everything under their thrall, no matter how harmful the consequences.²⁵ Through them, evil and injustice are introduced into the very structure of creation.

While such a notion may seem alien to Plato's *Timaeus*, Mansfeld has pointed out that Greek tradition is filled with stories of the gods deceiving humanity,²⁶ and Boyancé has argued that Plato himself bequeathed this denigration of the lower world rulers to future generations of philosophers. It was Plato who called the subaltern gods who rule the world "archons" or "rulers" (the same term that is used in the *Secret Revelation of John* for the lower world rulers) and who said that they exercise their rule with the aid of daemons.²⁷ Moreover, Christ seems to identify these "archons" with the "younger gods" who placed the souls of humanity under the power of the passions.²⁸ That role above all others indicts them.

Similarly, the *Secret Revelation of John's* appeal to Platonizing notions of hierarchical levels of reality does not function as it does for Plotinus to articulate "a theology of divine simplicity"; rather it helps to carve a chasm which sets the utopian ideal on one side and the gross parody on the other. Christ's aim in articulating the structure of reality is not to emphasize the interconnectedness of all things by linking them in a chain to God, the underlying ontological foundation of all reality, as does Plato. Rather he seeks to proclaim true knowledge about reality that will allow the soul to escape the bonds of the lower world—characterized in terms

of the world rulers' malice and illegitimate domination, the cruel power of fate and ignorance, and the soul's enslavement to the passions and material body. Rupture not continuity is the primary deployment of the Platonizing notion of levels of reality in the Savior's revelation to John.

Like Plato, the *Secret Revelation of John* cannot avoid the question of the origin of evil. Given the entirely good and perfect character of the Divine Realm, how could the lower world have ever come into existence? How could human suffering and death have come about? As we have seen, the *Secret Revelation of John* locates the origins of evil with the figures of Sophia and her offspring, Yaldabaoth. While they clearly resonate with images from Jewish wisdom literature and *Genesis* (as we will see in the next chapters), significant allusions to these figures intersect with Platonizing philosophy and astrology as well.

For the *Secret Revelation of John*, the problem with the created world is not simply its inferiority to the Divine Realm. Like Plato, Christ can assume that a copy is inferior to its model without interpreting the product itself in negative terms. For example, in describing the genesis of Autogenes-Christ, he says: "Barbelo gazed intently into It, the pure light. She turned herself toward It. She gave birth to a spark of blessed light, but it was not equal to her in greatness. This is the Only-begotten who appeared from the Father, the divine Autogenes" (*SRevJohn* BG 7.1–6). Such inferiority is to be expected, but the nature of Autogenes is nonetheless still light from light, blessed and divine. The problem with the lower world is not simply that it is an inferior copy, but that its nature is fundamentally oppositional and deceptive, the product of a radical break in the mimetic outpouring of divine being. The artificer of the world is not fair, but ugly and bestial, and his products resemble him according to the principle that "like follows like."

The *Secret Revelation of John* is not the first treatise to distinguish between the transcendent Monad and a demiurgic creator; that had already been accomplished in the philosophical speculation of the day, for example by Numenius,²⁹ and Philo, too, had distinguished between God and the

Logos. Rather the distinctive feature here is the extreme demonization of the demiurge and the catastrophic rupture posited in the mimetic activity of the world creator.³⁰

Einar Thomassen has noted that Yaldabaoth is a very different figure from the Platonic demiurge. Not only is the term “demiurge” never used to describe him, but “Yaldabaoth does not contemplate an eternal model—in fact he is blind, as his co-name Sammael implies, and knows nothing of the world existing above him.”³¹ As the *Secret Revelation of John* explicitly states, Yaldabaoth “ordered everything after the likeness of the first Aeons which had come into being, so that he might create them in the indestructible pattern. Not because he had seen the indestructible ones, but the power in him which he had gotten from his Mother bore in him the likeness of the world” (*SRevJohn* II 13.21–24). It is only because he possesses Sophia’s power that Yaldabaoth is able to generate the lower world; he himself is an “amorphous and chaotic” figure.³² As Thomassen argues, this portrait departs severely from standard Platonism and, I would argue, it does so precisely in order to articulate concerns specific to the *Secret Revelation of John*.

As we saw above, criticisms of the demiurge were already being offered by philosophers. Numenius suggested that the Second God—his equivalent of Plato’s demiurge—was prone to desire and that his character was unstable; his concern for matter led him to lose contact with the intelligible model, a serious flaw which Numenius used to explain the imperfect character of the material world. Numenius’ characterization of the Second God seems to fit aspects of both Sophia and Yaldabaoth; it is her unconsidered desire that results in the world creator’s separation from any contact with the Divine Realm, yet it is Yaldabaoth who “seizes upon the sense realm.” Indeed it is plausible to think of Yaldabaoth as the result of a split in Sophia herself comparable to that in Numenius’ Second God. I am not suggesting that the *Secret Revelation of John* drew directly upon Numenius—we have no evidence of an explicit literary connection—but only that Christ’s representation of Sophia and Yaldabaoth would not have been entirely incomprehensible in a Platonizing framework. Similarly

Plutarch's notion of a "maleficent soul" that had broken away from the Divine Realm made it possible to imagine a break between the intelligible and material realms that involved active malevolence. The *Secret Revelation of John's* unremitting oppositional logic is consistent with this kind of negative characterization of the world creator and his products.

Several scholars have noted that the *Secret Revelation of John* relies upon other topoi as well to characterize the deficiencies of Sophia's offspring. For example, ancient medical theory is used to portray Yaldabaoth as the product of weak female semen, a consequence of being generated without the consent of Sophia's male consort.³³ The physician Galen argued that females produce semen, but that it is weaker than male seed: "The female semen is exceedingly weak and unable to advance to that state of motion in which it could impress an artistic form upon the fetus."³⁴ Richard Smith suggests that Sophia's desire to reveal a likeness from within herself (*SRevJohn* 10.2) is an example of just such a feeble attempt at female production. The result is that her offspring, Yaldabaoth, is weak, formless, and imperfect.³⁵

Or again, Howard Jackson has focused especially on the theriomorphic portrayal of Yaldabaoth as lion-faced. He has assembled an impressive list of associations that ancients made with the figure of the lion³⁶:

- * in astrology: the planetary house of Leo in the Zodiac, where souls are first born into the world³⁷;
- * in ethics and reproduction: sexual passion, an association that links Yaldabaoth schematically with fire as a cosmogonic principle (creation), as well as with the material passions, uncontrolled lust, and animality³⁸;
- * in politics: ruling and kingship;
- * in cosmogony and cosmology: fire as the cosmogonic principle of creation;
- * in psychology: the tripartition of the soul.

These associations with the image of a lion connect Yaldabaoth with sexual desire, bestiality, and cruel kingship. Jackson connects this tradition explicitly with Platonism:

The lion as a symbol of sexual desire . . . is but a special application of a broader tradition that used beasts as metaphors of the *πάθη* ("passions"). That tradition stems from the likeness that Plato has Socrates paint of the human soul in the ninth book of the *Republic*: the soul comprises an immortal, human element, a many-headed beast, who represents the basest of drives, and thirdly a lion, who is, for Plato, the potentially salvageable passion of *thumos*, the sum of all that is spirited, aggressive and courageous in man. The Greek philosophical tradition, especially Stoics like Poseidonios, kept this Platonic metaphor alive, but under astrological impetus in its inevitable assimilation to the passionate, theriomorphic archons of Gnostic myth it was more and more pessimistically interpreted.³⁹

These and other cultural codes and literary tropes work to further the *Secret Revelation of John's* "demonization of the demiurge." In employing these allusions, the myth-makers of the *Secret Revelation of John* exploited possibilities already present in the philosophical tradition while deploying them for their own ends.

Another critical use of Platonic tradition can be seen in the split of the female principle into higher and lower divinities: Pronoia-Barbelo and Sophia. Turner suggests that both these figures take on characteristics of Plato's receptacle:

The functions of the maternal member of the Sethian triad, Barbelo, are similar to that of Plato's Mother and Nurse of becoming: she embraces "the All" and its "Womb" (the *Apocryphon of John* BG 54.1-19; II 5.5 [II 5.24]), she serves as an "eternal space," a "primal ingenerateness," and receives the divine "spark" that gives rise to her self-generated Son. So too the other "Mother" figure, Sophia, takes on characteristics of the Platonic receptacle when it is said that she became "agitated" when Ialdabaoth extracted some of her power from her, moving to and fro, not "above the waters" (Gen 1:2), but in the darkness of ignorance. Such a division of the mother figure into two levels has its analogy in the

bipartitioning of the cosmic soul or logos into a higher, stable and intelligible level and lower level in motion that occurs in certain Middle Platonic thinkers such as Plutarch and Numenius.⁴⁰

As Williams notes, Pronoia-Barbelo also fulfills the Platonic role of providence. According to Pseudo-Plutarch, “the Highest and Primary Providence is the intellection and will of the First God, and is benefactress of all things; in conformity with her all divine things are primordially arranged throughout, in the best and most beautiful way possible.”⁴¹ Not only does Pronoia’s name mean “providence” or “forethought,” but she is the First Thought of the Father and she comes forth according to his will. She orders the Divine Realm and is the savior of humanity in the world below—and hence can well be regarded as a benefactress.⁴²

The presentation of Sophia also has a Platonic cast, insofar as later Platonists held that the female principle was responsible for the deficiencies of the material world and its divergence from the divine model. Thomassen notes, for example, that the Neopythagorean-Platonist tradition uses the term “audacity” (*tolma*) to describe “the breaking loose of the Dyad from the Monad.”⁴³ This trope clearly resonates with Sophia’s boldness in daring to produce an offspring without the consent of the Spirit or the participation of her male consort.⁴⁴ Her action, too, could be characterized as “breaking loose” since it leads to the rupture in the Divine Realm and the establishment of the lower world. In the *Secret Revelation of John*, however, Sophia’s ignorant daring produces a product that resembles her act: the audaciously arrogant and ignorant Yaldabaoth. He is the very personification of her extravagant boldness.

The fallible character of the demiurge is intimately tied up with the creation of a suffering and mortal humanity. According to Timaeus, the heavenly bodies were formed by the eternal God (the demiurge) and they partake of his divinity and perfection insofar as possible. The rest of created beings, however, were made by his “children,” the so-called “younger gods.” In a passage that is most important for our purposes (*Tim* 41a–42e),

Timaeus insists that the creator of the universe chose *not* to make the lower animals, including men, lest they be equal to the gods. Rather, in order for the universe to be universal (to reflect the divine plentitude), he reasoned that it must also contain that which is mortal; hence the younger, created gods were delegated to shape what is mortal in humanity. At *Timaeus* 69c–d, Timaeus describes this process more fully:

Now of the divine, he (the demiurge) himself was the creator, but the creation of the mortal he committed to his offspring. And they (the younger gods), imitating him, received from him the immortal principle of the soul, and around this they proceeded to fashion a mortal body, and made it to be the vehicle of the soul, and constructed within the body a soul of another nature which was mortal, subject to terrible and irresistible passions—first of all, pleasure, the greatest incitement of evil; then, pain, which deters from good; also rashness and fear, two foolish counselors, anger hard to be appeased, and hope easily led astray—these they mingled with irrational sense and with all-daring love according to necessary laws and so framed man.⁴⁵

Timaeus insists that this is all for the good:

These are the elements, thus of necessity then subsisting, which the creator of the fairest and best of created things associated with himself when he made the self-sufficing and most perfect god, using the necessary causes as his ministers in the accomplishment of his work, but himself contriving the good in all his creations. Wherefore we may distinguish two sorts of causes, the one divine and the other necessary, and may seek for the divine in all things, as far as our nature admits, with a view to the blessed life, but the necessary kind only for the sake of the divine, considering that without them and when isolated from them, these higher things for which we look cannot be apprehended or received or in any way shared by us (*Tim* 68e–69a).⁴⁶

According to Timaeus, God himself intended to “sow the seed” of “that part of men worthy of the name immortal, which is called divine and is

the guiding principle of those who are willing to follow justice" (*Tim* 41c). But even then, the elements God used to create these souls were not as pure as before, "but diluted to the second and third degree" (*Tim* 41d). He divided the divine substance into souls in such a number that each soul was assigned to a star. From this marvelous vantage point in their heavenly chariots, the creator of the universe showed them all of destiny. The first birth of every soul would be the same for each. But depending upon how well they lived, their destinies would differ. For upon being implanted in bodies, they would have the faculty of sensation "arising out of irresistible impressions" and love "in which pleasure and pain mingle—also fear and anger, and the feelings which are akin or opposite to them" (*Tim* 42a–b). In the *Secret Revelation of John* by contrast, "the divine substance" of the stars is mere psychic (soul) material, not the higher divine Spirit. Destiny is no leveler of souls, but a cruel device to impose unjust control over humanity, and the faculty of sensation attached to materiality serves the same end. When Pronoia admonishes the soul to "remember its root," she is referring to the true Spirit of the Divine Realm which the world rulers have caused the soul to forget—precisely by tying the soul to the passions and the body as the "younger gods" of Plato do.

According to Timaeus, in order to live righteously, the soul must conquer these impulses of pleasure and pain, fear and anger. If it succeeds, it will remember its origin and return to its assigned star to live in blessedness. But if it fails, it will be reborn into a lesser state corresponding to the evils it has done. From cowardly and unrighteous men come women; from light-minded simpletons come birds; from those who never follow the guidance of the soul in the head, but only the passions of the breast come wild pedestrian animals; the more senseless and foolish of the former class come to crawl upon the earth; finally the most utterly senseless and ignorant of all return as water creatures, such as fishes and oysters. Change of form reflects the loss or gain of wisdom and folly (*Tim* 92c). Only by the victory of reason over the irrational can the soul become better and return to its original condition. In principle, the *Secret Revelation of John* agrees: souls must work to overcome the passions of the soul, and if they fail they

are cast again into “fetters” and the “prison,” presumably indicating that they will be reincarnated until they overcome the counterfeit spirit.⁴⁷

Timaeus says that when the creator god (the demiurge) had finished forming these human souls and showed them destiny, he turned them over to the younger gods to add what was needed to their souls and to the formation of their mortal bodies. Moreover, the younger gods were “to rule over them, and to pilot the mortal animal in the best and wisest manner which they could and avert from him all but self-inflicted evils” (*Tim* 42e). As we have seen, the *Secret Revelation of John* also dwells at length on this topic, but depicts the rule of Yaldabaoth’s minions not as “the best and wisest” but as wicked domination. As van den Broek already noted, the *Secret Revelation of John* resonates deeply here with Plato’s *Timaeus*, but the dissonances are also profound. In Plato’s *Timaeus*, the body is purposefully formed in structural complementarity to the cosmos in order that the self might achieve its highest end in conformity to the nature of the world. In the *Secret Revelation of John*, that complementarity functions instead to imprison humanity because the lower creator gods do not form the parts of the body in order to aid humanity in their spiritual quest for true knowledge, but to bind them to their own power.

Timaeus speaks at length about how the body was fashioned to aid in training the mind to rule it in order that a man might live up to his true nature as a rational being. As we have seen, all of creation is conceptualized in the *Timaeus* as the combined work of mind and necessity (*Tim* 47d; 68e–69a), so that some things in man are created for their own sakes, such as the stomach for food, and some for the sake of the divine. When the former become ends in themselves, nature is confounded. Timaeus explicitly links the ordering and creation of man to that of the cosmos, such that the two are structurally complementary to one another. The shape of the head, like that of the cosmos, is spherical, since the head encloses the “most divine part of us and is the lord of all that is in us” (*Tim* 44d). Its proper nature is to rule over the members of the body as its servants, and hence it is located highest in the body. In the head are placed those senses

which most aid man in achieving his perfect nature. Most important of these are the eyes, for "God invented and gave us sight to the end that we might behold the courses of intelligence in the heaven, and apply them to the courses of our own intelligence which are akin to them, the unperturbed to the perturbed, and that we, learning them and partaking of the natural truth of reason, might imitate the absolutely unerring courses of God and regulate our own vagaries" (*Tim* 47b–c). Here the visible becomes a teacher of the invisible; the created guides the soul toward the uncreated. The proper employment of sight orients the soul toward its proper exercise of reason, and thus aids it to achieve its own natural perfection. Similarly the mouth is situated in the head by virtue of its capacity for speech. As Timaeus explains: "The framers of us framed the mouth, as now arranged, having teeth and tongue and lips, with a view to the necessary and the good, contriving the way in for necessary purposes, the way out for the best purposes. For that is necessary which enters in and gives food to the body, but the river of speech, which flows out of a man and ministers to the intelligence, is the fairest and noblest of all streams" (*Tim* 75d–e). Here necessity (ingestion) and mind (the capacity for speech) both play a part in the placement of the mouth; the latter is good, the former unavoidable.

For the *Secret Revelation of John*, this economic arrangement of the body will never lead to knowledge of the divine; it will only further the enslavement of humanity to the material world and the psychic gods of the lower heavens. The arrangement of each part of the body to fit *their* nature and *their* order works only to alienate humanity from its true spiritual nature. Thus, while the *Secret Revelation of John* confirms the psychic and physical links of humanity with the cosmos, that link is not a sign of humanity's true nature but the worst kind of deception and entrapment.⁴⁸

Timaeus further argues that, like the cosmos, man is made up of different kinds of soul: immortal, mortal, and animal. The first is divine and derives from the creator of the universe. It is this soul which shall live immortal among the immortal stars. It dwells in the head. The other two

souls were added by the younger gods for the sake of necessity. The best of these lower two is the mortal soul, which is subject to pleasure and pain, rashness and fear, anger and hope. These are mingled with irrational sense and love. In order not to pollute the higher soul more than necessary, this soul has its boundary at the neck and proceeds to the midriff. That part of the mortal soul that is obedient to reason (courage and passion and love of contention) is between the midriff and the neck, closest to the head. The heart is located as a guard, so that passion might best be directed by reason. The lungs are there to support the heart in its task of regulating passion. The part of the soul which desires food and drink dwells further down by the navel:

(The gods) contriv(ed) in this region a sort of manger for the food of the body, and there they bound it down like a wild animal which was chained up with man and must be nourished if man was to exist. They appointed this lower creation his place here in order that he might be always feeding at the manger, and have his dwelling as far as might be from the council chamber, making as little noise and disturbance as possible, and permitting the best part to advise quietly for the good of the whole and the individual (*Tim* 70d–71a).

The liver is placed so as to aid in directing mind toward controlling the phantoms and visions generated in the “manger,” and so on for the rest of the body. Each part is placed exactly where it can provide the best blend of necessity and mind, for necessity provides man with what he needs to survive, while mind aims at the proper governance of the inferior by the superior (the body by the mind, the irrational by reason, the mortal by the immortal). Thus the third type of soul is placed between the midriff and the navel, for it has “no part in opinion or reason or mind, but only in feelings of pleasure and pain and the desires which accompany them” (*Tim* 77b). Such a soul is by nature passive, lacking the motions of reason.

According to Timaeus, the ordering of the human body is purposeful in every part, and is the best possible arrangement to aid man in achieving

his divine end. Moreover, every part of the human body mirrors the cosmos. Even respiration and the circulation of blood imitate the motion of the universe (*Tim* 81a-b). The body itself was designed to cooperate to the fullest extent possible in helping man nurture the divine part of his soul and achieve his goal to establish the rule of reason over the irrational within himself. Timaeus envisions the goal of human life as the return of man to his primordial nature, in accordance with the nature of universe:

Now there is only one way of taking care of things, and this is to give to each the food and motion which are natural to it. And the motions which are naturally akin to the divine principle within us are the thoughts and revolutions of the universe. These each man should follow, and by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the universe, should correct the courses of the head which were corrupted at our birth, and should assimilate the thinking being to the thought, renewing his original nature, so that having assimilated them he may attain to that best life which the gods have set before mankind, both for the present and the future (*Tim* 90c-d).

The *Secret Revelation of John's* account of the first man's composition also accords him three parts: the spirit-breath of the Mother-Sophia, the psychic substance of the "semi-divine" world rulers, and matter (or in II the material soul) whose nature belongs to the senses. It agrees, too, in describing the nature and relative value of each. The divine spirit partakes of immortality and true life. The psychic substance is characterized by the passions: pleasure, desire, fear, and grief, and all of their kind. The material nature is ruled by the four demons: hot and cold, wet and dry. To each should be given its due. The spiritual nature should be nurtured in every manner possible, but especially through revelation. The psychic nature should be resisted and if possible overcome entirely by pursuing an ethics aimed at purifying the soul from all evil. Finally, the power of the material nature should be neutralized, giving the material body only its minimal requirements until the final release, and employing practices of baptism and

healing magic (or exorcism) to protect the soul and body from the active malice of the powers that rule the world.⁴⁹

Like Plato in the *Timaeus*, the *Secret Revelation of John* asserts that the goal of human life is the return to the natural state of the universe, but they disagree irreconcilably in how they value the relationship between the highest part of the human self and creation of the material world. Plato would seem to accord humanity the capacity to achieve immortal bliss through the use of self-governing reason. He argues that humans merely require a proper education and good government to aid them, for they act unjustly only through ignorance and the tyranny of the passions over the reasoning mind. Such limitations can be overcome by the wise man, and it is such men who should rule in human government. The tendency of this kind of thinking is to account for evil, even political injustice, in terms of individual moral character and not as the result of social structures or the nature of the cosmos. From the *Secret Revelation of John's* perspective, the situation is much more dire, requiring divine aid. While Christ teaches the importance of overcoming ignorance and the passions in order to end suffering and evil, the *Secret Revelation of John* does not consider the practice of philosophy adequate to deal with the systematic, active malice pervading the very structure of the governance of the universe. For a more adequate account of the human condition and the possibility of salvation, the *Secret Revelation of John* looks elsewhere. We turn now from Plato to Moses.

8

Moses

ACCORDING TO TRADITION, God revealed the story of creation found in *Genesis* to Moses on Mount Sinai. In this account, creation is represented as the product of a divine Being who brings order to a watery chaos through speech-acts of enormous effective power. He first divides the world into distinct spheres: the light-filled heavens, the realms of air and water, and finally the regions of dry land. When these spheres are complete, God fills them with creatures appropriate for them, establishing time and filling the earth with teeming life: sun and stars in the heavens; birds and fish in the air and water; terrestrial animals on the dry land. Last of all he creates humanity in his image and likeness, male and female, to multiply and rule over the other living beings of creation. Ruling is part of God's intention in creation and belongs to his goodness, his concern for the proper care of creation. Humanity justly rules over the rest of creation because they alone are created in the divine image and likeness. The command to multiply is fundamental to the human task of life-giving rule set by God, and part of the goodness of creation. Their food is to be taken solely from plant life; there is no indication that killing or death belongs to God's plan; human mortality arises only through human disobedience.

A second creation story follows immediately on the narrative heels of the first, focusing not upon the orderliness and goodness of creation but upon the reason for human suffering and death. This is the story of Adam and Eve, a tale that through all the millennia of its telling has not ceased to fascinate and provoke.¹ God shapes a creature out of the ground and

breathes into it the breath of life. He places the human creature in a paradisiacal garden in order that it might be a farmer, tilling the ground and making it fruitful. Tension surfaces in the narrative at two points. First, with no explanation, God commands the first human not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and threatens it with death should it do so. Second, God notes that the human is alone, and He seeks a suitable companion among the animals without success. At last He puts the human into a deep sleep and brings forth woman out of his flesh and bones. Only now is humanity described in terms of sexual identity: "She shall be called *ishshah* (female) for she was taken out of *ish* (male)" (Gen 2:23b). Sexual union alone satisfies the deep need for human companionship, and it does so without any shame.

This "love story goes awry" when the humans are faced with the subtlety of the wild snake, who suggests to the woman that she and Adam will not die if they eat of the tree. Indeed its fruit is desirable insofar as it is capable of imparting a moral wisdom that will make them "like God knowing good and evil." The woman weighs the serpent's words, noting that the fruit is edible, that the tree is beautiful, and that wisdom is a desirable good. So she eats and gives some to the man.

Why is this act so wrong? Surely it is not blameworthy to want to attain moral knowledge. What about the desire to "be like God"? Surely there is no fault in this impulse—for ancient ethicists commonly considered the goal of all moral striving to become like God so far as possible.² No, the problem lies in *hybris*, in overstepping proper bounds, in placing human desire over divine command. Eating the fruit introduces a crucial rupture in the political order of ruling: the disobedience by the created toward their creator. Independent moral knowledge is apparently not needed; obedience to the rule of God is sufficient to assure moral order. Or rather Adam and Eve's action proves that they lack moral knowledge precisely because they act contrary to the will of God; they only realize their error once they have eaten. They have in effect produced the knowledge of good and evil by their own act of disobedience.

The consequences of their little meal are well-known. God curses creation by placing enmity where harmony had reigned: between animals and humans, between man and woman, between humanity and the earth. The final blow is the establishment of death by sealing off human access to the Tree of Life and casting Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden. Opposition to God's life-giving rule enters human history almost immediately in the most bitter form of murder: fratricide in the killing of Abel by Cain. The situation continues to deteriorate, culminating in God's reversal of the order of creation by collapsing the firmament and flooding the dry land. Only Noah, his family, and a select number of animals survive. Subsequent history is caught in this cycle as it is repeated again and again: human sin is followed by just punishment, repentance by unmerited divine mercy. Such is the human condition: suffering and injustice result because of continuing human resistance and opposition to the proper rule of God, their creator. Life continues only by God's unfailing mercy and justice.

The dissimilarities between the *Secret Revelation of John* and *Genesis*, especially in the evaluation of the creator God, are obvious and have often been noted, primarily by portraying the *Secret Revelation of John's* account as an impious "reversal" of the Biblical portrait of God's goodness in creation.³ The similarities between the two accounts are perhaps more subtle, at least to offended sensibilities, but they are fundamental. Both *Genesis* and the *Secret Revelation of John* understand the origins of evil to lie in action contrary to the knowledge and will of the true God. Both portray independent female thought and action as the cause of the rupture. Although the *Genesis* account understands the rule of male over female to arise only as a consequence of human disobedience, Christian interpreters in the Roman period usually understood Eve's act as a reversal of the "natural" hierarchical order of the male over the female.⁴ In the *Secret Revelation of John*, this reading is contested in BG regarding Eve, but all the versions agree in representing Sophia's action as a rupture of proper order. Sophia acts without the consent of the Father or her male partner. She oversteps the bounds of hierarchical gender order, leading to a rupture in the cos-

mos as well as among all living creatures. This reversal of proper order is also figured in the reversal of the natural rule of the human over the bestial. In *Genesis*, this theme appears in the serpent's wily speech to Eve and Adam; in the *Secret Revelation of John*, it appears in the picture of theriomorphic demigods using deception to rule over humanity. Both *Genesis* and the *Secret Revelation of John* understand the female's action as the cause of the rupture between the true God and humanity. Only the location of the rupture differs—and that makes all the difference.

For *Genesis*, the rupture lies in human disobedience to the creator; for the *Secret Revelation of John*, it is doubly portrayed, first in Sophia's bold independence and then in the world creator's subsequent disobedience to the transcendent Deity, a disobedience that constitutes an extreme consequence of Sophia's willful and ignorant behavior. Both acts of disobedience, in *Genesis* by the humans and in the *Secret Revelation of John* by Yaldabaoth, are motivated by the desire to be (false) gods. In *Genesis*, this arrogance is made explicit by the serpent's promise: "You (pl.) will be like God, knowing good and evil." At this point, the *Secret Revelation of John* shifts attention away from Sophia's motivation to focus upon the creator deity, Yaldabaoth. It is he, not humanity, who acts in arrogant disobedience by claiming that he is the only god. As we have seen, the subsequent acts of creation and domination by Sophia's misbegotten offspring are but further false and flawed attempts to style himself as God.

What this comparison demonstrates is not piety or impiety on the part of the mythmakers of the *Secret Revelation of John* (that judgment depends upon a normative positionality), but differences in the strategic deployment of common themes and logic. From Philo to Augustine, most interpreters of *Genesis* in the early centuries CE agreed in reading the dietary choice of Eve and Adam as a sin exemplifying the reversal of the proper hierarchical order of the rule of God over humanity, male over female, human over animal (as established by Adam's naming of the animals and reversed by Eve's obeying the snake). Not so in the *Secret Revelation of John*; there eating from the Tree of Knowledge brings illumination. The reversal

of the true Deity's proper hierarchical rule occurs not with Eve and Adam, but at the edges of the Divine Realm itself, in the will and desire of Sophia and her offspring to be like God. The lower world, the cosmic realm of darkness, is patterned on the Divine Realm of Light, but its flaw is already exposed by the fact that the cosmic realm is a fatherless world, orphaned by Sophia's desire to create without her male partner.

