

CHRISTIANS, GNOSTICS AND PHILOSOPHERS IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Mark Edwards

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in Late Antiquity



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PREFACE

The earliest articles in this collection – ‘Gnostics and Valentinians in the Church Fathers’, ‘Neglected texts in the study of Gnosticism’, and ‘Porphyry and the intelligible triad’, are all derived from my unpublished dissertation on ‘Plotinus and the Gnostics’. In the course of my research, it became apparent to me that scholars were apt to use the word ‘Gnostic’ with a promiscuity that was not sanctioned by the practice of ancient writers, and that the fault lay not in these writers but in the laxity of their modern commentators. The first part of this thesis is now a commonplace, thanks to the work of Michael Williams and Karen King; the second part still requires some defence, and the two pieces from the *Journal of Theological Studies* seem to me to merit republication in any case as the most exhaustive attempts to date to collect the relevant information from ancient texts, both pagan and Christian. The argument of ‘Porphyry and the intelligible triad’ would be heavily modified if I were writing it again, to take account of the erudite work of Gerald Bechtle, who proposes a second-century dating for the anonymous commentary on the *Parmenides*. I would also take a different view today of the chronology of the Gnostic texts, *Zostrianus* and *Allogenes*, which I waved away in a cursory appendix. I trust that it retains its value none the less as the first, and still in some respects the most thorough, critique of the magisterial work of Pierre Hadot, which cannot be ignored in any discussion of the date and origin of this pregnant text. A ferment of recent scholarship has made one thing irresistibly clear, that Neoplatonism and Gnosticism are not easily separated, and may be studied with mutual illumination. The same conviction inspired two later articles of mine, ‘The tale of Cupid and Psyche’ and ‘Porphyry’s *Cave of the Nymphs* and the Gnostic controversy’, which I republish here in the hope that they will not appear perverse or stale in the light of anything subsequently written.

As one of the editors of a collection of essays on *Apologetics in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1999), I had occasion to write on Constantine’s *Oration to the Saints*. My translation of this text, with notes designed primarily for the use of undergraduates, was published by Liverpool University Press in 2004. My observations, tentative as they are, have been attacked with a crude ferocity that leaves one wondering where to draw the boundary between honest misreading and wilful caricature. The article republished here, entitled ‘Notes on the date and venue of the *Oration to the Saints*’, is intended to be my last

word on the subject, not because I consider my own views unassailable, but because I doubt that any further discussion can be profitably sustained until new evidence comes to light. It should at least be clear from this piece that, since I have yet to see proof that Constantine could not have been in Rome for the Easter of 315, my casual suggestion that the speech may have been delivered by proxy was not advanced to justify my own dating of the speech. With this republication, I invite my interlocutors to examine my views with no less candour and courtesy than I have shown to theirs.

The article ‘Xenophanes Christianus?’, on the other hand, has received the criticism that it deserved. It is republished here because I believe its thesis to be important, and nothing that I have read so far inclines me to retract it. I am aware, none the less, that I did not provide a strong answer to the objection that the supreme god of Xenophanes is only the first among many, whereas the Christians whom I speculatively accused of forging polemics against idolatry in his name were monotheists who denied the existence of any deity but their own. Had I been better acquainted at that time with the works of Clement of Alexandria, I would have been able to point to a passage in which he himself, echoing Exodus 15.1, described his one God as captain of the ‘host of gods’ (*Stromateis* VII.5.6). I was also too peremptory in my assertion that Xenophanes would not have composed a poem in which hexameters alternated with pentameters. This was in fact the prosody of the *Margites*, ascribed to Homer, though I do not know of any scholar who has attributed an experiment in this metre to Xenophanes and it still seems to me that the fragments cited under his name by Clement differ strongly in diction and sentiment from others which are either more widely attested or are quoted without such blatant *parti pris*.

The shortest piece in the volume, ‘Quoting Aratus’, is reprinted as a specimen of the silent liberties which Jews and Christians permitted themselves in quoting classic texts. In this, as in a number of subsequent studies, my aim has been to show, not that Christian thought was independent of its pagan milieu, but that it drew from that milieu only what contributed to its organic germination from the soil in which it was sown by its first apostles. Thus, in ‘Justin’s Logos and the Word of God’, I do not mean to deny that Platonism had any role in shaping the mind of the great apologist, but I do wish to urge that he read all Greek philosophies through the spectacles provided by a tradition in which God is known to the intellect only by his own speaking. Again, in ‘Origen’s Platonism. Questions and caveats’, I hope that I have put to rest the fears of those who accused me of a doggedly ‘confessional’ hostility to the Greek schools in my monograph *Origen against Plato* (Aldershot, 2002). I do not deny that Plato was, in some acceptable sense of the word, an ‘influence on Origen’; the very fact, however, that (unlike Justin) he was not content to study

Plato only in florilegia, and had grasped the essential tenor of his writings made it possible for him to construct a philosophy in dialectic opposition to Plato, to set out those elements in his Christianity which were peculiarly Christian, in an idiom that would at once rebuke the arrogance and flatter the understanding of the Greeks.

In this item, as in an earlier one on ‘Clement and Alexandria and his doctrine of the Logos’, I have argued that Greek apologists and their pagan interlocutors often shared the same intellectual projects, though, as good philosophers do, they came by similar means to widely differing ends. In a similar vein, I have surmised, in ‘Pauline Platonism: the myth of Valentinus’, that the Christian interests and presuppositions of the heresiarch can be brought to light by examining his cosmogony with the same tools that we would bring to the interpretation of a Platonic myth. (I waive the question as to whether Valentinus or Ptolemy was the true author of the system that we know as ‘Valentinian Gnosticism’.) As an example of the converse procedure, I offer ‘Birth, death and divinity in Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus*’, a companion to my *Neoplatonic Saints* (Liverpool, 2000), which appeared in the same year. Both may be regarded as summations of my efforts, in a series of studies published during the previous decade, to show what might be done by the application to pagan texts of the ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’, which has been the standard instrument of gospel criticism for over a century. Classicists have often asked what materials would be left for the reconstruction of the Greek or Roman past if all ancient witnesses were interrogated with the same scepticism. My essays on Plotinus are experiments in answering this question; they pretend to no more authority than my efforts, in ‘Dracontius the African and the fate of Rome’, to subject a despised Latin versifier of late antiquity to the ‘deconstructive’, ‘ludic’ or ‘self-referential’ logic that is regularly applied to his precursors under the late republic and the principate.

In ‘Pagan and Christian monotheism in the age of Constantine’, I have tried to explain why Christians and Platonists could not make peace on the terms proposed by certain modern scholars. I do not contest the possibility of a Christian Platonism, but this was conceivable only when Platonism had ceased to be a living school, and even then the Cambridge Platonists knew that monotheism in its strictest sense could not be attributed to any Greek master. ‘Socrates in early Christian literature’ and ‘The figure of love in Augustine and in Proclus the Neoplatonist’ are further attempts to demonstrate that Christians never lived idly on the intellectual capital of paganism. A contrapuntal argument is made in ‘Some early Christian immoralities’ and ‘Satire and verisimilitude: Christianity in Lucian’s *Peregrinus*’, where I show that pagans of the second century owed little to the facts in their embellishments of early reports concerning Christianity. The conclusions of the former piece have been

favourably noticed in an astute and learned article by James Rives ('Pagans and Christians on human sacrifice', *Journal of Roman Studies* 1995), and I would hope that other hypotheses of mine will be equally useful to scholars working in contiguous fields of study. As I have said already, I disclaim all pretence to authority and finality; I am, in the Oxford tradition, a teaching academic, not a researcher subsidised by grants and special leave in order to carry my projects through to the last refinement. In keeping with that tradition, I would never say 'here is the indisputable truth, the definitive answer', or even 'here is *my* answer'; but 'here are some thoughts, which I hope are new: make of them what you will'.

MARK EDWARDS

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Christ Church, Oxford

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Each article has been given a Roman number in order of appearance, as listed in the Contents. This number is repeated on each page and is quoted in the index entries.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
APAW	Abhandlungen der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
BJRL	Bulletin of the John Rylands Library
Cl. Qu./CQ	Classical Quarterly
FKDG	Forschungen zur Kirchlichen-Dogmatischen Geschichte
GCS	Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller
GRBS	Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies
HSPh	Harvard Studies in Classical Philology
HThR	Harvard Theological Review
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
JAC	Jahrbuch für antike Christentum
JEH	Journal of Ecclesiastical History
JThS/JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
PG	Patrologia Graeca
P & P	Past and Present
RAC	Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum
RE	A.F. Pauly and G. Wissowa, Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft
REG	Revue des Etudes Grecques
REL	Revue des Etudes Latines
RhM	Rheinisches Museum
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SPCK	Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge
St. Patr.	Studia Patristica
SVigChr	Supplement to Vigiliae Christianae
TAPA	Transaction and Proceeding sof the American Philological Association
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
Vig. Christ.	Vigiliae Christianae
WUNT	Wissenschaftlichen Untersuchugen zum neuen Testament
ZAC	Zeitschrift für Antike Christentum
ZNTW	Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZPE	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik

Quoting Aratus: Acts 17,28

ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν· ὡς καὶ τινες τῶν καθ' ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν· τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν.

This verse from Paul's speech to the Athenians prompts two related questions: (1) who is the poet quoted? (2) what is the source for the author's knowledge of his words? The second, at least, would seem to admit of a more sustained inquiry than it has hitherto received.

1. Of the two known candidates¹ we may exclude Cleanthes, a Stoic philosopher who exclaims in verse four of his Hymn to Zeus ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ γενόμεσθα. He speaks to Zeus, not of him, and employs a different verb. Dibelius has shown that the plural τινες ... ποιητῶν need not imply that the author of Acts had more than one authority², and we know of another poet who supplies the exact quotation, and enjoyed a wide celebrity, among Christians and pagans, to which few other pagan writers, least of all Cleanthes, could aspire. This author is Aratus, who embarked upon his *Phaenomena* with a eulogy of Zeus:

Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα, τὸν οὐδέποτ' ἄνδρες ἐῶμεν
 ἄρρητον· μεστὰὶ δὲ Διὸς πᾶσαι μὲν ἀγυαί,
 πᾶσαι δ' ἀνθρώπων ἀγοραί, μεστὴ δὲ θάλασσα
 καὶ λιμένες· πάντῃ δὲ Διὸς κεχρήμεθα πάντες.
 τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος εἰμέν·

(Phaenomena 1–5)

Christians could not fail to know a little of Aratus, since he was famous enough, like Homer, to nourish magic and occasion heresy. He is quoted by Hippolytus from the astrologers in the fourth book of his *Elenchus* and from a Gnostic group, the Peratae, in the fifth³. Dibelius observes that this most familiar of allusions was also the

¹ The hypothesis that the opening phrase is a snatch from a poem ascribed to Epimenides was advanced by K. Lake and F. Jackson, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, Vol. V, London 1933, 246–251. But their theory that the Syrian exegete Ishodad preserves a paraphrase of an ancient poem is now generally rejected, and in any case even Ishodad names Aratus, not Epimenides or the eponymous Minos of his poetry, as the author of the words considered here.

² M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, London 1956, 50 n. 76.

³ *Elenchus* IV,6,3 cites *Phaenomena* 56 f.; V,16,15 f. cites 46, 61 and 70. The most copious allusions, only some of which are explicit, occur between IV,46,6–IV,49,4 and include 19–23, 27, 37, 38, 39, 44, 45, 46, 61, 62, 63–67, 70, 75, 179, 261, 269, 273, 332–335.

most felicitous, since the proem to the *Phaenomena*, like the speech on the Areopagus, declares that the supreme god has ordained the earth, its seasons and the motion of the heavens as a token of his existence and benevolence to man⁴.

2. The source of the citation having once been ascertained, it remains to decide whether Paul or his biographer would have known it at first hand. No use by a Gnostic author warrants the inference that a work was known to Christians of the apostolic era; we cannot say with certainty of any Gnostic sect that it was flourishing before the second century, and many addressed the study of pagan books with an assiduity that rendered them suspicious to the most learned of their catholic opponents. We cannot even be certain that the Gnostics read the *Phaenomena* in its entirety, since a writing of such eminence would be quoted far more often than it was read⁵.

It might be urged that Paul himself would have made the acquaintance of the poet of Soli. He was born in the same locality, and if it is true, as some maintain⁶, that he writes with a proficiency that could only have been acquired in the schools of rhetoric, it is hardly to be supposed that an education in the Asiatic provinces would have neglected the best of the Asiatic poets. It must be said, however, that if the Apostle was so finely trained he allowed himself surprising infelicities. Even where its grammar is pure, his writing has no taste of Attic, either in vocabulary or in syntax, and the theology of the Greeks is still so strange to him that he credits them with a cult of the physical elements⁷.

The one line from a Greek classic in a letter agreed to be genuine affords no index of great erudition. Φθείρουσιν ἥθη χρησθ' ὁμιλίαι κακάι (1Cor 15,33) is a trimeter, but the fact that it is ascribed, now to Menander and now to Euripides, implies that it was current as a proverb, and as a proverb it would seem to have come to Paul⁸. Hence it is that he uses it without any intimation that he knew it to have an author, and we

⁴ Dibelius, *Studies* (above n. 2) 48–57.

⁵ In fact the lines appear to have been taken from a commentary on Aratus by Euphrates, who is mentioned as an authority for the magicians at IV,2 and for the Peratae at V,13,9. The fact that the latter styles him a Peratic indicates only that he was claimed by the Peratics as a teacher, not that Hippolytus knew anything more concerning the provenance of his works. If this Euphrates is indeed the Stoic admired by Pliny and Epictetus (*Epistles* I,10; *Discourses* III,15,8; IV,8,17), but mocked by later authors both as a tool and as a rival of the thaumaturge Apollonius (Origen, *Contra Celsum* VI,41; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius V passim*), then even the learned Peratae did not know Aratus at first hand. On the Stoic belief in various forms of divination see Cicero, *De Divinatione* I, *De Natura Deorum* II, *De Fato*, and Seneca, *Quaestiones Naturales* II; for a Stoic as imitator of Aratus see Manilius, *Phaenomena*.

⁶ H. D. Betz, *Galatians*, Philadelphia 1979, is a celebrated example of such a thesis.

⁷ On the Galatians as worshippers of the elements see Gal 4,8–10. On the Galatians as Greeks see 3,28. The assumption that all pagans worship the elements is elaborated in the early Apology of Aristides.

⁸ For the use of the line as a proverb see Diodorus Siculus XVI,54. The ascription to Euripides is found in Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* III,16, and cf. Clement, *Stromateis* I,14. For the ascription to Menander see Jerome, *Epistles* LXX,3. The verse appears as Euripides Fr. 1024 (Nauck), as 808 in the *Sententiae Menandreae* and as Fr. 187 in Koerte, *Menandreae* II, Leipzig 1953. The latter opines that

cannot even be sure that he was capable of distinguishing a trimeter from the cadences of ordinary speech⁹.

The written speech, in any case, is the work of Luke, not Paul. Of Luke it is often surmised that he received a Greek education, since he writes the most elegant Greek of the four evangelists and does not share Matthew's interest in the life and thought of Palestinian Jews. But since he is no stranger to the Septuagint, in echoing which he frequently improves on Mark and Matthew¹⁰, it is likely that he sympathised with Judaism even before embracing Christianity; that is, he may have been one of the θεοσεβείς or "god-fearers", among whom the apostles to the Gentiles will have cast their earliest seeds¹¹. Such a man cannot have been wholly ignorant of the copious apologetic literature which the Jews had been addressing to their pagan neighbours over the past three centuries; it may, indeed, have furnished him with an archive for some episodes in the Acts of the Apostles¹², and is certainly the origin of the belief universally held by the first evangelists and martyrs, that the Greeks lived in the darkness of millennial polytheism, courting gods of wood and stone¹³. Luke can therefore hardly have neglected the apologists as a model when his hero was obliged to make a sermon to the Greeks.

Even the sparse remains of the Jewish apologists yield one instance of citation from the *Phaenomena* which is early enough to have met the eyes of Luke. The author is Aristobulus, a Jew of the second century B. C.¹⁴:

Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα, τὸν οὐδέποτ' ἄνδρες ἔωσιν
ἄρρητον· μεστὰὶ δὲ θεοῦ πᾶσαι μὲν ἀγυαί,
πᾶσαι δ' ἀνθρώπων ἀγοραί, μεστὴ δὲ θάλασσα
καὶ λιμένες, πάντη δὲ θεοῦ κεχρήμεθα πάντες.

Euripides was the original author, and it therefore appears that 1Cor 15,33 adds little weight to the arguments of F. W. Danker, *Menander and the New Testament*, NTS 10, 1963/64, 364–368.

- ⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449a25 on the facility with which trimeters were uttered in common speech. The adage μικρὰ ζύμη ὄλον τὸ φύραμα ζυμοῖ at 1Cor 5,6 is only one heavy syllable short of a trimeter.
- ¹⁰ See e. g. the Deuteronomic excuses at Luke 14,18–20 (not in Matthew's parable of the Great Supper) and the substitution of the phrase "finger of God" for "power of God" at Luke 11,20 (cf. Exodus 8,19). M. Wilcox (*The Semitisms of Acts*, Oxford 1965) concludes that many, though not all, were Septuagintalisms, and that the others reached Luke by sources known to him in Greek. For a summary of the arguments that make Luke a converted Gentile see W. Henriksen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Edinburgh 1978, 9 f.
- ¹¹ Cf. Acts 8,2 and Lake/Jackson, *Beginnings* V (above n. 1) 74–96.
- ¹² Thus the escape of Moses through sleeping guards and gates that open οὐτομάτη, described in Artapanus Fr. 3 (Jacoby) (Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* IX,27,23 f.), may be compared with that of Peter in Acts, especially at Acts 12,10.
- ¹³ Thus 1Cor 8,1 ff. presupposes the iconoclasm of Isaiah 44,10–20, the Letter of Jeremiah etc. Acts 4,24, affirming the supremacy of the one God, is the verse most frequently quoted to the pagans in the Acts of the Christian Martyrs.
- ¹⁴ Aristobulus Fr. 4 from Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 666b–d. On the date of Aristobulus see E. Schürer, revised Millar/Black/Vermees, *History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, Vol. III, Edinburgh 1986, 579 f.

Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἑσμέν· ὁ δ' ἤπιος ἀνθρώποισι
 δεξιὰ σημαίνει, λαοὺς δ' ἐπὶ ἔργον ἐγείρει
 μιμνήσκων βιότοιο· λέγει δ' ὅτε βῶλος ἀρίστη
 βουσί τε καὶ μακέλησι, λέγει δ' ὅτε δεξιά ὦραι
 καὶ φυτὰ γυρῶσαι καὶ σπέρματα πάντα βαλέσθαι.

Σαφῶς οἶμαι δεδειχθαι ὅτι διὰ πάντων ἐστὶν ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καθὼς δὲ δεῖ σεσημάγκα-
 μεν περιαιροῦντες τὸν διὰ τῶν ποιημάτων Δία καὶ Ζῆνα· τὸ γὰρ τῆς διανοίας αὐτῶν ἐπὶ
 Θεὸν ἀναπέμπεται· διόπερ οὕτως ἡμῖν εἴρηται. Οὐκ ἀπεικίκτως οὖν τοῖς ἐπιζητουμένοις
 προενηνέγεμθα ταῦτα. Πᾶσι γὰρ τοῖς φιλοσόφοις ὁμολογεῖται, ὅτι δεῖ περὶ Θεοῦ διαλήψεις
 ὁσίας ἔχειν, ὃ μάλιστα παρακελεύεται καλῶς ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς αἴρεσις. Ἡ δὲ τοῦ νόμου κατασκευὴ
 πᾶσα τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς περὶ εὐσεβείας τέτακται καὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἐγκρατείας καὶ τῶν
 λοιπῶν ἀγαθῶν τῶν κατ' ἀλήθειαν.

This passage should suffice to explode the case advanced by Dibelius for Luke's
 immediate knowledge of Aratus. What Aratus had to say of the earth, of its seasons
 and of the motion of the heavens is dispatched in his first nine lines, which are here
 set before us in their entirety. Scholars who have turned to Aristobulus for comparison
 with Luke have seldom observed one detail which suggests that he was the intermediate
 source for the evangelist¹⁵: this is the substitution of the word Θεοῦ, where metre
 permits, for the name of Zeus. Those who hold that Luke had read Aratus should be
 more surprised by the ease with which he appropriated lines that had been addressed
 to a pagan deity. Christian apologists sought few converts in the Greek pantheon, not
 even one so late and so proficient in Greek as Origen¹⁶, and their practice did not
 coincide with that of Aristeeas and other Jews, who could interpret the name of Zeus
 as one of the thousand masks of God¹⁷.

The audacity of Luke would thus be more remarkable than his learning had he
 pressed on Paul a phrase from the received text of Aratus. He would, however, be
 guilty of no such equivocation if the name of Zeus had already been displaced by a
 higher one in the version known to him; and, as we have seen, such a version was to
 hand in a Jewish writing which his interests would have led him to consult.

¹⁵ See H. Conzelmann, in: L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn (eds.), *Studies in Luke-Acts*,
 London 1968, 224, and in his *Acts of the Apostles*, Philadelphia 1987, 148; E.
 Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Oxford 1971, 528. E. Norden (*Agnostos Theos*,
 Leipzig 1923, repr. 1956, 121 f. n. 2) observes the alteration from Διός to Θεοῦ, which
 is metrically inadmissible in the first line.

¹⁶ See *Contra Celsum* V,45; VI,39, where it is maintained that the names of Greek and
 Hebrew deities are not exchangeable.

¹⁷ Letter of Aristeeas 15–16 and Aristobulus as above.

II

SOME EARLY CHRISTIAN IMMORALITIES*

For all the complaints of Paul (*ICor* 5.1 etc.), the early Christians do not seem to have been excessively libidinous, nor were their vices crueller than the fashion of the day. One cannot therefore fail to be struck by the gravity of the charges which the pagans are said to have levelled at them as a ground of persecution:

Τρία ἐπισημίζουσιν ἡμῖν ἐγκλήματα, ἀθεότητα, Θυέστεια δεῖπνα, Οἰδιποδείους μίξεις.

They press three charges against us: atheism, Thyestean banquets and Oedipodal unions.

(Athenagoras, *Legatio* 3.1)

These instruments of scandal were already gathering rust. Justin knows the tales of cannibalism, Tatian spurns them, Christians on the rack assured the governor of Bithynia that they ate none but wholesome foods¹. Sexual promiscuity was widely alleged, and want of evidence multiplied conjectures; apologists who wrote (and read) in Latin found the same sketch of themselves, but drawn with an even freer hand²:

infans a tirunculo farris superficie quasi ad innoxios ictus provocato caecis occultisque vulneribus occiditur; huius, proh nefas! sitienter sanguinem lambunt, huius certatim membra dispertiunt, hac foederantur hostia... Ad epulas solemnibus die coeunt, cum omnibus liberis, sororibus, matribus: sexus omnis homines et omnis aetatis.

An infant's skin is covered in flour, and a young lad, incited as though to harmless blows, causes his death with secret wounds. The infant's blood – oh, horror of it! – they lap up thirstily, they dismember his body, they are polluted by this victim... At meals on a holy day they have sexual intercourse, with all the children, sisters, mothers – people of every sex and every age.

(Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 9)

* Journal abbreviations are those of *L'Année Philologique*.

¹ Justin, *Apol.* 1 26.7; Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 25.3; Pliny, *Epist.* 96.

² The satire in the *Octavius* is generally held to originate with Fronto, who is *Cirtensis noster* at 9.6 and named at 31.2. See further P. FRASINETTI, *L'orazione di Frontone contro i cristiani*, *Giornale italiano di Filologia classica* 3 (1949), p. 238-254; G.W. CLARKE, *Four Passages of Minucius Felix*, in *Kyriakon. Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, Münster 1970, p. 502-504.

veni, demerge ferrum in infantem nullius inimicum, nullius reum, omnium filium ... piaculum enim admiseris, nisi incestum feceris.

Come, plunge your sword into an infant who is no-one's enemy, the culprit of no crime, the son of all ... for you will be guilty of sacrilege, if you do not commit the monstrous deed.

(Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 8.2)

ceterum quam vanum est profanos scire quod nesciat sacerdos? tacent igitur, et accepto ferunt, et nihil tragoediae Thyestae vel Oedipodis erumpunt.

Yet how vain is it that profane men should know what is unknown to the priest! Therefore they keep silence, and impart it to the initiate, and nothing transpires about these Thyestean and Oedipodal tragedies!

(Tertullian, *Ad nationes* I 7.23)

The Christians were atheists because they did not acknowledge the divinity of the civic pantheon or comply with worship³. It will not be maintained that the rest of the indictment could be true of any Christian society. Even if there were Gnostics who were so emancipated from the elements of the cosmos as to emancipate their bodies from the Law, their catholic adversaries do not mention anthropophagy or incest in the most speculative accounts of their transgressions. At least these crimes were not alleged by any before Epiphanius, and this praetorian of a late orthodoxy cannot stand as an authority on his own⁴.

An explanation advanced by Robert Grant is that the pagans were misled by shadowy notices of the Christian Eucharist⁵. Much speaks

³ For the charge see Justin, *Apol.* I 6.1, 13.1, etc. On its ground see G.E.M. DE STE-CROIX, *Why were the Early Christians persecuted?*, *P & P* 1963, p. 6-38; R. Lane FOX, *Pagans and Christians*, Harmondsworth 1986, p. 425-428.

⁴ See S. BENKO, *The Libertine Gnostic Sects of the Phibionites according to Epiphanius*, *VChr* 21 (1967), p. 103-119. It seems to me that too much credence is given to the Fathers' accounts of heresy in Benko's *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*, London 1985, p. 54-78, and also in A. HENRICH, *Pagan Ritual and the Alleged Crimes of the Early Christians*, in *Kyriakon. Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, p. 18 ff. Justin, though endeavouring to deflect the pagan charges against the heretics, does not pretend to have certain information at *Apol.* I 26, and his doubts are perhaps repeated by Irenaeus at *Adversus haereses* I 25.5 (an obscure passage).

⁵ R.M. GRANT, *Charges of 'Immorality' against Various Religious Groups in Antiquity*, in R. VAN DEN BROEK—M.J. VERMASEREN (eds.), *Essays on Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions*, Leiden 1981, p. 160-170.

for this theory, since it turns upon a rite which was peculiar to the sect and almost calculated to provoke misunderstanding. The Church which ate the flesh and drank the blood of its promised child might have appeared to fall little short of the enormities of Thyestes, and it is easy to guess what calumnies would take root in the minds of those who heard that the salutations of the Christians at their *agapai* or love-feasts were cemented by a kiss⁶. Were not the Christian meals an early object of suspicion, and does not Tertullian say that the indiscriminate use of the title 'brethren' was construed as an admission of corporate vice⁷?

Logical though it seems, this thesis falters at the bar of history. The practice and theology of the Eucharist were not known antecedently to Pliny, for the *superstitio vana et immodica* of his victims had to be exposed by torture⁸. Athenagoras is answering popular calumny, but popular information is unlikely to have exceeded that of Celsus, who appears to have said nothing of the Last Supper. The name of brethren did provoke indignant misconstructions, but our evidence does not show that these were prurient. Plotinus remonstrates against the extension of the term 'brethren' to the ignorant and vulgar by the Gnostics when they deny it to the sun (*Enneads* II 9.18.16-20), but it is in another chapter that he enjoins them, as despisers of the body, to forsake the love of women and of boys (II 9.17.27-28).

In any case the love of women is not a social vice, although it might be deemed a frailty in philosophers. Homosexual practices were repugnant to Plotinus (Porphyry, *VP* 15), but they do not constitute incest, and the brotherly endearments would have furnished no occasion for a libel on the women of the sect. The pagans knew so little that we must guess that the defamation of Christianity took less

⁶ S. BENKO, *op. cit.* (n. 4), p. 79-102, illustrates the importance of the kiss in the Christian ceremony, but does not show that the pagans were acquainted with the practice.

⁷ Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 39.8ff. At the end he vents his irony on the pagan imputations of a *coitio illicita*; but his statement that the word *dilectio* (Latin for *agape*) indicates the purpose of the feast does not persuade me, as it does Grant, that pagans knew this name or had observed the Christian kiss.

⁸ On Pliny's Letter 96 see A.N. SHERWIN-WHITE, *The Letters of Pliny*, Oxford 1966, p. 690-710; S. BENKO, *Pagan Criticism of Christianity*, in *ANRW* II 23.2 (1980), p. 1068-1076. As A. HENRICHS, *art. cit.* (n. 4), observes, the answers of the Christians show that suspicions were entertained about their meals, but not that any iniquity had yet been specified.

hold on what was known than on what was left to be imagined; the brethren were not so guilty in what they did as in what they shunned.

That is to say that Dölger was correct to surmise that pagan controversialists were filling a lacuna in their knowledge of Christian practices, just as they were wont to attribute every peculiarity to barbarians, every iniquity to the Bacchants, every vice to the misanthropy of the Jews⁹. From Justin we learn that Christians were derided as barbarians¹⁰, from Pliny that the magistrates expected them to be Bacchants¹¹, and from almost every source that their Jewish pedigree was notorious, and all the more discreditable for having been betrayed¹².

Even to say, however, that the Church incurred the obloquy that attached to all foreign thoughts and strange religions is not to have found a precedent for the most heinous imputations. Dölger looked for parallels to the Christian sacrifices in the nefarious oaths reputedly administered by conspirators¹³, in literary accounts of necromancy and in the horrors which were reported of the Jews. All of these yield cases of infanticide, none of incest, and none explain why the Christians were supposed to murder infants at their feasts. Pliny extorted knowledge of a Christian *sacramentum*, but does not state that he had previously heard of such a covenant, and our sources do not tell us that the object of the «Thyestean banquets» was to seal it¹⁴. Magic, indeed, was an unwholesome art in which the Christians were believed (and not without cause) to be proficient; but again we are not told that it was supposed to be a concomitant of meals¹⁵.

⁹ F. DÖLGER, *Sacramentum infanticidii*, *Antike und Christentum* 4 (1934), p. 188-228.

¹⁰ *Apol.* I 7.3, 46.3, 60.11; cf. Tatian, *Oratio* 1.1 etc.

¹¹ R.M. GRANT, *Pliny and the Christians*, *HThR* 41 (1948), p. 273-274; against which see A.N. SHERWIN-WHITE, *op. cit.* (n. 8), p. 692 and 705. But, while the parallels do not suffice to prove dependence, the suppression of the Bacchanals remained the classic precedent for religious persecution: see Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 6.7 and Cicero, *De legibus* 11.37.

¹² See e.g. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1; A. HENRICHs, *art. cit.* (n. 4), p. 23-24; S. BENKO, *ANRW* II 23.2 (1980), p. 1064-1065 on Tacitus, *Annales* XV 44.

¹³ See e.g. Dio Cassius XXXVII 30; Plutarch, *Cic.* 10.4.

¹⁴ On the sacramentum see A.N. SHERWIN-WHITE, *op. cit.* (n. 8), p. 706, and for the meaning 'oath' see Pliny, *Epist.* 29.2. Whatever his informants said, it is clear that the governor understood it to signify an oath.

¹⁵ On accusations of magic see Matthew 9.34 = Luke 11.15; Justin, *Apol.* I 26 and 30; Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 23-24; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.41 etc.

Cannibalism in desperate straits and murder with added cruelties in pursuance of a festival are ascribed to the Egyptians and the Jews, but these offerings are not said to be regular or young¹⁶.

Albert Henrichs seeks the prototype in Greek romance, and above all in the fragments of the sensational *Phoinikika* ascribed to one Lollianus¹⁷. In this a band of villains seals a compact by extracting and devouring certain organs from an incinerated child. The crime is an abuse of the devotions paid to Bacchus and Demeter, and there is therefore all the more reason to compare it with the infamies told of Christians; but chronology is uncertain, the evidence is silent once again with regard to incest, and it still remains to ask why these atrocities should be foisted on the Christians when other cults were spared.

Incest (like infanticide) would evoke more horror than any sin imputed to the Bacchantes, who, though they are said by Livy to have sanctioned every crime in nightly orgies, are not revealed by his testimony to be guilty of more than poisoning, murder and homosexual intercourse (XXXIX 13.6). Tacitus says of Jews that there was nothing forbidden among them, but does not go on to surmise what was permitted (*Histories* V 5.3); even when it is said of alien rites that they exclude no form of iniquity, neither Oedipodal marriages nor Thyestean banquets are attested, greatly though such unnatural performances would exacerbate the breach of moral law. This essay suggests that Thyestean banquets and Oedipodal conjugations were maliciously inferred from that disdain for social usages which, though it was not peculiar to the Christians, was in them most ostentatious, and was expressed in two most public shows of abstinence — from the altar and from the bed.

1. Sacrifice was a ritual which Christians thought it blasphemous to tolerate and pagans superstitious to avoid. The commonest ground of execution, in life as in martyrology, was refusal to comply with the cult of idols, and, from Stephen on, the ground of this refusal was a conviction that there is one God, who cannot be either housed or represented in the work of human hands. Persecution fell upon the Church under

¹⁶ Dio Cassius XLII 26.2 and LXVIII 32.1-2; Josephus, *Contra Apionem* II 91-96 (a Greek victim in the Temple).