Serious consequences follow from moving this rupture of divine order away from human responsibility to the edges of the Divine Realm. According to the *Secret Revelation of John*, human suffering and death do not arise because of human disobedience, and hence they cannot be overcome through adherence to an ethic of obedience to ecclesiastical authority. Contrary to Augustine's interpretation of *Genesis*, which has ruled the Christian imagination for over a millennium, the *Secret Revelation of John* holds that suffering and death do not arise from a moral defect in human character. Rather sin—ontological and epistemological alienation from God—is the result of rupture within the divine world, leading to human subjugation to a false god and his minions. These false gods maliciously seek to deceive humanity through counterfeit and deception: sexual reproduction instead of spiritual life; tasty foods instead of spiritual nourishment; law instead of justice; worldly knowledge instead of truth; material success instead of spiritual wholeness. As we have seen, for the *Secret Revelation of John*, overcoming suffering and death can only be achieved through revelation of humanity's true situation, cultivation of an ethics of *apatheia* by which the passions are mastered, and protection from the power of evil through baptism. Willful desire to be like God is at the root of the human situation, but its cause is less opposition to God than ignorance. Because this desire originates within the Divine Realm, humanity is not responsible for its own condition of suffering. Humans require salvation, not judgment. The sin is not theirs, but the consequences are. Yet humans are also responsible insofar as they become complicit in Sophia's error by sinning. It is necessary to reject all evil and turn to God, to be instructed in the truth and purified from all sin, in order to be saved. Human choice and

moral effort are not absent from Christ's teaching in the *Secret Revelation of John*, and yet the weight of responsibility for suffering and death lies with Sophia and Yaldabaoth, not with Adam and Eve.

How is it that the *Secret Revelation of John* can read *Genesis* this way? What presuppositions would one have to hold to generate such a reading or to make it plausible? One answer is that the *Secret Revelation of John's* reading solves certain problems that Jews and Christians were generally struggling with, especially the portrait of an anthropomorphic god who walks in the garden in the cool of the day (in the face of increasingly transcendent notions of monotheistic Deity), who has to ask Adam and Eve where they are (as though an omniscient God wouldn't know), who condemns all humans to death for eating a piece of fruit (in the face of claims to God's justice), and who describes Himself as filled with the passions of jealousy and wrath (when such passions are generally regarded as tied to the impulses of ignorance and the flesh).⁵ But in solving these problems, the *Secret Revelation of John* offered a radical solution that appealed to few. Suggesting that the creator God was ignorant and wicked resolved the problems but offered little comfort to those who looked to Scripture as divine truth and sought to model their lives according to its teaching.

To whom would such a solution make sense? Hans Jonas, one of the foremost scholars of Gnosticism in the twentieth century, argued that what made a myth like the *Secret Revelation of John* distinctive was its articulation of a particular experience of self and world, a kind of mood and worldview that reflected a human condition of existential alienation and nihilism.⁶ These he thought were the result of an historical crisis caused by the breakdown of ancient social institutions. The content and mood of Gnosticism was an expression of the world as it was actually experienced,⁷ and as such it expressed the particular historical conditions of that specific time and place. Thus the *Secret Revelation of John's* radical solution to the problems in *Genesis* corresponded to the "factual living conditions" people were experiencing.⁸

These views offer us two very important clues: The *Secret Revelation of*

John's interpretation of *Genesis* was plausible and persuasive to some people because it offered solutions to difficulties they had in reading *Genesis*, and because it was congruent with their psychological and material conditions. We can expand these insights by noting that the *Secret Revelation of John* provides more evidence of utopian commitments to social justice and divine salvation than it does to alienation and nihilism; so the text does not merely reflect social-political, economic, and psychological conditions, it also shapes attitudes toward them. It offers ethical orientation and hope to desperate people in an unjust world. It is also the case that the *Secret Revelation of John* did not merely solve certain academic difficulties in *Genesis*, it determined the reality of God and the truth of the human condition. It did this by reading a variety of ancient traditions as part of the same story. As we have seen, Plato's portrait of the Divine One was widely accepted and highly valued, but his understanding of evil was generally regarded as inadequate. On the other hand *Genesis*, despite problems with its anthropomorphic and limiting portrait of God, offered a much more extensive and persuasive narrative of the origin of human suffering and death. Reading the two together was one elegant solution to a disturbing set of questions. And this is precisely what the *Secret Revelation of John* does.

Plato and Genesis

Reading Plato and *Genesis* together as the same story was no innovation of the *Secret Revelation of John*.⁹ The Jewish philosopher Philo, for example, had integrated Plato's division of Being and becoming with the two creation stories of *Genesis* by reading the first story of creation in seven days as the creation of the immaterial world of Ideas, and the second story of the formation of Adam and Eve as the creation of the material world.¹⁰ In the *Secret Revelation of John*, the dualism of Plato's *Timaeus* is also seamlessly interwoven with *Genesis*. But instead of reading *Genesis* 1–3 as two stories as Philo does, the *Secret Revelation of John* reads both stories of *Genesis* twice, once with regard to the creation of the Divine Realm and again with regard to the creation of the lower world.

How does this work? According to the reasoning of the *Secret Revelation of John*, the world below is a copy of the world above, so everything that happens in the upper world has its reflection or parodic imitation in the world below. Although the intertextual references to *Genesis* in the account of the generation of the Divine Realm are relatively thin and easily missed, the allusions are sufficiently numerous for the reader to perceive them.¹¹ The allusions to the *Genesis* narrative in the creation of the world below are more obvious and have been widely documented. The account begins with Christ's interpretation of *Genesis* 1.1, where the spirit of God moves over the face of the waters, as the repentance of Sophia (*SRevJohn* 14.8–14), and continues with considerable detail, albeit selectively, through *Genesis* 9.17, where Noah and those with him are saved from the flood. My point here, however, is not merely that the *Secret Revelation of John* alludes to *Genesis*, but that the *Genesis* narrative is mapped onto a dualistic (Platonizing) framework by telling the story twice. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the point:

- ✦ Just as the spirit of God moves over the water and produces light in *Genesis* 1.2–3, so in the upper world of the *Secret Revelation of John* the transcendent Deity's creative self-contemplation in the light-water brings forth Pronoia; she is both the true light and the first Human (a word play on God's command "Let there be light/man"). Correspondingly in the lower world, the Light-Adam appears on the water below as the first act of God's appearance in the world. And Yaldabaoth's creation of fire parodies the true divine light (*SRevJohn* 11.4).
- ✦ Just as God creates humanity in his image and likeness in *Genesis* 1.26, so in the Divine Realm, Pronoia—who is called "the First Human"—appears as "the likeness of the light, the image of the Invisible Spirit" (*SRevJohn* 5.18–19). In the world below, the world rulers also create a human in the divine image and according to their own likeness (*SRevJohn* 15.12).
- ✦ Just as God creates through speech in *Genesis* 1, so the All comes forth through Christ, the Word of God, a personification of God's creative

activity as speech.¹² The *Secret Revelation of John* explicitly states that “through the Word, Christ, the divine Autogenes created the All” (*SRevJohn* 7.23). In the lower world, Yaldabaoth also creates through speech (*SRevJohn* 13.7).

- ✦ As God places lights in the firmament of heaven in *Genesis* 1:14–19, so in the Divine Realm Christ brings forth the four Lights (*SRevJohn* 8.1). In the lower world, Yaldabaoth creates the erring stars (the planetary powers and firmaments; *SRevJohn* 11.6).
- ✦ Just as in *Genesis* God creates Adam who brings forth his son Seth and all the generations of the seed of Seth, so too the plentitude of the Divine Realm includes Adam, Seth, and the seed of Seth. In the world below, the world rulers shape Adam; he produces Seth and the generations of the immovable race.
- ✦ In *Genesis* Eve is presented as the mother of the living; Pronoia fills this role for the Divine Realm, but so does another figure: Sophia. She is presented in the *Secret Revelation of John* as a kind of Eve figure. In both *Genesis* and the *Secret Revelation of John* a woman is at fault, motivated by the desire to “be like God.”¹³ Like Eve’s expulsion from paradise, Sophia’s expulsion from the Divine Realm marks the beginning of human suffering and death. So, too, in the lower world, God brings forth Eve from Adam and he recognizes her as “the mother of the living.”

There are numerous additional examples of this double reading of *Genesis*, but these are sufficient to illustrate how the *Secret Revelation of John* interlaces the twice-told tale of *Genesis* with the Platonic structure of Being and becoming.

Other particular characters or episodes are also given a dual Platonic and Biblical cast, without necessarily being told twice. For example, just as Plato holds that the stars are the final dwelling place of human souls, so too the four Lights are the final resting place of spiritual humanity in the *Secret Revelation of John*. Or again, Williams has suggested that the “to and fro” movement of *Genesis* 1.2 also has a correspondence in Platonism: “Precisely in a passage in the *Timaeus* that is touching on the levels of transi-

tion from the realm of transcendence to the realm of matter, Plato has the Demiurge lecturing to the not-yet-descended souls about the passion that they will experience when they are implanted in mortal bodies that are characterized by 'to and fro movement' (*Tim* 42a). It is just after this lecture that we read of the commissioning . . . of the construction and governance of the mortal realm by the younger gods (42d-e), and the subsequent narrative of the execution of this demand is full of remarks about erratic motion, disturbance and shaking which the soul experiences in the mortal bodies that are created (42e-44b).¹⁴ Such examples could be multiplied. The point is to see that *Genesis* and Plato's dialogues are being read selectively as part of the same story. But there are other major intertexts we need to consider as well, notably Jewish Wisdom literature.

9

Wisdom Literature

SINCE THE PUBLICATION of George MacRae's pivotal article on "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth" (1970), the importance of Jewish wisdom literature for understanding the *Secret Revelation of John* has been assured.¹ He detected numerous similarities to the figure of Sophia, whose name is the Greek translation of "wisdom" (*hokmah*) in Hebrew. Wisdom appears in Jewish literature as a female character acting out God's plan for creation and salvation.² She is variously described as the co-creator and first born of God, as the light, the bringer of life and salvation, and a teacher. She is the designer and controller of history who gave the Law to Moses and inspired the prophets. She is a spring and the living water. She comes down to humanity in a variety of guises to offer her wisdom, but she is rejected and finds no home among humans even though she is their mother and the source of life. Yet those who listen to her gain the knowledge of God and immortality.³

Numerous allusions to Wisdom find their place in the *Secret Revelation of John*, but with at least two significant modifications. In the first place, however extensive, the *Secret Revelation of John's* appropriation of the Wisdom tradition is highly selective. Those traditions that identified the true God with the creation of the world and the goodness and beauty in it are never cited. Nor are places where Sophia's mission was deemed successful, for example in inspiring the righteous throughout the history of Israel or in giving the Law to Moses.⁴ Second, the characteristics and roles given to the single figure of divine Wisdom in Jewish literature⁵ are spread among

a variety of figures in the *Secret Revelation of John*, including Pronoia, Epinoia, Sophia, and Eve. This profusion of wisdom figures can at times be confusing, but their multiplication and identification is a major unifying strategy in the narrative, bringing the diverse acts of creation and salvation above and below into a unity of purpose.

The decisive move was to split the figure of Wisdom into two higher and lower characters: Pronoia and Sophia. Pronoia is the primary savior figure in the text, bringing revelation and the power of the divine Spirit to humanity, but she does so primarily through her emissaries Autogenes-Christ and Epinoia, each of whom takes on some of the associations of Wisdom. Sophia, on the other hand, is a less positive figure, not only because her actions mirror those of the Biblical Eve, but because she is associated with the creation of the lower world. Her son, the Chief Ruler Yaldabaoth, is presented as a kind of anti-wisdom or fallen wisdom figure, the personification of Sophia's foolish desire to create alone apart from the harmony of her male partner and without the consent of the Father. Let's look at each of these figures more closely in order to see better how the allusions to Jewish wisdom literature are appropriated in the *Secret Revelation of John*.

The higher wisdom figure Pronoia is the true source of divine creation and salvation. Although the ultimate source of the All is the Invisible Spirit, everything proceeds from Pronoia. She is the only being to come forth directly from the Father's self-contemplation in the light-water. She is triple-formed: as Ennoia, she is the transcendent Deity's self-reflection; as Pronoia, she is Its thought; as Protennoia, she is Its thinking.⁶ She is called "his own image," the power that pre-exists everything else, the perfect Providence ("Pronoia"), the light and the likeness of the light, the Mother-Father, the First Man, and the virginal Spirit (*SRevJohn* 5.18–26). This is the true generation of the first of the transcendent Deity's creation: the Pronoia of Light, who is the Father of everything that comes forth⁷; she brings light and knowledge to all the aeons and to humanity. Every act of salvation and all the savior figures in the work are directly

identified with her. She is the giver of hidden revelation, the teacher of life who sends the Spirit to strengthen and instruct humanity. She gives immortality and knowledge of divine things.

There is no one passage in Jewish wisdom literature that presents precisely this portrait, but all of these characteristics of Pronoia in the *Secret Revelation of John* are attributed to Wisdom somewhere, and many of them are repeatedly emphasized. For example:

- ✦ first creation of God and co-creator: “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work the first of his acts of old . . . When he established the heavens, I was there . . . I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always” (*Prov* 8.22, 27a, 30).
- ✦ teacher of life: “Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Happy is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD, but whoever misses me injures himself; all who hate me love death” (*Prov* 8.33–36).
- ✦ light, spring of living water poured forth from the light,⁸ the power who is before the All, the glory of God, pure, a reflection of eternal light, a mirror of God’s working, the teacher of hidden revelation: “I learned both what is secret and what is manifest, for Wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me. For in her there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent and pure and most subtle. For Wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of the eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of

his goodness. Though she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the man who lives with wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against Wisdom evil does not prevail" (*Wis* 7.21–30 LXX).

- ✦ the Spirit sent as teacher and savior of humanity: "Send her (Wisdom) forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of thy glory send her, that she may be with me and toil, and that I may learn what is pleasing to thee. For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory. Then my works will be acceptable, and I shall judge thy people justly, and shall be worthy of the throne of my father. For what man can learn the counsel of God? Or who can discern what the Lord wills? For the reasoning of mortals is worthless, and our designs are likely to fail, for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthly tent burdens the anxious mind. We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labor; but who has traced out what is in the heavens? Who has learned thy counsel, unless thou hast given wisdom and sent thy holy Spirit from on high? And thus the paths of those on earth were set right, and men were taught what pleases thee, and were saved by Wisdom" (*Wis* 9.10–18).
- ✦ gives immortality: "in kinship with Wisdom there is immortality" (*Wis* 8.17).
- ✦ the remembrance of God: "Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my produce. The remembrance of me is sweeter than honey, and my inheritance sweeter than the honeycomb . . . Those who work with my help will not sin" (*Sir* 24.19–20, 22b).

Jewish wisdom literature had already made a place for Wisdom in *Genesis*. She is identified with the Spirit of God moving over the face of the

waters of darkness, and the light of *Genesis* 1.2–3. The Rabbis understood the plural of *Genesis* 1.26 (“let *us* create humanity in *our* image and likeness”) to be a reference to Wisdom working with God. She strengthens Adam and preserves Noah in the time of the flood. These and other images are appropriated by the *Secret Revelation of John*, creating a rich tapestry of Jewish and Platonizing allusions in Christ’s revelation.⁹

In addition, a distinctively Christian interpretation of *Genesis* enters here in reading the term “light” as “man” (a pun on the Greek words *phôs* and *phôs* from *Genesis* 1.2, as we saw above). In the *Secret Revelation of John*, the light-man who appears in the Divine Realm is Pronoia, called “the First Human.” But this figure is quickly identified with Christ as well when, in an act of self-reflective vision, Pronoia produces a spark of the blessed light, the Autogenes-Christ. He is the light, the only-begotten, “the first-born Son of the All of the Spirit of pure light.” He is not her equal, but he is perfect and completely good. He, too, acts as a creator: “And the Word followed the will. For through the Word, Christ, the divine Autogenes, created the All” (*SRevJohn* 7.22–23).¹⁰ He is granted authority and knowledge of the All, which allows him to act as a revealer to humanity (*SRevJohn* 7.26–32). It is his progeny who appears as the Light-Adam on the waters below and he is the divine model for the creation of Adam by the world rulers. Thus while Pronoia and Christ are closely associated in the *Secret Revelation of John*, the two figures are distinct hypostases, with Christ (word) subordinate to Pronoia (wisdom), as an offspring to a parent. Yet both play roles as creator and revealer, and they share similar epithets, so that Autogenes-Christ is also a kind of wisdom figure.¹¹

Another prominent wisdom figure is the emissary of light, Epinoia. She is sent down from the Divine Realm to aid Adam by bringing him life and knowledge (*SRevJohn* 18.24–27), even as *Wisdom of Solomon* 10.1–2 declares that Wisdom protected, delivered and strengthened Adam: “Wisdom protected the first-formed father of the world, when he alone had been created; she delivered him from his transgression and gave him strength to rule all things” (*Wis* 10.1–2). She also shelters Noah and the whole immovable race within a luminous cloud, even as Wisdom saved

Noah: "When the earth was flooded because of him, Wisdom again saved it, steering the righteous man by a paltry piece of wood" (*Wis* 10.4). She is the knowledge of the light, who teaches humanity about the things of God. So, too, Wisdom "makes instruction shine forth like light, like the Gihon at the time of vintage. Just as the first man did not know her perfectly, the last one has not fathomed her; for her thought is more abundant than the sea, and her counsel is deeper than the great abyss" (*Sir* 24.27–29). She proclaims "I will again make instruction shine forth like the dawn, and I will make it shine afar; I will again pour out teaching like prophecy, and leave it to all future generations. Observe that I have not labored for myself alone, but for all who seek instruction" (*Sir* 24.32–34). Even as Pronoia sends Epinoia as a gift to enlighten humanity, so in *Wisdom of Solomon*, God sends Wisdom:

For what person can learn the counsel of God? Or who can discern what the Lord wills? For the reasoning of mortals is worthless, and our designs are likely to fail, for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful mind. We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labor; but who has traced out what is in the heavens? Who has learned thy counsel, unless thou hast given Wisdom and sent thy holy spirit from on high? And thus the paths of those on earth were set right, and men were taught what pleases thee, and were saved by Wisdom (*Wis* 9.13–21).

Epinoia also appears as a kind of Eve figure in that she is called Adam's "helper" as is Eve in *Genesis* 2.18. It is Epinoia whom the world rulers attempt to extract from Adam in their act of "creating" the first woman. She knows their ploy, however, and escapes to the tree, instructing both Adam and Eve that they are "naked" of the light. The *Secret Revelation of John* identifies the higher aspect of Eve, who leads Adam to eat of the true knowledge of God, as divine Wisdom, while the material Eve is raped by the world rulers—but only after Epinoia has departed from her.

The figure most commonly associated by scholars both with Jewish

wisdom traditions and with Eve is Sophia. In the *Secret Revelation of John* (BG/III) the lower Sophia is called “our sister,” recalling *Proverbs* 7.4: “Say to Wisdom, ‘You are my sister.’” In a moving reading of *Genesis* 1.2, the spirit’s restless drifting over the waters is interpreted as Sophia grieving in shame at all the wickedness and rebellion that would occur through her son (*SRevJohn* 14.10–12). Just so Wisdom grieves for her children:

But how can I help you? For he who brought these calamities upon you will deliver you from the hand of your enemies. Go, my children, go; for I have been left desolate. I have taken off the robe of peace and put on the sackcloth of supplication; I will cry to the Everlasting all my days. Take courage, my children, cry to God, and he will deliver you from the power and hand of the enemy. For I have put my hope in the Everlasting to save you, and joy has come to me from the Holy One, because of the mercy which soon will come to you from your everlasting Savior (*Bar* 4.17–22).

Even as *Baruch’s* Wisdom entreats God to send aid to her children, so our Sophia prays and petitions the Father of the All (Pronoia) for aid (*SRevJohn* 14.23; 18.4).¹² Sophia is raised to the Ninth sphere above Yaldabaoth and his seven powers until her deficiency is corrected, even as Wisdom takes her place in the heavens according to *1 Enoch* 42.1–2.

Yet despite these and other similarities to Jewish wisdom tradition, the portrait of Sophia in the *Secret Revelation of John* is more parody than parallel. She is not the first creation of the true Deity, but the last of the aeons. She is powerful, but ignorant (see *SRevJohn* 10.7, 14). While she is responsible for all that comes forth in the lower world, that is not an occasion for praise but for repentance. The creator God of the lower world is not her source but the product of her ignorance. While it is Sophia who introduces light into the world below, the light becomes entrapped by his forces of darkness, making her the agent not of salvation but of enslavement. Grieving, she seeks help from the transcendent Realm, yet even though it is Sophia who seeks aid for her children, it is not she but the emissaries of

Pronoia from the light who descend into the world below. Here the Scriptural allusion is not to Wisdom, but to the *Genesis* story of Eve. As I noted above, the *Secret Revelation of John* reads this story in terms of rupture in the Divine Realm, even as *Genesis* presents it as rupture in God's plan for creation. In both stories, the origin of the rupture lies in action contrary to the will of God. Both narratives figure independent female thought and action as the source of the rupture. The *Secret Revelation of John*, however, significantly shifts the meaning of the rupture by associating the divine creatrix Sophia with the disobedient Eve—with the result that Sophia-Wisdom paradoxically comes to be equated with ignorance!

In this way, the “traditional” roles of Sophia as creator and savior are substantially reconfigured. The lower Sophia's creative role is limited to the act of rupture and she becomes not the savior but the object of salvation along with all her seed. Creation in the lower world derives instead from her child Yaldabaoth, who acts in some respects as a kind of “fallen Sophia-Eve.”¹³ It is he, not Sophia, who is enthroned and dwells in the clouds like Wisdom in *Sirach* 24.4.¹⁴ He is also something of an Eve figure, since he disobeys the transcendent Deity and aspires to be equal to God, even arrogantly claiming to be the only God. It is he who possesses (at first) the pure light and power stolen from the Mother. Since he possesses the light, he acts “as Christ” over his minions (*SRevJohn* BG 13.3), appropriating a false role of savior. The contrast between “the good son” (Autogenes-Christ, creator of the heavenly aeons) and “the bad son” (Yaldabaoth, creator of the world rulers and their demons) could not be more explicit. In these ways, the roles of Jewish Wisdom as creator and even as savior are shifted to Yaldabaoth.

This portrayal is a ferocious parody of true Wisdom—so much so that Aydeet Fisher-Müller has argued that Yaldabaoth is more closely equated with Wisdom's antithesis, Folly, than he is with Wisdom herself.

(S)ome characteristics of the demiurge suggest a close relationship between him and the adulterous/evil woman in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and

Sirach. Lady Folly in Proverbs 1–9 is no real woman. She is larger than life. Her feet reach down to Sheol. Her very essence is arrogance, pride and spiritual blindness. Through adulterous ways, she leads men to death. Yaldabaoth is no real woman either. He is larger than life, and he is larger than Lady Folly. He reaches cosmic dimensions and usurps the good creator God of old. Lady Folly represents an obstacle lurking from a corner of the path on which the young man travels, Yaldabaoth is an obstacle blocking most of the way leading to enlightenment. And as the young man in Proverbs is summoned to bypass the pitfalls of the seductive woman by Hokmah, so is the Gnostic called to escape the snares of Yaldabaoth by Pronoia . . .

Yaldabaoth the lion-faced monster with the flashing eyes represents the fires of passion, in particular, sexuality. He is the origin of sexual desire, whether he plants it in Eve or Adam. The human body is considered a tomb and trap. While the adulterous woman in Proverbs 1–9 is considered the cause of illicit sexuality, Yaldabaoth is seen as the origin of all sexuality and procreation.¹⁵

The wisdom of the lower world is folly. Just as the *Secret Revelation of John* satirizes *Genesis* by exposing the creator as an arrogant, theriomorphic pretender, so it takes equal pleasure in parodying Jewish wisdom tradition by portraying divine Wisdom as an ignorant and foolish female.

Jewish wisdom literature has no place for a fallen Sophia, but she makes sense in the context of the *Secret Revelation of John*. She is a logical result of the intertextual reading of Platonic cosmology, *Genesis*, and Wisdom literature. The “double” reading of *Genesis* and Wisdom on a dualist Platonizing framework produces two creator gods, two wisdoms, two Eves, and so on, one belonging to perfection, one to parody. Wisdom is the glue that holds all of these together. Wisdom is Pronoia, Sophia, and Eve (as well as Christ, Epinoia, and Yaldabaoth); she is the creator above (Pronoia) and below (Yaldabaoth); she is the savior above (Pronoia, Christ) and below (Epinoia, Christ). The lower Sophia is the unstable

bridge between the true reality and the flawed copy. Her story accounts at once for continuity and for rupture between these two realms.

The Jewish figure of Wisdom was thus an ambiguous figure for the *Secret Revelation of John's* mythmakers. In Jewish tradition she is a divine figure associated with light and knowledge, but she is also associated with the Jewish God as co-creator of the world. *Proverbs* 8 tells us that she was with the creator when he laid the foundations of the world, his helper and delight. This portrait makes her at best a disturbing figure for the *Secret Revelation of John*. She is a unifying as well as a transgressive figure who not only bridges above and below but is the sign of rupture through acts of female *hybris* and ignorance. To return the universe to proper order, she must be restored to her proper place through repentance.

I think the greater paradox, however, lies in the doubling of the figure of Eve. If Sophia is a kind of heavenly Eve, responsible for the rupture in the Divine Realm, the same cannot be said of the lower Eve in the *Secret Revelation of John*. Insofar as she is responsible for Adam eating the fruit of knowledge, she is his savior, not the source of sin and corruption. Like Pronoia above, she is mother of a son in the divine image. The *Secret Revelation of John's* highly favorable portrait of Eve seems to be a consequence of its parody: if the God who commands the humans not to eat is wicked, and eating is good, then Eve's action is right not wrong. The irony for the modern reader is that the story of Sophia actually conforms more closely to the Eve of *Genesis* than does the account of Eve in the world below. After all, it is Sophia who desires to be like God and transgresses the divine order, leading to suffering and death for all humanity. Again ironically, Eve's story in the *Secret Revelation of John* actually conforms more to the traditional figure of Wisdom who descends to bring knowledge and illumination to her children. Eve is identified with Epinoia of light, the Spirit of the heavenly Pronoia; she is the mother of Seth and consequently of all the immovable race. The result is the story of a "fallen" but repenting Sophia and a mother-savior named Eve.

IO

The Gospel of John

THE FINAL MAJOR INTERTEXT we are going to consider is the *Gospel of John*.¹ A number of features suggest that the framers of the *Secret Revelation of John* knew the *Gospel of John* and wanted the reader to see a connection between them. The titles of both works ascribe them to the apostle John,² and the frame story repeatedly offers language reminiscent of the *Gospel of John*:

- ✦ John asks himself, “Why was he sent into the world by his Father who sent him?” even as the *Gospel of John* says: “For God sent the Son into the world.”³ And the reason he was sent is also similar: Jesus says, “I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness” (*GosJohn* 12:46).
- ✦ The Johannine prologue declares that “the light shines in the darkness” and “the true light that enlightens every person was coming into the world”; so in the *Secret Revelation of John*, the appearance of Christ to John is marked by a light that illumines the whole creation below.⁴
- ✦ The Pharisee Arimanios asks John where his master is, and John replies: “He has gone again to the place from which he came,” and at the end of the revelation, Christ himself declares, “I first went up to this perfect aeon” (*SRevJohn* 27.1). Just so Jesus in the *Gospel of John* states repeatedly that he is from God and will return to God.⁵
- ✦ In the *Secret Revelation of John*, Christ is explicitly associated with the figure of Autogenes (“self-begotten”) and in that role is the only-begotten

Son of the Father, the Light, the Word who created the All, the true God over the All, and the Truth (*SRevJohn* 7.5–6, 23, 29–30). So, too, in the *Gospel of John*, Jesus is divine (God),⁶ the Christ,⁷ the only-begotten son,⁸ the Word through whom all things were made, the Light that shines in the darkness, and the Truth.⁹

- ✦ In the *Secret Revelation of John* 22.29–30, the Mother (Pronoia) sends her Spirit down to the heavenly race in order “to awaken the essence which resembles it (the Spirit)” and (in the longer version II/IV) “to prepare a dwelling place.” In the *Gospel of John*, Christ tells his disciples that after he leaves to “prepare a place” for them (14.3), the Holy Spirit will descend and “When the Spirit of truth comes, it will guide you into all the truth” (16.12). The sending of the Spirit in the *Gospel of John* identifies the Christian community as those who are filled with the Spirit, even as the immovable race is defined as a community of the Spirit-filled in the *Secret Revelation of John*.
- ✦ Arimanius accuses John of abandoning the tradition of his fathers and following the deceptions of Jesus, a charge not far from that of Jews in the *Gospel of John* 7.12 who claimed that Jesus “is leading the people astray.”
- ✦ Pharisees play the role of antagonists of Jesus in both works, and the anti-Judaism of the *Secret Revelation of John* would certainly fit a reading of passages in the *Gospel of John* such as 8.42–44: “Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him.’”
- ✦ In the *Gospel of John*, Jesus explicitly states that he will go first to prepare a place for his disciples, but will come again “and take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (*GosJohn* 14.3; cp. 13.36). It would seem that the appearance of Christ to John in the *Secret Revelation of*

John constitutes his “coming again” to bring John into the truth of the light and ultimately into the Divine Realm.