¹⁷ *Art. cit.* (n. 4). For text of the fragments see A. HENRICHs, *Die Phoinikika des Lollianus*, Bonn 1972; English translation by G.N. SANDY in B. REARDON (ed.), *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, Berkeley 1989, p. 809-812.

Diocletian, Decius and Valerian, and in every case the omen was an edict of subscription to a mystery in which no-one but the Christians believed¹⁸. Within the Church abstention was enforced by the proscription even of what was sold in shambles after sacrifice, and this law was so notorious that the eating of such remnants was surmised to have been the motive for the expulsion of Peregrinus from the Church¹⁹.

Modern scholars have noted that two forms of sacred diet were incompatible with the usual civic rites²⁰. There were some — the Pythagoreans and the Orphics — who decried the use of meat at any meal and hence prohibited sacrifice; on the other side were Bacchants, who sought the cover of the wilderness, and were said to cement their orgies there by the rending and devouring of a live beast. Indeed, the beast was poor fare, if the fate of the Theban Pentheus does not belie the origins of the ritual; for this, like the dismemberment of Orpheus at the behest of Dionysus, may imply that there were occasions when the victim of their frenzy was a man²¹.

If these reports are spurious, they illustrate the propensity of the ancients to invent where they were forbidden to observe. Détiénne suggests that the Orphics sought to dissociate themselves from the atrocities of Bacchants by inventing the myth of Dionysus–Zagreus, in which the god himself is torn asunder²². If that was their intention, it did not succeed, at least for their Pythagorean cousins: the mere neglect of the public ceremony was enough to induce suspicions that the recusant was uncommonly depraved. The Pythagoreans of Cicero's day were conspicuous by their abstinence from sacrifice, or at least by their attempt to restrict its cruelties²³. It is evident that the orator, who knew the Pythagoreans by acquaintance, knew also what false notions an unfriendly and ignorant audience would conspire with him to believe:

¹⁸ For a recent treatment see M. SORDI, *The Christians and the Roman Empire*, London 1986, p. 96-132, though the earlier chapters of this work are marred by excessive credulity.

¹⁹ See *De morte Peregrini* 16 and n. 33 below. For the proscription of εἰδωλόθυστα see *Revelation* 2.14; Justin, *Dialogus* 34.8; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I 26.3.

²⁰ M. DÉTIENNE, *Culinary Practice and the Spirit of Sacrifice*, in J.-P. VERNANT–M. DÉTIENNE, *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, Chicago 1989, p. 1-20.

²¹ See E.R. DODDS, *Euripides. Bacchae*, Oxford 1960, p. xxv-xxviii and n. 22 below.

²² M. DÉTIENNE, *Dionysus Slain*, Baltimore 1979, p. 68-94. For criticism of both Dodds and Détiénne see A. HENRICHs, *Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence: the Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard*, *HSPH* 88 (1984), p. 205-240.

²³ See the dedication to Nigidius Figulus in the proem to his translation of the *Timaeus*.

volo ut mihi respondeas tu, qui te Pythagoreum soles dicere et hominis doctissimi nomen tuis inmanibus et barbaris moribus praetendere, quae te tanta pravitas mentis tenuerit, qui tantus furor, ut cum inaudita ac nefaria sacra susceperis, cum inferorum animas elicere, cum puerorum extis deos manis mactare soleas, auspicia ... contempseris ...

I want you to answer me, you who are accustomed to call yourself a Pythagorean, and use the name of a most learned man to veil your savage and barbarous customs: what is this great depravity of mind that has seized you, what is this great madness, that, when you have performed unheard-of and wicked rituals, when you are in the habit of calling up the souls of those below, and of appeasing departed spirits with children's entrails, you make light ... of auspices?

(*In Vatinius* 14)

The burden of this question, and its sequel, is that Vatinius is no true Pythagorean; but Cicero appeals to the common prejudice that anyone who pretends to more religion than his neighbours is a hypocrite, and that a hypocrite is capable of all that he professes to abhor. I have argued elsewhere that the same insinuation is to be met with in Lucretius²⁴, the contemporary of Cicero. If such rumours touched Pythagoreans, who were Greeks of ancient pedigree and sometimes men of consular distinction, what was to be said of men whose creed was novel and of alien provenance, while their lives were voluntarily obscure?

The banquets of Thyestes, possible in Argos only as the fulfilment of a curse already uttered, were revolting to Greek sentiment, but myth and legend tell us that such feats polluted Scythia and Persia, Lycaonia and Thrace²⁵. The bigotry of Greece was apt to credit all enormities to barbarians, in defence not only of custom, but of trade. The silversmiths of Ephesus, we remember, are reported to have sustained their agitation for a day when they discovered that their markets had already been reduced by the first conversions from idolatry (*Acts* 19.23-24). In time no riot was needed to alert the Roman magistrate, and Pliny, having made the Christians choose between death and sacrifice, is proud to observe that his measures have restored the emoluments of pagan shrines:

²⁴ M.J. EDWARDS, *Lucretius, Empedocles and Epicurean Polemics*, A & A 35 (1989), p. 104-115, with respect to *De rerum natura* III 41-54 and Empedocles F115 DK.

²⁵ See Herodotus I 73 on the Scythians and I 119 on Harpagus; the stories of Lycaon and of Tereus are too well-known to require citation.

neque civitates tantum, sed vicos etiam atque agros superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est; quae videtur sisti et corrigi posse. certe satis constat prope iam desolata templa coepisse celebrari et sacra sollemnia diu intermissa repeti pastumque venire victimarum, cuius adhuc rarissimus emptor inveniebatur.

The infection of this false religion has invaded not only the cities, but all the surrounding villages; yet it seems that it can be halted and chastised. Certainly it is plain enough that shrines which were all but deserted have begun to be frequented and the sacred festivals, which were long neglected, are being taken up again, and fodder is being sold for victims, though up to now a buyer for this was seldom to be found.

(*Epistulae* 96)

From this remark we learn enough to explain the pagan vilification of the Christian feasts²⁶. To fear and resentment anything is credible, and the mission of the Church excited both. Nothing need be known of the community except that it was a group which had seceded from the practices of society, and did more than any other such group to induce secession in others. The Christians were worse than Jews because they set no limits to the nation, and worse than the philosophers because they set no limits to the school.

2. The order of society was preserved by sacrifice, and its continuance by marriage. Marriage was the means by which a man raised heirs for his family, and without the perpetuation of the family, what survived²⁷? Christians, who expected to live on in a better world, could set less store by having progeny in this: indeed, in the earliest days, when it was thought that the transition would be sudden and universal, their instructors thought it best to live without ties (*ICor* 7.29 etc.). As the New Jerusalem receded, it continued to unlock its gates to martyrs; and celibacy was not only a desirable condition for the zealot, but a proof of zeal in those who would not be given the opportunity to die²⁸.

Paul himself declared that it was good for a man not to touch a woman (*ICor* 7.1), and even the most catholic of the Fathers thought

²⁶ Cf. A. HENRICH, *art. cit.* (n. 4), p. 21; A.N. SHERWIN-WHITE, *op. cit.* (n. 8), p. 709-710.

²⁷ See further P. BROWN, *The Body and Society*, London 1989, p. 5-64.

²⁸ See further K.E. KIRK, *The Vision of God*, London 1931, p. 500, on voluntary suffering as a substitute for martyrdom.

the virgin state superior to that of a wife and mother. The authors of heretical romances made it plain that it was the duty of an Apostle to break up marriages and of virgins to avoid them. The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* show what odium a resolute virginity might experience in the world.

Worse than the evasion of the marital bond was the breach of it. Paul had spoken against this (*ICor* 7.10-16), but, as in the case of meats, it proved convenient to ignore him; many a Christian neophyte took advantage of the easy laws to divorce a pagan spouse. What recriminations might ensue we see from *Justin's Second Apology*:

γυνή τις συνεβίου ἀνδρὶ ἀκολασταίνοντι, ἀκολασταίνουσα καὶ αὐτὴ πρότερον. ἐπεὶ δὲ τὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ διδάγματα ἔγνω, ἐσωφρονίσθη καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα ὁμοίως σωφρονεῖν πείθειν ἐπειράτο.

A certain woman lived with a vicious man, herself at first addicted to the same vices. But when she became acquainted with the teachings of Christ she adopted sober manners and endeavoured to impart them to her husband.

(*Apol.* II 2.1-2)

μὴ βουλομένου ἀπαλλαγείσης κατηγορίαν πεποιῆται, λέγων αὐτὴν Χριστιανὴν εἶναι. καὶ ἡ μὲν βιβλιδίον σοι τῷ αὐτοκράτορι ἀναδέδωκε, πρότερον συγχωρηθῆναι αὐτῇ διοικήσασθαι ταῦτα· ἑαυτῆς ἀχιοῦσα, ἔπειτα ἀπολογήσασθαι περὶ τοῦ κατηγορήματος μετὰ τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων αὐτῆς διοίκησιν. καὶ συνεχώρησας τοῦτο. ὁ δὲ ταύτης ποτὲ ἀνὴρ, πρὸς ἐκείνην μὲν μὴ δυνάμενος τανῦν ἔτι λέγειν, πρὸς Πτολεμαῖόν τινα κτλ.

[After prolonged and unavailing effort] she divorced him against his will, and he denounced her as a Christian. For her part she wrote a petition to Your Majesty, asking that she might put her goods in order and promising to answer the indictment when she had done this. You gave consent, but her former husband, unable to pursue his case against her, turned upon Ptolemaeus [her instructor in Christian precepts].

(*Apol.* II 2.7-9)

The magistrates are corruptible, and a persecution follows, since the question «Are you a Christian?» is enough to put a man on trial for his life. Nevertheless, divorce and not religion was the initial cause of hatred, and if it could rouse such sentiments it could also

prompt the associated calumnies. The famous words of an orator declare that the Greeks used marriage as an expedient for begetting heirs, but took their pleasures outside it (Ps-Demosthenes, *In Neaeram* 122). When marriage was so limited a contract, only the worst suspicions could be formed concerning those who had evaded or dissolved it, and where religious motives were professed they would be readily disbelieved. Hippolytus pursues a life which ought to render his chastity unassailable, but appears to render all the more credible the story of his making overtures to his father's wife (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 951-957). The Bacchic rites begin to be detested in Rome when a man informs his concubine that his recent initiation will entail ten days' seclusion from her company (Livy XXXIX 11-12); neither she nor the Senate can believe that the rites themselves will leave the chastity of participants intact. Propertius hints that a bed denied to him by the cult of Isis may be secretly prepared for rival lovers (IV 5, cf. II 33a), and an anecdote in Josephus shows that intrigue and impiety were expected of her priests (*Antiquities* XVIII 3.4).

Two sects of the ancient world were notorious for eschewing matrimony. Epicurus, whose garden was condemned as the resort of the voluptuary and the idler, had asserted that the wise man will not marry; Epicurean and Christian were in any case assimilable, because both scorned the cult of civic gods²⁹. But if an eccentric life, obstreperous poverty and lack of education made a philosopher, then the Christian was a Cynic. The comparison was drawn by pagan and Christian: Julian's *Seventh Oration* dwells upon it, and some have thought that Aelius Aristides' denigration of the Cynics hides an assault upon some members of the Church. Tatian, though he denounced the Cynic Crescens, is perhaps the most probable target at this epoch, since he was said to have rejected marriage together with all things Greek³⁰. To call a man a Cynic with regard to sexual conduct was a serious allegation, for the Cynics, while rejecting

²⁹ The Gnostics are compared to Epicureans by Plotinus, *Enneads* II 9.15.8, and at Lucian, *Alexander* 38, the false prophet expels the two groups simultaneously from his performances.

³⁰ See Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I 28.1; P. DE LABRIOLLE, *La réaction païenne*, Paris 1934, p. 82-87; R.M. GRANT, *The Heresy of Tatian*, *JThS* 5 (1954), p. 62-68, with special regard to Aelius Aristides, *Oration* XLVI.

marriage, thought no act obscene. According to the reports of him, their founder Diogenes dedicated an image of a prostitute at Delphi, deflowered a boy then sent him to a brothel, and was accustomed to perform in public «the works of Aphrodite and Demeter», saying once, as he masturbated openly, «I wish the stomach could be as quickly eased» (Diogenes Laertius VI 2.60, 61, 69).

That the Cynic would not marry was an axiom to imperial admirers: Crates was admitted as an exception, but had been married with reluctance, and to a woman like himself³¹. In earlier days opinion was less perverse: Antisthenes conceded the necessity of marriage as a means of reproduction, while Diogenes supported the community of wives (Diogenes Laertius VI 11 and 72). Since he believed that nothing which was done could be unnatural, he allowed no bar to marriage but the will of either party; the corollary, that incest was permissible, was drawn (though only in theory) by the Sceptics and the Stoics³².

The notion that the Christians could be made to look like Cynics was carried to an extreme of art by at least one pagan writer: Lucian insinuates that the suicide of the charlatan Peregrinus was inspired by his recent trifling with the Church³³. The affinity, while it compromised the chastity of Christians, would strengthen the suspicions of their diet. Cynics of the Empire mocked the pantheon and despised its sacrifices; they were famous for their readiness to consume the meals of Hecate, which others found abominable; and, while they were not accused of any ‘Thyestean banquets’ (since they had no ceremonies), Diogenes was believed to have made light of the original occasion in a play³⁴.

When the Christians showed themselves opposed to marriage, or at least to marriage with a pagan, comparison with the Cynics would augment suspicion, just as when they refrained from sacrifice they

³¹ Epictetus II 22.76. For Crates and Hipparchia see Diogenes Laertius VI 96; *Anth. Pal.* VII 413 (Antipater of Sidon); D.R. DUDLEY, *A History of Cynicism*, Cambridge 1937, p. 49-52 and 221.

³² D.R. DUDLEY, *op. cit.* (n. 31), p. 29-30, attributes to Diogenes himself an endorsement of incest, but I cannot find the proof.

³³ M.J. EDWARDS, *Satire and Verisimilitude: Christianity in Lucian's Peregrinus*, *Historia* 38 (1989), p. 89-98.

³⁴ See e.g. Lucian, *De sacrificiis*; on meals of Hecate, *Id.*, *Cataplous* 7 and *Dialogi mortuorum* 1.1; A.B. DRACHMANN, *Atheism in Pagan Antiquity*, London 1922, p. 120-132.

would incur the charges laid against another arcane philosophy. The success of Christianity fed resentment, its worship of a Jew inflamed contempt, and the necessity of answering it would therefore seem to challenge new exertions in invective. The allusions to Thyestes and to Oedipus need not rest on pagan knowledge of ecclesiastical mysteries; to have none was enough.

III

Justin's Logos and the Word of God

Scholarship has generally attempted to show that the notion of the Logos in Justin's Apologies is largely indebted to Stoic or Platonic philosophy. If, however, we trace its roots in the Biblical tradition, we shall find that these may be adequate to explain it. Such an explanation avoids the difficulties inherent in its rivals and makes the thought of the Apologies continuous with that of Justin's contemporaries and his Dialogue with Trypho.

It seems that for many scholars Justin Martyr was two people. One produced, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, a vast and eloquent compilation of those texts in the Greek Old Testament which can be made to prefigure Christ. Though this work engaged him in controversy with the Jews, this Justin was pre-eminently a Biblical theologian, and Nygren can subsume him with the "nomos-type" in Early Christian ethics, which has at least the virtue that it is not the "eros-type."¹ The other Justin wrote the two *Apologies*, where, in order to woo the Greeks through their philosophy, he sometimes keeps his Bible at his back.² The proofs of his acquaintance with the schools are found in the opening of the *Dialogue with Trypho*, in the obvious erudition of the *Apologies*, and above all in his doctrine of the

1. A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, part 2, vol. 1, trans. P. S. Watson (London: SPCK, 1938), 49–72. A recent book devoted to Justin's exegetic practice is W. A. Shotwell, *The Biblical Exegesis of Justin Martyr* (London: SPCK, 1965). A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1 (London: Mowbrays, 1975), 90, observes that the notion of Christ as Nomos is carried over to the *Apologies*, though he does not attempt the consistent reading of the term *Logos* offered here.

2. In my article, "On the Platonic Schooling of Justin Martyr," *JTS* 42 (1991): 17–34, I attempt to identify the Platonic models that guided Justin in his construction of a theology. I am here concerned with what was only cursorily treated there, namely the antecedents of the term *Logos*, and shall refer to other treatments of this subject in the course of the present paper.

Logos, which is widely held to have been deducible only from Greek sources, though some would name the Platonists where others commend the Stoics.

While there can be no doubt that Justin tempers his exposition to his audience, and that his early studies put him abreast of at least one school of pagan thought, it is seldom necessary, or even possible, for a thinker of such magnitude to cut his mind in half. The search for pagan elements in his concept of the Logos has all but blinded us to the numerous occurrences of the same term in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, whose important contribution to the problem of Christian thought is thus severely underrated. I shall argue here that even the *Apologies* cannot be elucidated from the pagan schools alone, and that the womb of his Logos-doctrine was the *Dialogue*, where the term is used to confer on Christ the powers that were already attributed in Jewish literature to the spoken and written utterance of God.

I

Jewish tradition from the earliest period had revered the Word of God. "You shall not add to the word that I have given you" (Deuteronomy 4.2), says the legislator, and, though the Septuagint has *rhema* here, it calls the ten commandments the *deka logoi* at Exodus 34.28. Up to Hellenistic times this legislative Word had been repeated and embellished by the prophets, whose succession was once thought to be unending. Sometimes God himself is represented as the speaker, proclaiming that his *rhema* will not return to him empty, but bear fruit in his creation (Isaiah 55.11); only a fool would doubt the efficacy of the logos by which "the heavens were made" (Psalm 33.6).³

It thus required no Hooker or Aquinas to discover that the Law which moves the elements is the source and sum of moral ordinances. A striking note of the Biblical tradition is, however, that in the present age these are not inscribed on hearts at birth,⁴ but are imparted and renewed by the

3. I follow G. Kittel's *Theological Wordbook*, vol. 4, trans. G. Bromiley (New York, 1967), 69–136 in taking as one the usual Hebrew terms for "word" and their usual equivalents in the Septuagint. The practice of the Septuagint itself is not uniform, the words *logos* and *rhema* are related to different tenses of the same verb, and we have no reason to think that Justin's acquaintance with Hellenistic Judaism was confined to the written Bible. The most relevant passages in Kittel are 94–8 on the prophetic word, 98–9 on the Word as Law, 99–100 on the Word of creation.

4. Though this is of course the hope of prophecy: see Jeremiah 31.31–4 and II Corinthians 3.3. A referee points out the use of prophetic passages to illustrate the role of

daily hearing of a text. The Book, not moral reasoning, is the cause of those repentances which follow the exposure of Israel's corporate dereliction.⁵ The very Psalm which tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God (19.1ff), that day and night extol him in succession, that the voices of the sun and moon are heard in every nation,⁶ does not imply that these suffice to make his creatures righteous; they manifest in visible, though silent, form the power that underwrites the spoken Law:

The Law of the Lord is without blemish, converting souls; the witness of the Lord is faithful making wise the simple. The judgments of the Lord, being righteous, rejoice the heart, the commandment of the Lord shines far, enlightening the eyes (Psalm 19.7–9 Septuagint).

When prophets failed, the written Word assumed an inexhaustible dominion. Rabbis of the early Christian era fixed the limits of the Torah, yet subjected it to such ingenious rules of exegesis that they were never at a loss to reach the heights of metaphysics or the extremes of casuistry.⁷ This written text was the all-sufficient symbol of the word that God had spoken, and the latter, as the one sure intermediary between the ailing people and their hidden King, acquired the characteristics of a superhuman being. The Memra has a place above the angels as that agent of the Deity who sustains the course of nature and personifies the Law.⁸

How common or how orthodox these speculations were in the second century we cannot decide; we do, however, find that personality is bestowed upon the Word in a Jewish author who lived earlier than Justin and was known by name at least to younger Christians of his age. Philo's Logos, jointly formed by the study of Greek philosophy and of the Torah, was at once the written text, an eternal notion in the mind of the Creator and the organ of his work in time and space.⁹ Under this last aspect, it receives such epithets as Son, King, Priest and Only-begotten; in short, it becomes a person, though perhaps not a different person from the Speaker. The influence of Philo (or his milieu) on the development of early Christian

Christ as the heart of the covenantal Law at *Dial.* 93, and also the implied equation of Law with the prophetic word at Isaiah 1.10, 8.16 and 30.9–10.

5. See esp. I Esdras [Ezra] 8 and IV Kings [II Kings] 22–3 in the Septuagint.

6. On the original and subsequent interpretation of this phrase, see N. Frye, *The Great Code* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 24.

7. See now H. L. Strack and G. Stemberger, *Talmud and Midrash* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1993).

8. On the testimonies to the Memra and the difficulties of using it, see G. F. Moore, "Intermediaries in Jewish Tradition," *HTR* 15 (1922): 41–61. On Wisdom, Paul and Torah, see W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1948), 147–176.

9. On Philo, see H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1947), 177–246.

doctrine must have been profound, though its initial conduits are obscure.¹⁰

If it be thought tendentious to reckon Philo as a Jew, it would be even more tendentious to enroll him in the calendar of philosophy under the constellation of Middle Platonism. There was never a school of Middle Platonism, as there were schools of Neoplatonism; the term is a convenient designation for those philosophers who wrote before Plotinus and exhibit an important debt to Plato. These authors, for the most part, would appear to have been unknown to one another,¹¹ and no thought that occurs in one should be treated as the property of all. All the admitted Platonists whose work survives in quantity were born after Philo's death, and, even where they coincide with him in thought or language, we cannot deduce immediately that they point to Philo's model. It is possible that Philo's own conjectures found their way into the schools of Apamea or Alexandria;¹² it is probable that Hellenic and Hebraic minds were never so estranged by their respective tongues as some are wont to argue;¹³ in cases like the present, where he has both Biblical precedent and orthodox Jewish comment to support him, we should not call Philo a Platonist (or even a Pythagorean),¹⁴ but take him at his own word as a pious intellectual, who expressed in Greek the spirit of a Jew.

If Justin drew on Philo, then, it was as a representative of current Judaism.¹⁵ Certainly known to him, since it occurs in the Book of Proverbs, is the portrayal of divine Wisdom, or Sophia, as a female being, capable of utterance, who sits by God at the moment of creation (Proverbs 8.22ff). In the Wisdom of Solomon, the metaphor is prolonged into an allegory, in which Sophia herself accepts the functions of creation and of government, and differs from God, if anywhere, in being the agent only of his most

10. See H. A. Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, vol. I (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 200–359; D. T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), esp. 132–156 on Clement. On the relevance of Philo to Justin, see Runia, *Philo*, 97–105 (showing that most scholars have postulated a common environment, if not dependence); R. Holte, “Spermatikos Logos,” *Studia Theologica* 12 (1958): 123–128 and 147–8.

11. For recent discussion, see H. Ziebrinski, *Heilige Geist und Weltseele* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1994), 22–43.

12. See J. Whittaker, “Moses Atticizing,” *Phoenix* 21 (1967): 196–201 for a defence of this (possible, though not proven) view.

13. See, e.g., J. Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, Studies in Biblical Theology 33 (London: SCM Press, 1962), attacking the theories of Cullmann, Robinson and Marsh.

14. See D. A. Runia, *Philo*, 136, citing Clement, *Stromateis* I.72.4, II.100.3.

15. See on this question D. A. Runia, *Philo*, 99–104, reviewing O. Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy*, Novum Testamentum Supplement LVI (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987) and W. A. Shotwell, *Biblical Exegesis*, 93–113.

benevolent deeds towards humanity and Israel.¹⁶ Her acts are thus recorded in the heavens and in history; she is as potent, as mysterious and as present as the Law. The latter, we are told in Deuteronomy (30.12–14), is not to be sought in heaven or overseas, but in the faith of the obedient; and Job, who knows that Wisdom too transcends the height and depth and has her only seat in God, is therefore all the more desirous to receive her in his heart (28.20–28).

The Word which rules the heavens and that which makes the written Law are thus the same, and yet there is no place for an intuitive discovery of God. There is not so much one spirit that joins man with his creator as a dual revelation; and the revelation of deity in the heavens is accessible only to those, who, like the Psalmist, know the Maker through his Law. Even at Wisdom 13.5, the one case where the handiwork of heaven is adduced as a revelation to the Gentiles, Wisdom herself is not the subject of this revelation, and her voice is audible only to the readers of the Word which she inspires.¹⁷ This distinction in Jewish thought between immanent and mediated Wisdom could not fail to have a bearing on the theology of Justin, since he is among the first to equate this figure with the pre-existent and exalted Christ.

He was not the first, since Paul styles Christ the Wisdom of God at I Cor 1.18–25. Even in the “Hellenistic” Gospel of John, as has recently been argued by John Suggit, the conception of Christ as Logos is pervasive and indebted to the Jewish encomia of the Word of God.¹⁸ While broaching the possibility that this had been personified already in Rabbinic teaching, Suggit finds it more illuminating to match the properties of Jesus in the Gospel with the functions of the Word in Psalm 119, the alphabetic *magnum opus* of its genre. In the Psalm, the Law or Word is called the bearer of truth, the Way, the source of life and the giver of light; all this is said of Jesus in the Gospel. Both Jesus and the Law enjoin the keeping of commandments, but in the new dispensation the Holy Spirit supersedes the Law as teacher, while Jesus must succeed it as the object of our love. As the Psalmist celebrates the permanence of the Law, so Christ extends the promise of eternity to all who abide in him.

16. See especially Wisdom 10–11, which may have helped to inspire the Gnostic contrast between Sophia and the Demiurge.

17. I rely here upon J. Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), 66–7, though he does not look for the distinction that I am making.

18. J. Suggit, “John 17.17,” *JTS* 35 (1984): 104–117. He compares Ps 119.142 with John 8.32; 119.9 with 14.4–6; 119.93 with 6.35; 119.105 with 1.4; 119.60 with 15.13; 119.97 with 21.15; 119.12 with 16.13; 119.89 with 15.4–11.

The titles *Nomos* and *Logos* are applied to Christ in a work of the second century, which has recently been proposed as a source or parallel for Justin.¹⁹ The few surviving fragments of the *Preaching of Peter* show that it made no peace with Greek or Jew: Christ is *Nomos* as the author of a new covenant, and *Logos* as the power by which, according to the Psalm, God made the world.²⁰ As Rordorf (and Justin) note, the source for the combination of the titles is Isaiah 2.3 (Micah 4.2): “there shall come forth a law and word from Zion.” *Arche* is another appellation of the Savior in this document; the usage, endorsed by Justin’s pupil Tatian, will no doubt have been supported by some version or congener of the opening verse of John.²¹

The “*Nomos-Logos*” thesis attains its classic form in Melito of Sardis, a contemporary of Justin who was later to be (for some at least) a canon of orthodoxy.²² In his *Homily on the Pascha*, he expounds the typological relation between the acts of God through Moses and his epiphany in Christ. The mystery which by the old dispensation was expressed through Law is now revealed more clearly in the *Logos* (9–10); the Law is old, the Word is new (19–20); the Law has been fulfilled because the Gospel has shone forth (236–7). As the last example shows, the *Logos* here is not so much the Word in Jesus as the word about him; yet it is treated in the metaphors that John applies to the incarnate Jesus, and Melito also says that whereas Christ, in so far as he judges, is the Law, his true name when he teaches is “the Word” (55–6).

We cannot prove that Justin was acquainted with rabbinic thought,²³ or even with the Fourth Gospel, but the Johannine terms for Christ were in his own vocabulary,²⁴ and he shared with John a desire to trace the thread

19. See W. Rordorf, “Christus als *Nomos* und *Logos*” in A.M. Ritter (ed.), *Kerygma und Logos* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1979), 424–434.

20. See Rordorf, “Christus als *Nomos*,” 426, citing Clement, *Strom.* VI.5.41.4–6.

21. See Rordorf, “Christus als *Nomos*,” 427/9. E. F. Osborn, *Justin Martyr* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1973), shows that there are cogent grounds for thinking that Justin used a harmony of the Gospels.

22. See Rordorf, “Christus als *Nomos*,” 431 for reference to Melito. On the theology, see S. G. Hall, *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha and Fragments*, xl–xli. The association with John is made by Suggit (n. 18), 115–117. Melito’s Quartodeciman practice did not lead to any doubts of his doctrinal orthodoxy.

23. E. R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* (Jena, 1923; reprinted Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1968) makes a case for the influence of Hellenistic Judaism. It is now not widely believed that his Trypho was the Rabbi Tarfon: see, e.g., N. Heydahl, “Tryphon und Tarphon,” *Studia Theologica* 9.2 (1955): 77–88. For other discussions of Rabbinic influence, see W. A. Shotwell, *Biblical Exegesis*, 93–113, and E. F. Osborn, *Justin Martyr*, 107–110.

24. Not only *Logos*, but “vine” to judge by *Dial.* 110.4. The term *monogenes* is cited

from Judaism to Christianity. "Nomos into Logos" is the gist of Melito's homily, and will be our guiding principle in the following attempt to extract a single definition of the Logos from the whole of Justin's work.

II

No reader of an ancient book should overlook the prologue. When we detach this portion of the *Dialogue with Trypho*, as a frontispiece to the study of the *Apologies*, we have already failed in our task as commentators, having forestalled the possibility of learning from the text. This skirmish with the pagans at the outset gives a preliminary savor of that method which the author will apply with greater intricacy in the main part of the *Dialogue*. This consists of using a familiar term in unexpected company, to convey an intimation of truths too great to be expressed at one attempt.

In his opening chapter Justin notes that the founder of a school is called the "father of its *logos*" (2.2). This is one of the earliest occurrences of the latter term in the *Dialogue*, and even had it not been used elsewhere to denote the Father of the Trinity (35.6), the sacred connotation of the whole phrase could hardly fail to strike a Christian. Justin next describes his misadventures in philosophy, from which he was converted through discussion with an old man by the sea. Even at the beginning of this colloquy, however, he personifies the Logos in a style that is not Platonic "what greater work could there be than this, to show that the Logos rules all things, then conceiving it within and riding on it, to look down upon the errors of those below" (3.1)? His aim is not to reproduce the exact words of a scene that may in any case be fictitious,²⁵ but to adumbrate a more plausible account of his salvation, in which an inner logic lifts him from the intellect to the Logos, from his speculative desire for the unseen to faith in Christ as the infallible and present Word of God.

Elsewhere in this conversation, *logos* denotes the faculty of reason, or the use of it. Justin is required to give a "reason" (3.6) for his confidence that his own beliefs and acts are in accordance with "right reason" (*orthos logos*: 3.3); this is another phrase that will acquire a Christian force when it recurs (141.1). Justin's interlocutor exposes the variety of meanings in the word *logos* when he presses him for "arguments" (9.1–3) after finding

at *Dial.* 98.5 and 105.1, though it is not clear whether this shows knowledge of the Johannine usage.

25. See Edwards, "Platonic Schooling," 18–21 for discussion and bibliography. For full commentary on the prologue, see J. C. M. van Winden, *An Early Christian Philosopher: Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho Chapters One to Nine*, *Philosophia Patrum* 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971).

previous offerings void of “sense” (5.2). His irony thus annihilates the claim, endorsed by Trypho (1.3), that philosophy is distinguished by its possession of “the whole *logos*”. The standard English rendering of the last word would be “argument” or “account,” but we may note in anticipation that at 2 *apol.* 8.3 the “whole *logos*” is Christ.

Trypho is made to use the word *logos* rarely, and almost always to invite a further argument from Justin (48.1, 55.1, 57.3, 77.1, 94.4). The latter may reciprocate by asking for the *logos* or “interpretation” of a crucial passage, but in the great majority of instances the text itself is the object signified. Appeal is made in chapter after chapter to “the Word” alone (49.1, 60.4–5, 67.7 etc.), the Word of God (38.2 etc.), the “prophetic Word” (56.6, 77.2, 110.3, 128.4), the “Word that spoke” to or through Isaiah (87.2), Moses (56.13, 58.4, 62.1), David (68.5, 85.4), Solomon (62.4) or Zechariah (49.2). The Word that can so often be the subject of a verb is never far from being personified, and the idiom that makes a human being its instrument would seem more proper to an author, or his powers, than to the written medium. If we apply the Rabbinic (and Origenistic) principle that the meaning of a term in any context may be present in all the others,²⁶ we shall be required in Justin’s case to unify the original, divine *communication* with its material *expression* in the Bible and the *sense* read into this by a discerning commentary.

The noun *Logos* had served Christians for over half a century²⁷ as a title of the Lord. Yet nothing in this period, save the prologue to the fourth Gospel, can compare with the *locus classicus* in Justin, which extols “the Word of Wisdom, God begotten of the Father” (61.3), and adorns him with the other appellations of his pre-existent glory. The keynote of the *Dialogue with Trypho* is that all the riddles in the Jewish Scriptures are resolved by the birth, the ministry, the death and the exaltation of this Person; as God and man he is both the author and the latent sense of what is written. Not by his dogmatic formulations (it was an age of scant resources), but by the frequency with which he confers two meanings on the same expression, Justin harps on the interpenetration of the Savior and his Word.