In addition to these and other possible allusions found in all versions of the *Secret Revelation of John*,¹⁰ it is also clear that the *Gospel of John* became increasingly important as an intertext in its transmission history. In particular there is a marked tendency to work out the connections to Johannine thought more systematically in the longer version (II/IV) than in the shorter versions (BG and III) through the addition of the Pronoia monologue and numerous smaller changes. The longer version explicitly associates Christ with each of the three appearances of Pronoia, and glosses them all as the light shining in the darkness, an elaborate expansion of *GosJohn* 1.5: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”¹¹

Several scholars have noted impressive similarities to the Johannine prologue, and even suggested that the Pronoia hymn might be directly related to it, either as the source of the prologue or as a paraphrase of it.¹² No matter how that issue is ultimately resolved, the changes in II/IV stressing that the true light comes into the world only with the appearance of Pronoia-Christ are striking. In particular, they strengthen the links to the Johannine prologue by interpreting Christ as the Word through an intertextual reading of *Genesis* and Jewish wisdom traditions and by interpreting Christ’s revelation as the light which comes from above into the dark world to enlighten humanity with the true knowledge of the Father.¹³

What might be the purpose of these Johannine links? One possibility is that they indicate conflict or competition. Ekschmitt has suggested that because a very large portion of the *Secret Revelation of John* understands itself as secret teaching, “The title ‘The Apocryphon (Secret Teaching) of John’ could elicit the opinion that the writing operates in competition to the canonical Gospel of John with the goal of expanding its teaching, perhaps even of surpassing it.”¹⁴ Another purpose might be exegetical. The fact that the entire *Secret Revelation of John* is framed as the return of Christ

to complete his revelation and show the way back to the Divine Realm makes it possible to read it as the completion of Christ's revelation in the *Gospel of John*, the fulfillment of his promise to return and show them the way back to the Father. The *Secret Revelation of John* is filling the gaps in Christ's revelation in the *Gospel of John*, offering a fuller narrative of the Divine Realm, the creation of the world and humanity, the condition of humanity in the world, and salvation. The ascription of the work to John overtly places the *Secret Revelation of John* in the tradition of Johannine Christianity and it has the effect of asking readers to interpret the *Gospel of John* within the framework of Christ's revelation.

II

Countering Lies and Deception

THE INEVITABLE CONCLUSION of Christ's revelation is that tradition is fraught with distortions, counterfeit images, and partial truths. The narrative of the *Secret Revelation of John* exposes this deception and counters it with the full truth of revelation. Before Christ, the truth had appeared only in a distorted way, perverted by the machinations of the world rulers. While emissaries from above had repeatedly worked to illumine humanity about the truth of their origins and destiny, all their teaching had been distorted—witness the partial and misleading accounts of Moses, Plato, and Solomon. But now Christ's own disciple, John, has composed a complete account of the full truth, an account that offers the key to understanding not just Moses, Plato, and Solomon but the *Gospel of John* as well.

In its revisionary mode, the *Secret Revelation of John* fits solidly within the Christian hermeneutical project. Christians in general were engaged in rereading Scripture (LXX), tradition, and history in the light of Christ's life and teaching. Paul, for example, insisted that, correctly read, the story of Hagar and Sarah presaged the second covenant of Christ (*Gal* 4.21–31). The *Gospel of Matthew* read the genealogy of Jesus as the culmination of all salvation history laid out in Scripture. In his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, Justin Martyr claimed that the true meaning of Scripture could only be understood as a prophecy of the coming of Christ, and Athenagorus in his *A Plea Regarding Christians* revised the entire conceptuality of ancient religious practice by styling the gods of traditional Greek and Roman religion as demonic powers.¹ If we moderns should feel the audacity of this

sweeping cultural project more fiercely in the pages of the *Secret Revelation of John* than we do with Paul or the *Gospel of Matthew*, that is only because the latter's historical success has domesticated their boldness. All such interpretations were revisionary, and Christians of all stripes were charged with impiety, immorality, atheism, and hatred of humanity for their efforts. Similar charges flew between Christians as well, because much was at stake in how the world was reread, not least the identity of Christianity itself.²

In part, the *Secret Revelation of John* is merely taking on the same problems that others were addressing. Ancient theologians and philosophers were concerned with certain problems they found in the Bible and Plato. For example, Jews and Christians sought to resolve the conflict between Moses' anthropomorphic portrait of God (as a vengeful, jealous deity who walked in the garden in the cool of the day and had to ask Adam and Eve where they were) and the reigning ideas of God as transcendent, omniscient and omnipotent. Or again, the use of the plural in *Genesis* 1.26 ("Let us create humanity in our image and according to our likeness") raised problems for monotheism. Other readers might well have asked what kind of God would want to keep humanity from the knowledge of good and evil, or punish all of humanity with death for eating a piece of fruit. Plato also left an assortment of difficulties to his successors such as the relation of the Demiurge (the creator God) to the transcendent One and how to account for evil and disorder in the world. The *Secret Revelation of John* resolved these difficulties in both *Genesis* and Plato by exposing the world creator as a demiurgic pretender, a lower, ignorant, and arrogant God. That solution not only explained the problematic character and actions of Moses' creator God, it also offered an account of the relationship between the demiurge and the transcendent Deity that explained the origin of evil and disorder, a point Plato had not sufficiently explained.

But such a solution could not be offered without significant criticism of both Moses and Plato. From the point of view of the *Secret Revelation of John*, Plato had been much too naïve in considering this world the best

possible and in associating its creation with the highest Deity, and he had not sufficiently accounted for the operations of active malice or for undeserved human suffering and death. Moses' account in *Genesis* corrected those mistakes by exposing the creation and governance of the world by a jealous, arrogant, and ignorant demi-god, but Moses wrongly supposed this deity to be the only true God, deserving of human worship and obedience. So while *Genesis* offered a plausible account of the serious rupture in creation that resulted in human suffering, toil, and death, Plato had offered a much more adequate theology of the transcendent Deity in the *Parmenides*. In the hands of Christ, each of these authors offered significant criticism of the other, while simultaneously solving problems or gaps in their respective thinking.

One of the charges often levelled against the *Secret Revelation of John* is anti-Judaism. Certainly its ridicule of the God of *Genesis* as an arrogant and ignorant pretender strikes at the core of Jewish piety. This charge goes far beyond "hermeneutical problem-solving" and seems indeed to "reverse" the true meaning of Scripture. As we have shown, the issue is less "reversal" than it is an effect of the *Secret Revelation of John's* double reading of *Genesis*, which is given a highly positive valence when applied to the generation of the Divine Realm, but a relatively negative valence when applied to the generation of the lower world. The point is that only Christ can open up the true meaning of Scripture, which has been distorted like everything else in the lower world. Scripture is nonetheless fundamental to the construction of the narrative Christ offers.

This said, it is impossible to gainsay the willingness, even gleefulness, of the *Secret Revelation of John's* ridicule of the most cherished beliefs of Jews. Surely this must be evidence of some kind of real animosity. The work's anti-Judaism would have functioned to draw sharp boundary lines between Judaism and Christianity—a fundamental issue in early Christian identity formation.³ Accepting the teaching of the *Secret Revelation of John* would have required rejecting how Jews were (variously) reading and appropriating their traditions. This point largely holds for philosophers as

well; criticism of Platonizing philosophy would similarly have served boundary-setting functions. But the biting animosity expressed toward *Genesis* does not appear in the treatment of philosophical and astrological materials—no matter how offended philosophers and astrologers may have been by what they saw as gross errors on the part of the *Secret Revelation of John*.

Further complicating the situation, Moses is used to correct Plato, and Isaiah is called upon to correct Moses. The point is not merely that the framers of the *Secret Revelation of John* rejected or disparaged the prestigious traditions of their age but that Christ's revelation *and that alone* offered the key to understanding the truth—about God, humanity, and the world. The *Secret Revelation of John's* intertextual reading strategy is not just aimed at using prior "sources" to make its own points. Its goal is to lead readers to read those "sources" through its lenses. If one accepts the revelation Christ gives in the *Secret Revelation of John*, it should not be possible to read Moses or Plato or Wisdom literature or the *Gospel of John* or any of the other material it incorporates the same way again. It has opened up new readings and new reading possibilities that may extend far beyond the actual content of the *Secret Revelation of John* itself to effect the construction of a new kind of reader. For although the apparent goal seems to have been to produce an entirely congruent and unified, totalizing narrative of God, the world, and humanity—a kind of grand theory of everything—in the end numerous incongruities and outright contradictions remain that push readers to their own investigations. We can speculate that in practice the narrative worked less to weave a seamless whole than to produce a particular kind of reader. Much as the *Book of Revelation* continues to produce readers who look at current events for signs of the end time and the second coming of Christ, so the *Secret Revelation of John* may have aimed to produce wise and resistant readers of the world. Readers who are able to expose the arrogance and ignorance of the power in the world, and discern the true Spirit from the counterfeit. Knowing readers who recognize that deception and violence are tools of the weak and the

malicious—not of the true God. Readers who are urged to seek and cultivate their true spiritual natures, created in the Image of the First Human and filled with the Spirit of the Mother.

Through their very particular reading of shared cultural resources, the framers and readers of the *Secret Revelation of John* produced a powerful social-political critique and a utopian vision of reality. The *Secret Revelation of John* represents itself as having the key to the true meaning of all of human history, the truth finally available only through revelation. Christ's teaching illumines the most prestigious cultural traditions by throwing them into the light of revelation. The traditions of the past can now be seen for what they are: deceptions, counterfeit images, and partial truths. But one can now also see in them the real truth. The *Secret Revelation of John* provides a paradigm for distinguishing between the true and the seeming, the model and the copy, the real and the deceptive.

I2

The History of the Text

IN THE INTRODUCTION, we traced some elements of the history of the *Secret Revelation of John*: the discovery of manuscripts in Egypt; possible connections with the local Pachomian monastery and the circulation of texts throughout Egypt; use by Irenaeus for refutation; and the work's composition in an urban school setting, arguably Alexandria. That review of the *Secret Revelation of John's* history gives some idea of the different audiences that may have read it over a period of about four centuries. What I'd like to do here is look at additional clues to the history of its use provided by the manuscript variants of the two major versions.

So far we have mostly been treating the *Secret Revelation of John* as though it were a single work, despite notable differences among three of the four surviving manuscript copies which show that the text of the *Secret Revelation of John* was unstable. Those differences (called manuscript variants) are the result of scribal changes during the process of transmission.¹ It was common practice in antiquity for scribes to "correct" or "improve" the manuscripts they copied. The changes we see in the different versions of the *Secret Revelation of John* indicate that even in antiquity readers found various kinds of difficulties or inadequacies in the text. Many changes can be attributed to the spelling practices or dialects of the scribes; others are attempts to improve the text's style or logical consistency; still others arise from different choices in the translations from Greek to Coptic. Such variants tell us very little about how the work was read in antiquity. Other variants, however, are more consequential. Looking systematically at

those variants can inform us about the interests of the scribes who made the changes, and perhaps also about how the work may have been used.²

All four surviving copies of the *Secret Revelation of John* largely tell the same story, but significant differences do appear, most notably in the two extensive additions to the longer version (II/IV): the list of the demons ruling over each part of the body, and the Pronoia hymn. The addition of the list of demons, supposedly taken from the *Book of Zoroaster*, indicates an intensified interest in integrating practices of healing into the mythical world of the *Secret Revelation of John*; it does not otherwise substantially change the meaning of the narrative. The addition of the Pronoia monologue at the end of the work, however, is more complex in its effects on the narrative of the *Secret Revelation of John* and it merits a closer look.

The Pronoia hymn

Scholars generally regard the Pronoia monologue as an independent composition, written in the late first or early second century, and later integrated into the *Secret Revelation of John*.³ In a brilliant essay, Bernard Barc and Louis Painchaud have demonstrated that the incorporation of the Pronoia hymn (or monologue⁴) precipitated a wave of changes throughout the whole work. Indeed most of the variants between the shorter and longer versions (excepting the list of demons) can be accounted for by seeing the longer version as the product of a coherent reworking of the narrative into an extended account of the triple descent of Pronoia into the lower world.⁵

The hymn itself is placed near the end of Christ's revelation to John, after the counterfeit spirit has mired humanity in temptation, forgetfulness, and darkness. The change from third to first person address exactly at that point apparently afforded a good literary opportunity to insert the first person address of the Pronoia hymn. In the hymn, Pronoia descends three times into the darkness in order to illumine her seed and bring them the protection of baptismal sealing. Yet when this hymn is inserted into the *Secret Revelation of John*, it is put in Christ's mouth. Thus it is no longer

Pronoia who speaks but Christ who declares, "I am the perfect Pronoia of the All." Thus Christ becomes identified with Pronoia-Barbelo, the first power who came forth from the thinking of the Invisible Spirit (*SRevJohn* II 5.16). It is reminiscent as well of Christ's first person declaration to John: "I am the Father; I am the Mother; I am the Son" (*SRevJohn* 3.12). The effect of these revelatory declarations is to see Christ not merely as an emissary from Pronoia, but as a kind of avatar of Pronoia herself.

At the first descent, Pronoia enters into the realm of darkness as far as "the midst of the prison." Her presence causes the foundations of chaos to shake, and she hides so that she will not be recognized. In the second descent, she approaches those who belong to the light, but again she retreats because her presence threatens to destroy the foundations of chaos before her mission is accomplished. Finally she descends for a third time and enters the prison of the body. She calls out the name of each of her seed, teaching them to remember their true root and sealing them against the forces of darkness. Having completed her mission, she ascends. With her departure, Christ concludes his revelation to John.

As Barc and Painchaud demonstrate, this schema of a triple descent was read back onto the narrative of the *Secret Revelation of John*, so that Pronoia's first descent is interpreted as the appearance of the Light-Adam on the water below; the second descent as Epinoia's aid to Adam; and the third descent as the revelation of Christ to John. This "rewriting" of the *Secret Revelation of John* is manifest in numerous changes throughout the narrative. In order to illustrate the most significant additions or changes from the versions of BG and III, I have marked them in italics in the quotations below. For example, II/IV makes significant changes and additions in describing the appearance of the reflection of the light-Adam on the waters below in response to the repentance of Sophia:

And a voice came *from the exalted heavenly Aeon*, "The Human exists and the Child of the Human." The Chief Ruler, Yaltabaoth, heard it, but he thought that the voice had come *from his Mother, and he did not*

understand where it had come from. And the holy and perfect Mother-Father, the perfect Pronoia, the image of the Invisible, who is the Father of the All, in whom the All came into being, the First Human, taught them by revealing his likeness in a male model. The Aeon of the Chief Ruler trembled all over and the foundations of the abyss quaked. And upon the waters which dwell under matter, the underside was illumined by the appearance of his image which had been revealed. And when all authorities and the Chief Ruler stared (on the water), they saw all the region below which was shining. And by the light, they saw the model of the image upon the water (SRevJohn II 15.1–11).

Compare this with the description of the first descent of Pronoia in the hymn:

I, the perfect Pronoia of the All, changed into my seed. For I existed from the first, traveling on every road. For I am the wealth of the light. I am the remembrance of the fullness. I traveled into the vastness of the dark, and I persevered until I entered the midst of the prison. And the foundations of chaos quaked. And I hid myself from them because of their evil, and they did not recognize me (SRevJohn II 26.1–8).

As Barc and Painchaud note, the changes in II 15 as a whole work to make it clear that it is Pronoia who descends, in the form of the first Human and as light. Her presence illuminates the whole cosmos, but the Rulers of the cosmos do not comprehend who she is or where the light comes from. Four major changes in the meaning are effected, all of which associate the appearance of the first Human with the first descent of Pronoia: 1) The first Human who appears on the waters is explicitly identified as Pronoia. 2) His appearance causes the foundations of the abyss to shake. 3) The appearance of the first Human is luminous, even as the first manifestation of Pronoia in the monologue is “the wealth of the light.” 4) The ignorance of the world Rulers is emphasized. Barc and Painchaud note, too, that the place of the revelation, described in the monologue as “the midst,”

is interpreted as an intermediary region between the realms above and below. They suggest that this median area is figured as water in the text, functioning as a kind of filter which diminishes the clarity of the manifestation of the first Human, so that the ruler's attempted reproduction of that image is unable to move.⁶ Hence the mission of the first Human is unsuccessful, and he (Pronoia) retreats.

In the hymn, Pronoia descends again:

Again I returned for the second time and I traveled. I came forth into those who belong to the light, which is I, the remembrance of the Pronoia. I entered the midst of the dark and the inside of Hades, seeking to put my household in order. And the foundations of chaos quaked such that (it seemed) they would fall down upon those who dwell in the chaos and destroy them (*SRevJohn* II 26.9–15).

This second descent of Pronoia-Christ from the hymn is elaborated in II/IV as the descent of Epinoia to Adam. Additions to II/IV explicitly identify Epinoia with Pronoia and emphasize the working of Pronoia in all that Epinoia does.⁷ She is also identified with Eve as Life and the mother of the living, and with the Tree of Knowledge, instructing Adam and working for the salvation of Sophia's light-seed. For example, when Adam wakes from his trance after his surgery, he sees the woman beside him:

Immediately, the luminous Epinoia *appeared* for she had uncovered the veil which had been on his understanding. He became sober from the drunkenness of the darkness and he recognized his *likeness*. And he said, "Now this is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. Because of this, man will leave his father and his mother and he will cling to his wife and they will no longer be two but a single flesh." *For his partner will be sent to him and he will leave his father and his mother. It is our sister Sophia who came down in innocence in order that she might correct her deficiency.* Because of this she was called Zoe (*Life*), the mother of the living by *Pronoia* of the authority of heaven and [. . .] to him [. . .]. And

through her *they tasted the perfect knowledge*. In the form of an eagle, I appeared on the tree of knowledge, which is the Epinoia from the pure, luminous Pronoia, so that I might teach them and awaken them from the depth of the sleep. For they were both in a fallen state and they recognized their nakedness. The luminous Epinoia appeared to them as light, awakening their thought (SRevJohn II 21.18–33).

Here Epinoia is Adam's true likeness, spiritually identical to the likeness of the first Human which had appeared reflected upon the waters. She is light and brings illumination to human understanding. Upon seeing her, Adam recognizes the presence of true Life, and knows that she is the true mother of all that is living. Her presence allows the two humans to understand that they have been naked of understanding, and she brings the pure light and the teaching of true knowledge. Readers are also given several lessons in the proper meaning of *Genesis*. The mystery of marriage is the conjoining of each person with the spiritual partner from above; proper sexual union lies in the recognition of the spiritual essence or likeness in one's partner. Nakedness does not refer to a lack of material clothing but to a spiritual deficiency; salvation implicitly means being properly clothed in the light of true understanding. Nor is it the snake who instructs, but rather Epinoia-Christ in the form of an eagle.⁸ In both the longer and shorter versions of the *Secret Revelation of John*, the descent of Epinoia to Adam is figured as a descent of wisdom into the world to bring true teaching and knowledge of God to humanity, but, as Barc and Painchaud note, only the longer version tells the story of Epinoia's retreat from the world below in the face of the malice of the Chief Ruler:

And the Chief Ruler saw the virgin who stood beside Adam, *and that the living luminous Epinoia appeared in her*. And Yaldabaoth was filled with ignorance. *And when the Pronoia of the All knew, she sent some beings and they snatched Zoe from Eve*. And the Chief Ruler defiled her *and he begat two sons from her* (SRevJohn 22.10–16).

More than anything else, this motif of retreat links the Epinoia of light with the second ascent of the Pronoia in a way absent entirely from the shorter versions of the *Secret Revelation of John*.⁹ Apart from harmonizing the passage with the Pronoia hymn, there would seem to be no reason for Epinoia to withdraw.

The third descent of the Pronoia appears in the longer version (II/IV) as the appearance of Christ to John.

Still for a third time, I who am the light that exists in the light and the remembrance of the Pronoia, I traveled in order to enter into the midst of the darkness and the inside of Hades. I filled my countenance with the light of the consummation of their aeon. And I entered the midst of their prison, which is the prison of the body.

And I said, "Whoever hears, arise from lethargic sleep!"

And he wept, shedding tears; heavy tears he wiped from himself. And he said, "Who is it who calls my name and from where does this hope come to me who am dwelling in the fetters of the prison?"

And I said, "I am the Pronoia of the pure light; I am the thought of the virginal Spirit, the one who raises you to the place of honor. Arise and remember that you are the one who has heard, and follow your root, which is I, the compassionate. Fortify yourself against the angels of poverty and the demons of chaos and all those who ensnare you, and be watchful of the lethargic sleep and the garment of the inside of Hades."

And I raised him up and sealed him with the light of the water with five seals so that death would not have power over him from this day on (*SRevJohn* II 26.18–33).

The integration of this manifestation of Pronoia-Christ apparently required little in the way of editorial changes to the shorter version (BG/III). The only meaningful change is the introduction of the title "Savior" into the body of the narrative in the dialogue with John, as Barc and Painchaud note.¹⁰

The appearance of Christ to John is marked again by cosmic disruption, mirroring the initial descent of the Pronoia-Christ as the Light-Adam: "The heavens opened and the whole creation below the heavens was illuminated. And the world quaked" (*SRevJohn* II 3.1-3). Here the light has been able to penetrate into the world below and finally illuminate the lower creation, even as in the monologue the presence of Pronoia-Christ brings light to the soul. Just as Pronoia awakens and strengthens the sleeper by bringing compassion and knowledge,¹¹ so too Christ comes into the world below in response to the grieving and doubting John, strengthening him and giving him the full revelation of true knowledge, that is, the whole narrative of the *Secret Revelation of John*.

The monologue concludes with the final retreat of Pronoia-Christ:

Behold, now I will go up to the perfect aeon. I have completed everything for you in your ears. I have told you (John) all things so that you might write them down and give them in secret to your fellow spirits. For this is the mystery of the immovable generation (*SRevJohn* II 27.1-5).

The conclusion points the reader back to the first lines at the beginning of the longer version of the narrative (*SRevJohn* II 1.1-2), which define the *Secret Revelation of John* (II/IV) as a whole: "The teaching of the Savior and the revelation of the mysteries together with the things hidden in silence and those things which he taught John, his disciple."¹²

In addition, Barc and Painchaud have noted that the "Pronoia editor" of II/IV has significantly modified the description of the appearance of Barbelo found in BG/III to cohere more specifically with the Pronoia figure of the hymn:

And Its thinking became a thing. And she who appeared in Its presence in the luminescence of Its light was revealed. She is the first power who came into being before them all. She appeared from Its thought, the Pronoia of the All, her light [. . .] light, the perfect power, that is, the

image of the perfect invisible *virginal Spirit*, *the first power*, *the glory of Barbelo*, the glory which is perfect in the aeons, *the glory of the revelation*. She glorified the *virginal Spirit and praised It* since she had appeared because of It. That one is the first Thought (Protennoia) of Its image. She became a womb for the All because she is prior to them all, the Mother-Father, the first Human, the *holy Spirit*, the triple male, the triple power, the triple named androgyné, and the eternal aeon among the invisible ones, and the first to come forth (SRevJohn 5.13–26).

These changes, they argue, “tend to accentuate the primacy of Pronoia, the first power and Mother (womb of the All), and to magnify notably the emphasis on her relation to the Father” as appearing in his thought.¹³ I might add, the changes also emphasize that she is *the glory of the revelation* and *the holy Spirit*, the image of the *virginal Spirit*. It is possible that these phrases are also meant to strengthen her identification with Christ’s revelation and with the salvific activity of Epinoia-Eve and the Spirit.

The Light of the World

In pursuing the analysis of Barc and Painchaud further, I noticed that significant shifts occur as well in the treatment of the light motif. The hymn associates the light shining below with the three descents of Pronoia. Editorial changes throughout the longer version have reduced the role of the lower Sophia in favor of emphasizing that pure light (spiritual illumination) is introduced only in conjunction with the triple descent of Pronoia (as the luminous Human, the Epinoia of light, and the luminous Christ). This has been accomplished by “dimming” the light of Sophia and by strengthening the connections of the triple descent of the Human, Epinoia, and Christ with the presence of the Light.

The most immediate and notable change is the portrayal of Sophia and her light in the world below. The longer version of the *Secret Revelation of John* repeatedly states that the light of Sophia introduced into the lower

world and into humanity has been dimmed by contact with the darkness, a point entirely absent from the shorter versions of BG and III. Indeed Sophia herself becomes dark. For example, while all the versions agree that Yaldabaoth did not share his portion of the Mother's light with any of his creation—after all, it is because he alone possesses this light that he was Lord/Christ over all those he created—II/IV adds: “When the light mixed with the darkness, it caused the darkness to shine, but when the darkness mixed with the light, it darkened the light so that it became neither light nor dark, but it was weak” (*SRevJohn* II 12.4–6). II/IV also adds that Sophia “understood her deficiency when the brightness of her light was diminished and she was darkened” (*SRevJohn* II 14.5–6). Moreover, where BG states that the transcendent Deity poured the living water of light upon “all the aeons and the worlds,” II/IV says merely that “It provides for all the aeons” (*SRevJohn* 5.10)—an omission that would seem to deprive the lower worlds of the Father's light.

The longer version repeatedly adds material associating the presence of the pure light with Pronoia and her envoys. Their very presence is itself Light and brings illumination. The versions do not differ here strongly, since BG and III also consistently associate the envoys from the Divine Realm with the presence of light, but in a variety of more and less subtle variants, II/IV emphasizes this point more fully. For example, *SRevJohn* II 21.33 adds that Epinoia appeared to Adam and Eve “as light”; and again at *SRevJohn* II 22.11, the text says that the luminous Epinoia appeared in Eve. Both points are absent in BG and III. In the Noah story, II emphasizes again the saving presence of the light by stating that Epinoia (“she who was with him”) illumined Noah (*SRevJohn* II 24.28) rather than BG's statement that Noah and the others were “in the light”—meaning they were within the sheltering cloud. Such variants are small, but together they add up to an increased focus on the association of the light with the text's savior figures. This pattern would seem not only to fit well with the addition of the Pronoia hymn, but also to strengthen connections with the *Gospel of John's* teaching that Christ is the light of the world.

Scribal Interests and Uses of the *Secret Revelation of John*

The question yet remains, how are we to understand the motivations behind the labor required to integrate the Pronoia hymn structurally into the myth of the *Secret Revelation of John*? What does it achieve? One possibility lies in the connection between the Pronoia hymn and baptismal theology and practice. George MacRae characterized the hymn as “a Gnostic liturgical fragment probably recited at a ceremony of initiation much in the manner of a Christian baptismal homily or hymn.”¹⁴ The introduction of the hymn into the *Secret Revelation of John*, then, would signal a concern for integrating the theology of ritual practice more fully into the myth as part of the salvific labors of Pronoia and her avatars.¹⁵ This suggestion receives confirmation from Jean-Marie Sevrin’s outstanding analysis of Sethian ritual. He noted that the longer version of the *Secret Revelation of John* (II/IV) demonstrates a more extended concern with the ritual practices of baptism and anointing than do the shorter versions (BG and III). Not only does the longer version present a greater elaboration of the theological meaning of baptism, but it also provides more evidence for the actual practice of baptism and anointing. As was noted above, while none of the texts allow us to describe the actual ritual in any detail, the mention of “five seals” seems to indicate either multiple baptisms or a single ceremony with five ritual actions or parts.