At 109.2 Justin quotes the prophecy of Micah (4.2) that a “Law and Word” (*nomos kai logos*) will issue forth from Zion for the vindication of Israel. For him, as for the prophet, this betokens the renewal of the Torah, but he presumes that, like himself, the Jews apply it to a personal redeemer. They do not know “who it is” that issues from the sanctuary, because they

26. See Strack and Stemberger, *Talmud and Midrash*, 22 for the Rabbinic principle.

27. See Grillmeier, *Christian Tradition*, 26–32 (on the New Testament) and 86–89 (on Ignatius).

do not acknowledge the dual advent of the saviour, first in passible humanity, then in the consummating power of "Law and Word." The insight that the Logos is the perfection of the Nomos is therefore not peculiar to Melito and John.

Another ambiguity has already occurred at 109.1: the nations are declared to have received from the Apostles and to have understood through them "the word proclaimed." Is this word (*logos kērūkhtheis*) the word which constitutes the proclamation or the Word whom it proclaims? Passive forms of the verb *kerusso* are found throughout the *Dialogue*, the subject being occasionally an abstract proposition, but more often Christ himself under a title.²⁸ Here the equivocal syntax may be intended to convey what we have noted in the case of Jewish Wisdom: the logos is the vehicle of the Logos, the Word of God is known to us primarily through the word that speaks of him.

At 23.3 Justin undertakes to proclaim the "divine word" (*theios logos*), which he himself heard from "that man." Both the epithet *theios* and the allusion to the old man are unique outside the prologue, where the right rule (*orthos logos*) for discovering *to theion* is the matter in dispute. By this echo Justin means to intimate that his quest is now fulfilled, and we should thus expect the locution *theios logos* to refer, not to the Scripture, but to its omnipresent Subject. This conjecture is strengthened by the ascription of the title *theios logos* to Christ in both *Apologies* (1 *apol.* 33.9, 2 *apol.* 13.3), and all but proved by the course of Justin's argument in this section of the *Dialogue*, where his case is that the ceremonial law has been abolished by the renewal of God's covenant with Abraham in Christ.

In a text of great importance for the history of dogma (100.5), Mary is found superior to Eve because the one "conceived the *logos* of the serpent" to engender death and sin, while the other by "faith and joy" prepared her womb for the Son of God. While Justin cannot speak of any temporal conception of the Logos, he brings this title into play by contrast with the offspring of the serpent, thus explaining how the fruits of Mary's faith could avert the penalty of our sins against the legislative Word. After all, Christ's demiurgic power was clearly present in the Paradise which saw all creatures made "by the word of God" (84.1); and the Jews, when they "despised the Word of God" (102.2) did equal violence to the Scriptures and to the one of whom they tell.

Chapter 61 begins with a puzzling exclamation: "setting forth a *logos*, let us generate a *logos*, not by taking anything away so that the *logos* we set

28. For impersonal uses see *Dial.* 85.7 and 100.1; for personal uses *Dial.* 14.8, 34.2, 36.1, 71.2, 110.2; for both together *Dial.* 76.6.

forth will be diminished.” These properties of the spoken word, as soon appears, are adduced to render credible the *genesis* of Christ, the “Word of Wisdom” (61.3), whose divinity entails no diminution in the substance of his Father. The intervening commentary observes that when a fire is lit from fire there is no subtraction from the stock; the prologue uses a variant of this Platonic metaphor to express the zeal that the old man has awakened in his soul.²⁹ So twice again the analogy is drawn, with Justin’s customary obliqueness, between the word that bears the revelation and the Word whom it reveals. Perhaps the same complicity may be observed between the title “Word of Wisdom” and his later appeal to “what is said in Wisdom” (129.3), making “Wisdom” first an attribute of deity, then the title of a book.

In every case a polysemic symbol is created by two simultaneous drafts upon a well-stocked bank of meanings. No suspicion of heedless ambiguity or gratuitous complication will survive comparison with the Jewish precedents, which make the same expression, “Word of God,” connote an agent and his instrument, the Book and its authority, the power of cosmic government and its manifest decree.

III

A summary of the uses of the term *logos* in the *Apologies* must be brief if it is to be uncontroversial. It signifies at times the human faculty of reason or its products, but, when combined with epithets like “divine” or “whole,” will also stand for Christ. Identical with or closely related to him is the *logos spermatikos*, which is the source of revelation and is styled a part or image of the whole *logos*. This implants in us a seed or *sperma*, which enables us to think and live in accordance with the *logos*, and conveys a dim perception of “the whole *logos*,” the incarnate Son of God. The theory is presented in epitome towards the end of the *Second Apology*³⁰:

For each, from part of the divine spermatik *logos* seeing that which was akin [or, partially seeing that which was akin to the divine spermatik *logos*], spoke well. But those who contradicted themselves in their cardinal doctrines are seen not to have possessed the infallible understanding and incontrovertible knowledge. What was said well by all was thus the property of us, the Christians, for we worship and love, after God, the Word from the unbegotten and

29. See Edwards, “Platonic Schooling,” on the relation between *Dialogus* 8.1 and Numenius, Fr. 14 Des Places.

30. On the alternative translations in the first sentence, see Edwards, “Platonic Schooling,” 33–4, commenting on R. Holte, “Logos Spermatikos,” 147–148.

ineffable God, since for our sakes he became a man, so that, becoming a partaker of our sins, he might also perform the healing. For all the writers, through the sowing within them of the implanted word (*emphutos logos*), were able to see dimly what was the case [or, what existed]. For the seed of something and the image (*mimema*) given according to capacity are one thing, but that of which there is participation and imitation is another, [and these are possible] by reason of his grace (2 *apol.* 3–6).

Carl Andresen, in a famous study, traces back this doctrine to the Middle Platonism in which Justin, by his own account, was schooled.³¹ The term *spermatikos logos* is not found in this tradition, but Antiochus and Cicero had acquainted the Old Academy with *semina virtutum*, “seeds of virtue,” which are implanted in the soul by intermediaries of God in much the same way as the ideas have been impressed upon the matter of the world. Since Justin can be shown to have subscribed to this cosmology, he might also, Andresen says, have joined the Platonists in holding that a feeble intimation of divinity is at work in every soul. The Platonists, for their part, had derived their terms from Stoicism, but not without an important change of meaning; neither they nor Justin could embrace the Stoic opinion that the soul, being made of fire, is but a part of that intelligent material which informs and comprehends the universe.

In a still more famous article, Ragnar Holte observes that Andresen cannot supply the evidence for all the steps that are needed to effect the transformation, and he therefore attaches more weight to the absence of the phrase “*spermatikos logos*” in the vocabulary of Middle Platonism.³² He also notes that those who seek Platonic antecedents have been puzzled to find an origin for the notion that the seed is consubstantial with the Logos who imparts it. Among such scholars, Cramer suggests a borrowing from Philo, with perverse contamination of Justin’s text, while Pfättisch can give rather more of a hearing to the Stoics.³³ Andersen adduces many passages which affirm that moral insight comes by nature, though these do not entail that man is born with an intuition of the Gospel or of God.³⁴

31. C. Andresen, “Justin und die mittlere Platonismus,” *ZNTW* 44 (1952–3): 157–198. On cosmology see esp. 165–6, endorsed by L. W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr* (Cambridge: CUP, 1967), 35–7. The cited Hellenistic passages are: Albinus (=Alcinous), *Didascalica* 25; Antiochus, *apud* Ciceronem, *De Fin.* V.21.59; Cicero, *De Fin.* IV.7.18; Origen, *Contra Celsum* IV.25.

32. Holte, “Logos Spermatikos,” 110–168.

33. J. A. Cramer, “Die Logosstellen in Justins Apologien kritisch untersucht,” *ZNTW* 2 (1901): 311 and 313; I. M. Pfättisch, *Der Einfluss Platons auf die Theologie Justins des Martyrers*, Forschungen zur christliche Literatur und Dogemengeschichte 10.1 (Paderborn, 1910).

34. Andresen, “Justin und die mittlere Platonismus,” 177–8.

A third position might embrace these theories, while observing that they do not in every case conflict with those that turn to Jewish sources for a doctrine of the Logos.³⁵ The Stoics could give their own meaning to the statement that the Logos is a Nomos; and, whatever the antecedents of the name Logos in Philo's writings, it was surely the Hellenistic schools that taught him to define it by the term *spermatike ousia*. With such a mediator—a Jewish mediator in his own view, as we have stated—could not Justin have taken his doctrine indirectly from a Greek source, while believing that he stood squarely in the Biblical tradition?

Against all these positions, I shall argue in the remainder of this paper that they entail at least six special difficulties which a theory based entirely on the current understanding of the Scriptures would forestall.

1. Whatever Justin learned from his early schooling with the Platonists, it was not the use of Logos as a name for the cosmic demiurge or the intellect of man. It was the Stoics who spoke of *logos* where the Platonists spoke of *nous*; yet Justin is either singularly ignorant of their views or strangely ungenerous, since, while he admires their virtues, he says little of their tenets, except to endorse their prophecies of a terminal conflagration or *ekpurosis*, while deploring their belief in the omnipotence of fate and the perpetual restitution of the past.³⁶ The notion that he borrowed from Stoics and Platonists unconsciously must be taken, in the present state of knowledge, as a claim that he read Philo; and Goodenough's convictions on this subject have been met by criticisms which have hitherto been found unanswerable.³⁷
2. Holte, in attributing to Justin a belief that makes the knowledge of God ubiquitous by nature, does little to reconcile this with the more famous and influential claim advanced in the *First Apology*: namely, that the knowledge of divine things in pagan circles, and especially in Plato, was entirely derived from casual acquaintance with the Scriptures.³⁸ Justin nowhere shows himself aware that he holds two theories, or adopts the simple measures that would suf-

35. A referee points out to me Cicero, *De Resp.* III.22.33 and Clement, *Strom.* I.(25).165–6 on law as the *orthos logos* in some philosophers (though Clement himself formulates this notion, and adds that they stole it from Moses). As will be pointed out below, Cicero's concept of *ratio* hardly matches that of the speaking *logos* in Christianity.

36. See, e.g., Andresen, "Justin und die mittlere Platonismus," 185–7.

37. E. R. Goodenough, *Theology of Justin*, 168–173, answered by Barnard, *Justin Martyr*, 93–5.

38. Though Holte, "Logos Spermatikos," discusses the loan theory at 159–165.

fice to reconcile them. Both charity and economy should dispose us to conclude that he intended to state, not two—not even two complementary—theories, but one.

3. The theory of a congenital intuition of sacred truth implies a natural affinity between the mind of man and his Creator. In Aristotle, Plato and the Stoics this is an axiom, but for Justin it is not merely an unknown but an alien principle. Although the *Second Apology* declares that the enlightened mind enjoys a partial vision through the Logos of *to suggenes* (2 *apol.* 13.3 above), the grammar does not determine whether this kinship in the object is with the seer or with the Logos.³⁹ This question is determined, on the other hand, by the *Dialogue with Trypho*, where the old man, who is the mouthpiece of paternal revelation, forces Justin to renounce his Platonism and confess that the mind has no innate communion with God (*Dial.* 4.2). No doubt a shrewd apologist would allow a pagan audience to retain some false assumptions that he would hasten to repudiate in the presence of a Jewish one; but was it not the stated aim of every second-century apologist to convince his pagan neighbors that no god could be identical with a portion of the world?
4. The formula *emphutos logos*, used of our means of apprehending Christ at 2 *apol.* 13.5 is thought to be of Stoic provenance by many,⁴⁰ yet, notwithstanding a certain number of comparable phrases in Stoic literature, there is no true case of this.
5. Theories of a kinship between mankind and God would usually entail an understanding of salvation as the attainment of a likeness to, or union with, the Deity. "To be like God" is the goal of life in Plato, and in later times his school bent all its thought and discipline to the consummation of this end. While Christian thought could not gainsay the insuperable divorce between the creature and its Creator, Irenaeus and Origen conceive the work of grace as the imparting of that spiritual perfection which was lost or pre-empted in the fall of Adam.⁴¹ The reason for the muted praise of Justin in Nygren's *Agape and Eros*, on the other hand, is that he ignores such hopes and grounds his faith in the imitation of Christ's ac-

39. Against Holte, "Logos Spermatikos," 147–148. See n. 30 above.

40. See Holte, "Logos Spermatikos," 133–136. J. von Arnim notes only *emphutos prolepsis* at *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, vol III (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903), 17.14, i.e., Plutarch, *Stoic. rep.* 1041e.

41. See Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* V.6; Origen, *De princ.* III.6.1 etc.

tions, not the sharing of his nature, in the righteousness of service, not the confidence of growth.

6. The work of Christ as Logos, in the *Apologies* as in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, is effected by continual activity; both the means and the time of his revelation are in the mystery of his will.⁴² As Basil Studer observes in a recent study, Justin frequently describes his Logos as a power or *dunamis*;⁴³ and, whereas a Stoic or Platonist might have given the name of Logos to an ever-active potency that works without choice or feeling, the power of Justin's Word is manifested in spontaneous and momentary acts of revelation. In short, as Studer emphasises, he *teaches* and he *speaks*.⁴⁴ Stoic pantheism, and even the Platonic theory of emanation, leave no room for anything so personal or elective in the ruling principle, making it more a permanent ground of virtue and felicity than a temporal cause of either.

Holte, paying little heed to this dynamic working of the Christian Logos, illustrates the insufficiency of his own solution by proposing that the Stoic Logos was combined in Justin's theory with the parable of the Sower.⁴⁵ In Stoic and Platonic metaphor the salient characteristic of the seed is its potential for maturity; it is an origin, a portion, a proleptic adumbration of the plant. Since, however, *sperma* is cognate with the root of *speirein*, etymology defines it, less as something that will *grow*, than as something *sown*. Justin uses *sperma* interchangeably with *spora*, which betrays its derivation still more clearly.⁴⁶ In so far as *sperma* is connected in his *Apologies* with the activity of Christ, we have no reason to think that he would separate the sowing from the seed, any more than he elected to separate speaking from the word.

A theory which avoids these criticisms has already been unveiled. The kernel of Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* might be stated, in the words of his contemporary Melito, as "*Nomos* into *Logos*"; might not this current

42. See especially *1 apol* 63.4–5: "The word of God is his Son, as we have said. And he is called messenger (angel) and apostle, because he announces what is to be known and is sent out to show forth whatever is announced, as our own Lord said, 'He who hears me hears him that sent me.'" As subsequent remarks make clear, Justin has in mind particularly the apparition of God to Moses and the Israelites at Sinai, i.e., God in his role as Lawgiver.

43. B. Studer, "Der apologetische Ansatz zur Logos-Christologie Justins der Martyrs," in Ritter, *Kerygma und Logos*, 435–448. On special manifestations of Christ's *dunamis*, see *Dial.* 30.3 etc.

44. Studer, "Der apologetische Ansatz," 443: "Gott in ihn *redet* und *spricht*".

45. See Holte, "Logos Spermatikos," 128.

46. Cf *2 apol.* 13.5 and *2 apol.* 8.1.

slogan shed as much light on his two *Apologies*? We observed elsewhere that epithets of *logos* from the *Dialogue* recur in the *Apologies*; it only remains to show that an explanation of this term in the *Apologies* which is based upon Christ's personal inspiration and fulfilment of the Scriptures is as strong on all six points as its competitors are weak.

1. Justin's perfect acquaintance with the Septuagint is beyond all need of proof. We have seen above that this thesaurus yielded to ancient seekers a composite notion of the Logos which fell only one step short of a Christology. Melito and the Fourth Gospel take this step when they affirm that the incarnation of the Saviour turned the Law into the Word. Justin required no precedent in pagan thought for his doctrine of a Word who was the agent of creation and its governor, the Son of God and teacher of humanity, the record and the instrument of grace.
2. From current expositions of his doctrine, one would never guess that the passage in which Justin traces the better thoughts of pagans to the Bible is also one of the most important witnesses to the meaning of his "seed":

And whatever both philosophers and poets said about the immortality of the soul or punishments after death or the contemplation of the heavens or other such doctrines, they contrived to know and expounded by beginning from the prophets; hence there appear to be seeds of truth among all (*1 apol.* 44.9–20).

Here at least the theory of dissemination is also a theory of plagiarism; we have to do, not with two competing theories, but with complementary statements of the same one. Not nature, but the written text, is the vehicle of enlightenment, and the point of the metaphor lies not so much in any latent properties of the seed as in the fact that it is sown.

3. The seed in Justin's thought is both a portion and an image of the Logos, but is nowhere consubstantial with the believer, who requires it both as object and as guide of his mental eye if he is to imitate the one of whom the seed itself partakes. The seed can be a medium of truth to him without being an inherited constituent of his nature, since, even when he dwells upon the metaphor from nature, the seed in Justin seems to be related to its archetype in the manner of a symbol. At *1 apol.* 19.1, where Justin finds a simile for the posthumous resurrection of the body in the growth of the human foetus from the semen, he makes no use of theories of gesta-

tion or heredity, but only of the principle that the seed is as an *eikon graphē*, a written or graven image, of the supervenient form.

4. The phrase *emphutos logos* is a proof that Justin's language is continuous with early Christian preaching: it is first attested at James 1.21: "receive in meekness the *emphutos logos* that is able to save your souls." Here the seventeenth-century's "engrafted word" is still the best translation, since the meaning is that life comes by the Gospel, not by anything held in common with the world.
5. Our thesis is that the whole of Justin's work propounds the Christology which Melito reduces to the catchword "Law become Logos." His equation of "Law and Logos" with the Saviour in his *Dialogue with Trypho* is confirmed by the citation of the same text in the *First Apology* (39.1). He urges that the Christians do not break the laws of men (68.10), though he also intimates that these are not so profitable as the *theios logos*:

For that which human ordinances were powerless to effect, the *theios logos* would have done, had not the base demons scattered many lies and impious allegations, taking into alliance the bad and variable nature in every man towards all evil (1 *apol.* 10.6).

The formula *theios logos*, which is a proper name of Christ in the *Apologies*,⁴⁷ must connote here the commandments given to Israel, which are contrasted on the one hand with the Gentile codes and on the other with the lies of demons. Nothing is granted to human beings by nature but their vices; Justin states elsewhere that both the motion of the heavens and human chastity are in the course of nature (2 *apol.* 2.4, 4.2), and that human beings have an innate capacity to choose between good and evil (2 *apol.* 14.2), but without presuming anywhere that knowledge of divine truths is inborn. His references to partaking or *methexis* of the *logos*, though they are often thought to bespeak his pagan schooling, are amply covered by our thesis. Propositional truth "partakes" of Scripture, since the Scripture itself contains all revelation; when human beings partake, it is according to an idiom, familiar since Herodotus, whereby hearers are called partakers of what they hear.⁴⁸

6. In his *Apologies* Justin mentions passages from Scripture, in which

47. See Pfädtisch, *Der Einfluss Platons*, 110; Holte, "Logos Spermatikos," 94; 2 *apol.* 13.3.

48. See Herodotus, *Histories* I.127, where the sense is that of being party to a secret.

sperma is definable as "that which supervenes on propagation."⁴⁹ The blessings pronounced upon the seed of Abraham were contingent, not on any inchoate merit, but on paternity, and even in the New Testament, it is chiefly as the recipient of these promises that Christ is called the seed of Abraham.⁵⁰ The germination of seeds is a frequent subject in the parables,⁵¹ but the seed does not originate in any natural environment; it is the gift of a peculiar dispensation, which occurs at a point in history and is mediated only by the Gospels which contain the parables.

The parable of the Sower, as it is glossed in the Synoptics (Matt 13.8ff and par), is for us a parable of interpretation. The seed is at first the propositional word, but then, as it flourishes or withers, it takes on the situation of the hearer. The word is therefore all but identical with its recipient, yet this is no result of our original constitution, but only of the historical embodiment of truth in Jesus Christ. The Sower is the Word of God, according to Luke (8.11), so that the term *spermatikos logos* was no more than a description of his parabolic role.

That this phrase must denote the sowing agent, not the sown, is proved by Holte, who also demonstrates that the Stoics were the first to coin it.⁵² But this is not to say that they defined all subsequent usage, as it could easily be adopted either in ignorance or in defiance of their intention. The latter is most probably the case when Justin avers that the Stoics themselves, who posit an implanted seed (*emphuton sperma*) of wisdom in all humanity (2 *apol.* 8.1), had only partial knowledge of the whole spermatik Logos (8.3). He evidently does not wish to endorse the term *emphuton sperma* in their sense, but by this discreet allusion he insinuates that the true spermatik Logos, though accessible to all Christians, had reached the Stoics in a fragmentary and mediated form.

Justin imitates the shift of meaning which we noticed in the parable of the Sower when he contrasts the word of Socrates with the perfect revelation:

For not only were these [falsehoods] refuted among the Greeks by the *logos* of Socrates, but also among the barbarians by the *logos* itself transformed, made man and called Christ Jesus (1 *apol.* 5.4).

49. Thus Isaiah 54.3 is cited at *Dial.* 13.8; Genesis 21.12 at 56.7; Genesis 24.4 and 28.14.

50. Thus the discussion at *Galatians* 3.16–17 is entirely with respect to *kleronomia*, not germinative properties.

51. See, e.g., Mark 4.6–9; Matthew 13.24–30 and 13.31–2 etc.

52. Holte, "Logos Spermatikos," 136ff.

This is no pun, no sophistry, no equivocation: among the Jews, the most intractable of all barbarians, Christ is indeed the written Word made flesh.

IV

These criticisms of Andresen and Holte are intended as an original contribution to the study of Justin Martyr; they should none the less commend themselves to those distinguished scholars who have already urged that Justin is primarily a Christian, that he did something more than pump the veins of Scripture with Stoic ethics and Platonic metaphysics. Even while this view was being allowed to stand in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*,⁵³ Henry Chadwick wrote that there was no pejorative sense in which he was either an eclectic or a syncretist, and E. F. Osborn rightly approves his dictum that “Justin does not merely use Greek philosophy. He passes judgment on it.”⁵⁴ Our study, however, goes a little further in suggesting that, so far as one who wrote in Greek could do so, he avoided even the use of that philosophy with which he was so thoroughly acquainted.

We must, for example, question Chadwick’s statement that the Martyr entertained a Platonic doctrine of the natural affinity between the soul and God.⁵⁵ When he puts this teaching into his own mouth as a Platonist, it is immediately rejected by the old man. Nor can we infer that he had already found his Logos in the Academy because we hear him express the ambition of “mounting the *logos* that governs all, and looking down on others and their pursuits.”⁵⁶ This is the common idiom of Platonists, who aspired to an exalted state of reason which would make them friends of God and the unrecognised superiors of all their fellow-mortals; but it is only an ironic contiguity of language that enables the young philosopher to speak as though he already understood the ruling Principle whom only Christians know.

Even where Justin makes the greatest possible concession to philosophy, we must be careful to observe what is withheld. Though some, like Socra-

53. Article, “Justin,” by W. H. C. Frend in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1970), 570, now revised for the new edition (1995).

54. E. F. Osborn, *Justin Martyr*, 42, citing H. Chadwick, *Early Christianity and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: OUP, 1966), 20.

55. Chadwick, *Early Christianity*, 12, citing *Dial.* 4.2.

56. *Dial.* 3.3, playfully replying to the imputation of being a *philologos*. Van Winden, *Early Christian Philosopher*, 57, notes the relevance of Plato, *Phaedo* 85c8, to which one might add other passages collected in my “Treading the Aether,” *CQ* 40 (1990): 465–9.

tes, lived *meta logou*, they did not live *meta tou logou*;⁵⁷ they had their critical faculties by nature, but, except through plagiarism, no acquaintance with the Word. Just as in the parable of the Sower, there is one soil that is better prepared than others, yet there is none that is so prepared as to contain the seed already. Scripture is the necessary bridge between philosophy and Christ.

Our conclusion, therefore, is that in the two *Apologies*, no less than in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, Christ is the Logos who personifies the Torah. In Jewish thought the Word was the source of being, the origin of Law, the written Torah and a Person next to God. Early Christianity announced the incarnation of this Person, and Justin makes the further claims that Scripture is the parent of all truth among the nations, and that the Lord who is revealed to us in the New Testament is the author and the hermeneutic canon of the Old.

Is it, we may ask, a strong objection to our theory that it makes the apologist speak with the same intent to Greek and Jew? How could he expect a pagan audience to comprehend a doctrine based on an esoteric key that, once mislaid, took Christian scholarship some centuries to recover? This objection is based upon a widespread but fallacious modern axiom that an author must address himself entirely to the comprehension of his present audience. No seminal interpretation of Homer, Virgil or Shakespeare has subscribed to such a premiss in our century, and we can no more hope to extrapolate the audience from the work in ancient times than we could estimate the character of an eighteenth-century reader from the poems of William Blake. Every genius has to create the audience that will be able to comprehend him, and even a mind of the second rank, like Justin's, may be driven a little way beyond its period by the force of the world's most influential book.

In any case we cannot lightly assume that all apologies were written for the putative addressees. Most speeches in the ancient world have an epideictic quality, so that, if they fail to convince another party, they may none the less enhance the author's credit with his own. Arnobius wrote his learned and unusual book to prove that his conversion was sincere; Origen expounded his mature beliefs by arguing against a pagan author who had been dead for half a century, and appears to have been forgotten by his co-religionists. Can anyone believe that all twenty-two books of Augustine's *City of God* were inspired by the calamities of a city that he hardly knew, and the feeble possibility of a pagan restoration? It is often assumed that in

57. 1 *Apol.* 46.3. Cf. 1 *apol.* 5.3, and, for the relevance of the definite article, 5.4, cited above.

the second century apologies still aspired to have an effect upon their putative recipients, and yet the evidence that pagans read them is nugatory. Robert Grant invents a bold itinerary that would allow one patient autocrat to hear all five apologies that invoked his name;⁵⁸ but no one has located the Areopagus from which Tatian could have delivered his *Oration to the Greeks*.

Justin's knowledge of Greek philosophy is not in doubt; and neither—most uncommon though it was for a Christian writer of this epoch—is his martyrdom. We need not, then, deny that he might crave a pagan audience and hope to effect conversions by his preaching. We may, and should, deny that he would let his thoughts be fettered by the likely understanding of a pagan readership, and we may reasonably imagine that at all times he was writing, as he died, for the instruction of the Church.

58. R. M. Grant, "Five Apologists and Marcus Aurelius," *VigChr* 42 (1988): 1–17. For further remarks, see my "Aristides of Athens and the Origins of Christian Apologetic," forthcoming in *ANRW* 27.2.

IV

SATIRE AND VERISIMILITUDE: CHRISTIANITY IN LUCIAN'S *PEREGRINUS*

“Whether Peregrinus was a Christian or not” wrote Bishop Lightfoot, “we have no means of ascertaining”¹. Lucian is our sole source for the Christian career of Peregrinus, who earned for himself an expensive renown and a more than Olympic glory when he died on a pyre of his own construction in 165 A. D. Lucian’s narrative of his brief flirtation with Christianity lacks the circumstantial embellishments which compel us to believe the later episode (19–20) of his quarrel with the great sophist Herodes Atticus, a figure whose enmity to Peregrinus is in any case attested in other sources. The treatise *On the Death of Peregrinus* tells us merely how the Church received the charlatan when the better sort disowned him (11), how they ministered to his comforts in adversity (12) and how at last they expelled him for some slight but sufficient wrong (16). This, the stuff of all Christian martyrologies, neither strains nor compels belief; but we find also that the adventure is described in terms which must be incompatible with the discipline and faith of the early Church. It is surely mere absurdity in Lucian to inform us that the deceitful guest became their “thiasarch” or that they treated him with the honours due to a god (*Peregrinus* 11, discussed below).

Lucian was a satirist and a man under no obligation to be discerning; some measure of verisimilitude we are nonetheless entitled to expect. Modern critics, feeling the want of this, have exclaimed upon his “monumental ignorance”², have alleged that he took Christianity for a mystery “of Oriental origin”³ and have found him to be inferior to his educated contemporaries when it came to distinguishing Christians from Jews.⁴

If there is to be any defence of Lucian it must lie in an understanding of his methods and aims as a satirist. Satire seeks, not truth, but the characteristic and the probable: it depicts living characters, not as individuals, but as representative men. In the life of Peregrinus both the occasion and the materials for satire were ready to hand. For enemies like Tatian and admirers like Theagenes, the Cynic was the paragon of philosophy and Peregrinus was the consummate

¹ *Ignatius and Polycarp* (London 1889) pp. 334–5. That the Christians knew nothing of his Churchmanship appears from the *Scholia in Lucianum*, p. 216f. (Rabe).

² G. Bagnani, “Peregrinus Proteus and the Christians” in *Historia* 4 (1955), p. 111.

³ S. Benko, “Pagan Criticism of Christianity in the First Two Christian Centuries” in *ANRW* 23.2 (1979) p. 1109.

⁴ W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford 1965) p. 274, citing Jebb at n. 39.

Cynic; it is Lucian who must show that his career is a perversion of this philosophy, whose genuine exemplars were often unrecognised, and whose liveliest and most ludicrous aberrations were to be found in the Christian Church. To illustrate these remarks we may consider the following paradigms: (1) of the Christian as seen by his fellow-Christians; (2) of the Cynic as seen by one of his admirers, who is also suspicious of counterfeits; (3) of the Cynic, and in particular Peregrinus, as seen by Christians; (4) of Peregrinus as seen by the more credulous of the Cynics.

1. The earliest Christian apology was addressed to the Emperor Hadrian by a certain Aristides and preserved or imitated in many a later Christian work.⁵ The fame of this treatise vastly exceeded its merits and even pagans were glad to quote some its memorable phrases in order to turn them back upon the new sect. Celsus, a contemporary of Lucian and perhaps even an acquaintance,⁶ reciprocated the strictures of Aristides upon the helplessness of Asclepius and Heracles by remarking that even Christ had been unable to save himself,⁷ and it may have been in the words of the apologist⁸ that he found the source for some of his own loose statements about the Jews. Another phrase from the work was taken up by the Roman populace in the exclamation “Quo usque tertium genus?” which Tertullian professed not to understand.⁹

The virtues of the Christians are extolled in a single chapter, which Celsus may have plundered once again when he remarked that Christians traced their generation from Christ himself:¹⁰

XV. Οἱ δὲ Χριστιανοὶ γενεαλογοῦνται ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ· οὗτος δὲ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου ὁμολογεῖται ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς διὰ τὴν σωτηρίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων· καὶ ἐκ παρθένου ἁγίας γεννηθεὶς ἀσπόρως τε καὶ ἀφθόρως σάρκα ἀνέλαβε, καὶ ἀνεφάνη ἀνθρώποις, ὅπως ἐκ τῆς πολυθέου πλάνης αὐτοὺς ἀνακαλέσῃται· καὶ τελήσας τὴν θαυμαστὴν αὐτοῦ οἰκονομίαν διὰ σταυροῦ θανάτου ἐγεύσατο ἔκνουσιν βουλῆ κατ’ οἰκονομίαν μεγάλην· μετὰ δὲ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀνεβίω καὶ εἰς

⁵ See the edition-by J. Rendell Harris in *Texts and Studies* I ed. J. A. Robinson (Cambridge 1891).

⁶ See the opening of Lucian’s *Alexander*, but the difficulties in the identification are well known, since Celsus appears from Origen to be a Middle Platonist. See H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge 1965) pp. xxiv–xxvi.

⁷ See Rendell Harris, “Celsus and Aristides” in *BJRL* 6 (1921) pp. 172f.

⁸ Aristides, *Apology* 114. See Rendell Harris (1891) pp. 22–3.

⁹ See Aristides, *Apology* 2 and Tertullian’s *Ad Nationes* I.8 and I.20; also *Scorpiace* 10. Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity* (trans. Moffatt, London 1908) pp. 266–78, seems to regard the phrase as a pagan monopoly.

¹⁰ See Rendell Harris (1921) pp. 168f.

οὐρανοὺς ἀνήλθην· οὐ τὸ κλέος τῆς παρουσίας ἐκ τῆς παρ' αὐτοῖς καλουμένης εὐαγγελικῆς ἀγίας γραφῆς ἔξεστί σοι γνῶναι, βασιλεῦ, ἐὰν ἐντύχῃς. 2. Οὗτος δώδεκα ἔσχε μαθητάς, οἱ μετὰ τὴν ἐν οὐρανοῖς ἄνοδον αὐτοῦ ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὰς ἐπαρχίας τῆς οἰκουμένης καὶ ἐδίδαξαν τὴν ἐκείνου μεγαλωσύνην, καθάπερ εἰς ἕξ αὐτῶν τὰς καθ' ἡμᾶς περιῆλθε χώρας τὸ δόγμα κηρύττων τῆς ἀληθείας· ὅθεν οἱ εἰσέτι διακονοῦντες τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ κηρύγματος αὐτῶν καλοῦνται Χριστιανοί. 3. Καὶ οὗτοι οἱ ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς εὐρόντες τὴν ἀλήθειαν· γινώσκουσι γὰρ τὸν θεὸν κτίστην καὶ δημιουργὸν τῶν ἀπάντων ἐν υἰῷ μονογενεῖ καὶ πνεύματι ἀγίῳ καὶ ἄλλον θεὸν πλὴν τούτου οὐ σέβονται. Ἔχουσι τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις κεχαραγμένας καὶ ταύτας φυλάττουσι προσδοκῶντες ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν καὶ ζωὴν τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος.

(*Apologia Aristidis* 15.1–3).

Children of Christ and knowing their own immortality, believers are prepared to give their lives on behalf of the gospel (15.8), and, knowing what the philosophies of the world can only boast of, they can claim to possess the secrets of divinity and truth.