Another significant shift concerns the gender symbolism in the Adam and Eve story. In II/IV, Eve is more clearly associated with a negative symbolization of the feminine by becoming more closely associated with sexuality—itself an ambivalent arena of struggle between Yaldabaoth and the true Spirit. As I noted in an earlier publication, BG and II/IV present quite different views of the subordination of woman to man at *SRevJohn* 22.1–7. Compare BG:

Yaldabaoth knew that they had withdrawn from him. He cursed them. Moreover, he adds concerning the female that the male should rule over

her for he does not understand the mystery which came to pass from the design of the holy height. But they were afraid to curse him, thereby revealing his ignorance.

Here the subordination of woman is strongly condemned as another piece of ignorance and an act that is contrary to God's plan—there is no more direct condemnation of patriarchy to be found in ancient literature. Now note the changes in II:

But when Yaldabaoth knew that they had withdrawn from him, he cursed his earth. He found the female preparing herself for her male. He was lord over her, for he did not understand the mystery which had come to pass from the holy design. And they were afraid to blame him. And he revealed his ignorance that dwelled in him to his angels.

Here the direct condemnation of subordination is missing—and indeed the subordination itself appears ambiguous. Who was “lord over her”? Who is it who does not understand the holy design? Who revealed his ignorance? It is not clear whether the pronoun “he” refers to Adam or Yaldabaoth. Moreover, while it is clear that the female is actively “preparing herself” for the male—a phrasing that seems to have overt sexual overtones—it is nonetheless not exactly clear what that means. Is Eve being portrayed as a seductress?¹⁶ If so, rather than condemn the subordination of women, II would seem to be reifying the identification of the feminine with sexuality and ignorance. In contrast, however, Barc and Painchaud suggest that II has changed the passage to convey quite a different meaning: Epinoia is preparing for the Savior in order to correct the deficiency caused by Sophia in acting alone without her consort, but Yaldabaoth doesn't understand that.¹⁷ From this perspective, there is no presentation of Eve as temptress; in contrast to Yaldabaoth, Epinoia understands the holy design. This interpretation would seem to fit the gloss at *Secret Revelation of John* II 21.21–23 that Adam's partner was sent to help correct the deficiency of Sophia. It may be, however, that the point re-

mains the same—somewhere in the ambiguity of II, the clear condemnation of woman's subordination has been lost.

In addition, the view that the feminine is being associated negatively with sexuality is supported by a second change in the text concerning the location of sexual desire (*SRevJohn* 22.22–24):

BG: Up to the present day, marital intercourse came about from the Chief Ruler. He planted a desire for seed in Adam, so that from this essence (of desire) a likeness from their counterfeit spirit might be born.

II: Now up to the present day, intercourse has continued from the Chief Ruler. And he planted a seed of desire in her who belongs to Adam. From intercourse he caused birth in the likeness of bodies and he supplied them from his counterfeit spirit.

In both versions, sexual intercourse is presented as the evil work of the Chief Ruler. But in II, sexual desire is placed in woman; in BG and III, the desire for seed is placed in Adam. Not only is the location of desire different, but also its nature: woman desires intercourse; man desires offspring. The implication in II is that it is woman who draws man down into the filth of fleshly intercourse.¹⁸ Barc and Painchaud suggest that this change fits the later monastic context in which the *Secret Revelation of John* was found: "The only change in sense [between BG and II] is the addition of two letters in Codex II (24.19) which shift the seat of sexual desire from Adam to Eve. This bias is typical for early Christian monasticism."¹⁹ This suggestion fits well with what we know about the *Secret Revelation of John's* connection with the Pachomian monastery near Nag Hammadi—especially when we remember that the longer versions were both found near there, while no monastic connection is known for BG.

A third possible reason for the addition of the Pronoia monologue would be to enrich the intertextual allusions to the *Gospel of John*. The frame narrative already suggests a connection with Johannine Christianity, but the development of the light motif noted above works to make

sharper the allusion to *John* 1:1–5. It clearly places Christ at the beginning of all things, identifies him with life and light, and most importantly insists that “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

In conclusion, there are at least three notable effects of the addition and integration of the Pronoia monologue and its themes into the longer version of the *Secret Revelation of John*: an increased interest in rationalizing ritual practice, especially baptism, in terms of the work’s mythological framework; a shift in some gender imagery; and an enrichment of intertextual allusions to the *Gospel of John*. In addition to these, we can note the stronger emphasis on healing by the addition of the extended list of demons and body parts from the *Book of Zoroaster*. Altogether these may indicate a closer association of the work with a communal setting where baptism is understood in terms of moral purification and protection from the effects of demons. The ties to the *Gospel of John* indicate a stable or even increasing association with Christians for whom Johannine traditions were highly valued. And finally, the shifts in gender may point toward a monastic setting (like that of the early Pachomians?) where women were present but their leadership was not allowed and their presence was considered to be a sexual temptation. While the results of this analysis seem meager, it does provide evidence for shifting perspectives and interests among those who used the *Secret Revelation of John*.

Postscript

THE HISTORY OF THE *Secret Revelation of John* does not end in antiquity. Its rediscovery more than a century ago launched it in new directions. Today it plays numerous roles in contemporary thought, most notably as the signature example of “Gnosticism.” Indeed the *Secret Revelation of John* has garnered a place of privilege in modern descriptions of Gnosticism precisely because, more than any other surviving work, it resembles the views refuted by early Christian polemicists like Irenaeus of Lyons, who cited a portion of the *Secret Revelation of John* in his five volume work *Against Heresies*. In antiquity, however, ancient Christian polemicists did not call this phenomenon “Gnosticism” but most often categorized this kind of thinking as heresy, and until recently church historians have generally followed suit. Even when we have suspended their normative judgement, the polemicists’ descriptions have often been carried over uncritically—in large part because they were the only descriptions we had until the new discoveries in Egypt. In a previous book, *What is Gnosticism?*, I argued, however, that caricatures of Gnostic myth tend to distort the work’s content and make critical engagement with it impossible.¹

For example, stereotypes that “Gnostics hate the body” are belied by the emphasis on healing the body of demonic influence and by the presentation of Adam and Eve’s production of Seth as a restoration of the image of God—a rectification of Sophia’s deficiency modeled on the production of the Son by the transcendent Deity and Barbelo-Pronoia. The charge that denying the creation of the world by the true God leads to a nihilistic

asceticism or libertinism fails in the face of the text's central concern with divine goodness and justice and its biting denunciation of structural evils. The charge that "Gnostics are saved by nature" and hence need neither the actions of a Savior nor moral effort is confounded by the central role of Christ and other savior figures, as well as the *Secret Revelation of John's* emphasis on the need for spiritual perfection through instruction, moral purification, and ritual practices. The work's representation of the God of *Genesis* as an ignorant and malicious pretender-god and its repeated corrections of Moses point less to impiety than to the Christian construction of its relationship to Judaism as an important—and hotly contested—factor in early Christian identity formation.² Most forms of Christianity, including prominent examples from the New Testament and the church fathers, took a critical stance toward "Judaism." The *Secret Revelation of John's* reading of Scripture is not a simple matter of reversal or even of solving widely perceived interpretive problems³—although it does both; for the *Secret Revelation of John* simultaneously appropriates, interprets, and critiques Scripture by revealing the truth hidden in Moses' account. Like the body of Adam and all human bodies, Scripture tells a double tale, for the creation story of *Genesis* is told twice, once with reference to the generation of the Divine Realm and again with reference to the lower world. Where Moses strays from a complete understanding, for example when God puts Adam to sleep (*Gen* 2:21), Christ corrects his account—but the notable fact is that in at least one case, he does so by citing the prophet Isaiah (*Isa* 6:10). Here Christ instructs John (and the reader) in proper intertextual midrash!⁴ Nor is Jewish Scripture the only target of Christ's corrective instruction. Greek philosophy, astrology, and other traditions also come in for serious rewriting and recontextualization, often with significant critical import. The charges of impiety belong to the rhetorical struggle over whose interpretation of tradition is true; who was pious and who impious depends upon where one stands.

In the modern period, moreover, it is sometimes said that "Gnostics" or "heretics" had a more positive view of the feminine and therefore legiti-

mated women's leadership in their communities—and at least some of the church fathers agreed with this assessment, though they took it to be yet another sign of the disorderly conduct of these “heretics.”⁵ Again the matter is not simple. The *Secret Revelation of John* demonstrates considerable ambiguity and ambivalence in its presentation of gender. Pronoia and Epinoia offer powerful female figures of divinity and salvation, along with the transcendent Father and the Son-Christ. Yet the *Secret Revelation of John* represents all evil as the result of a female's bold independence from male authority. BG's radical condemnation of the subordination of women to men as an ignorant act of the arrogant Chief Ruler is obscured by II/IV's confused rewriting of the scene (22.4–7). The *Secret Revelation of John* does not appear to offer a consistently positive or negative portrait of the feminine. Rather gender imagery accomplishes a variety of different kinds of narrative work. At times feminine imagery serves to emphasize nurture and creative powers, at other points weakness or impropriety. It would seem that the text could have provided only the most ambiguous warrant for women's leadership. Possibly its greatest asset for contemporary feminist Christian theology is its portrayal of proper sexuality as the recognition of the image of God in the other, and its insistence that Eve's essential divine nature remains untouched by the violent sexual assaults of the world ruler. Although she has been raped and has given birth to two sons by the Chief Archon, when Adam turns to her he recognizes in her the divine essence, and together their sexual union produces Seth, whom II/VI describes as the true likeness of the Child of the Human (*SRevJohn* 22.26–29).

The analysis of the *Secret Revelation of John* offered in this volume thus demonstrates how misleading such caricatures and stereotypes can be when taken as an objective description of the contents and goals of the work. Even in trying to overcome these distortions, it can be difficult to escape the terms of the debate that the early polemicists set. In his important book, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* Michael Williams made us poignantly aware of the limits of typological constructions of Gnosticism that fall

into stereotyping. One strategy was to offer a set of alternatives to the usual typological categories:

- ✦ protest exegesis or hermeneutical problem-solving
- ✦ parasites or innovators
- ✦ anti-cosmic world-rejection or sociocultural accommodation
- ✦ hatred of the body or the perfection of the human
- ✦ deterministic elitism or inclusive theories of conversion.

As useful as these distinctions are for unsettling the old typological clichés—and they are very useful in breaking away from the polemics of ancient heresiology—they nonetheless stay within the terms of the debate set by the polemicists, now only taking an oppositional strategy. The problem is not just that the many different works categorized as “Gnostic” take a variety of theological positions, but that a complex work like the *Secret Revelation of John* can actually fit all these alternatives: Its exegesis evinces both protest and problem-solving. Its reading of Scripture is radical and revisionary, but it does solve a number of long-standing problems. It is “parasitic” insofar as it draws deeply from the pool of ancient traditions, and innovative in how it reads those traditions together. It is certainly anti-cosmic, but it also is highly accommodating in its affirmation of the highest values of the age. The body is both the site of demonic influence and the place where the perfection of the human likeness to God can be manifest. It declares boldly that (almost) all shall be saved, maintaining an unresolved tension between free will and determinism. But the fact is that none of these categories—positive or negative—describes the text very well. They do not let us see its interpretative strategies, the ends to which its selective appropriation of traditions works, its utopian vision and social critique, its deployment of the body as map and territory for revelation and salvation, its ethical imperatives, or its insistence on God’s goodness and justice. What I have tried to do in this volume is to set those typological categories to the side and show some of the ways in

which the *Secret Revelation of John* can be read—as a story, as social critique, and as intertextual hermeneutics.

Read as a linear story, it moves from the origins of everything that exists to the final salvation of humanity. Within that story can be discerned a number of thematic points of emphasis, notably the work's vigorous capacity for social critique. In addition, the *Secret Revelation of John's* extensive cross-referencing of multiple literary resources gives the work a multi-dimensional texture by insisting that each character, each action or narrative element implies some other—whether by genealogical connection, splitting or repetition, breaks and fractures, mimesis or parody. These intertextual dimensions of the work's structuring constitute one of the foundational achievements of the *Secret Revelation of John*: a hermeneutics in which the revelation of the Savior supplies the true interpretation of much prestigious scriptural and philosophical tradition of its day. It is a document whose meaningfulness shifted as it was read over time by a variety of groups for a variety of ends. It displays literary and social continuity and difference through the history of its multiple versions and translations, the diverse audiences who read and used this work for diverse purposes, and the changing interests of scribes and scholars on such matters as baptismal ritual, gender symbolism, and scriptural interpretation.

The different kinds of readings from antiquity already display some of the multiple and overlapping projects in which the *Secret Revelation of John* is engaged, in particular its spiritual project of liberation and salvation, its ethical project of making readers more sensitive to justice and social critique, and its grand hermeneutical project of negotiating ancient cultural pluralism. Arguably, the most explicit aim of the *Secret Revelation of John* is found in its liberating spiritual agenda in which the Savior's revelation forms and transforms people through instruction, moral purification, and ritual empowerment. Through this process, they come to take up a socially critical orientation to the world expressed in utopian commitments to God and in resistance to the evils of injustice, ignorance, violence, arrogance, and malice.

What persuasive power this position may have had stemmed in part from its capacity to marshal a wide variety of prestigious materials to support its position. By structurally integrating diverse traditions into a single overarching narrative—traditions which on the surface seem to offer competing claims to truth—the *Secret Revelation of John's* homogenizing hermeneutics offers a good example of one strategy for negotiating ancient pluralism. One might object to my using the modern term “pluralism” to refer to the ancient social world of Alexandria, given that the contexts of Mediterranean antiquity and Western modernity evince significant incongruities in material conditions, social and political structures, notions of identity, and other factors. The term nonetheless spotlights the *Secret Revelation of John's* concern with negotiating multiple claims to truth. It engages this pluralist situation hermeneutically by reading major works of traditional literature and scripture as part of the same story, attempting to smooth out incongruities among them to craft a totalizing discourse out of multiple currents in its intellectual environment. Despite its extravagant claim to know the truth through divine revelation from God, the *Secret Revelation of John* fails to achieve its totalizing intentions—as of course all such efforts must fail. John's supposed record of revelation is only a partial narrative, and one which sometimes causes more problems and confusions than it resolves. That ancient readers were aware of these problems is shown not least by the many variants among the manuscripts, many of which are best explained as efforts to tidy up inconsistencies or to contribute to its totalizing impulse by adding even more materials, such as the melothesia from the *Book of Zoroaster* or the Pronoia monologue. The overall accomplishment is nonetheless a grand narrative of broad spiritual and intellectual scope.

In the end, the *Secret Revelation of John* does not have one meaning because it did not occupy only one position in the history of Christianity. For those who framed it, it was the record of Christ's revelation and an authoritative teaching tool in the school of Christian salvation. For those who opposed it like Irenaeus, it was the devil's device to lead Christians

astray from the truth. For the Pachomian monks who read and preserved it, it may have been used to strengthen the ascetic in their souls' battle against the powers of the flesh.

What will it mean today? This ancient book took up many of the most significant and most disputed problems of its age on the nature of God, the world, humanity, evil, and salvation. These issues were framed in language and concepts far removed from contemporary sensibilities. Yet despite its antiquity, there is much here that is still under serious debate in our own times: the spiritual meaning of the body and sexuality, the relation of religion and politics, the relationship of Christianity to Judaism and other religious traditions, the proper interpretation of Scripture, and the nature of truth itself. It may be that critical engagement with the *Secret Revelation of John* will offer new resources for the complex issues of our own age.



Abbreviations

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Abbreviations

ANCIENT LITERARY WORKS

AgHer	<i>Against Heresies</i>
Agr	Philo, <i>On Husbandry (De Agricultura)</i>
ApJohn	<i>Apocryphon of John</i>
AuthTeach	<i>Authoritative Teaching</i>
Bar	<i>Baruch</i>
BG	Berlin Codex (Berolinensis Gnosticus)
I Cor	<i>First Corinthians</i>
1 Enoch	<i>First Enoch</i>
Enm	<i>Enmead(s)</i>
Ex	<i>Exodus</i>
ExTheo	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Excerpts from Theodotus</i>
Fuga	Philo, <i>On Flight and Finding (De Fuga et Inventione)</i>
Gen	<i>Genesis</i>
GosEg	<i>Gospel of the Egyptians</i>
GosJohn	<i>Gospel of John</i>
GosLuke	<i>Gospel of Luke</i>
GosMary	<i>Gospel of Mary</i>
GosMatt	<i>Gospel of Matthew</i>
GosPhil	<i>Gospel of Philip</i>
HaerFab	Theodoret, <i>Haereticarum fabularum compendium</i>
HE	Eusebius, <i>Church History</i>
HypArch	<i>Hypostasis of the Archons</i>
Leg	Philo, <i>Allegorical Interpretation (Legum Allegoriae)</i>
LetPetPhil	<i>Letter of Peter to Philip</i>

LXX	Septuagint (the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek)
NHC	Nag Hammadi Codex/Codices
<i>OrigWorld</i>	<i>On the Origin of the World</i>
<i>Parm</i>	Plato, <i>Parmenides</i>
<i>Phaed</i>	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i>
PHP	Galen, <i>De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis</i>
<i>PrepEv</i>	Eusebius, <i>Preparation for the Gospel</i>
<i>Prov</i>	<i>Proverbs</i>
<i>Ref</i>	Hippolytus, <i>Refutation of All Heresies</i>
QA	Philo, <i>Questions and Answers on Genesis (Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesim)</i>
<i>Sir</i>	<i>Ecclesiasticus, or The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach</i>
<i>SRevJohn</i>	<i>Secret Revelation of John</i>
<i>Tim</i>	Plato, <i>Timaeus</i>
<i>TrimProt</i>	<i>Trimorphic Protennoia</i>
<i>Wis</i>	<i>Wisdom of Solomon</i>
<i>Zost</i>	<i>Zostrianos</i>

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

AAR	American Academy of Religion
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
BCNH	Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi
BZNW	Beihefte für Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum Christianorum orientaliū
DTC	<i>Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IDB	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
JAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>

JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NHLE	<i>Nag Hammadi Library in English</i> , ed. Robinson and Smith
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
<i>NovTest</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OLZ	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
RAC	<i>Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum</i>
SAC	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions (Supplements to <i>Numen</i>)
SNAM	Studies in Neoplatonism: Ancient and Modern
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

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INTRODUCTION

1. See Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*.
2. For more on Gnosticism as a category of modern scholarship, see King, *What is Gnosticism?*
3. It is possible that Basilides also attempted something similar to this kind of comprehensive theology, but the fragmentary remains of his work do not allow us to know that with any certainty. Given that most of early Christian literature has been lost, it is of course also possible that other unknown Christians may have attempted such a project without any trace remaining.
4. Four ancient copies of the *Secret Revelation of John* have survived to the modern period. In the Berlin Codex (BG 19.6–77.7), *SRevJohn* takes up 58 manuscript pages; in Nag Hammadi Codex II (NHC II 1.1–32.10), it takes up 32 pages; in NHC III (1.1–40.11), 40 pages; in NHC IV (1.1–49.28), 49 pages.
5. At some places the texts say there were twelve Aeons.
6. All are saved except apostates who turn away after knowing the truth.
7. See Schmidt, “Ein vorirenaisches gnostisches Originalwerk,” 839.
8. An English translation of these works can be found in Robinson and Smith, *NHLE*.
9. Schmidt, “Ein vorirenaisches gnostisches Originalwerk,” 839.
10. See Schmidt, *Die alten Petrusakten*, 2.
11. Till and Schenke, *Die gnostischen Schriften*, 1.
12. In addition, Codex III from Nag Hammadi contained a copy of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, the third work in the Berlin Codex that Till was edit-

ing. Williams has argued for the importance of *SRevJohn* in antiquity based not only on the relatively large number of surviving copies and the fact of multiple editions, but also on the fact that *SRevJohn* appears as the first work in three of the four codices in which it is preserved (see Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 8, 248–249).

13. Till and Schenke, *Die gnostischen Schriften*, 2.

14. Revised edition by Till and Schenke, *Die koptisch-gnostische Schriften*.

15. Waldstein and Wisse, *The Apocryphon of John*.

16. See Givensen, *Apocryphon Johannis*; Krause and Labib, *Die Drei Versionen*.

17. The construction of lineages was a well-established practice in antiquity not only in second- and third-century Christianity, but in philosophy, medicine, and politics. The earliest Christian literature did not appeal to any kind of lineage or even to inspired revelation; it depended upon showing that Christ's life and teachings fulfilled the venerable tradition of Hebrew Scripture. Only when that claim was contested, possibly in the face of the production of a wide variety of gospels and other literature, did the notion of lineage arise in order to authorize and authenticate a work's place in tradition. It is thus possible to trace a shift in author-function (à la Foucault, "What is an Author?") sometime between the composition of the first-century gospels and their use in the second century and beyond.

18. Even Irenaeus, who does not mention any connection to John, treats the work as *Christian* heresy. Even if the work were only secondarily ascribed to John, that does not mean that the work itself is not Christian, but only that some new strategy was needed to make that connection more persuasive. The addition of the framework would merely strengthen the connection of the work to one kind of Christianity, just as the addition of the Pronoia hymn to the longer version achieves much the same end, further strengthening the connection specifically to the *Gospel of John* (see Chapter 12).

19. For further discussion of Christian teachers in the second century, see Neymeyr, *Die Christlichen Lehrer*; Marksches, "Lehrer, Schüler, Schule."

20. See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho a Jew*, chapters 2–8. The rhetorical character of Justin's statement in the context of the dialogue does not detract from the point that Christianity could be and was perceived as one type of philosophical school among others.

21. For discussions of education in the ancient world, see Marrou, *A History of Education*; Snyder, *Teachers and Texts*; Criboire, *Writing, Teachers and Students and Gymnastics of the Mind*.

22. See Casson, *Libraries in the Ancient World*, 31–47.

23. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 159–160.

24. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 157–158.

25. See Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 157–158.

26. Hauschild notes that the question and answer form suggests a school discussion (Hauschild, *Gottes Geist und der Mensch*, 225, 229).

27. See Böhlig, “Die griechische Schule”; Grant, “Theological Education at Alexandria.” Feldman also notes that astrology was a prestigious part of the intellectual mix (*Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 187).

28. See, for example, Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 124–135. For further discussion and critique of notions about the Jewish origin of Gnosticism, see King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 169–190.

29. See Petrement, *A Separate God or Logan*, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*.

30. Jonas, “Response to G. Quispel,” 293. So Jonas proposes, rather than “Jewish origins,” we might better speak of “Jewish antecedents”; instead of an origin within Judaism (“at the fringes”), we might better speak of a “zone of proximity and exposure”; instead of a crisis among Jews, we might better imagine that the encounter of Judaism by (antagonistic) non-Jews was “catalytic and provoking.”

31. Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt*, xvii–xviii; for a description of Jewish life under the Ptolemies, see pp. 47–157.

32. See the discussion of Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 202–203.

33. See the account of Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt*, 161–225.

34. See Pearson, “Earliest Christianity in Egypt.”

35. Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt*, 227–231; quotation from p. 230.

36. See Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 217.

37. Louis Feldman summarizes: “(T)he Neo-Pythagorean philosopher Numenius (cited in Lydus, *De Mensibus* 4.53), who lived in the second century, in a clear encomium of Jewish theology, speaks of the Jewish G-d who is the father of all the other gods and who consequently deems any other

god unworthy of sharing in his cult . . . In the third century, Porphyry (cited in Lydus, *De Mensibus* 4.53) pays obvious tribute to the Jewish conception of G-d by identifying Him with the Platonic demiurge, that is, the second G-d who is the creator of all things. A similar view is expressed by his pupil Iamblichus . . . as well as by Syrianus and by Proclus in the fifth century. Apparently the thought was traditional with the Neo-Platonic school” (*Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 152, 153).

38. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 151; see also 175.

39. For a discussion of the Jewish elements in *SRevJohn*, see Pearson, “Jewish Sources in Gnostic Literature,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*.

40. See Quack, “Dekane and Gliedervergottung,” 113. Quack insists, however, that the originally Egyptian source of the names found in the *Secret Revelation of John* had to have been mediated through dependence on Greek Hermetic Vulgata from the Hellenistic period (see *ibid.*, 119–120).

41. *AgHer* I.29.

42. *SRevJohn* II 14.2.

43. The four surviving copies of the *Secret Revelation of John* are written in Coptic, but the differences among them suggest that they derive from three separate translations from three Greek recensions (Wisse, *ABD* III, 899; Waldstein and Wisse, *Synopsis*, 1–7). The longer versions in Nag Hammadi Codices II and IV show only minor variations in spelling, which indicates they are copies of a common *Vorlage*. The shorter versions in the Berlin Codex and Nag Hammadi Codex III, on the other hand, differ at numerous points from each other, indicating that they represent separate translations from different Greek recensions (see Till, *Die gnostischen Schriften*, 12; Waldstein and Wisse, *Synopsis*, 1). Emmel dates the initial translations to the mid-to-late third century (“Tradition and Textual Transmission,” 37); Waldstein and Wisse also suggest a late third- or early fourth-century date for the translations from Greek into Coptic (see *Synopsis*, 1).

44. Funk, “The Linguistic Aspect of Classification,” 145–146.

45. Even the similarity in content between Codices III and IV is somewhat misleading since the versions of the *Secret Revelation of John* contained in them are significantly different. Moreover, scholars have classified the con-

tents of the Nag Hammadi Codices into various subgroups, including Valentinian Christianity, Sethian Gnosticism, Thomas Christianity, and Hermeticism (see King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 153–169). The *Secret Revelation of John* is considered to be Sethian, but it is interesting to note that only NHC IV contains solely Sethian works; the other codices show a mixture of materials from Valentinian, Sethian, and Thomas Christianities. This fact may indicate that modern classifications do not correspond to the reading practices of the people who used these codices.

46. See Wisse, “Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt.”

47. See the discussion in Chapter 12.

48. For example, the first German translation was published by Till in 1955, but was limited largely to a scholarly audience. So, too, Alv Kragerud published a Norwegian translation in 1962 (*Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift*, 1–22), but again the journal was limited largely to a scholarly readership.

49. Robinson, “From Cliff to Cairo,” 21.

50. Robinson, “From Cliff to Cairo,” esp. 38.

51. See Robinson, “From Cliff to Cairo,” “The Discovering and Marketing of Coptic Manuscripts” and “The Jung Codex.”

52. For more on these publications, see King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 150–153, and Scholer, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography* (two volumes with annual updates in the journal *Novum Testamentum*).

53. An exception would be work like that of Gillibert, *Jésus et la Gnose*, or studies in Jungian psychology.

I. THE IDEAL: THE DIVINE REALM

1. See Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, 247; Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 385–386. In particular comparison with Numenius is potentially fruitful.

2. See Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, 248–251; Kenney, “Ancient Apophatic Theology.”

3. BG no doubt means to imply that the transcendent Deity is superior to perfection when it says: “For It cannot be perfected.” II clarifies: “It is total perfection.”

4. Here the *Secret Revelation of John* combines the *via negationis* with the *via analogiae*, a move common to Eudorus, Irenaeus, and Clement according to

Mansfeld (see “Compatible Alternatives”). Ekschmitt calls this a “hard contradiction” of concern only to philosophers, not Gnostics (*Ugarit—Qumran—Nag Hammadi*, 188), but it is in fact a commonplace of the period.

5. See the discussion of Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, 249–251; King, *Revelation of the Unknowable God*, 18–19; 161–167.

6. The later Sethian treatise, *Allogenes*, explicitly denies that this positive terminology could ever be sufficient to describe the transcendent Unknowable Deity, while at the same time it, too, combines the *via negationis* with the *via eminentiae* and the *via analogiae*; see *Allogenes* 61.22–67.38. See also the discussion of Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, 251–253; Williams, “Negative Theologies,” esp. 281–286.

7. For a thorough discussion of the theme of stability, see Williams, *The Immovable Race*.

8. Armstrong recognizes the unproductive character of the dismissal of *SRevJohn*'s presentation of the transcendent Deity as “bad philosophy,” arguing that “the Gnostics” are telling exciting stories not doing philosophy (see “Dualism,” 43). Here attention to the rhetoric of each (how they are persuasive and to whom), as well as to the politics of their substantive answers to the same questions (their proposals about “the way things are” and who those arrangements serve), might prove an illuminating complement to abstract analysis.

Mansfeld argues that combining these modes of conceiving the Deity is “much more than eclecticism” (“Compatible Alternatives,” 101). Eudorus justified this usage by arguing that “monism and dualism are not two different systems; rather, they are two different ways of representing reality, albeit of unequal value” (*ibid.*, 106). In particular, Mansfeld argues, Alkinoos clearly recognized that these three ways of conceiving the Deity were all appropriate, if not entirely consistent (*ibid.*, 109). Regarding the *Secret Revelation of John* and related literature, he concludes: “Given the overall Middle Platonist theological context in which the expression occurs in the above Gnostic sources, one may safely submit that the authors of these tracts lifted this formula (together with the context itself) from the standard Middle Platonist literature at their disposal which naturally they adapted to suit their convenience but still followed very closely” (*ibid.*, 117). Kenney further argues that “Apophasis without *kataphasis* would be empty. Moreover, even the most in-

tensely apophatic theology is guided by a tacit conception of its divine or ultimate principle” (“Ancient Apophatic Theology,” 265).

9. The derivation of the name “Barbelo” is unclear. Scholars have suggested either a Semitic etymology from “in four is God” (see Leisegang, *Die Gnosis*, 186) or a Late Egyptian etymology from “boiling over” or “overflow” (see Dillon, “Monotheism,” 75–76).

10. For further discussion of the generation of the Barbelo aeon, see Dillon, “Monotheism,” 76–77.

11. Whittaker notes that the language of self-generation has nuanced connotations in Middle Platonism, but he doubts that the name of Autogenes (“the self-generated one”) belongs to this field: “for the most part it is the vocabulary of self-generation that appears in our Gnostic texts rather than the explicitly formulated notion.” (“Self-Generating Principles,” 185). As to the notion, he states: “already in the second century some thinkers had drawn the conclusion that if the impassibility of the first principle were to be preserved then the second principle must not be *generated* by the first but must rather *proceed* from it” (*ibid.*, 181). This second principle could, however, be described as self-generated “for the reason that the first principle is immutable and therefore nongenerative” as well as transcendent. “In all probability therefore Numenius thought of his Second God as a self-generating second principle modeling himself upon the pattern of the First God” (*ibid.*, 183).

12. Logan argues that “the four illuminators undoubtedly represent an angelization of the Zervanite tetrad articulating the days of the month. Thus Harmozel derives from *Ohrmazd-el* (= first day); Oroiael from *Xwar* (= light/eleventh day); Daueithe from *Day* (= creator/twenty-third day); Eleleth from the Aramaic (*illith* corresponding to the female Zervanite *Den, Xrad*, Wisdom personified)” (*Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*, 20).

13. See the discussion of Dillon, “Pleroma and Noetic Cosmos,” esp. 106–107. Dillon notes that “Besides Man himself, the Sethians at least believed that archetypes of all the pneumatics existed in the Pleroma, or perhaps just that the pneumatics existed in the Pleroma as aeons or *logoi* before becoming embodied. It is possible that the Sethians did not distinguish very clearly between these two possibilities, only the former of which is truly Platonist.”

14. Even the multiplication of divine hypostases that Plotinus objected to would likely have been regarded at worst as grotesque and crude, but not

impious. Such multiplication was not unheard of, for example Proclus' multiplication of demiurgic forces (see Opsomer, "Proclus on demiurgy and procession").

2. THE PROBLEM: RUPTURE

1. E.g., *HypArch* 94.4-33; *LetPetPhil* 135.8-136.15; *OrigWorld* 98.13-100.29; *Zost* 9.16-11.9; *GosPhil* 9.31-32; Irenaeus, *AgHer* I.2.2-4 and I.30.2-4; Hippolytus, *Ref* 6.25-26.

2. See *SRevJohn* 4.7, 14. For more on "prounikon" ("reckless daring") see Pasquier, "Prouneikos."

3. Williams suggests that this behavior is modeled on "the violation of household protocol" (*Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 155).

4. Such a *topos* is common in antiquity, for example in deliberative rhetoric where the topic is *homonoia* (concord); see Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 38-47; Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*.

5. See, for example, *Tim* 34c.

6. It is hard to overstress the symbolic importance of this description of Yaldabaoth's bestiality. The polarity human/animal was basic to the dualistic logic of Greek thought and a primary category for rhetorically distinguishing the boundaries between self and other. An illuminating discussion regarding fifth c. BCE Greek literature is given by DuBois, *Centaur and Amazons*, esp. 4-5, 95-109. She suggests that this polarity became fundamental to a hierarchical ordering of social relations in Greek thought after the Peloponnesian War. See also the discussion of the connotations of the leonine form below, Chapter 7.

7. Williams ("Higher Providence, Lower Providence and Fate") and Denzey ("Under a Pitiless Sky," 130-174) have argued that Middle Platonism has provided a model for the splitting of divine providence into two or more entities, operative at different ontological levels. In the *Secret Revelation of John*, these are hypostasized: the Pronoia above, the lower archon created by Yaldabaoth called Iaoth-Pronoia, and lowest of all Fate.

8. Gilhus also notes the theme of imitation ("The Perception of Spiritual Reality," 55).

9. For a discussion of the immateriality of light, see Dillon, "Looking on the Light."

10. Although not found in the Bible, some ancient Jewish traditions held that God created angels on the first day of creation (see, for example, the interpretation of *Genesis* in *Jubilees* 2:2, discussed by Fossum, "The Gnostic Concept of the Demiurge," 148).

11. Also called Ennoia or Barbelo.

12. Plese suggests that: "Priority assigned to perception, to 'seeing one's own image,' as an essential prerequisite for concept-formation, points to a Stoic influence. . . . The Savior's account of the effusion of aeons from the first principle preserves [the Stoic epistemological] model even to a greater detail. God cannot conceptualize before receiving information from the senses. That is, he first must see his own reflection (image) in the mirror-like substrate in order to attain the first notion (*ennoia*) of the 'self.' At the next stage, he will turn into a reflection subject (*nous*, Autogenes) and think of himself as a separate object (*idea*, *ennoëma*). Then, by employing the discursive reasoning (*logos*), he will analyze this separate 'self' (*definiendum*) down to its individual dispositions (twelve aeons) and acquire, as a result, the systematic knowledge (*sophia*) of the 'self'" ("The Apocryphon of John," 125, 131).

13. Codex III has a variant reading here: "He copulated with Ignorance who is with him." The phonetic similarity is lost, but the contrastive lexical point remains with its focus on the noetic characterization of the productive act.

14. Moreover, insofar as Cooper (*The Virgin and the Bride*) is right that Mediterranean culture linked its judgment about a man's character (and hence his honor and status) to the sexual reputation of the women he was associated with, then by analogy to human social behavior, the names and behavior of Pronoia and Aponoia add yet another dimension to the polarized characterization of the transcendent Deity and the world creator.

15. Origen cites Celsus, who claims about the Creator God that "such a God even deserves to be cursed in the opinion of those who hold this view of him, because he cursed the serpent which imparted to the first men knowledge of good and evil" (*Contra Celsum* 6.28 cited from Chadwick, pp. 343-344). Origen responds that these ideas belong to a group called the Ophites who received their teaching from a man named Euphrates. These same Ophites are said to have a system of seven archontic daemons, of whom "the first is formed in the shape of a lion" (6.30; Chadwick, 5). Origen

gives the double names of these archons. He says their names were taken from magic and from a misunderstanding of Scripture. “From magic they took Ialdabaoth, Astaphaeus, and Horaeus. From the Hebrew scriptures they took Iao, the name used by the Hebrews, Sabaoth, Adonia, and Eloaeus. But the names taken from the Bible are titles of one and the same God. God’s enemies did not understand this, as even they admit, and thought that Iao was one God, Sabaoth another, and Adonaeus a third being (the scripture called him Adonai), and Eloaeus, whom the prophets call in Hebrew Eloai, yet another” (6.32; Chadwick, 349).

3. THE RESULT: THE SITUATION OF HUMANITY IN THE WORLD

1. See the discussion of Daniélou (“Le mauvais gouvernement du monde,” esp. 458) who notes the theme of the bad government of the world is widely used to explain war and other violence as a consequence of heavenly world rulers fighting among themselves.

2. Armstrong, “Dualism,” 44.

3. The *Secret Revelation of John*’s interpretation of *Genesis* has received extensive attention from scholars. See, for example, Böhlig, “Der jüdische und jüdenchristliche Hintergrund in gnostischen Texte von Nag Hammadi”; van den Broek, “Autogenes and Adamas: The Mythological Structure of the Apocryphon of John”; Colpe, “Heidnische, Jüdische und Christliche Überlieferung in den Schriften aus Nag Hammadi”; Giversen, “The Apocryphon of John and Genesis”; Janssens, “L’Apocryphon de Jean”; Kragerud, “Apocryphon Johannis: En Formanalyse”; Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, 57–77; Pearson, “Jewish Sources in Gnostic Literature”; “Use, Authority and Exegesis of Mikra in Gnostic Literature”; “Biblical Exegesis in Gnostic Literature” (pp. 29–38 in *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*); Stroumsa, *Another Seed*; Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*; Nagel, “Die Auslegung der Paradieserzählung.”

4. So Giversen, “The Apocryphon of John and Genesis,” 74.

5. Although this theme of the dimming of the mother’s light appears explicitly only in II/IV, Hauschild notes that in BG the sending of Epinoia works to devalue the breath of the spirit given to humanity through Yaldabaoth (*Gottes Geist und der Mensch*, 232).

6. See the discussion of Quispel, “Der Gnostische *Anthropos*” and “Ezekiel

1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis"; Schenke, *Der Gott "Mensch" in der Gnosis*, esp. 95–156. Pagels discusses this motif in some detail in "Exegesis of Genesis 1 in the Gospels of Thomas and John," 483–486, noting how the *Secret Revelation of John* connects Gen 1.3 and 1.26.

7. See the discussion of Giversen, "The Apocryphon of John and Genesis," 64–65. The Greek philosopher Numenius also points to this phrase from *Genesis* to account for why souls are attracted to descend into the material world, and why demons avoid water. It is because of divine breath into the waters (see fragment 30, *Des Places*; and the discussion of Plese, "The Apocryphon of John," 99–100). The likeness of a human form appearing in the firmament as a voice from above also appears in *Ezekiel* 1:25–26.

8. See the discussion of Schenke, *Der Gott "Mensch,"* 95–156.

9. See the discussion of Pearson, "Biblical Exegesis in Gnostic Literature," 29–38.

10. *HypArch* 88.3–10; trans. Layton, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (ed. Robinson), 163 (modified).

11. For elaboration of this analysis, see King, "Ridicule and Rape, Rule and Rebellion."

12. Note that the term used to describe Adam's condition ("idle, lazy") is the same term used to emphasize that Sophia's thought was *not* idle (*SRevJohn* 10.7). Here the text clearly intends the reader to contrast the effectiveness of divine beings with the world rulers' ineffectiveness.

13. Williams argues that the upright stance is an important theme indicating a distinctly human ability (see *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 128–130).

14. We can speculate that one reason for this elaboration is that the *Genesis* passage may have seemed problematic to ancient interpreters. The notion of God physically involved in shaping matter may have seemed inappropriate for their theology of a transcendent, omnipotent Deity. Similarly, Platonism affirmed that anything created by God participated in his characteristics of mind and life; the implication of the *Genesis* story that creation required a separate act of life-giving opened up a problematic gap in the story which the myth-makers had to fill in order to "correct" this problematic implication. If, as they supposed, the creator God was impotent and ignorant (being involved so intimately with matter), then naturally he didn't understand how the creature became alive, and Moses' account of the scene had simply left out the activity of the transcendent Deity above.

15. It is interesting that in the related Sethian work, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, one of the world creator's minions, Sabaoth, actually does repent and is sent a female instructor from the Divine Realm (see *HypArch* 95.13–34). For a full discussion of this fascinating scene, see Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*.

16. The term “helper” is a translation of the Greek *βοηθός*, the same term used in the Greek translation (LXX) of *Gen* 2.18 to describe the role of the first woman.

17. Note that *SRevJohn* II 22.36 reads “seed” instead of “deficiency” (BG) or “need” (III).

18. This word play on the Greek terms seems to have been lost in the Coptic translation (compare BG with III).

19. For more on the trees of paradise, see Gilhus, “The Tree of Life and the Tree of Death,” esp. 344–347.

20. Here the idea of a “trance” is no innovation since it follows the Greek translation of the Hebrew which translates “sleep” as “trance” (*Gen* 2.21 LXX).

21. The illegitimacy of such attempts at domination is even more strongly portrayed in *HypArch*; see McGuire, “Virginity and Subversion,” and King, “Ridicule and Rape, Rule and Rebellion.”

22. All the versions state that Epinoia appeared in the form of an eagle (*SRevJohn* 21.26).

23. BG 21.25 indicates that Epinoia instructed only Adam, although the text says that “both” had fallen into ignorance (BG 21.31). III is restored to read the plural. II 21.31–33 clearly reads that both received knowledge.

24. One possible solution that has been proposed here is to see this as a pun (or mistranslation) based on the phonic similarities between “snake” (*hiera*) and “eagle” (*hierax*) in the Greek translation (LXX).

25. For example, II 21.26–29 takes Christ to be the eagle who spoke to Adam and Eve from the Tree of Knowledge, in contrast to BG where it is Epinoia who speaks as the eagle. Or again, the union of Adam and Eve into “one flesh” (*Gen* 2.23–24) is interpreted in BG 21.21–23 as a mystery that prefigures the rectification of the Mother's deficiency through union with her partner, while in II 21.21 it figures the correction of Adam's deficiency by his partner, Eve, a union which leads him to abandon his false father and

mother, Yaldabaoth and matter. It would seem that these difficulties arose by trying to solve all the “problems” in *Genesis* while simultaneously trying to cram too many different intertexts together at one intersection in the *Genesis* narrative, especially the activity of Epinoia, the dialogue of Christ and John, and the Pronoia hymn. (The latter was attached to the end of II/IV and precipitated numerous modifications throughout the text; see Chapter 12).

26. The curse of subordination occurs only in BG and III; II 22.3–5 says only that Yaldabaoth “found the woman preparing herself for her husband. He was lord over her for he did not understand the mystery which had come to pass from the holy design.” This alteration will be discussed below when we consider the addition of the Pronoia hymn to the longer version in Chapter 12.

27. In the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, this theme was exploited to ridicule the impotence of the creator God and expose his condemnable behavior (see King, “Rule and Rebellion, Rape and Ridicule”).

28. See Denzey, “Under a Pitiless Sky,” 179–180.

29. For further discussion of the flood story, see Brakke, “The Seed of Seth at the Flood,” esp. 55–58.

30. Corrigan suggests that the reference to “the spirit of darkness mixed with evil” demonstrates “the active negativity of darkness or matter . . . and is seen as a cause of evil in other forms of darkness” (“Positive and Negative Matter,” 22–23, n. 21). The view of matter as the principle of all evil is most clearly seen in Numenius Fr. 52 (Des Places; see the discussion of Corrigan, “Positive and Negative Matter,” 21–24).

31. Traces of these elaborations found their way into Sethian and Manichaean myths (see Scopello, “Le Mythe de la ‘chute’ des anges”; Pearson, “Jewish Sources,” 453–455; Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament*, 24–25). Pearson has argued that the *Secret Revelation of John*’s interpretation of Gen 6.1–4 on the angels and the daughters of men “is based upon 1 *Enoch* 6–8, a significant element being added: the material dealing with the Imitation Spirit” (“Jewish Sources,” 459; see also 453–455 and Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 34–70). Pearson additionally suggests that there was influence from *T. Reuben* 5.5–7 in having the angels assume the likeness of the women’s husbands (“Jewish Sources,” 454). For more on fallen angels in the Enoch literature, see Reed, *Fallen Angels*.

32. So Pearson, "Jewish Sources," 451–455, esp. 454; see also Böhlig, "Zum Antimimon Pneuma."
33. Compare 1 *Enoch* 8:1–2.
34. See Denzey, "Under a Pitiless Sky," 168.
35. For an alternative view, see the discussion of matter as the source of evil in Corrigan, "Positive and Negative Matter," esp. 22–23.
36. Schenke stresses that creation in the image of God indicates that humanity also partakes of the divine substance; this is demonstrated in particular, he notes, in BG 22.29–30 which states that "The Spirit came down to awaken the essence which is like it." In this passage, "essence" refers to the two humans: "If they resemble the spirit of Sophia, then they also resemble the Father since the spirit of Sophia, as a being of the light world is like the Father" (see Schenke, *Der Gott "Mensch,"* 41–43). We might note that Plato considered the highest part of the soul to be a god-given daemon (*Tim* 90A).
37. Cp. 1 Cor 15:35–50.
38. There are also other minor differences. For example, the order of the list in the *Secret Revelation of John* is marrow, bones, sinews, flesh, blood, skin, and hair; in the *Timaeus*, it is marrow, bones, sinews, flesh, skin, hair, and nails. *Secret Revelation of John* has blood instead of nails. The text inserts blood into the list between the flesh and the skin, demonstrating that it understands that the order of the list is not arbitrary, but proceeds from the inner to the outer components of the human bodily makeup. See van den Broek, "The Creation of Adam's Psychic Body," 46.
39. See *ibid.*; Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, 300–308; Welburn connected the names of the powers with the astrological planets and the zodiac in "The Identity of the Archons"; Quack, "Dekane und Gliedervergottung."
40. See Jackson, "The Origin in Ancient Incantatory Voces Magicae"; Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, 300–308.
41. Quack, "Dekane und Gliedervergottung," 100.
42. The quotation of Porphyry is preserved in Eusebius, *PrepEv* IV (92b–d), cited from Gifford, *Eusebius: The Preparation for the Gospel*, I, 100.
43. See Quack, "Dekane und Gliedervergottung," 110.
44. Sentence paraphrased from Quack, "Dekane und Gliedervergottung," III.
45. In Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.58 (cited from Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 496).

46. See Quack, “Dekane und Gliedervergottung,” 112. Martin refers to magical spells that “mention the common belief that the human body has 365 members, in reflection of its cosmic structure” (*The Corinthian Body*, 17). He cites PGM IV. 94–153 and refers to p. 40, n. 43 in Betz’s edition, *The Greek Magical Papyri*. See also Ranke “Die Vergottung der Glieder.”

47. The names in the *Secret Revelation of John* show especially clear connections to Egyptian materials in the list of the 72 daemons connected to the body parts. Yet because in the *Secret Revelation of John* the order of the Decans is entirely confused and the quality of the Egyptian forms of the names is relatively poor, Quack concluded that the originally Egyptian source of the names found in the *Secret Revelation of John* had to have been mediated through dependence on Greek Hermetic writings from the Hellenistic period. The *Book of Zoroaster*, he suggests, was an astrological tractate, whose origin need not be outside of Egypt, or at least not outside the realm of Egyptian influence (Quack, “Dekane und Gliedervergottung,” 119–120).

48. See King, “The Variants of the *Apocryphon of John*,” 112.

49. Van den Broek also notes that it is not the Authorities (Exousiai) themselves who form the soul, but “the female aspects of the androgynous planetary rulers” (“The Creation of Adam’s Psychic Body,” 46). He does not explain this occurrence, but it may be one way in which the text can emphasize the weakness and defectiveness of the human soul.

50. Quack suggests that the *Book of Zoroaster* is an astrological tractate (“Dekane und Gliedervergottung,” 121). Books ascribed to Zoroaster are also mentioned by Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* I, 15.69, and Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 16.

51. Burgess, “How to build a human body,” 44. See also Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, 309–310.

52. For more detailed consideration, see the discussion of Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, 312–316.

53. For further discussion, see Quack, “Dekane und Gliedervergottung.”

54. Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 83.

55. See Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, 311–312. In a somewhat different division, the Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria writes: “Our soul is made and constituted of eight parts: of the rational part, which permits of no division, and of the irrational part, which is naturally divided into seven parts—the five senses, the organ of speech and the organ of reproduction. And these

seven parts are the causes of wickedness and are brought to judgment. And death is acceptable to the chief ruler (i.e., the mind) in whom evil is. Accordingly whoever kills the mind by mixing in folly instead of sense will cause the dissolution and breaking up of the seven irrational parts. For just as the chief ruler is disposed toward virtue, so also are disposed the parts which are subordinate to him” (Philo, *QA I,75*, Loeb edition, p. 44 supplemental vol. I).

56. This formulation of the moral life presumes Stoic philosophical teaching about the necessity of overcoming the passions in order to live a life of virtue. By the imperial Roman period, this ideal of *apatheia* was widespread in the moral discourse of the Mediterranean world. The four passions and their corresponding products are generally associated with the moral discourse of Stoic philosophers, such as Chrysippus and Epictetus. In this discourse, pleasure, desire, grief, and fear were considered to be the roots of all other passions. These passions are described in *SRevJohn II 17.48–57*. See the discussion of Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, 312–316. He regards the lists of passions at *SRevJohn 23.7–12* as belonging to the same discourse of opposition to the passions (pp. 330–331). Despite the differences in precise terminology (only II uses the technical terms of Stoicism), I agree that the import is the same.

57. Modern readers should carefully note that the ancient conception of the passions is not the same as the modern notion of feelings. As Sandbach points out, “What the Stoics wished to abolish was not emotion but ‘passion’ (pathos) or, as Cicero translated the word, ‘mental disturbance.’ They had no word that corresponds to the English ‘emotion’” (Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 59–60; see also his discussion, 60–68).

58. The following is based on Nussbaum, “The Stoics on the Extirpation of the Passions”; see also Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, IV.11–12; 22 and Graver, *Cicero on the Emotions*, 43–47, 93–94.

59. Nussbaum, “Extirpation of the Passions,” 158–159; see also *The Therapy of Desire*, 386.

60. Nussbaum, “The Extirpation of the Passions,” 160, 161.

61. Van den Broek notes that in earlier sources the planetary *melothesia* referred only to the carnal body. He suggests that the association of the planets with the psychic body derives from “the doctrine that the soul during its

descent from heaven assumes from the planets an astral, psychic body," a view seen most clearly in the *Corpus Hermeticum* ("The Creation of Adam's Psychic Body," 56; for an example from the Hermetic Corpus, see "The Poimandres of Hermes Trismegistus" I.25–26a). See also the discussion of Jackson, *The Lion becomes Man*, 212.

62. For another, enlightening approach to the limits of dualism in Sethian myth, see Patricia Cox Miller, "The Myth of Eros and Psyche."

63. See especially the discussion of Hauschild, *Gottes Geist und der Mensch*, 225–235.

64. The text does not speak of "salvation by nature" *per se*, but it clearly emphasizes the divine origin of humanity and its purpose in life. By the first and second centuries CE, the identification of the purpose of life (see Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 43–44) had shifted in Middle Platonic thought from the ideal of "life in accordance with nature" to a greater emphasis upon the ideal of achieving "likeness to God" (see Plato, *Theaetetus* 176b). The *Secret Revelation of John* reflects this shift. The text seldom uses the term "nature" (*physis*), and then only to refer either to the lower nature of the planetary rulers (e.g., *SRevJohn* BG 11.25) or to the physical body (e.g., (*SRevJohn* 23.32). The more important terminology in the *Secret Revelation of John* is that of likeness.

Although the *Secret Revelation of John* does not do so, it is possible for this kind of anthropology to embrace the ideal of living "according to nature." To do so, however, requires making a distinction between a person's true spiritual nature and the false, so-called "nature" of matter. The *Gospel of Mary*, for example, teaches that discovering one's own divine nature within means to abandon the false illusory "nature" of the world. Living according to the "nature of the body" must be denied in order to achieve the realization of one's spiritual likeness to God. See *GosMary* 7.1–21 and the excellent discussion by Pasquier, *L'Évangile selon Marie*, 48–56.

65. II and III 7.3. The scribe who copied BG seems to have omitted the phrase "resembling the blessed light" through haplography; it is restored in the translation from III.

66. A similar point was made by Schottroff regarding the Valentinians ("Animae naturaliter salvandae," 94; see also 83–86, 90–93).

67. Indeed, it is only when Powers realize the intellectual, spiritual, and

moral superiority of the *psychic* person that they imprison him in a material body out of jealousy (see *SRevJohn* 18.12–18). After creating the body, they use its impulses, especially the desire for food, wealth, and sexual intercourse to enslave humanity further. Through these impulses, attachment to the material body works to keep humanity in the ignorance of darkness and desire.

4. THE SOLUTION: SALVATION

1. Hauschild, *Gottes Geist und der Mensch*, 235, 247.
2. Valentasis (“Adam’s Body,” esp. pp. 152–153) noted this point.
3. See, for example, Butler, *Bodies That Matter*.
4. Note that with sex and gender, reproductive activities and the categories of male and female are not bodily categories at all, since they can be ascribed to transcendent non-material Beings. Nor does gender identity seem to be particularly fixed in the Divine Realm, where androgynous beings symbolize both unity and division or multiplication, and both male and female pronouns can be used for the same figure (e.g. Barbelo).
 5. See Cooley, *Religious Imagination and the Body*, who talks about the body as site and as sign, linking the two by what she calls “mapping.” The point is precisely not to give priority to the physical as a “given-real” and see signification as secondarily added on by culture; rather the body is always both site and sign. Or to put it another way, from this theoretical perspective the body is not a blank slate onto which culture writes its messages or constructs social order (see Butler, *Bodies That Matter*).
6. On the topic of “Family as Divine Image,” see the important discussion of Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 154–157. He suggests that *SRevJohn* provides a model for reordering relationships of the social family into a greater likeness to the divine (157).
 7. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 155.
8. Is there any evidence that the parodic critique extended to the divine rule? I find only one example among the discrepancies of the manuscript tradition. In the shorter version (BG), Christ calls Yaldabaoth’s subordination of Eve to Adam another attempt at domination, an act contrary to the will of the Divine Realm. The longer version (II/IV) changes this passage quite thoroughly, claiming Eve works to provoke sexual desire in Adam, thus aiding Yaldabaoth in his attempt to enslave humanity through sexual desire.

This change indicates that some editor recognized that the strident critique of gender subordination in the world below could be applied reciprocally to the transcendent Deity's condemnation of Sophia's resistance to subordination.

9. That some editor worked to cut off this hermeneutic possibility in at least one manuscript tradition (II/IV: by changing the world ruler's illegitimate condemnation of Eve's subordination to Adam into a scene in which she "is preparing herself for her husband") indicates that at least some readers did *not* intend the critique to go so far.

10. This fact is obscured somewhat in the generally excellent English translation of Waldstein and Wisse who often choose terms that in English have clear sexual connotations not present in the Coptic (for example, ΜΕΕΥΕ, "thought, thinking," is translated as conceive/conception; ΟΥΩΝΩ ΕΒΟΛ, "show forth, reveal," is translated as "bring forth"; and especially the translation of ΠΡΟΥΝΙΚΟΝ as "sexual knowledge" despite the arguments of Anne Pasquier that in this context the term means something more like "audacity" (see Pasquier, "Prouneikos"). The Greek term *προύνικον* certainly can carry sexual connotations (unlike the Coptic ΜΕΕΥΕ or ΟΥΩΝΩ ΕΒΟΛ), but the translation of "sexual knowledge" is grossly overstated. Indeed the only argument that Meyer makes against Pasquier's interpretation of the asexual character of the term in the *Secret Revelation of John* is to point toward the description of Yaldabaoth as an "untimely birth" (ἔκτρωμα or ΖΟΥΖΕ ΜΠΑΚΕ; see Meyer, "Response to 'Prouneikos,'" 69). This image, however, applies much more to the nature of the product, Yaldabaoth, than it does to the method of his generation. The fact that in works other than the *Secret Revelation of John* Sophia's act is more clearly represented in sexual terms should not obscure this fact, but rather point up the *Secret Revelation of John's* de-emphasis of sexuality in the Divine sphere. Again, however, we can see a tendency in the longer version to "clean up" this possible misinterpretation by reading ΤΣΟΜ ΠΑΤΧΡΟ ("invincible power") instead of ΠΡΟΥΝΙΚΟΝ ("audacity").

11. See *SRevJohn* 11.5–6; Irenaeus, *AgHer* I.29 (line 88–89 in Waldstein and Wisse, p. 192); and Theodoret, *HaerFab* 13 (line 88–89 in Waldstein and Wisse, p. 192). The longer version (II) does not say that he "copulates," but it does use the sexual term "beget."

12. My thinking on this topic was very helpfully nuanced by a conversa-

tion with Ingvild Gilhus and Virginis Burrus whose papers also dealt directly with it, at a conference on “The Language of Body and Bodily Processes: Sensual and/or Metaphorical” at the University of Oslo, November 8–9, 2004. The papers of Gilhus (“Sexuality and Knowledge: The Relationship between Carnality and Salvation”) and Burrus (“The Sex Life of God: Divine Generativity, Metaphoricity, and Ancient Christian Theology”) both dealt directly with the *Secret Revelation of John*, and in different ways emphasized that sensual metaphors bridged the gap of transcendence and materiality.