2. For all their rough demeanour, their jejune diet and the filthiness of their attire, Lucian's Cynics share with all their rivals in philosophy the desire to be as gods (cf. Epictetus III.22). As an anonymous interlocutor tells Lycinus, they are as innocent of need as the Olympians (*Cynicus* 12 and 20) and show to advantage even against the heroes of mythology. Heracles (*Cynicus* 13) is their paradigm, and who could ask for more?

In another dialogue these claims are endorsed by Philosophy herself. The only beings worthy of comparison with the Cynics are the Brahmins (*Fugitivi* 6), who take the example of Heracles so far as to die upon pyres that they themselves have built and kindled. Lucian seems to exhort us to admire this fatal discipline, just as the spectacular combustion of an Indian sage in the forum had already excited general admiration and lasting praise.¹¹ Against such men, her followers and champions, Philosophy sets the pretenders, who cleave to the outward tokens of her virtues in the hope of avoiding labour and gaining wealth. They affect to be her μαθηταὶ καὶ ὁμιληταὶ καὶ θιασῶται (*Fugitivi* 4), but at their head is the charlatan Peregrinus, whose ostentatious death provides the starting-point of the dialogue. Like the Brahmins and the Christians Peregrinus flaunts his pretensions to philosophy and to divinity, but he is in fact the antitype of the true Cynic – false philosopher, false martyr and false god.

¹¹ See Strabo XV. i. 73.

3. Three Christian apologists, all nearly contemporary with Peregrinus, allude to him as a pagan without evincing any suspicion that he was known to be an apostate from the Church. Tertullian (*Ad Martyras* 4.5) is at least prepared to admire him and to bestow upon him his proper appellation when he exhorts his readers to emulate the fortitude of those pagans who suffered death without spiritual defences. The point is entirely lost if Peregrinus is supposed to have died for the new faith and not for the splendid errors of the old.

Peregrinus is thus a martyr after a fashion for Tertullian, keeping company with Empedocles, Socrates (*De Anima* 1.2) and Heraclitus. It is Tatian who calls him a Cynic,¹² and he adds the sobriquet Proteus, always fastened upon the sophist by his detractors, but not employed, or employed with a certain diffidence, by the partisans of his fame.¹³

Τί μέγα καὶ θαυμαστὸν οἱ παρ' ὑμῖν ἐργάζονται φιλόσοφοι; Ὁατέρου γὰρ τῶν ὤμων ἑξαμελοῦσι, κόμην ἐπιειμένοι πολλήν, παγωνοτροφοῦσιν, ὄνυχας θηρίων περιφέροντες, καὶ λέγοντες μὲν δεῖσθαι μηδενός· κατὰ δὲ τὸν Πρωτέα σκυτοδέψου μὲν χρῆζοντες διὰ τὴν πῆραν, ὑφάντου δὲ διὰ τὸ ἱμάτιον, καὶ διὰ τὸ ξύλον δρυσοτόμον, διὰ δὲ τὴν γαστριμαργίαν τῶν πλουτούντων καὶ ὀυποιοῦ. Ὡς ζηλῶν ἄνθρωπε τὸν κύνα, τὸν Θεὸν οὐκ οἶδας, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ἄλογον μίμησιν μεταβέβηκας. Ὁ δὲ κεκραγὼς δημοσίᾳ μετ' ἀξιοπιστίας, ἔκδικος γίνῃ σαυτοῦ, κἄν μὴ λάβῃς, λοιδορεῖς· καὶ γίνεται σοι τέχνη τοῦ πορίζειν τὸ φιλοσοφεῖν.

(*Oratio ad Graecos* 25.1).

The phrase κατὰ δὲ τὸν Πρωτέα is commonly taken to signify that “Proteus” is a member of that tribe who pretend to Olympian self-sufficiency, yet are equal or inferior to others in the multitude of their needs. Dudley took it to indicate that Tatian is alluding to some self-effacing apophthegm from the mouth of the sophist himself.¹⁴ Whether he adduced him for his authority or his example it is obvious that the value of Peregrinus for this apologist is that he furnishes the most notorious evidence for the indictment of his own sect.

¹² Tatian may be the only attested example of an apostate from Christianity to Cynicism in the second century, but in fact the jibe of Hippolytus (*Refutation* VIII.20) that he and his followers are rather Cynics than Christians suggests that that is not how they styled themselves. However, the resemblance between the Christians and the Cynics was pointed out by Origen: see J. Bernays, *Lucian und die Kyniker* (Berlin 1879) pp. 93–4 and 98–9.

¹³ For unfavourable references see Lucian, *Demonax* 21 and Philostratus, *Vitae Sophistarum* II. 1. 33. Ammianus at XXIX. 1. 39 uses the name Peregrinus, as does Eusebius in his *Chronicon* under Olympiad 236. For diffidence see Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* XII. xi. 1: “cui postea nomen Proteus factum est”.

¹⁴ D. R. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism* (Cambridge 1937) p. 178. It is unlikely that Peregrinus entertained such a low estimate of himself.

Tatian testifies to a state of war between the Cynics and the Church. The enmity is most palpable in his denunciation of Crescens (*Oratio* 19.1), the Cynic who brought about the death of Justin in what would appear to have been a display of mutual animosity (Justin, 2 *Apol* 3). Crescens, according to Tatian, is a mere hypocrite, surpassing other men in only three things, his covetousness, his passion for boys and his pusillanimity in the face of death. The Cynic is of all sages the most amenable to Christian principles of criticism, since his life is almost a parody of the discipline of Christ. Since early days the disciples had assumed the garb of poverty, forgetting human comforts and social intercourse, and the apologists took these patient exercises as a proof of their claim to the title of philosopher which few in the pagan world were disposed to allow them.

If the Christian has achieved the true goals of philosophy, then the Cynic, and in particular the arch-Cynic Peregrinus, must be the caricature of the genuine philosopher. Athenagoras (*Legatio* 26.2-4) sneers at his self-immolation and the honours that it attracted: can the statues of one who proved to be mortal be of advantage to the sick? We find no sign that Peregrinus presents a difficulty to the Christian, no expression of regret for his apostasy, no shade of admiration for his most illustrious deed. Athenagoras also elects to use the sobriquet Proteus ("you all know Proteus, the man who threw himself on the pyre at Olympia"), and where Tatian treated the sophist as a pretender to philosophy, this mockery of his death and of his effigies insinuates that he had no claim to be called either martyr or god.

4. In Lucian's *Peregrinus*, Theagenes fears that comparison with Socrates' death would belittle this modern Heracles (5), and is ready to flaunt the name of Zeus himself (5 and 6). Mistaking him for a public benefactor, the populace hails Peregrinus as "the one patriot, the one sage, the one partisan of Diogenes" (15), erroneously conferring philosophic honours upon him in a form of words appropriate to the acclamation of a saviour God.¹⁵ We see that he enjoyed esteem in all three roles enumerated above, that is, as philosopher, as martyr and as present divinity, making it necessary for Lucian to disarm the trite comparisons with Heracles and the Brahmins and to put into the mouth of an anonymous philosopher a long parody of the encomium of Theagenes.

Thus the death of Peregrinus raised for the Cynics an army of admirers whom they could not afford to welcome and an army of detractors whom it was difficult to evade. Above all Peregrinus was a mark for the Church apologists, who made no doubt of his being a perfect Cynic and would not miss the opportunity of exploding the exaggerated claims of the rival sect.

¹⁵ See Norden, *Agnostos Theos* pp. 244-5; E. Peterson, ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ, (Göttingen 1926); R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harmondsworth 1986) pp. 34-5.

Lucian's task is to turn the game against the triumphant adversaries of the movement and to rescue it from its less discerning friends.

A certain familiarity with the apologists is indicated by Lucian's assertion that the Christians honoured the scoundrel as a "new Socrates" (*Peregrinus* 12). Justin (2 *Apol.* 10) and Athenagoras (*Legatio* 8.2) commemorate the Athenian sage as one who died, like a Christian, on a disingenuous charge of atheism and corruption; but the trope is not one that was likely to occur to a pagan author unless he already knew of such claims. Although there is little evidence that Lucian (or for that matter even Celsus) was acquainted with the *Apologies* of Justin, and the works of Athenagoras and Tatian may be later than his treatise on *Peregrinus*,¹⁶ it seems that he has exploited Aristides in one paragraph where he mocks the θαυμαστή σοφία (11) of the Church:

βραχεὶ γάρ, ἀφειδοῦσι πάντων. καὶ δὴ καὶ τῷ Περεργίνῳ πολλὰ τότε ἦκε χρήματα παρ' αὐτῶν ἐπὶ προφάσει τῶν δεσμῶν καὶ πρόσποπον οὐ μικρὰν ταύτην ἐποιήσατο· πεπείκασι γὰρ αὐτοὺς οἱ κακοδαίμονες τὸ μὲν ὄλον ἀθάνατοι ἔσσεσθαι καὶ βιώσεσθαι τὸν αἰὲ χρόνον, παρ' ὃ καὶ καταφρονοῦσι τοῦ θανάτου καὶ ἐκόντες αὐτοὺς ἐπιδιδόασιν οἱ πολλοί· ἔπειτα δὲ ὁ νομοθέτης ὁ πρῶτος ἔπεισεν αὐτούς, ὡς ἀδελφοὶ πάντες εἶεν ἀλλήλων, ἐπειδὴν ἅπαξ παραβάντες θεοὺς μὲν τοὺς Ἑλληνικοὺς ἀπαρνήσωνται, τὸν δὲ ἀνεσκολοπισμένον ἐκεῖνον σοφιστὴν αὐτῶν προσκυνῶσι καὶ κατὰ τοὺς ἐκεῖνου νόμους βιώσι. καταφρονοῦσιν οὖν ἀπάντων ἐξίσης καὶ κοινὰ ἡγοῦνται ἄνευ τινὸς ἀκριβοῦς πίστεως τὰ τοιαῦτα παραδεξάμενοι. ἦν τοίνυν παρέλθῃ τις εἰς αὐτοὺς γόης καὶ τεχνίτης ἄνθρωπος καὶ πράγμασι χρῆσθαι δυνάμενος, αὐτίκα μάλα πλούσιος ἐν βραχεὶ ἐγένετο ιδιώταις ἀνθρώποις ἐγγανῶν.

(*De Morte Peregrini* 13).

The crude θεοὺς . . . ἀπαρνήσωνται is an unsympathetic gloss upon the Christian ἄλλον . . . οὐ σέβονται; Lucian goes on, like Aristides, to derive the passion for martyrdom from the original crucifixion and to declare that it is supported by the hope of eternal life. In his effort to make the pretensions of the apologist recoil upon the Church, he applies to the martyrs the epithet κακοδαίμονες which he fixed upon *Peregrinus* at the beginning of his treatise.

In the chapter already quoted Aristides goes on to protest that the Christians "do not desire the belongings of others" (15.4); the satirist concludes that they

¹⁶ Athenagoras' *Legatio* is dated to 177 A. D. in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, Vol I pp. 204–5, and in Pauly-Wissowa, *RE* II (1895–6) p. 2021. Tatian's *Oratio* ought to belong to the period before his apostasy, even if, as Harnack maintained, it is later than his departure from Rome. The latest possible date for his breach with the Church is 172 A.D. Lucian's *Peregrinus* must, of course, be later than 165. On these questions see Pauly-Wissowa, *RE* IV.A.2 (1932) pp. 2468–9 and *DCB* Vol IV p. 784.

despise all the goods of the world. We look after widows and orphans, says the apologist (15.7); Lucian does not forget them, for they are the dupes who attend Peregrinus in prison (*Peregrinus* 12). This strange race, who, as Aristides avers, do not fornicate, bear false witness, steal or dishonour their fathers and mothers (15.4), are almost created to be the butts of a charlatan who is guilty of all these crimes (*Peregrinus* 9 and 15). After all, it is Aristides who boasts (15.7) that they never turn away strangers, and the dangers of a too credulous hospitality were mentioned in Christian homilies.¹⁷ The Syrian text of Aristides preserves a passage which might be said to tell the story of Peregrinus in miniature:¹⁸

If they know that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs, and if it is possible that he may be delivered, deliver him.

Thus Lucian has found the Christian Church to be vulnerable to the praise of its own apologist; he has turned the phrases of Aristides against his brethren in order to deny them both the glory of their martyrdom and their hopes of a belated share in the properties of God. He does not scruple (*Peregrinus* 13, above) to call the Christians *idiōtai*, a word which was then applied by the philosophers to those whom they regarded as incapable of elevated thought.¹⁹

It need hardly be said that anyone who was known to be a Christian was likely to suffer ridicule and hatred enough from the world. Drawing upon the prejudice of his contemporaries Lucian shows Peregrinus to be (1) a false god, (2) a false martyr, and (3) a false philosopher, waiving the distinctions on which a Christian would have insisted, not through ignorance, but in accordance with the insidious conventions of his art:

1. If Christians pay divine honours to Peregrinus, such credulity is to be expected from men who honour another human being as a god. Lucian (*Peregrinus* 11) juxtaposes two assertions: that the simple brethren honour Peregrinus as a Lawgiver,²⁰ and that Christ himself was no more than a

¹⁷ See *Didache* XI. 1–6.

¹⁸ See Rendell Harris (1949) p. 49. See also *Pap. Lon.* 2486 for ἀδελφοὺς καλοῦσιν αὐτοῦς (1.11) and θεοῦς ἄλλους οὐ προσκυνοῦσιν (1.12).

¹⁹ See E. Schwartz in his commentary on the *Peregrinus* and *Philopseudes* (Paris 1951) p. 96. For the use of the word to designate those ignorant of philosophy see Lucian's *Fugitivi* 21.

²⁰ Schwartz (1951) p. 94 asserts without argument that the Nomothetes of *Peregrinus* 13 is Christ and not St Paul. Contempt for Greek gods was not, however, a tenet that Christ was required to inculcate in Palestine, and all the items in Lucian's indictment can be supported from Paul's letters (*Rom.* 1.23–7; *1 Cor* 10.21; *1 Cor* 2.2; *Philippians* 3.1 etc.). It is unlikely that Lucian knew Paul's writings at first hand, but it is possible that he knew something of the early history of the Church. It remains probable that the application of the word to Peregrinus is intended to raise him ironically to the rank of a Christian Father, if not to that of Christ himself.

“crucified sophist”. It is the practice of a good citizen to respect the gods of others; but Peregrinus belongs, like Christ, to a class of ignoble deities whom no-one will defend.

The statement also accords with Lucian’s principle of making Peregrinus the perfect master in every role that his dishonest ambition chooses to assume. We are constantly reminded that the sophist has taken the imitation of Heracles to an extremity (*Peregrinus* 21, 24, 25, 29 and 33), and when in prison he carries on a voluminous correspondence which, like the letters of Ignatius, is even added to the body of Christian Scripture (12);²¹ naturally, therefore, when he elects to be a leader among the Christians, he is deemed worthy of the honours which are accorded so superstitiously to the Founder.

2. Lucian’s contemporaries were disposed to admire both Heracles and the Brahmins; but most, no doubt, agreed with Epictetus (*Discourses* IV.7.6) in regarding Christian martyrdom as a habit of desperate fortitude, arising, not from constancy of purpose, but from folly and weakness of mind. Lucian notes that they give themselves up too willingly, that their martyrdom is mere suicide, and his governor dismisses Peregrinus when he discerns that he is “one who longs to die” (*Peregrinus* 14). The courage of Peregrinus is therefore founded merely upon the custom and example of bad tutors, and Lucian can take note of the Brahmins (*Peregrinus* 25) only to insinuate the contrast (made much clearer in his *Fugitivi*) between their valiant parting from the world and the inglorious suicide of this modern showman.

So far is Peregrinus from being worthy even of the fanatical reverence of the Christians that he is excommunicated when they find him eating “one of the foods that they consider unclean” (16). The tasting of *eidolothuta* was a sin akin to apostasy, and one for which the heretics were repeatedly denounced by Christian leaders during times of persecution when it seemed unsafe to exercise the indulgence recommended by St Paul.²² Lucian’s suggestion is avowedly a conjecture: his intention is merely to indicate that the sophist was as capable of corrupting the faith of the ignorant as he was of shaming philosophy by his masquerade of virtue.²³

²¹ Lightfoot used this as evidence for his theory that the Christian career of Peregrinus was an embroidered parody of the Acts of Ignatius (*Ignatius and Polycarp*, pp. 344ff.), but modern scholarship has inclined to the opinion of K. von Fritz that the details which impressed Renan and Lightfoot are the stuff of all martyrology, and ought not to be cited to prove the influence of any particular one: see Pauly-Wissowa (1937) pp. 662–3.

²² See Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.26.1–2; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* III.27; Frend, “The Gnostic Sects and the Roman Empire” in *JEH* 5 (1954) pp. 25–37.