13. Such slippage shows either that the *Secret Revelation of John* could occasionally apply sexual and birthing language to divine reproductivity or that the Coptic terms (“beget, give birth, produce”) do not necessarily bear strictly sexual connotations but fill the metaphorical field of productivity more generally.

14. The language here of “swelling out” and “cannot be idle” suggests to me the urgency of birthing rather than a decision by Sophia to abort.

15. A point noted by Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 156.

16. This point stands in sharp opposition to the portrayal of Eve in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, where the purity and power of Eve’s daughter Norea is played against the degradation of her mother (see King, “Ridicule and Rape” and “The Book of Norea”).

17. I thank Virginia Burrus for help with the formulation of this question. See her study, *The Sex Lives of Saints*.

18. The topic of names was tied to interests in the capacity of language to communicate both truth and falsehood (see for example, Plato, *Cratylus* 408C, 422D, 397B–C). Such notions were widespread in this period, including among Christians (see Dillon, “The Magical Power of Names,” esp. 206, 216).

19. On the tradition of a double set of names of the archons, see Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man*, 23–24.

20. Not only are there certain differences in the listing of names, but there is considerable internal inconsistency in each of the versions. Each version lists twice the names of the first seven authorities, and in each case there are considerable variants. Moreover each version first lists the names of twelve authorities (*SRevJohn* 11.12–23), and then gives a different list for the first seven authorities who rule over the heavenly spheres (*SRevJohn* 12.17–23).

21. *AuthTeach* 30.4–32.1; cited from MacRae’s text and translation in Parrott, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI*, 276–81. The fishing metaphor is less usual. MacRae also points toward parallels in Clement of Alexandria and Origen, *Commentary on John* XX.43 (GCS VI, o. 387, line 4). Although this passage properly belongs to the milieu of Latin moral discourse (see Richard Valentasis, “The ‘Authoritative Teaching’ and the Roman Ascetical Tradition,” Society of Biblical Literature Meeting, Denver, November 18, 2001), the use of the metaphor of food as a trope for deceptive temptations that lead to death is compatible with the *Secret Revelation of John*. I have cited it at length in order to illustrate the entirely conventional character of the *Secret Revelation of John*’s metaphorical equation of food with deceit and entrapment.

22. The same theme is further elaborated in *SRevJohn* II 24.8, where adultery with Wisdom produces Fate.

23. Luttkhuizen interprets the need of spiritual people to receive the Spirit in terms of the Aristotelian distinction between potentiality and actuality (“Traces of Aristotelian Thought,” 194). He cites Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*, 266; Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 195, 196; see further Luttkhuizen, “The Creation of Man and Woman,” 147 ff.

24. Cited by Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, 35; my emphasis.

25. An earlier version of the following section on ethics was delivered in a paper titled “Neither Libertine nor Ascetic: A New Look at Gnostic Ethics,” presented at the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature, San Francisco, 1992. Portions of this analysis were later published in “The Body and Society.” Many of the points made below, especially in analyzing the *Secret Revelation of John*’s attitudes toward the body, were made in the earlier 1992 article and are similar to points made by Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* chapter 6 (1996).

26. The notion that the self is the competition ground of two opposing forces, the true and the counterfeit spirit, shows some knowledge of traditions of interpretation of Plato’s discussion of the soul in the *Laws* (see esp. 896e, 898a–b, 904a–e).

27. Till writes that knowledge (*gnosis*) is the decisive issue, while ethics is merely secondary (*Die gnostischen Schriften*, 50–51), but I think that the two are not separable: the purpose of gaining knowledge is to overcome the passions. Both versions of the *Secret Revelation of John* make it clear that even

those who have knowledge succeed in their struggle to overcome the passions *only to varying degrees*; virtue does not come of itself as a result of correct knowledge.

28. Plato says that the evil of the soul is injustice, while the evil of the body is disease (*Republic* 609C).

29. See *En quête de la gnose*, II, 255–256. Proclus writes, “All knowledge is accomplished by means of a likeness between the knower and the known” (cited in Burgess, “How to build a human body,” 44). In contrast, Dietzfelbinger understands the spiritual message of the *Secret Revelation of John* to be the human need to overcome “self willfulness,” which he defines as “seeking one’s own gain”; salvation is seen as overcoming Sophia’s act of willfulness (*Schöpfungsberichte aus Nag Hammadi*, 70–71).

30. *Écrits gnostique*, 332.

31. The Alexandrian theologian Origen also considers human life to be a battleground between opposing spiritual forces, but emphasizes the moral basis of this struggle in the free will of the soul and defends the justice of the creator God (whom he considers to be the only, true God) in subjecting souls to the corrective experiences of suffering in this life (see *On First Principles*, 3.2–3).

32. See also Seneca, *On Anger*, who agrees that anger is “the most hideous and frenzied of all the emotions” (1.1.1) and must be entirely excluded from the soul (1.7.2–3).

33. For further discussion, see King, “The Body and Society,” 88–94.

34. Translation cited from ANF II, pp. 210, 209, slightly modified.

35. See also 1 *Cor* 3.15; Tosefta Sanhedrin 13.3, which seem to suggest that those who are neither fully evil nor fully good will suffer fire before being saved.

36. Cp. *Mt* 12:31; *Lk* 12:10.

37. Williams points out how this emphasis that all will be saved (except apostates) does not convey a deterministic doctrine; rather all people possess the potential “seed of Seth” that must be awakened (see *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 195–198).

38. Examples include *Didache* 1–2.

39. Antony, *Letter One*, quotation lines 77–78 (from Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 197–202).

40. See Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*.

41. See Wisse, “Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt.”
42. See Dillon, “The Theory of the Three Classes of Men”; “The Descent of the Soul.” Gruenwald compares Qumran sectarian division of humanity with Gnostic dualism (*From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 87–88). For a discussion of the relationship of Gnosticism to the Qumran literature, see also 78–97; for the relationship to the *Hekhalot* literature, see 98–118.
43. *ExTheo* cited from Foerster, *Gnosis*, vol. I, 149. See also Dillon, “The Desert of the Soul,” 358–362.
44. See the discussion of Plese on repentance as a “good” passion. He argues that Sophia’s repentance is a model for every Gnostic (see “The Apocryphon of John,” 206–207, 217–218).
45. The most important study of baptism is that of Sevrin, *Le dossier baptismal séthien*, esp. pp. 9–48.
46. So Gruenwald, who wrote in reference to sealing found in both Mandaeism and *Hekhalot* mysticism (*From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 113).
47. The Valentinian Theodotus similarly ascribes to baptism the power to overcome the powers of Fate and hence death (see *ExTheo* 78.1–2).
48. Sevrin attributes this mirror imagery to Jewish-Hellenistic speculation about Wisdom (*Le dossier baptismal Séthien*, 21 n. 18).
49. *Le dossier baptismal Séthien*, 21 n. 8. See also Turner, “Ritual in Gnosticism,” 87–97, who writes: “The Sethian baptismal water was understood to be of a celestial nature, a Living Water identical with light or enlightening” (89). So, too, Gilhus writes with reference to the sealing at the end of the Pronoia hymn, “Provided that this reference is to a factual baptism, the water is a material parallel to the pure light-water which surrounds the Father (imitation) (II,4,18–28), and is perhaps also a contrast to the ‘water of forgetfulness’ provided by the chief archon (polarization) (II,25–7–9)” (Gilhus, “The Perception of Spiritual Reality,” 57).
50. So Logan, “The Mystery of the Five Seals,” 191.
51. An example of the effectiveness of baptism might be seen in the *Secret Revelation of John’s* retelling of the flood story (*Gen* 6–7). David Brakke has suggested that the shift in the story emphasizing that humanity is saved from darkness by the hiding in a luminous cloud and the presence of the Epinoia of light works not only to connect the story with Johannine imagery, but also “ties the flood story in a way to Gnostic baptism” (Brakke, “The Seed of Seth at the Flood”).

52. Sevrin, *Le dossier baptismal Séthien*, 31–37.

53. Plese suggests that John's request for further information in the introduction ("How was the savior appointed? Why was he sent into the world by his father who sent him? Who is his father? And of what sort is that aeon to which we will go?" [SRevJohn 2.8–11]) is "construed in the form of the four so-called 'baptismal' questions" ("The Apocryphon of John," 7).

54. For extended discussion of baptism in the *Secret Revelation of John* and other Sethian texts, see esp. Sevrin, *Le dossier baptismal Séthien*, esp. 8–48, 247–294; Logan, "The Mystery of the Five Seals"; Turner, "Ritual in Gnosticism," 87–97.

55. See GosEg NHC IV, 56.25; 58.6, 27–28; 59.27–28; 66.25–26; 74.16; 78.4–5; NHC III, 55.12; 63.3; 66.3; TrimProt NHC XIII 47.29; 48.31; 49.27–28; 50.9–10; *Untitled Treatise* (ed. Schmidt and MacDermot) 32.10.

56. Turner, "Ritual in Gnosticism," 87; so also Sevrin, *Le dossier baptismal Séthien*, 37.

57. So G. Schenke, *Die dreigestaltige Protennoia*, 145–163, and "Trimorphic Protennoia and the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel," 41–42; Turner, *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, and XIII*, 452–453; "Ritual in Gnosticism," 95–96.

58. G. Schenke, "Trimorphic Protennoia and the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel," 42.

59. Logan, "The Mystery of the Five Seals," 192–193.

60. This list of names stands in stark contrast with the use of *nomina barbara* in *Allogenes* for theurgic purposes. There the invocation of divine names was meant to elevate the soul toward likeness with the divine. See King, *Revelation of the Unknowable God*, 12–16, 124–129; Pearson, "Theurgic Tendencies."

61. The names show especially clear connections to Egyptian materials in the list of the 72 daemons connected to the body parts. The fact, however, that the order of the Decan is entirely confused, and that the quality of the Egyptian forms of the names is relatively poor, led Quack to the conclusion that the originally Egyptian source of the names found in the *Secret Revelation of John* had to have been mediated through dependence on a Greek Hermetic *Vulgata* from the Hellenistic period (Quack, "Dekane und Gliedervergottung," 119–120).

62. For a discussion of widespread practices of magic for healing, see

Kotansky, “Incantations and Prayers for Salvation”; examples from Coptic Christianity can be found in Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 79–145.

63. See the discussion of Pearson, “Theurgic Elements,” 253–254, 267; Williams, “Psyché’s Voice.”

64. Quack, “Dekane und Gliedervergottung,” 122.

65. David Frankfurter points to this passage’s similarities to 4 *Ezra* 3 to support his point that Christian Gnosticism has its roots in Judaism, shown by its stress on “the achievement of otherworldly knowledge according to early Jewish literary models of ascent and angelic mediation” (“Early Christian Apocalypticism,” 418–419). Only the form of the *topos* (disturbed believer receives answers to questions from heavenly revealer) is similar, however. The type of questions, the identity of the revealer, and the content of the revelations all differ. Certainly the anti-Judaism of the *Secret Revelation of John* and the rebuke for apostasy from Judaism find no place in 4 *Ezra*.

66. See Givensen, *The Apocryphon of John*, 152.

67. The polymorphism of Christ is a widespread motif in early Christian literature (see Stroumsa, “Polymorphie divine”; Junod, “Polymorphie du dieu sauveur”). It is found in *Acts of Peter*, *Acts of John*, et al. Regarding *Acts of Peter*, Wilhelm Schneemelcher writes: “The author has taken up the widespread motif of polymorphy in order to emphasize the limitations of our possible knowledge of God” (“The Acts of Peter,” 275).

68. Plese shows how the order of the Savior’s speech (what is, what was, and what will be; *SRevJohn* 3.14), contrary as it seems to notions of time (what was, is, will be), actually corresponds to Plato’s cosmological account in the *Timaeus* (see 27d–28a; 37e–38a). Here “what is” corresponds to Being; “what was and will be” corresponds to Becoming (see “The Apocryphon of John,” 74–75).

69. For an example of the use of texts from Nag Hammadi for spiritual instruction see Louis Painchaud, “From the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul* to the *Three Steles of Seth*: Codices I, XI and VII from Nag Hammadi Viewed as a Collection.” Society of Biblical Literature Meeting, Denver, November 18, 2001.

70. According to Gilhus, “John combines two roles, he is both a spiritual vehicle and a model of man. He has thus a similar role as Christ in Christianity, but in relation to Christianity this combination of roles has moved

one step down the god/man ladder, and is no longer played by the Son of God” (“The Perception of Spiritual Reality,” 54).

5. UTOPIAN DESIRE, SOCIAL CRITIQUE, AND RESISTANCE

1. See for example, Seneca, *On Mercy*, I.1.2; Chestnut, “The ruler and the logos”; Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor*; Price, *Rituals of Power*.

2. Much like the *Book of Revelation*, the *Secret Revelation of John* offers a sharp critique of current arrangements but does not advise overt rebellion or even any action to improve conditions. In *Revelation*, believers are called to remain faithful and to wait for God’s angelic army to war against the forces of Satan at the end of the age. In the *Secret Revelation of John*, believers are admonished to cultivate spiritual knowledge and virtue, confident that in the end they will ascend to their rightful places in the Divine Realm. Any violent opposition to the forces that govern the world would only surrender the soul into the hands of the counterfeit spirit, for violence belongs solely to the evil ones, not to the true Deity. For political views of the *Book of Revelation*, see e.g. Schüssler Fiorenza, “Followers of the Lamb”; Bauckham, “The Economic Critique of Rome”; and Young, “Christianity.”

3. On the deaths of Seneca and Thrasea, see Tacitus, *Annals* xv.60–71; xvi.21–35; on the condemnation of the Christians, see *Annals* xv.44. For an extended discussion, see MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*.

4. See MacMullen, “Judicial Savagery,” esp. 214–217. MacMullen notes that the habit of punishment was tied to the distance of rank and status that set apart those who ordered punishments and those who suffered them, a situation which allied violence with rank. Some scholars have been led by this to suggest that those who wrote and read the *Secret Revelation of John* were part of the elite classes who might be expected to exert power but who in the face of Roman imperium were relatively disenfranchised (see Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 288–292; Kippenberg, “Versuch einer soziologischen Verortung”).

5. The reading of “Gnostic” myth as social criticism is not new. Jonas (*Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, I, 214–215, 226–227), Kippenberg (“Versuch einer soziologischen Verortung”), Rudolph (*Gnosis*, 264–268, 292), and Wink (*Cracking the Gnostic Code*) have made similar suggestions, albeit for “Gnosticism” as a whole.

6. Such political critique need not necessarily be the primary object of

the myth's framers in order for it to be present. For a discussion of the role of intentionality, see Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal," 283.

7. See also Centrone, "Platonism and Pythagoreanism," 570–571.

8. Centrone notes for example that "what Platonic philosophy continued to offer was a general theoretical framework for political reflection," considering especially Philo and Plutarch ("Platonism and Pythagoreanism," 560).

9. As Plutarch puts it: "It is not possible to discover any other beginning of justice nor any other source for it other than from Zeus and from the universal nature, for thence everything of the kind must have its beginning if we are going to have anything to say about good and evil" (*Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1035c).

10. See the discussion of Schofield, "Epicurean and Stoic Political Thought," esp. 451–453. As Schofield notes, Stoic political theory in the Roman period becomes increasingly abstract, yet he goes on to note that earlier Roman aristocrats of the late Republic had acquired from Greek philosophy "a language for debating critical issues of contemporary politics and for formulating the choices which as public actors they could not avoid making."

11. So Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 79–80.

12. Stobaeus iv.7.61 (cited from Chesnut, "The Ruler and the Logos," 1315, n. 15).

13. Following the discussion of Chesnut, "The Ruler and the Logos," who treats in particular the Neopythagorean pseudepigrapha, the Middle Platonic philosopher Plutarch, the Late Stoic moralist Seneca, and the Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria.

14. This point is argued by Cicero and Stobaeus (see Schofield, "Epicurean and Stoic Political Thought," 448).

15. The cult worked, too, to support the legitimacy of local rulers over cities and indigenous populations. S. R. F. Price has insightfully shown how the imperial cult in Asia Minor functioned to impose "a definition of the world" by articulating and establishing a particular set of power relations through ritual (*Rituals and Power*, esp. 247–248).

16. A Latin Panegyric (291 CE); cited from Price, *Rituals and Power*, 247.

17. See also Goodman's careful consideration of how widespread opposition to Rome was ("Opponents of Rome: Jews and Others").

18. See MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 81–83.

19. Philo, *Embassy to Gaius; Against Flaccus*; Goodenough, *Politics of Philo Judaeus*, 1–63.

20. *Apology II* (cited from ANF III, p. 19).

21. Conceiving of myth as in any sense political may seem strange to modern readers, but in antiquity the lines between political theory, cosmology, and especially ethics were not clear (for a discussion of the differences between ancient Greek and Roman and modern notions of politics and political theory, see Cartledge, “Greek political thought,” esp. 11–12, 20). Platonists and Stoics alike treated politics as a type of ethics (on Plato, see Schofield, “Approaching the Republic,” 195, 199, 232; on Plutarch, see Centone, “Platonists and Pythagoreans,” 577, 581; on Stoics, see Gill, “Stoic writers of the imperial period,” 600). Plutarch advises that the only reason to engage in political activity is “nothing else than what is good (τὸ καλὸν)” (*Precepts of Statecraft* 799a). Christopher Gill argues that one genre of ethics involved in political theory is “therapy (typically ‘curing’ listeners by removing false beliefs),” a description that applies quite aptly to the purpose of Christ’s revelation in the *Secret Revelation of John* (See Gill, “Stoic Writers of the Imperial Period,” 600).

22. See the discussion of Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 103–107.

23. Cited from NHLE, 516, with modification.

24. For example, Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 264–267; Wink, *Cracking the Gnostic Code*, 25 (but note the apparent contradiction in 37–38); Keller, “Das Problem des Bösen.” In part, their point arises from drawing too strong a distinction between social criticism and political action, such that too strongly distinguishing thought from action or narrative from practice misses the ways in which intellectual or theoretical conceptualization, such as one finds in mythic narratives, is an important kind of social practice. On this point, see Lamberth, “Intimations of the Finite,” 212; Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 127–146.

25. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 198–199.

26. He distinguishes among the practices of material domination, status domination, and ideological domination, and the kinds of public and disguised resistance that can occur as a response to each (see the summary chart in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 198).

27. See Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 81, 91, 115, 108–135. In particular, he notes that “millennial imagery and the symbolic reversals of folk religion are the infrapolitical equivalents of public, radical, counterideologies: both are aimed at negating the public symbolism of ideological domination” (199, my emphasis).

28. See Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 136–182, esp. 136–142, 156–160, 166–172.

29. See Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 139, 158.

30. The fact that no specific political figures or offices are named, as Rudolph points out, does not mean that a work is entirely without political effect or intent. Works like the *Secret Revelation of John* succeeded in divesting “the ancient system of rule . . . of its sanctity; it has been [according to Hans Jonas] ‘degraded from the alleged dignity of an inspired ‘hierarchical’ order to a naked display of power . . . which at the most could exact obedience but not respect.’ This ‘ideal rebellion’ or ‘metaphysical emptying’ of the old rule did not indeed lead to its actual abolition, but the whole counter-design of the gnostic system as it confronts us in its soteriology and eschatology effected for its advocates a practical devaluation and weakening of political conditions” (Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 265–266, citing Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, vol. 1, 226–227, n. 2. See further, Jonas’ discussion, *op. cit.* 115–226).

31. The cited phrase is from Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 137.

32. See Young, “Christianity,” for an overview of political attitudes of Christians toward Rome. Young stereotypically characterizes “the gnostic position” on politics as “antimaterialistic . . . The outlook was individualistic and cosmic, not political or social” (642).

33. For a discussion of the public and political character of Roman religion, see Cartledge, “Greek Political Thought,” 13–15.

34. See, for example, Pagels, “Christians against the Roman Order”; Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, 32–33; Perkins, *The Suffering Self*; Schüssler-Fiorenza, “The Followers of the Lamb.”

35. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 2 (cited from ANF II, p. 181).

36. *The Corinthian Body*, 62.

37. Myths of adultery, avarice, jealousy, and violence by the gods supplied

ample evidence to those who wanted to censure the traditional gods and their mores (for a summary, see Attridge, “The Philosophical Critique of Religion under the Early Empire”). Even in defending the traditional practices, the moral philosopher Plutarch counterattacks by condemning certain pagan practices, suggesting that it is atheists and superstitious people who have improper views of the gods (*Superstition* 171 A–B). Both atheists and superstitious people show that they have made false judgements, says Plutarch, but only the superstitious combine this with passion in order to derange the soul. It was, however, just such practices as Plutarch describes that led to criticism of the traditional religion. The traditional cults, critics held, presupposed a view of the gods that a reasonable person could not accept.

38. Justin, *Second Apology* 5–6 (trans. cited from Barnard, *St. Justin Martyr*, 76–77).

39. See Reed, *Fallen Angels*.

40. Pétrement argued that the origins of Gnosticism in Christianity can be shown exactly at this point: the Christocentric critique of the religion of the world (*A Separate God*, 22, 23).

41. See Williams, who has questioned that *SRevJohn* evinces an “unusual antagonism toward creation” by comparing it to apocalyptic thought (*Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 100).

42. See Ex 20.5.

43. See Gen 6.5–7; 7.17–23; 19.24–25.

44. See Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, 227, n. 2.

45. *Laus Constantini* (appended to Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*). See the discussion of Young, “Christianity,” 651–653.

46. A point made well by Michael Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 54–79. He treats the problem as one of exegesis and concludes that there are a number of different kinds of hermeneutical approaches in that group of texts aimed at tackling these passages that were widely perceived as “difficult.” He does not, however, take up the task of accounting for the kind of solutions proposed by “gnostic” exegesis.

6. METHODS AND STRATEGIES

1. Gruenwald offers an example from Qumran: “In what may rightly be called a *locus classicus* of the (Qumran) sect’s esoteric interpretation of Scripture, 1 *QpHab.* vii 1–14 comments on the prophecy of Habakkuk (ii 1–3), and

defines the relationship of the new revelation to the original prophecy. God, the Peshet says, has revealed to the sect's Teacher of Righteousness 'all the secrets of the prophecies of His servants the prophets.' Even if the new revelation stands, as it actually does, in some kind of contrast to the old prophecy, it is nevertheless taken as the revelation of the real intention or meaning of the original prophecy" (*From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 80–81). He sees this phenomenon, however, not as a common strategy of ancient hermeneutics as I argue, but as "a new religious attitude which based man's religious orientation towards God not on ignorance but on an ever increasing amount of knowledge" (82–83). I would say it is rather an attempt to claim that the Teacher of Righteousness' revelation conforms to the past and does not introduce anything "new"—only a clearer understanding of venerable tradition.

2. Cited from Eusebius, *HE* 6.19.4 (Loeb edition).

3. Trans. Butterworth, *Origen*, 270–272 with modification.

4. In contrast, modern scholars often charge the *Secret Revelation of John* not with a too-literal interpretation of Scripture, but with reversing its literal meaning. For example, Dahl writes: "They consciously turned the texts upside down. The illuminated understanding and the esoteric tradition became more normative than the written text." His example of the latter are the repeated references to Moses being wrong in *SRevJohn* ("The Arrogant Archon," 698). Williams offers a solid critique of how contemporary scholars often understand the *Secret Revelation of John's* hermeneutics as the purposeful reversal of the accepted meaning of traditional materials, fired by a rebellious and impious spirit of revolt and unadulterated perversity (*Rethinking Gnosticism*, 54–79). This meaning appears to be "reversed" because the *Secret Revelation of John* lost out in the battle to control the meaning of *Genesis* and other traditions. It also seems to some that so much has been appropriated that the *Secret Revelation of John* may seem to have no tradition of its own, but to be a mere parasite feeding on the borrowed heritage of others. See the critiques of Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 80–95; King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 222–224.

5. Kenney, "Ancient Apophatic Theology," 275.

6. Some scholars have argued that there are notable similarities to the Qumran literature as well (see for example, Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*).

7. Cited from Eusebius, *Preparation*, IX, 7 (p. 443). Eusebius quotes

Numenius and other authors precisely in order to make his own point about pagan wisdom's origins in Judaism, and its functions as *preparatio evangelica*.

8. Other philosophers were involved in a similar program. Megasthenes, in his book *On Indian Affairs*, wrote: "All that has been said about nature among the ancients is said also among the philosophers outside Greece, partly among the Indians by the Brahmans, and partly in Syria by those who are called Jews" [cited from Eusebius, *Preparation*, 9.6 (p. 442)]. So, too, Jews like Philo were engaged in a project of synthesizing the cultural goods of their day. Like midrash, Philo is filling in the gaps, solving the hermeneutic problems, and so on. It looks to us like he is using Plato to interpret Moses, but from his perspective, he is merely commenting on the text to elucidate and bring out its true meaning. He is also clear that any resemblance between Plato and Torah is due to Plato's having learned from Moses, not the other way around. Even the middle-Platonist philosopher Numenius could ask rhetorically: "For what is Plato, but Moses speaking in Attic Greek?" They were all engaged in reading Greek philosophy, Torah, wisdom literature, and other materials to establish the universal truth.

9. See Fallon, "Gnostic Apocalypses"; Attridge, "Valentinian and Sethian Apocalyptic Traditions."

10. For further discussion of the genre (form and content) of apocalypse, see Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. I, 219–223.

11. Frankfurter notes that the closest generic parallel to the framework of the *Secret Revelation of John* is 4 Ezra (see "The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses," 159–160).

12. Scholars have identified a number of smaller generic units, including a philosophical treatise on the transcendent Deity, a theogony, the *Genesis* retelling (midrash), a melothesia, the dialogue on the fate of souls, and a liturgical hymn or monologue (the Pronoia Monologue). They have tended to take these generic units as independent literary sources, secondarily incorporated in various stages into the framework of the *Secret Revelation of John* (see Schenke, "Nag Hammadi Studien I"; Kragerud, "Apocryphon Johannis: En Formanalyse"; Waldstein, "The Providence Monologue"; Turner, "To See the Light"; Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*; Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*). While this is certainly a possibility, it is not clear what sense they would have made on their own outside of the larger context of the treatise. More-

over, recent work in ancient compositional techniques has suggested that such units may have been composed precisely to fit within larger generic frameworks (see Rose on Homer for example, *Sons of the Gods*, 43–91.) My aim here, however, is not to isolate possible priors incorporated into the *Secret Revelation of John*, but to analyze the shape of the whole.

13. So Boyarin, summarizing a point of Hayden White, writes: “In White’s view, then, there is a stock of ‘archetypal story forms,’ which are the bearers of the ideology of the given culture. When an historian, including the most modern and ‘scientific’ of historians, reconstructs the past, this is always done in conformity to the plots which the intertext of the culture allows. This is what endows the narrative he or she creates with both plausibility and significance” (*Intertextuality*, 85–86).

14. Certainly there was slander in antiquity about the Jews worshipping the head of an ass in their temple, but the narrative here shows no indication that it is playing off such nonsense.

15. See Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 149–153. He concludes: “It is the Jewish insistence on derogating every other theology that aroused the ire of pagan intellectuals . . . It is this illiberality on the part of the Jews in denying the validity of any other religion and this lack of patriotism in refusing to acknowledge the religion identified with the state that leads to attacks on Jewish theology.”

16. The version in Codex II additionally identifies her with Sophia (II 21.22 ff.).

17. And *SRevJohn* even added a Platonizing interpretation: The plural also encompassed Plato’s notion that the multiplicity of things is the product of the demiurge and the indefinite dyad or the demiurge and his “children,” the younger gods.

18. The so-called Christian apocrypha provide numerous illustrative examples of narrative elaboration (see e.g., the infancy gospel literature; see Hock, *The Infancy Gospels*). Rabbinic midrash provides other examples, albeit with rather different hermeneutic principles (see Boyarin, *Intertextuality*). For examples of allegorical practices and strategies, see the excellent study of Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*. His typology of the uses of allegory, recognizes that allegory can be used variously to domesticate literal meanings, to bring them “into step with the times,” or to “provide a revolutionary challenge to

prevailing cultural norms” (*Allegorical Readers*, 10). Contrary to his perspective, however, I would claim that both types are revisionary, albeit used as he claims for different political ends. A famous example of the strategy of identification is offered by Apuleius, who identifies many ancient Goddesses with Isis (see *Metamorphoses* II, 1; 8, 25).

19. Our task is complicated by the fact that most ancient tradition is lost to us, not only because the written texts have not all been preserved but even more because most people would have learned these stories and philosophical ideas from oral tradition and enacted them in the unwritten practices of their daily lives.

7. PLATONIZING PHILOSOPHY

1. See Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 3.
2. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Plato’s *Timaeus* are by Benjamin Jowett, “*Timaeus*.”
3. Although Plato does not himself identify matter with the receptacle, later Platonists will take this step (see the discussion of Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism*, 310–311, esp. n. 6).
4. The movements of these heavenly bodies are far beyond human discernment, and *Timaeus* curtly dismisses astrologers and their attempts to predict the future by charting the stars and planets (*Tim* 40c–d).
5. For a discussion of these issues, see Dillon, *Middle Platonism*, 6–7.
6. See Dodds, “The *Parmenides* of Plato”; Dillon, *Middle Platonism*; Mansfeld, “Compatible Alternatives”; Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism* and “Ancient Apophatic Theology.” The use of negative theology can also be seen in some Sethian texts like *Allogenes* (see King, *Revelation of the Unknowable God*, 16–34, 154–176; Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism*, 382–385, 502–510, 724).
7. See Kenney, “Ancient Apophatic Theology,” 269, 262.
8. See the discussion of Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism*, 267–268.
9. See the discussion of Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism*, 12–15.
10. Translation from Bury, *Plato*, vol. 9, p. 117, with minor modification.
11. Translation from Bury, *Plato*, vol. 9, pp. 117, 119, with minor modification. Turner sees a correspondence here between the Divine Triad in the *Secret Revelation of John* and the family triad of Form as Father, Receptacle as Mother, and phenomenon as Child in *Timaeus* 50d (*Sethian Gnosticism*, 313–

314, 499–500). In another interesting intertextual reading, Plutarch reads Plato's Father-Mother-Son triad of Ideas-Receptacle-Offspring (*Tim* 50C–D) with Egyptian mythology of Osiris-Isis-Horus as Intelligence-Matter-Cosmos (*On Isis and Osiris* 372E–373C; see Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism*, 374). Comparison of this passage with the *Secret Revelation of John* demonstrates how different hierarchical schemes result not solely from the use of varied “sources,” but also from different hermeneutic strategies and rhetorical goals of intertextual reading.

12. See Dillon, *Middle Platonism*, 200–202; Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism*, 43–53.

13. Dillon, *Middle Platonism*, 202. Dillon continues, “We seem thus to be brought close to Gnostic beliefs.”

14. See Kenney's discussion of Numenius in *Mystical Monotheism*, 68.

15. Fragment 11, cited from Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 367–368 with slight modification.

16. See Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 368. He continues, “This insistence, repeated in Fr. 19 and 20, that the Demiurge is only good by participation in the Father, seems to imply at least a mild downgrading of this entity, in a rather Gnostic spirit. It is in Numenius with his negative view of the world, that one would expect to find the closest approximation to the Gnostic notion of a less-than good, ‘ignorant’ Demiurge, who is responsible for the flawed creation in which we are imprisoned. Certainly, there are suggestions that the Demiurge creates as a result of a lust (*orexis*) for Matter (Fr. 11), by which he is ‘split’ (perhaps even rent asunder, in the matter of Dionysus or Osiris). In the heat of his enthusiasm for Matter, he becomes forgetful of himself. It would be going too far, however, to take Numenius' Demiurge as being in any sense an evil principle, despite the dangers of his position” (op. cit., 369).

17. See Kenney, “Ancient Apophatic Theology,” esp. 262.

18. See, for example, Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism*, 65.

19. Scholten has stressed the relative lack of interest in theodicy on the part of Sethian Gnostics generally. He argues that theodicy was emphasized rather by the critics of Gnostic thought and this view was adopted by modern scholars from them (*Martyrium und Sophiamythos*, 281, 283–284).

20. That is to say, the *Secret Revelation of John* emphasizes the evaluative

over the logical-epistemic aspects. According to Kenney, “Plato’s hierarchical metaphysics may be said, in broad terms, to have rested upon two distinct bases: the logical-epistemic and the valuational.” The evaluative cast shows up in that “throughout the dialogues, the spectrum running from ‘being’ to ‘non-being’ is represented as having strongly evaluative overtones.” Kenney further suggests that “What motivated the further degree of reality hypothesis seems to have been the cognitive surety that was attached to such universals.” He continues: “the very concept of ‘being’ is based upon a conceptual backdrop that holds predicative or qualitative stability to be preferable to their opposites. This component of the theory is, however, expanded greatly in many passages, which indicates that Plato attached even stronger evaluative and religious associations to this position . . . Plato’s general view [is] that what is less real is of little worth. This tendency to depreciate lower levels of reality over against ‘being’ in a fairly radical fashion is not uncommon in Plato” (see Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism*, 4–11; the quotes are from pp. 4, 8, and 8–9). Kenney also cautions scholars against too easily reading philosophical ideas into ‘Gnostic’ texts (see esp. “Ancient Apophatic Theology,” 263–265).

21. Kenney, “Ancient Apophatic Theology,” 269.

22. As Kenney puts it: “One dominant theme throughout Greco-Roman theism is the idea that the cosmos is an ordered whole that mirrors the transcendent order” (“Apophatic Theology,” 272).

23. So Williams: “Something about the structure of divinity can be observed in the visible cosmos, though a full understanding of the nature of the relationship depends on further revelation—as it did for many Jewish and Christian authors” (“Negative Theologies,” 296).

24. Because of its use of Platonic dualism for oppositional ends, it would be impossible for the *Secret Revelation of John* to entertain the notion that the unjust, bad, impious, or dishonorable could have any place in the Divine Realm (see the discussion of Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism*, 13–15). Moreover, in my opinion the *Secret Revelation of John’s* structuring of reality is less about ontology or even epistemology (though it definitely concerns both) than about offering a framework within which to spin the story of both corruption and salvation simultaneously. The doubling implied in two levels of reality, one mirroring the other, results in a doubling of the narrative in the *Secret*

Revelation of John. The story of divine unfolding is told twice in *Secret Revelation of John*, once with regard to the Divine Realm and once with regard to the world below. Thus the ontology of Platonizing philosophy in a sense becomes narrativized in the *Secret Revelation of John* by repetition of above and below, and by the drama of the moves and countermoves made to entrap or free humanity.

25. Jonas found this derogation of the heavens to be the most convincing sign of Gnostic impiety, an attitude that defined not only the essence of Gnosticism but also made it comparable to the existential alienation of twentieth-century nihilism. Assuredly certain Christian theologians and Platonizing philosophers agreed in condemning these views as impiety. But I think the matter is more complex than Jonas realized, because this derogatory attitude toward the heavenly powers was developed in contrast to a utopian view of the world above. That contrast revealed the nature of the powers that rule the world to be actively malevolent and fundamentally unjust. More is going on here by way of social critique than mere disparagement and pessimism, however existentially honed (see especially Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 241–265, 320–340).

26. Mansfeld, “Bad Demiurge,” 265. However, he traces the pattern of the “bad demiurge” to Parmenides, not Plato (see particularly pp. 270–274 where he gives six factors in Parmenides’ thought that can be called “gnostic”).

27. See Boyancé, “Dieu cosmique,” esp. 353–354, referring to *Statesman* 271d and *Laws* X, 903b–905d.

28. *Tim* 41–42; 69c. See also van den Broek, “The Creation of Adam’s Psychic Body,” 43; Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism*, 17.

29. Des Places, *Numenius*, Fr. 12. See the excellent discussion of Dillon, “Pleroma and Noetic Cosmos: A Comparative Study” and *The Middle Platonists*, 366–372; Plese, “The Apocryphon of John,” 85.

30. See, for example, Armstrong, “Dualism,” 44–45. Williams argues against the proposition that “The demonization of the demiurge was a single, gradual and essentially unidirectional development” whose crucial step “is not to be explained in terms of some social crisis” (“The Demonizing of the Demiurge,” 81, 83). Rather he attributes the various portraits of the demiurge to various “concerns over exegetical problems and problematic scriptural passages, issues of theodicy, and the influence of ascetic presuppositions” (86).

31. Thomassen, “The Platonic and the Gnostic ‘Demiurge,’” 229.

Thomassen has objected that the *Secret Revelation of John* does not use the term “demiurge,” that Yaldabaoth does not form matter into an orderly cosmos by looking to an eternal model, and moreover that *SRevJohn*’s primary interest is not in cosmology but in soteriology (op. cit., 228–231; Turner makes the same points summarizing Thomassen in *Sethian Gnosticism*, 48–49). All these points are quite true, but it is going too far to suggest that “We must conclude, therefore, that neither with respect to terminology, conceptual structure or focus of interest is there any indication that the cosmogony of the *Timaeus* exercised an influence on that of *Ap. John* and cognate documents” (231). He himself notes that the Christian polemicists, as well as Plotinus and Porphyry, all used “the designation ‘demiurge’ applied to a malevolent creator and world ruler” in their refutations of the heretics (227), so at least in antiquity readers of texts like the *Secret Revelation of John* considered figures like Yaldabaoth to be demiurgic figures.

32. Thomassen, “The Platonic and the Gnostic ‘Demiurge,’” 229. Plese also notes that Yaldabaoth is not precisely equivalent to the world creator in Plato’s *Timaeus*, rather: “Two characteristic functions of Plato’s Demiurge—(a) separating elements and (b) shaping, out of them, the World-Body—are divided in the *Apocryphon* between Sophia and Ialdabaoth. The former separates, the latter fabricates. The former sees the model, the latter does not. The former acts in the latter and provides him with the impulse to create. The former is the preliminary cause of the world’s creation, the latter its instrumental cause” (“The Apocryphon of John,” 84).

33. See, for example, R. Smith, “Sex Education in Gnostic Schools”; Castelli, “Response to Sex Education in Gnostic Schools”; Fischer-Müller, “Yaldabaoth,” 85–89.

34. Galen, *De Usu partium* 14.7; cited from Smith, “Sex Education,” 350.

35. Smith, “Sex Education,” 350.

36. Jackson describes his own method as follows: “The task now at hand is to identify the different cultural ingredients which went to produce the Gnostic mythological amalgam, and, so far as possible, to mark out the stages of their individual developments and the sequence of their entry into Gnostic tradition” (*The Lion Becomes Man*, 45). This approach treats associa-

tions with the lion as sources of syncretism and stages of development. Here, however, I am reading his work concerning the leonine Yaldabaoth in terms of synchronic and intertextual deployment of cultural codes and hermeneutic strategies.

37. See Jackson's fuller discussion in *The Lion Becomes Man*, 73–74; see also his summary on p. 172.

38. Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man*, 177–179; see more on Platonizing connections to the passions, 198–199.

39. Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man*, 212.

40. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism*, 252; see also 591.

41. *On Fate* 572f ff; cited from Williams, "Higher Providence," 483.

42. For further examples of the fit of Pronoia to the Middle Platonic notion of "higher providence," see Williams, "Higher Providence," 485–487.

43. Thomassen, "The Derivation of Matter," 5; see also Dillon, who states that one of the reasons for the soul's descent was considered to be "wantonness" ("The Descent of the Soul," 360). Turner notes that Sophia's act "however audacious and blameworthy, involves at least a small component of contemplation" (*Sethian Gnosticism*, 575).

44. Although the term *prunikos* is used in the *Secret Revelation of John* rather than *tolma*; see the discussion of Pasquier, "Prouneikos."

45. Translation from Hamilton and Cairns, *Plato*, 1193.

46. Translation from Hamilton and Cairns, *Plato*, 1192.

47. I am following Williams here who reads the passage in *SRevJohn* Syn 72.4–9 to teach that those souls who are overcome by the counterfeit spirit are reincarnated until they finally receive the liberating knowledge (see *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 197).

48. This negative assessment of the soul's encasement in flesh was also shared by Numenius (see Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 366).

49. In this system, matter appears to be an uncreated substrate resistant to the spirit by its very nature (see Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism*, 572).

8. MOSES

1. My reading of *Gen* 2–3 here is heavily indebted to the brilliant analysis of Tribble, "A Love Story Gone Awry."

2. See the discussion of Dillon, *Middle Platonism*.
3. See the examples given by Williams and his rebuttal in *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 54–79.
4. While I am entirely persuaded by Phyllis Tribble's arguments (in "A Love Story Gone Awry") that the *Genesis* account does not support the view that the female was created inferior by nature (rather the woman was first subordinated to the man as a curse), it may very well be the case that the myth-makers of the *Secret Revelation of John* knew and were thinking with an interpretation (a "strong misreading") of *Genesis* that regarded woman as an inferior creation. But not all versions of the *Secret Revelation of John* read *Genesis* the same way here; see chapter 12.
5. See the discussion of Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 54–79. Concerning the plural in *Gen* 1.26, Williams suggests "the plurality of creators in demiurgical myths such as in *Ap. John* or the *Baruch* book of Justin 'the pseudo-gnostic' seems best characterized as not an exegetical 'inversion' or 'reversal' but an alternative solution to an old problem" (68).
6. For a more extended discussion of Jonas, see King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 115–137.
7. For a critique of "experience" in historical analysis, see Joan Scott, "'Experience.'" Her primary point is that experience itself is not a given, but is culturally constructed. She argues that "It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. To think about experience in this way is to historicize it as well as to historicize the identities it produces" (25–26).
8. Jonas insisted: "It is also our opinion that the factual living conditions of people are a decisive constituent in their thinking; and further, that external events and patterns can play a significant role as well" (*Gnosis* I, 63–64).
9. Some Christians read not only Plato and *Genesis*, but drew upon a range of philosophical literature to interpret Jewish Scripture (LXX) more widely. Eusebius, for example, attests that the Alexandrian theologian Origen knew not only the writings of Plato, but of Numenius, Cronius,

Apollophanes, Longinus, Moderatus, Nichomachus, distinguished Pythagoreans and Stoics, and applied them to Jewish scriptures (*HE* 6.19.8).

10. From a modern perspective, this solved the problem of why there are two accounts of creation in *Genesis*, but from Philo's perspective it was proof that Plato had derived his inspiration from Moses. For an excellent and detailed analysis of Philo's reading of the *Timaeus*, see Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato*; for a brief comparison of Philo with the *Secret Revelation of John*, see King, "The Body and Society."

11. MacRae, for example, wrote: "In a sense we may say that the very intention of the Gnostic myth is to provide a 'true,' esoteric explanation of the Genesis story itself. Therefore, if the events of earth are held to be but shadowy copies of the realities above, we must expect to find at least some of the characters and actions of Genesis translated to the pleromatic level. We may not be able to recognize them easily, but that is merely a consequence of the esoteric intentions and often inept craftsmanship of the Gnostic mythologizers" ("The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," 99). Of course from the perspective of the *Secret Revelation of John*, *Genesis* was not translated from the lower world into the higher, but the opposite; to see it otherwise is to read the normative interpretation of *Genesis* as solely to do with the physical universe onto a very different narrative. Might it also be less the ineptitude of the "Gnostic mythologizers" than of contemporary readers who miss what may have appeared to ancient authors and readers as rather obvious allusions to *Genesis*?

12. The Autogenes-Christ is also a kind of hypostasized personification of the goodness of creation, based on a word play on *christos/chrēstos* (Christ/goodness).

13. See MacRae, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," 100–101.

14. Williams, "Higher Providence," 489.

9. WISDOM LITERATURE

1. Although MacRae framed his article in terms of "Gnostic myth" generally, his primary attention was on the "Sethian-Ophite" type of Gnosticism, now largely associated with Sethian Gnosticism, especially the *Secret Revelation of John*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and *On the Origin of the World*.

2. MacRae noted significant similarities to the figure of Sophia in the *Secret Revelation of John*, especially in comparison to *Prov* 8.12–36; *Sir* 24.1–22; *Wis* 6–10, and *Bar* (LXX) 3.9–4.4. In these works, as well as in the *Secret Revelation of John*, Sophia speaks and acts as an hypostasized character. She is intimate with God, as his creation, reflection, and image. She is his holy spirit. She is the first of his creatures who was brought forth in the beginning, and she was instrumental in the creation of the world. She is identified with the seven-fold structure of the cosmos. She is enthroned and dwells in the clouds, but descends into the world to bring revelation and wisdom to humanity. Rejected, she ascends back to her celestial home. It is said that Sophia protected, delivered and strengthened Adam. She is life, and in some related Sethian literature (but not in the *Secret Revelation of John*), she is identified with the Tree of Life (see *Prov* 3.18). She is called mother and sister. Other scholars have added to this list.

3. For a general introduction to Jewish Wisdom literature, see Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*. For Wisdom as co-creator and first born of God, see *Prov* 8.22–31 and *Sir* 1.4; as light and salvation, see *Wis* 7.25–28 and *Prov* 8.32–36; as a teacher, see *Prov* 1.20–22; 8.1–11; as the designer and controller of history, see *Wis* 10.1 ff.; as the Mosaic Law, see *Sir* 24; as the one who comes down to offer life, see *Prov* 8.32–36 and *1 Enoch* 42; as mother and source of life, see *Prov* 1.20–33 and *4 Ezra* 7.72; as a fountain or spring, see *Sir* 15.3; 24.30; as living water, see *Prov* 16.22; 14.27, *Song of Songs* 4.15 and *Bar* 3.12. No doubt even this extensive list of shared motifs could be expanded.

4. *Wis* 13.1–9 emphasizes the goodness and beauty of God's creation; *Sir* 44–50 tells how Sophia works with the righteous in history; in *Sir* 24, it is Sophia who gives the Law to Moses.

5. An exception here might be Philo, who attributes some traditional characteristics of Wisdom to the Word (*logos*); but he also can represent Wisdom as the mother of the Word (*Fuga* 109), even as Pronoia is the mother of the Word, Christ.

6. Here I follow the analysis of Barc and Painchaud, who conclude: "As the emanation of the thought of the Father, she is Ennoia; as the source of everything, she is the perfect Pronoia of the All; when she reflects upon the Father, she becomes the image of the Invisible one, Protennoia. In other terms, in reflecting upon himself (= Ennoia), the Father manifests a thought

(=Pronoia) which is his thinking (Protennoia). Protennoia, the thinking of the Father, manifests him and the manifestation is like that of the primordial triple-formed Man” (“La réécriture de l’Apocryphon de Jean,” 324). On the name, Barbelo, see Sieber, “The Barbelo Aeon as Sophia.”

7. BG clarifies that she is the Father from the unbegotten Father, i.e., from the transcendent Deity (see *SRevJohn* BG 6.26).

8. On *Wis* 7:25–26 (LXX), see Mantovani, “Acqua magica e acqua di luce.”

9. See Boyarin, “Gospel of the *Memra*,” 255–257. There are other intertextual readings of wisdom literature and *Genesis* that are not alluded to in the *Secret Revelation of John*, for example that Wisdom is poured out in the rivers of Eden’s garden (see *Sir* 24.30–34).

10. One also sees this association in Philo and the Targums between wisdom and word; *logos* and *sophia*; *memrah* and *hokmah* (see Boyarin, “The Gospel of the *Memra*”).

11. For Christ as an image of God’s goodness, cp. *Wis* 7.27 (LXX) and *SRevJohn* 7.8–10. Even as III figured the relationship of Pronoia to the transcendent Deity as a “likeness of the light” and not the light itself, so, too, III figures the Autogenes-Christ as a “spark of light resembling the blessed light.”

12. Again BG clarifies that the Father here is Pronoia, not the transcendent Deity. So, too, a tradition of Eve’s repentance in *The Life of Adam and Eve* portrays her grief that her action has led to the suffering of her children, perhaps furthering the intertextual references between Sophia and Eve.

13. See Fischer-Mueller, “Yaldabaoth.”

14. And elsewhere: see MacRae, “The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth,” 89.

15. Fischer-Mueller, “Yaldabaoth,” 91. She further notes: “Greek-Hellenistic views about women influenced the Gnostic myth makers in their creation of the image of Yaldabaoth. Already Plato stated that anyone who did not live well during his first life would be reborn as a woman in the second life (*Timaeus* 42b). For Aristotle and the medical profession, women were a natural, but necessary deformity. In the light of ancient medical opinions, Yaldabaoth’s traits of weakness, lack of form and perfection, androgyny, monstrosity, and inability to create perfect offspring, are clearly connected with femaleness” (“Yaldabaoth,” 91).

10. THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

1. Many prominent scholars consider the frame narrative and with it the allusions to the *Gospel of John* to be a secondary addition constituting a Christianization of the *Secret Revelation of John* (see e.g., H.-M. Schenke, “Nag Hammadi Studien I”; Arai, “Zur Christologie des Apocryphons des Johannes”). Others have disputed this point (see Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*, 72–73; Plese, “The Apocryphon of John,” 11).

2. Knowledge of other traditions (whether written or oral) are present as well, for example, identifying John and James as the sons of Zebedaios (*GosJohn* 21.2; *GosMatt* 4:21; BG 19.6–9). Waldstein also suggests a common use of Psalms by Hebrews and the *Secret Revelation of John* (see Waldstein, “The Mission of Jesus in John,” 87).

3. *GosJohn* 3.17; cp. 5.37; 6.44; 8.16, 18, 42.

4. *GosJohn* 1.5, 9; see *SRevJohn* 3.2.

5. See *GosJohn* 8.14, 42; 13.3; 16.28; 20:17. One thinks, too, perhaps, of *John* 9 where the Pharisees don’t know where Jesus comes from.

6. See *GosJohn* 1.1–5.

7. See *GosJohn* 1:41.

8. See *GosJohn* 3.16.

9. See *GosJohn* 14.6. Included here are the many similarities that appear due to a common reliance on wisdom traditions, for example, the identification of Christ with light and life and truth.

10. For a more extensive list of possible parallels between BG and *GosJohn*, see Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, 427–429.

11. The reference to the light shining in the darkness has obvious resonance with *Gen* 1.2. Indeed, Boyarin has suggested the Johannine prologue can be read as a midrash on *Genesis* with significant intertextual references to wisdom literature (see “The Gospel of the Memra”). The development of the light theology in II/IV pushes the *Secret Revelation of John* in a more dualistic direction, emphasizing the darkness of the cosmos and the presence of the light solely with the divine revealers, while the shorter versions of BG and III more fully recognize the presence of light within Sophia and her Adamic children. Hauschild argues that the tradition of the sending of the *Epinoia* of light seems to be an independent and competing tradition to

explain how the Spirit came to be in humanity; its effect, he argues, is to devalue the breath of the spirit through Yaldabaoth (see *Gottes Geist und der Mensch*, 231). Compare also Denzey's analysis of *Trimorphic Protennoia* and *Gospel of Thomas* in comparison to the *Gospel of John* in "Genesis Traditions in Conflict?" 36–41.

12. Hofrichter, for example, suggests that the *Secret Revelation of John* is a paraphrase of the Johannine prologue (*Im Anfang war der "Johannesprolog,"* 209–215). Other scholars have posited a close relationship between the Pronoia monologue and a section of *Trimorphic Protennoia* in which Protennoia descends three times into the world (*TrimProt*). This association is important for our topic, because these same scholars have suggested that the Johannine prologue may be related literarily to this passage in *Trimorphic Protennoia* (see esp. Janssens, "Un source gnostique du Prologue?" and "The Trimorphic Protennoia and the Fourth Gospel"; Colpe, "Heidnische, jüdische und christliche Überlieferungen III" (1974), 109–125; Evans, "On the Prologue of John and the Trimorphic Protennoia"; Wilson, "The Trimorphic Protennoia"; Helder mann, "In ihren Zelten"; Yamauchi, "Jewish Gnosticism?"; G. Schenke, "Die dreigestaltige Protennoia"; *Die dreigestaltige Protennoia*; J. M. Robinson, "Sethians and Johannine Thought"; Hofrichter, *Im Anfang war der "Johannesprolog,"* 215–221; G. Robinson, "The Trimorphic Protennoia and the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel"; Turner, "Trimorphic Protennoia," 371–401).

13. The intertextual reading of *SRevJohn* and *GosJohn* is facilitated by the fact that the Johannine prologue already establishes an intertextual reading of Genesis, wisdom literature, and Christ, as has been widely recognized (see e.g., Brown, *The Gospel of John*, cxxii–cxv; Boyarin, "The Gospel of the Memra").

14. Ugarit—Qumran—Nag Hammadi, 185.

II. COUNTERING LIES AND DECEPTION

1. As Peter Brown puts it: "Salvation meant, first and foremost, salvation from idolatry and from the power of the demons. 'The unity of God and the refutation of the idols' were themes which any Christian lay man or woman was free to expound to outsiders. All past tradition was re-interpreted by such teaching" (*The Rise of Western Christendom*, 26–27).

2. See the discussion in King, *What is Gnosticism?*, esp. chapters 1 and 2.
3. See King, “Which Early Christianity?”

12. THE HISTORY OF THE TEXT

1. Some variants may also have been present at the time of composition, depending upon how we understand that process (see King, “Approaching the Variants”).
2. For further discussion of this problem methodologically, see King, “Approaching the Variants.”
3. See for example Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, 43, 340; Turner, “Ritual in Gnosticism,” 91; Waldstein, “The Providence Monologue.”
4. Waldstein (“The Providence Monologue”) suggests that the Pronoia “hymn” is perhaps better characterized as a monologue, since its hymnic characteristics have been questioned.
5. See Barc and Painchaud, “La Réécriture de l’Apocryphon de Jean,” 319.
6. *Ibid.*, 326, and 322 n. 16.
7. See especially II 24.3, where Epinoia is explicitly identified as Pronoia in an addition not in BG or III.
8. Barc and Painchaud, “La Réécriture de l’Apocryphon de Jean,” argue that this passage (*SRevJohn* II 21.18–33) should be understood as a reference to all three descents (1. Pronoia of the sovereignty of heaven; 2. And through her (=Epinoia); 3. they tasted knowledge (=Christ) who appeared in the form of an eagle on the tree of knowledge). This reading is an attempt to deal with two difficulties in the text: the seeming redundancy of “through the Pronoia of the sovereignty of heaven and through her” by seeing it as referring to two different characters: Pronoia and Epinoia. The second difficulty is the introduction of the first person, which in context can only be the Savior Christ speaking to John. The passage may indeed offer a reprise of the three manifestations, but the main point seems to be to identify the work of Pronoia and Epinoia with the revelation of Christ. It may be that Barc and Painchaud intended to make this point, but their consideration of the passage as part of the third descent by Christ is confusing; it is clearly still part of the second manifestation, that is, the work of Epinoia.
9. See Barc and Painchaud, “La Réécriture de l’Apocryphon de Jean,” 328.
10. *Ibid.*, 329. The title occurs at *SRevJohn* II 20.17,18; 21.3; 23.1.

11. One might compare the description of Wisdom's deliverance of Joseph from prison with the Pronoia hymn here: "When a righteous man was sold, wisdom did not desert him, but delivered him from sin. She descended with him into the dungeon, and when he was in prison she did not leave him, until she brought him the scepter of a kingdom and authority over his masters. Those who accused him she showed to be false, and she gave him everlasting honor" (*Wis* 10:13–14).

12. See Barc and Painchaud, "La Réécriture de l'Apocryphon de Jean," 329–330.

13. *Ibid.*, 325.

14. MacRae, "Sleep and Awakening," 502.

15. It could be suggested alternatively that the Pronoia monologue was not known or used by those who wrote and read the short versions of the *Secret Revelation of John*, so that the inclusion of the Pronoia myth represents the integration of a baptismal theology fundamentally foreign to it. This is unlikely since scholars are generally agreed that the Pronoia hymn is a relatively ancient work (see Turner, "Ritual in Gnosticism," 91; Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, 43, 340), comparable in date to the fundamental myth of the *Secret Revelation of John* itself, and since even the shorter versions of the work (BG and III) show some knowledge of baptismal theology. We therefore cannot assume that the interest in baptism or the practice of baptismal ritual itself is new. Rather the evidence seems to indicate a concern to rationalize or harmonize the theology of baptismal ritual in terms of the larger cosmological and anthropological themes of the myth. Hence the addition of the Pronoia monologue may indicate not so much an increased interest in baptismal theology as in the systematization of Sethian Christian belief and practice. At any rate, it is difficult to see in this move any tension over differing understandings of ritual practice. Its importance may have varied, but ritual practice seems to have always been a component of the Sethian Christian understanding of the processes of salvation.

16. I interpreted the text this way in an earlier article (see King, "Sophia and Christ," 170).

17. See Barc and Painchaud, "La Réécriture de l'Apocryphon de Jean," 328–329.

18. See King, "Sophia and Christ," 170.

19. See Barc and Painchaud, “La Réécriture de l’Apocryphon de Jean,” 328–329.

POSTSCRIPT

1. Descriptions of Gnosticism often include a set of distinctive elements; for a summary listing of these by Adolf von Harnack and Hans Jonas, see King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 62–63, 119–133. See also critical work on the category of “Gnosticism” by M. Smith, “The History of the Term”; Layton, “Prolegomena”; and Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism.”*

2. For more on this point, see King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 7, 38–47.

3. See the excellent discussion of Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* 54–79.

4. For more on intertextuality and midrash, see Boyarin, *Intertextuality.*

5. For an assessment of this position, see the essays in King, *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism.*

Index of Cross-References

Four copies of the *Secret Revelation of John* have survived into the modern period. These manuscripts are usually referenced according to the particular page and line numbers of each manuscript, resulting in four different numberings of the work. Here I have introduced a new single numbering of the translation that encompasses all the manuscripts. Below is a table providing cross references between the new translation and the old manuscript and line numbers. (Since NHC IV is badly damaged and nearly identical to NHC II, cross references are not given.)

SRevJohn	BG	NHC III	NHC II
1.1			1.1-2
1.2			1.2-4
2.1	19.6-12	1.1-6	1.5-9
2.2	19.12-14		1.9-11
2.3	19.14-16		1.11-12
2.4	19.17-20.1	1.12-14	1.13-16
2.5	20.1-3	1.14-15	1.16-17
2.6	20.4-6	1.15-17	1.17-19
2.7	20.6-7	1.17-19	1.20
2.8	20.8-9	1.19	1.21
2.9	20.9-11	1.20-22	1.22-23
2.10	20.12		1.23-24
2.11	20.12-14	1.23-24	1.24-25
2.12	20.14-16		1.26-28

SRevJohn	BG	NHC III	NHC II
2.13	20.16-19		1.28-29
3.1	20.19-20		1.30-31
3.2	20.20-21.1		1.31-32
3.3	21.1-2		1.33
3.4	21.2-3		2.1
3.5	21.3-4		2.1-2
3.6	21.5-6		2.3-4
3.7			2.4-5
3.8	21.7-13	2.16-20	2.5-9
3.9	21.14-16		2.9-11
3.10	21.16-18		2.11-12
3.11	21.18-19		2.12-13
3.12	21.19-21		2.13-14
3.13	21.21-22.2		2.15
3.14	22.2-6		2.16-18
3.15	22.6-8	3.8-9	2.18-19
3.16	22.8-9	3.10	2.19-20
3.17	22.10-12		2.20-22
3.18	22.12-16		2.22-25
4.1	22.16-17		2.25-26
4.2	22.17-19		2.26-27
4.3	22.19-22		2.28-30
4.4	22.22-23.3		2.31-32
4.5	23.3-5		2.33-35
4.6	23.5-7	4.8	2.35-3.1
4.7	23.8-9	4.9-11	
4.8	23.9		
4.9			3.1-2
4.10	23.10-11		3.3-5
4.11	23.11-14		3.5-6
4.12	23.14		3.7
4.13	23.15-17		3.7-8

SRevJohn	BG	NHC III	NHC II
4.14	23.17-19		3.9-10
4.15	23.19-21		3.10-12
4.16	23.21-24.1		3.12-13
4.17	24.1-2		3.13-14
4.18	24.2-4		3.14-15
4.19	24.4-6	5.1-2	3.16-17
4.20	24.6-8	5.2-3	3.17-18
4.21	24.8-9	5.4-5	3.19-20
4.22	24.9-13	5.5-8	3.20-22
4.23	24.13-15	5.8-10	
4.24	24.15-17	5.10-11	3.23
4.25	24.17-18	5.12	3.24
4.26	24.18	5.13	3.24-25
4.27	24.19	5.13	
4.28	24.19-20	5.14-15	3.26
4.29	24.20-25.1	5.16-18	3.27-29
4.30	25.2-5	5.19-22	3.29-31
4.31	25.6-7	5.22-23	3.31-33
4.32			3.33-34
4.33	25.8-9	6.1-2	3.34-35
4.34	25.9-11	6.2-3	3.36-4.1
4.35	25.11-13	6.4-5	4.1
4.36			4.2
4.37	25.13-19	6.5-10	4.3-7
4.38	25.20-22	6.11-12	4.7-9
5.1	26.1-2	6.13-15	4.9-10
5.2	26.3-6	6.16-19	
5.3	26.6-8	6.19-20	4.10-12
5.4	26.8-10	6.21-22	4.13-15
5.5	26.10-11	6.23-24	
5.6	26.11-14	6.24-7.1	4.15-18
5.7	26.14	7.1-2	4.18-19

SRevJohn	BG	NHC III	NHC II
5.8	26.15-19	7.2-5	4.19-21
5.9	26.19-21	7.6-7	
5.10	26.22-27.1	7.7-8	4.21-22
5.11	27.1-4	7.9-12	4.22-24
5.12			4.24-26
5.13	27.4-5	7.12	4.26-27
5.14	27.5-8	7.13-15	4.27-29
5.15	27.8-9	7.15-16	4.29-30
5.16	27.9-10		4.31
5.17	27.10-11	7.16-17	4.31-32
5.18	27.11-12	7.17	4.32-33
5.19	27.12-13	7.17-18	4.34
5.20	27.14-15	7.18-19	4.35-5.2
5.21	27.16-17	7.20-21	5.2-4
5.22	27.17	7.21-22	
5.23	27.18-19	7.22-23	5.4-5
5.24			5.5-7
5.25	27.19-21	7.23-24	5.7
5.26	27.21-28.4	8.1-5	5.8-11
6.1	28.4-6	8.5-7	5.11-13
6.2	28.7	8.7-8	5.14
6.3	28.7-9	8.8-9	5.14-15
6.4	28.9-10	8.9-10	5.15-16
6.5			5.16-18
6.6	28.11-13	8.11-13	5.18-20
6.7	28.14-15	8.14	5.20-21
6.8	28.15	8.15	5.21
6.9	28.16-17	8.15-16	5.22-23
6.10	28.17-19	8.16-17	5.23-24
6.11	28.19-21	8.18-20	5.24-26
6.12	28.21-29.1	8.20-21	5.26-27
6.13	29.1-2	8.21	5.27-28

SRevJohn	BG	NHC III	NHC II
6.14	29.2-3	8.21-23	5.28-30
6.15	29.4	8.23	5.30
6.16	29.4-6	8.23-9.1	5.30-32
6.17	29.7-8	9.1-3	
6.18			5.32-33
6.19			5.33-34
6.20			5.34
6.21			5.35
6.22			5.35-6.2
6.23	29.8-9	9.3-4	6.2-3
6.24	29.9-11	9.4-5	6.3-4
6.25	29.11-14	9.6-8	6.5-7
6.26	29.14-18	9.8-10	6.8-10
7.1	29.18-20	9.10-12	6.10-12
7.2	30.1	9.12	6.12-13
7.3	30.1-2	9.13-14	6.13-14
7.4	30.3-4	9.15	6.14-15
7.5	30.4-6	9.15-17	6.15-16
7.6	30.6-8	9.17-19	6.17-18
7.7	30.9-14	9.20-23	6.18-22
7.8	30.14-15	9.24	6.23
7.9	30.15-17	10.1-2	6.24-25
7.10	30.17-19	10.2-4	6.25-26
7.11	30.19-31.1	10.5-6	6.26-28
7.12	31.1-4	10.6-8	6.28-30
7.13	31.4	10.8-9	6.32-33
7.14	31.5-6	10.9-10	6.33-34
7.15	31.6-7	10.11	6.34
7.16	31.7-8	10.12	6.35-7.1
7.17	31.8-9	10.12-14	7.1-3
7.18	31.10-11	10.14-15	7.3-4
7.19	31.11-12	10.16	7.4-5

SRevJohn	BG	NHC III	NHC II
7.20	31.13	10.17-18	7.6-7
7.21	31.13-15	10.18-20	7.7-8
7.22	31.15-16	10.20-21	7.9
7.23	31.17-18	10.21-23	7.10-11
7.24	31.19-32.1	10.23-25	7.11-13
7.25	32.1-3	10.25-11.2	7.13-15
7.26	32.3-8	11.3-6	7.15-19
7.27	32.8-10	11.6-8	7.20-21
7.28	32.10-12	11.8-10	7.21-22
7.29	32.13-14	11.10-11	7.22-24
7.30	32.15-18	11.12-13	7.25-27
7.31	32.18	11.13	7.27-29
7.32	32.18-19	11.13-14	7.29-30
8.1	32.20-21	11.15-17	7.30-32
8.2	33.1-4	11.17-19	7.32-8.1
8.3	33.4-5	11.20-21	8.1-2
8.4	33.5-7	11.22-23	8.2-4
8.5	33.7-10	11.23-12.1	8.4-6
8.6	33.10-12	12.1-3	8.6-8
8.7	33.12-14	12.3-6	8.8-10
8.8	33.15-17	12.6-8	8.10-12
8.9	33.17-20	12.8-10	8.12-14
8.10	33.20-34.1	12.10-11	8.15-16
8.11	34.2-4	12.12-13	8.16-18
8.12	34.5-7	12.14-15	8.18-20
8.13	34.7-9	12.16-17	8.20-21
8.14	34.9-13	12.18-22	8.22-25
8.15	34.13-15	12.22-24	8.25-26
9.1	34.15-18		8.26-28
9.2	34.19-35.5	12.24-13.4	8.28-34
9.3	35.6-10	13.4-8	8.35-9.3
9.4	35.11-12	13.9-10	9.4-5

SRevJohn	BG	NHC III	NHC II
9.5	35.13-14	13.11-12	9.5-7
9.6	35.14-16	13.12-13	9.7-8
9.7	35.17-20	13.14-16	9.9-11
9.8	35.20-36.2	13.17-19	9.11-14
9.9	36.2-7	13.19-14.1	9.14-17
9.10	36.7-9	14.1-4	9.18-20
9.11	36.10-11	14.4-5	9.20-21
9.12	36.12	14.6	9.21-22
9.13	36.12-14	14.6-7	9.22-23
9.14	36.14-15	14.7-9	9.23-24
10.1	36.16-20	14.9-12	9.25-28
10.2	36.20-37.1	14.13-14	9.28-29
10.3	37.1-6	14.19-22	9.29-32
10.4	37.6-7	14.23	9.33
10.5	37.7-9	14.24-15.2	9.34-35
10.6	37.10	15.2	9.35
10.7	37.10-13	15.3-5	10.1-2
10.8	37.13-16	15.5-8	10.2-5
10.9	37.16-18	15.8-9	10.6-7
10.10	37.18-20	15.9-11	10.7-8
10.11	37.20-21	15.11	10.9
10.12	37.21-38.1	15.12	10.9-10
10.13	38.1-5	15.13-15	10.11-13
10.14	38.5-6	15.15-16	10.13-14
10.15	38.6-7	15.16-17	10.14-15
10.16	38.8-10	15.17-19	10.15-17
10.17	38.10-12	15.19-21	10.17-18
10.18	38.13-14	15.21-22	10.19
10.19	38.14-17	15.22-16.1	10.19-21
11.1	38.17	16.1	10.21-22
11.2	38.18-19	16.2-3	10.22-23
11.3	38.19-39.1	16.3-4	10.23-24

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11.4	39.1-4	16.4-6	10.24-25
11.5	39.4-6	16.7-8	10.26-27
11.6	39.6-7	16.8-9	10.27-28
11.7	39.7-10	16.9-11	
11.8	39.10-13	16.11-13	
11.9	39.13-16		
11.10	39.16-18	16.13-15	
11.11	39.19-40.4	16.15-20	
11.12	40.4-5	16.20	10.28-30
11.13	40.5-7	16.21-22	10.30-31
11.14	40.7-8	16.22-23	10.31-32
11.15	40.8	16.23	10.32
11.16	40.9	16.23-24	10.33-34
11.17	40.10	16.24-25	10.34-36
11.18	40.11-13	16.25-17.1	10.36
11.19	40.14	17.1-2	10.36-37
11.20	40.15	17.2-3	10.37
11.21	40.16	17.3	11.1
11.22	40.17	17.4	11.1-2
11.23	40.18	17.5	11.2-4
11.24	40.19-41.4	17.6-10	
11.25	41.5-6	17.10-12	
11.26	41.6-8	17.12-14	
11.27	41.9-10	17.14-16	
11.28	41.11-12	17.16-17	
11.29	41.13-15	17.17-20	11.4-7
12.1			11.7-8
12.2			11.8-9
12.3			11.10
12.4			11.10-12
12.5			11.12-13
12.6			11.13-15

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12.8			11.16
12.9			11.17
12.10			11.17-18
12.11			11.18-19
12.12			11.19-21
12.13			11.21-22
12.14			11.22-23
12.15			11.24-25
12.16	41.16-17	17.20-21	11.26
12.17	41.17-18	17.22	11.26-27
12.18	41.19-20	17.23	11.27-28
12.19	41.20-42.1	17.24-18.1	11.28-29
12.20	42.1-2	18.1-2	11.29-31
12.21	42.3-4	18.3-4	11.31-32
12.22	42.4-5	18.4-5	11.32-33
12.23	42.5-7	18.5-6	11.33-34
12.24	42.7-8	18.7	11.34-35
12.25	42.9-10	18.8-9	
12.26	42.10-11	18.9-10	11.35-12.1
12.27	42.12	18.10-11	12.2-4
13.1	42.13-15	18.12-13	12.4-5
13.2	42.15-18	18.13-15	
13.3	42.18-43.2	18.16-18	12.6-8
13.4	43.2-4	18.19-20	12.8-9
13.5	43.4-5	18.21-22	12.9-10
13.6	43.6-7	18.22-23	12.10-12
13.7	43.8	18.24	12.13
13.8	43.9-11	18.25	12.13-15
13.9	43.11-13		12.15-16
13.10	43.13-15		12.17-18
13.11	43.15-17		12.18-19

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13.12	43.18-19		12.19-20
13.13	43.19-20		12.21-22
13.14	44.1-2		12.22-23
13.15	44.3-4		12.23-25
13.16	44.5-7		12.25-26
13.17			12.26-28
13.18			12.28-30
13.19			12.30-32
13.20			12.33
13.21	44.7-8		12.33-35
13.22	44.8-9		12.35-13.1
13.23			13.1-2
13.24			13.2-5
14.1	44.10-13		13.5-7
14.2	44.13-15		13.8-9
14.3	44.15-17		13.9-11
14.4	44.17-18		13.12-13
14.5	44.19-45.2		13.13-14
14.6	45.4-5		13.14-16
14.7	45.2-4		13.16-17
14.8	45.6-7		13.17-18
14.9	45.7-10		13.18-21
14.10	45.10-13		13.21-23
14.11	45.13-15		13.23-25
14.12	45.15-17		13.25
14.13	45.17-18		13.25-26
14.14	45.18-19		13.26
14.15	45.20-46.1		13.26-28
14.16	46.2-3		13.28
14.17	46.4-6		13.29-30
14.18	46.6-8		13.30-31
14.19	46.8-9		13.31-32

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14.20	46.9-11		13.32-34
14.21	46.11-12	21.1	13.34-36
14.22	46.13-15	21.1-2	13.36-14.1
14.23	46.15-18	21.2-4	14.1-5
14.24	46.19-47.3	21.4-8	14.5-6
14.25	47.4-5	21.8-9	14.7
14.26	47.6-7	21.10-11	14.8-9
14.27	47.8	21.11-12	14.9-10
14.28	47.9-13	21.12-15	14.11-13
15.1	47.14	21.16	14.13-14
15.2	47.15-16	21.17-18	14.14-15
15.3	47.16-17	21.18-19	14.15-16
15.4	47.18-20	21.20-21	14.16-17
15.5			14.18
15.6	47.20-48.3	21.21-23	14.18-23
15.7	48.4-5	21.23-24	14.24
15.8	48.6-7	22.1	14.24-26
15.9			14.26-30
15.10			14.30-33
15.11	48.8-9	22.2-3	14.33-34
15.12	48.10-14	22.3-6	15.1-3
15.13			15.4
15.14	48.14-15	22.6-7	15.5
15.15			15.6
15.16	48.16-49.1	22.8-10	15.6-7
15.17	49.2-4	22.11-13	15.8-9
15.18	49.4-6	22.13-14	15.9-10
15.19	49.6-9	22.14-18	15.11-13
15.20	49.9-10	22.18-19	15.13-14
15.21	49.11-12	22.19-20	15.14-15
15.22	49.12-13	22.20-22	15.15-16
15.23	49.14-15	22.22-23.1	15.16-17

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15.24	49.16-18	23.1-2	15.18-19
15.25	49.19-50.1	23.2-3	15.19-20
15.26	50.2-3	23.3-4	15.20-21
15.27	50.3-4	23.5-6	15.22-23
15.28	50.5	23.6-7	
15.29	50.6-7	23.7-8	15.23-24
15.30	50.8-9	23.9-II	15.24-26
15.31	50.10-II	23.II	15.26-29
16.1			15.29-30
16.2			15.30-31
16.3			15.31-32
16.4			15.32
16.5			15.33
16.6			15.34
16.7			15.34-35
16.8			15.35
16.9			16.1
16.10			16.1-2
16.11			16.2
16.12			16.2-3
16.13			16.3
16.14			16.3-4
16.15			16.4
16.16			16.5
16.17			16.5
16.18			16.5-6
16.19			16.6-7
16.20			16.7
16.21			16.8
16.22			16.8
16.23			16.9
16.24			16.9-10

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16.25			16.10-11
16.26			16.11-12
16.27			16.12
16.28			16.13
16.29			16.13-14
16.30			16.14
16.31			16.14-15
16.32			16.15
16.33			16.15-16
16.34			16.16-17
16.35			16.17
16.36			16.18
16.37			16.18
16.38			16.18-19
16.39			16.19
16.40			16.20
16.41			16.20-21
16.42			16.21
16.43			16.21-22
16.44			16.22
16.45			16.22-23
16.46			16.23
16.47			16.24
16.48			16.24-25
16.49			16.25
16.50			16.26
16.51			16.26-27
16.52			16.28
16.53			16.28-29
16.54			16.29
16.55			16.29
16.56			16.30

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16.57			16.30
16.58			16.30-31
16.59			16.31-32
16.60			16.32-33
16.61			16.33-34
16.62			16.34
16.63			16.35
16.64			16.35-17.1
16.65			17.1
16.66			17.2
16.67			17.2-3
16.68			17.3
16.69			17.4
16.70			17.4-5
16.71			17.5
16.72			17.6
16.73			17.6
16.74			17.7-8
16.75			17.8
17.1			17.8-10
17.2			17.10
17.3			17.10
17.4			17.11
17.5			17.11-12
17.6			17.12-13
17.7			17.13
17.8			17.13-14
17.9			17.14-15
17.10			17.15
17.11			17.15-16
17.12			17.16
17.13			17.17

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17.14			17.17-18
17.15			17.18
17.16			17.18-19
17.17			17.19
17.18			17.20
17.19			17.20-21
17.20			17.21
17.21			17.22
17.22			17.22-23
17.23			17.23
17.24			17.24
17.25			17.24-25
17.26			17.25
17.27			17.25-26
17.28			17.26-27
17.29			17.27-28
17.30			17.28-29
17.31			17.29-30
17.32			17.30-32
17.33			17.32-33
17.34			17.33-34
17.35			17.34-35
17.36			17.35-18.1
17.37			18.1-2
17.38			18.2-3
17.39			18.4-5
17.40			18.5
17.41			18.6
17.42			18.7-8
17.43			18.8-9
17.44			18.9-10
17.45			18.10-12

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17.46			18.12-13
17.47			18.13-14
17.48			18.15-16
17.49			18.16
17.50			18.17
17.51			18.17-18
17.52			18.18-19
17.53			18.19-20
17.54			18.21-24
17.55			18.24-26
17.56			18.27-29
17.57			18.30-31
17.58			18.31-32
17.59			18.33-19.1
17.60			19.2-3
17.61			19.3-6
17.62			19.6-8
17.63			19.8-10
17.64	50.11-14	23.12-14	19.10-12
18.1	50.15-16	23.14-15	19.13-14
18.2	50.16-51.1	23.16-19	
18.3	51.1-4	23.19-21	19.15-16
18.4	51.4-7	23.22-23	19.17-18
18.5	51.8-12	24.1-4	19.18-21
18.6	51.12-14	24.4-6	19.21-22
18.7	51.14-17	24.6-9	19.22-25
18.8	51.17-19	24.9-11	19.26-27
18.9			19.27-28
18.10	51.20	24.11-12	19.28-32
18.11	51.20-52.1	24.13-14	19.32-33
18.12	52.2	24.14-15	19.34-20.1
18.13	52.3-4	24.15-16	20.1-2

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18.14	52.4-5	24.16-17	20.2-3
18.15	52.6-8	24.17	
18.16	52.8-11	24.17-20	20.3-5
18.17	52.11-15	24.20-23	20.5-7
18.18	52.15-17	24.23-24	20.7-9
18.19	52.17-19	24.25-25.1	20.9-10
18.20	52.20-53.2	25.2-4	20.11-12
18.21	53.2-3	25.4-5	20.13-14
18.22	53.4-8	25.6-10	20.14-17
18.23	53.8-10	25.10-11	20.17-19
18.24	53.11	25.12	20.19
18.25	53.12	25.12-13	20.20
18.26	53.12-14	25.13-14	20.20-21
18.27	53.14-17	25.14-17	20.21-23
18.28	53.18-20	25.17-19	20.24-26
18.29	53.20-54.4	25.20-23	20.27-28
19.1	54.5-7	25.23-26.2	20.28-30
19.2	54.7-9	26.2-3	20.30-31
19.3	54.9	26.3-5	20.32
19.4	54.9-11	26.5-6	20.32-33
19.5	54.11-14	26.6-8	20.33-35
19.6	54.14-16	26.8-10	20.35-21.1
19.7	54.16-18	26.10-11	21.1-2
19.8	54.18-55.1	26.12-13	21.2-4
19.9	55.2-3	26.13-14	21.4-5
19.10	55.3-6	26.14-17	21.5-7
19.11	55.6-9	26.17-19	21.7-9
19.12	55.9-13	26.20-23	21.9-12
19.13		26.23-25	21.12-13
19.14	55.13-15	26.25-27.1	21.13-14
19.15	55.15-18	27.1-4	21.14-16
20.1	55.19-20	27.4-6	21.16-18

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20.2	56.1-3	27.6-8	21.18-19
20.3	56.3-5	27.8-10	21.19-20
20.4	56.5-7	27.10-12	21.21-22
20.5	56.7-10	27.12-14	21.22-24
20.6	56.10-11	27.14-15	21.24-25
20.7	56.12-13	27.15-17	21.26-27
20.8	56.14-15	27.17-18	21.28-29
20.9	56.16-17	27.19-20	
20.10	56.18-19	27.21-22	21.30
20.11	56.19-20	27.22-24	21.30-31
20.12	56.20-57.2	27.24-28.1	21.32
20.13	57.2-3	28.1-2	21.33
20.14	57.3-5	28.2-3	21.34-35
20.15	57.5-6	28.3-5	21.35-36
20.16	57.7	28.5-6	21.36-22.2
20.17			22.2
20.18	57.8-12	28.6-9	22.3-5
20.19	57.13-15	28.10-11	
20.20	57.15-18	28.12-14	22.6-7
20.21	57.18-19	28.14-15	22.7-8
20.22	57.20-58.1	28.16-17	22.9
20.23	58.1-3	28.17-19	22.9-11
20.24	58.3-4	28.19	22.12
20.25	58.4-7	28.19-23	22.12-15
20.26	58.8-9	28.23-24	22.15-16
20.27	58.9-10	28.24-25	22.16-18
21.1	58.10-12	28.25-29.1	22.18-20
21.2	58.13-14	29.1-2	22.20-21
21.3	58.14-15	29.2-3	22.21-22
21.4	58.16	29.4-5	22.22-23
21.5	58.17-20	29.5-7	22.23-25
21.6	58.20-59.1	29.7	

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21.7	59.1-5	29.8-11	22.25-28
21.8	59.6-7	29.12-13	22.28-29
21.9	59.7-9	29.13-15	22.29-30
21.10	59.9-11	29.15-16	22.31
21.11	59.11-12	29.16-17	22.32
21.12	59.12-13	29.18-19	22.32-34
21.13	59.14-15	29.19-20	22.34-35
21.14			22.35-36
21.15	59.15-16	29.20-21	22.36-23.2
21.16	59.17-18	29.21-22	23.3
21.17	59.19	29.23-24	23.4-5
21.18	59.20-60.2	30.1-3	23.5-8
21.19	60.3-4	30.3-4	23.9
21.20	60.5-11	30.5-10	23.10-14
21.21	60.12-13	30.10-11	23.14-16
21.22			23.20-21
21.23	60.14	30.12	23.22
21.24	60.14-18	30.13-16	23.23-25
21.25	60.19	30.17	23.25-26
21.26	61.1-2	30.17-18	23.26-28
21.27			23.28-29
21.28			
21.29	61.2-4	30.18-19	23.30
21.30	61.4-5	30.19-20	23.30-31
21.31	61.5-7	30.20-21	23.31-32
21.32			23.32-33
21.33			23.33-34
22.1	61.8-9	30.22-23	23.35-36
22.2	61.9-10	30.23	23.37
22.3			23.37-24.1
22.4	61.10-12	30.24-25	24.1-2
22.5	61.12-15	30.25-31.1	24.2-3

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22.6	61.16-17	31.2	24.4
22.7	61.17-18	31.2-3	24.4-6
22.8	61.18-62.1	31.4-5	24.6-7
22.9	62.2	31.5-6	24.7-8
22.10	62.3-4	31.6-7	24.8-10
22.11			24.10-11
22.12	62.5-6	31.7-8	24.12
22.13	62.6-7	31.8-9	
22.14			24.13-15
22.15	62.8	31.10	24.15-16
22.16			24.16-17
22.17	62.8-11	31.10-13	24.17-19
22.18	62.12-13	31.13-14	24.19-20
22.19	62.13-15	31.15-16	
22.20	62.15-18	31.16-19	24.21-24
22.21	62.19-20	31.19-20	24.24-25
22.22	63.1-4	31.21-23	24.26-27
22.23	63.5-6	31.23-24	24.28-29
22.24	63.6-9	32.1-3	24.29-31
22.25	63.10-12	32.4-6	24.32-34
22.26	63.12-13	32.6-7	24.35-36
22.27	63.14	32.7-8	24.36-25.1
22.28	63.14-16	32.8-9	25.2
22.29	63.16-18	32.9-10	25.2-5
22.30	63.19-64.2	32.11-12	25.5-7
22.31	64.2-3	32.12-14	
22.32			25.7-8
22.33			25.8-9
22.34	64.4	32.14-15	25.9-11
22.35	64.5-8	32.15-18	25.11-13
22.36	64.8-10	32.18-20	25.13-14
22.37	64.11-13	32.20-22	25.14-16

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23.1	64.14-16	32.22-25	25.16-18
23.2	64.17-18	32.25-33.1	25.18-20
23.3	64.19-65.2	33.1-3	25.20-23
23.4	65.3-6	33.4-6	25.23-25
23.5	65.6-8	33.6-7	25.26
23.6	65.8-11	33.7-9	25.26-28
23.7	65.11-13	33.9-11	25.29-30
23.8	65.13-16	33.11-13	25.30-33
23.9	65.16-20	33.14-16	25.33-35
23.10	66.1-6	33.16-18	25.35-26.1
23.11	66.6-8	33.19-20	26.1-3
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23.34	70.2-4	35.25-36.1	27.17-19
23.35	70.4-7	36.1-3	27.19-20
23.36	70.7-8	36.3-4	27.20-21
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24.3	71.8-13	36.22-37.1	28.1-5
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SRevJohn	BG	NHC III	NHC II
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24.26	73.11-12	38.4-5	29.11-12
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25.18	75.4-7	39.6-8	30.8-9
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SRevJohn	BG	NHC III	NHC II
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26.9			30.21
26.10			30.21-23
26.11			30.23-24
26.12			30.24
26.13			30.25-26
26.14			30.26-27
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27.5	75.19-20	39.17-18	31.31
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SRevJohn	BG	NHC III	NHC II
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