²³ Bagnani (1955) p. 111 suggests that Peregrinus was an Ebionite who was expelled for practising dietary restrictions that the Church did not acknowledge. This assumes, however, that there were proselytising Ebionites of whom the Fathers knew nothing, and that Peregrinus voluntarily joined himself to one of the few communities which expelled men even for private

3. The charlatans in the *Fugitivi* are characterised as μαθηταὶ καὶ ὀμιληταὶ καὶ θιασῶται; Peregrinus rises among the Christians to the rank of προφήτης καὶ θιασάρχης καὶ συναγωγεὺς (*Peregrinus* 11). The vocabulary is deliberately promiscuous in both cases, since the aspiration is not to master any particular discipline but to win whatever name may chance to fall from the lips of the world. Lucian evinces no propensity to confuse the Church with other private cults: the joke is that one cult was like another to the ambition of Peregrinus, that he consummated his role as a false philosopher by achieving the highest dignities in a Church that was wholly ignorant of the true state of his soul.²⁴

Philosophy is a blessing to society, while the charlatan is a mere parasite, whom the true devotee of wisdom will not care to entertain. The governor of Syria is represented as a man with a bent for philosophy (*Peregrinus* 14): the description does not serve to identify him, but assigns familiar roles to both the magistrate and his charge. Denuded of all pretensions, failing even to extort the crown of martyrdom from his accusers, Peregrinus stands before the appointed representative of educated Rome. The reader knew what would pass between this Christian and the governor, the rigmarole of extravagant hopes and squandered erudition which so many officials had been compelled to hear and some had been foolish enough to chastise. Peregrinus can only be an object of contempt to the true philosopher who will no more indulge his hopes of becoming a martyr than he will fall in with the cant that makes him a god.²⁵

*

The Christians mocked Peregrinus as a false god, berated him as a true Cynic and treated his martyrdom, now as a useless pantomime, now as a act of courage that was badly directed and easily excelled. Lucian treats the followers of Christ as counterfeit Cynics and Peregrinus as their most illustrious model.

proselytising. Meals of Hecate (see Schwartz (1951) p. 98) were considered abominable by other than Christian observers, and Lucian speaks of them openly elsewhere (e.g. *Dialogi Mortuorum* 1.1). However, *Cataplous* 7 indicates that he was prepared to treat the consumption of detestable food as a mark of the bad Cynic.

²⁴ For another instance of wilful failure to discriminate between Christians and Bacchanals see Pliny's Letter to Trajan, where the language of Livy justifies a severity not warranted by the governor's own findings: see further R. M. Grant, "Pliny and the Christians" in *HTR* 41 (1948) pp. 273–4.

²⁵ Bagnani (1955) p. 110 attempts to find suppressed truth behind this narrative, arguing that if the charge were Christianity alone, the proceedings were by *delatio*, not *cognitio*, and the governor had no right to dismiss the prisoner. But in fact the "usual penalties" were not mandatory, and in spite of Trajan's rescript trials were sometimes by *cognitio*: see G. De Ste Croix, "Why were the Early Christians Persecuted?" in *Past and Present* 26 (1963) p. 15. Bagnani's argument throughout his article forgets that Lucian is a satirist, and postulates ignorance even when there is nothing to explain.

It is curious to note that he makes his hero vulnerable to strictures which were passed both by himself and by Aristides on the gods of the pagan world. Zeus, exclaims the satirist (*De Sacrificiis* 5), was a veritable Proteus, assuming all manner of bestial forms in order to accomplish the most bestial forms of crime. Your gods, says Aristides, are all adulterers and profligates, and Zeus is among the worst: "How then can a god be an adulterer, a paederast or the murderer of his own father?" (6.9). These are the first three roles that Lucian assigns (*Peregrinus* 9), without either commentary of his own or any external testimony, to the man whom he is later to treat with ridicule as a self-appointed god. The satire is thus embellished with the invectives of a traditional controversy: Lucian exposes the pretensions of the charlatan by either inventing or giving unusual prominence to his escapades as a Christian, and prefaces his career with a Churchman's caricature of pagan immorality, the better to disparage both the deceiver and the credulous hospitality of the deceived.

Xenophanes Christianus?

HISTORIES OF PHILOSOPHY typically include chapters on the period 'from Thales to Plato' which obscure the fact that Plato's writings are the earliest extant in Greek philosophy. Most of our information about his predecessors dates from the Roman Empire, and is apt to receive the most uncritical treatment in such histories. At times the sources paraphrase, at other times they quote, but even then not with sufficient notice of the context to permit the redressing of error or prejudice in their interpretations. Philosophers quote their predecessors to illustrate the antiquity of their own opinions or, if the predecessor is unfriendly, to dispel the authority of his august name with such instruments as rhetoric can procure. If some readers were content with obloquy and ridicule, there were others whom citation, even if partial and unseasonable, was more likely to persuade.

When Christians take up an ancient author, they know that a Christian audience will suspect him, while a pagan will applaud.¹ In the first case, the purpose is to reveal to other Christians that an unbaptized philosopher is at the root of some prevailing heresy; in the second, pagans are required to learn that what they most abhor in Christianity was anticipated by the best of the Greeks.² The latter case is attested by citations of the sixth-century B.C. Xenophanes of Colophon in the *Stromateis* of the late second-century apologist Clement of Alexandria. I shall argue here that although these quotations serve their purpose,

¹ See J. P. Hershbell, "Hippolytus' *Elenchus* as a Source for Empedocles Reconsidered," *Phronesis* 18 (1973) 97-114, 187-203; C. Osbourne, *Rethinking Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge 1987). For appraisals of pagan doxography cf. e.g. J. P. Hershbell, "Plutarch as a Source for Empedokles, Re-examined," *AJP* 92 (1971) 156-84; G. E. L. Owen, "Philosophical Invective," *OxStAncPhil* 1 (1983) 1-26.

² On the character of Alexandrian Christianity see S. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria* (Oxford 1971); on the aims and resources of the apologists see J. Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, tr. J. A. Baker (London 1975).

they are unlikely to be genuine. The case rests first on the records of Xenophanes in the least impeachable sources, then on inquiry into the consistency of Clement's citations with these findings, and finally on the doubtful contexts of these testimonies.³

I

If Xenophanes can be shown to have believed anything, it was that gods are in all respects superior to men. Even to talk of gods would seem to be only a concession to the idiom of contemporaries, for, although Xenophanes can allude to 'gods' who have hidden certain things from human speculation (B18; cf. B34.2), the doxographies of pagans, such as Aristotle, Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, Sextus Empiricus, and Plutarch, make him monolatrous and in some sense pantheistic.⁴ "He sees, he thinks, he hears as a whole," according to a line preserved by Sextus (B 24; cf. D.L. 9.19=A19); gazing at the firmament with a sublime intuition of unity, says Aristotle, Xenophanes declared that "the All is God" (*Metaph.* 986b=A19).

Among his remains is a statement that God shakes all things by the *phren* of his *nous* (B 25): ἀλλ' ἀπάνευθε πόνοιο νόου φρενὶ πάντα κραδαίνει. This motion is like that caused by the nod of Zeus in the *Iliad*, for, while the minds of gods and men in Homer are also instruments of feeling, that of Zeus is set apart by its power to give immediate execution to his will.⁵ Even if, as Darcus holds, the *phren* stands for the effective operation of the intellect, while the *nous* is its cognitive faculty,⁶

³ The fragments of Xenophanes will be cited from Diels-Kranz, *Vorsokr.*⁶ I (Berlin 1951). This text is employed with little apparatus by M. Untersteiner, *Senofane, Testimonianze e frammenti* (Florence 1956).

⁴ On the conventionality of the plural form see e.g. Guthrie, *Hist. Gk. Phil.* I (Cambridge 1962) 375f. Most uses simply take up words of others (e.g. in epic or festivals), and where this is not obviously the case (as in B18), we do not know whether the poet wrote *in propria persona*. The evidence of the doxographers is unanimously in favor of one god.

⁵ See K. Reinhardt, *Parmenides und die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie* (Bonn 1916) 112ff; J. Warden, "The Mind of Zeus," *JHistIdeas* 32 (1971) 3-14. G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, rev. M. Schofield (Cambridge 1983) 170f, declare that Xenophanes alludes to Homer only by negation, but this seems to me too strong. His monotheism is rather, as they also say, a "bold development" of the old belief.

⁶ S. M. Darcus, "The *Phren* of the *Nous* in Xenophanes' God," *SymbOslo* 83 (1978) 25-39.

Xenophanes' notion of the deity is clearly a refinement of the epic one; nevertheless, he is at some pains to say that Zeus is not this deity. For to Zeus and the other gods Homer and Hesiod had imputed every kind of vice and injury, which could not be predicated of a god (B 11):

πάντα θεοῖς ἀνέθηκαν Ὀμηρός θ' Ἡσίοδος τε,
ὅσσα παρ' ἀνθρώποισιν ὀνείδεα καὶ νόγος ἐστίν,
κλέπτειν μοιχεύειν τε καὶ ἀλλήλους ἀπατεύειν.

The story that Xenophanes was a rhapsode need not, even if it were verified, be inconsistent with his criticisms.⁷ The ancient notices of Xenophanes and the invention of allegory by his contemporary Theagenes of Rhegium both suggest that such protests were incipient in this period, since all known allegorical writing proposes or implies the defence of myth.⁸ Thus, so far, the poet of Colophon believed in only one god, who surpassed the epic Zeus in power and did not share his faults.

II

With this pagan evidence the Christian sorts well, yet not so perfectly as modern scholars often imply. The following citations are consecutively attributed to Xenophanes in Clement, *Strom.* 5.109.1 (=B23, 14):⁹

(1) εἷς θεὸς ἔν τε θεοῖς καὶ ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστος,
οὔτι δέμας θνητοῖσιν ὁμοῖος οὐδὲ νόημα.

(2) ἀλλ' οἱ βροτοὶ δοκέουσι γεννᾶσθαι θεοὺς
τὴν σφετέρην δ' ἐσθῆτα ἔχειν φωνήν τε δέμας τε.

Eusebius (*Praep. Evang.* 13.13.36) attempted to turn the first line, an iambic trimeter, into an hexameter without success.¹⁰

⁷ D.L. 9.18=A19; R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship I* (Oxford 1968) 8f.

⁸ On Theagenes see Pfeiffer (*supra* n.7); for recent bibliography see H. Schibli, *Pherekydes of Syros* (Oxford 1990) 99 n.54.

⁹ Text from the edition by O. Staehlin, *Clemens Alexandrinus* (Berlin 1960) II 399f.

¹⁰ Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 13.13.36: ἀλλὰ βροτοὶ δοκέουσι θεοὺς γεννᾶσθαι, which Bergk supplements with ὁμοίως.

Bergk did better, but as the trimeter also appears in Theodoret's *Curatio* (3.72), it evidently stood in Clement's text. Diels-Kranz and Staehlin, in editing Clement, therefore ignored the emendation.

- (3) ἄλλ' εἴ τοι χεῖρας γ' εἶχον βόες ἢ ἐλέοντες
 ἢ γράψαι χεῖρεσσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἄπερ ἄνδρες,
 ἵπποι μὲν θ' ἵπποισι βόες δέ τε βουσὶν ὁμοίας
 καὶ (κε) θεῶν ιδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ' ἐποίουν
 τοιαῦθ' οἷον περ καὶ τοὶ δέμας εἶχον.

Staehlin's version (*Strom.* 5.109.3=B 15), reproduced here, includes the particle γε in the first line. Eusebius offers a somewhat different reading, for which various emendations (perhaps unnecessary) have been suggested.¹¹

At *Strom.* 7.22 Clement paraphrases an otherwise unknown couplet¹² stating that men of different races and different features are always apt to make their deities like themselves. The Christian apologist can thus infer an attack upon idolatry, but the portion of the text that is most clearly a quotation does not refer to painting, and what use Xenophanes made of his observation remains uncertain.

Clement is the first to cite these testimonies but omits those preserved by others. Among the traits peculiar to this little Christian library three arouse doubt of its origin in the archaic period:

(1) It is difficult to imagine how the first line of fragment 2 (above) could have become an iambic trimeter by accident, yet

¹¹ *Praep. Evang.* 13.13.36: ἄλλ' εἰ χεῖρας ἔχον βόες, ἢ ἐλέοντες. This will pass as a fragment of a hexameter, though Diels-Kranz, assuming that the beginning of the quotation is the beginning of a line, write ἄλλ' εἰ χεῖρας ἔχον βόες <ἵπποι τ'> ἢ ἐλέοντες, in which they have been followed by numerous scholars.

¹² The original wording is: τὰς μορφὰς αὐτῶν ὁμοίας ἑαυτοῖς ἕκαστοι διασχωραφοῦσιν, ὡς φησὶν ὁ Ξ. Αἰθίοπες τε μέλανας σιμούς τε Θρηκίκες τε πυρροὺς καὶ γλαυκοὺς. Diels-Kranz, Untersteiner, and others have Xenophanes say:

Αἰθίοπες τε (θεοὺς σφετέρους) σιμούς μέλανας τε
 Θρηκίκες τε γλαυκοὺς καὶ πυρροὺς (φασὶ πέλεσθαι).

Aristotle's observation that men make the gods resemble themselves in manner as in feature (*Pol.* 1252b25ff) need not depend upon Xenophanes, whom he does not name.

if these lines are by Xenophanes, it cannot have been one in origin. Xenophanes' fragments are all in elegiacs or in uniform hexameters; and even if he, like Solon and Archilochus, wrote iambics, no poet of this age or any other uses alternating trimeters and hexameters as a regular form of verse.¹³

(2) The locution εἷς θεός is otherwise unattested in Xenophanes or in any other of the most ancient Greek philosophers, and, to judge by his other doxographers, Xenophanes was not so partial to εἷς as to ἕν.¹⁴ He would appear to have employed the definite article to denote the God who was both One and All.¹⁵ If it is indeed ancient, this is perhaps the only use of εἷς to indicate, not absolute singularity, but only superiority to other beings in a numerous class. It would also contradict the philosopher's axiom, which more than one authority ascribes to him, that no god can be subject to the power of any other; for such a principle makes it inconceivable that one among the gods should rule the rest.¹⁶

(3) The word δέμας, though attested only here in the remains of this philosopher, occurs on all three occasions when his words are quoted in meter. The intent is to proscribe the use of images, a practice that philosophers of the archaic and classical periods were not accustomed to condemn, although they can hardly have applauded it. Heraclitus scorned the mysteries, and was followed by both Plato (e.g. *Rep.* 364C–65A) and the Derveni commentator;¹⁷ Plato, as indignant as Xenophanes to hear of Homeric gods whose passions led them into adultery, mendacity, and murder (e.g. *Euthphr.* 6B–C), does not single out

¹³ The attested works of Xenophanes include his *Silloi* and *On Nature*: see Kirk and Raven (*supra* n.5) 166f. Diogenes Laertius (9.18) attributes to him epic, elegiac, and iambic compositions.

¹⁴ A30 (=Arist. *Met.* 986b), 31 (=Simpl. in *Phys.* 22.22), 34 (=Cic. *Acad.* 2.118), 35 (=Timon fr.59), 36 (=Theodoret, *Curatio* 4.8). Both εἷς and ἕν appear frequently in the *De Xenophane, Melisso et Gorgia* (hereafter '*De XMG*'), but this is agreed by all to be too late and too tendentious to be a source of ipsissima verba. W. Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford 1947) 52, notes that this tract demonstrates the existence of one Being, not one God. In view of what is argued here, we cannot rely on A33=Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 1.14.

¹⁵ Frequent in *De XMG*; see also Arist. *Met.* 986b; Timon fr.60.

¹⁶ *De XMG* 977a24–32; A31 (=Simpl. in *Phys.* 22.22), 32 (=Plutarch *ap.* Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 1.8.4). For an attempt to make a formal argument of these asseverations see J. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers* I (Oxford 1979) 86–89.

¹⁷ See Heraclitus B5 D.–K.; *P.Derv.* col. xvi, as in the appendix to *ZPE* 47 (1982).

the plastic representations of divinities as a fraud proving the blindness of the artist, and it seems that no one in the archaic and classical periods denounced the civic images because they claimed to depict the physiognomy of gods.

Heraclitus can indeed be cited on the insanity of addressing prayers to images, but it is uncertain whether the anthropomorphic character of these images was important to his argument.¹⁸ Epicureans later opined that the proper features of the gods appeared in images, but endorsed no cult of either. In the strictures confirmed as authentic, the acts, not the visual representations of the gods, engage Xenophanes; and Homer never describes Zeus' face, only his nod, ambrosial locks, thunderbolt, and declamations.

III

These considerations induce a suspicion only intensified by a study of Clement's source. A long inventory of passages ascribed to other philosophers and dramatists testifying to the unity of the godhead follows the citations from Xenophanes peculiar to Clement. Many of these also occur in the *De Monarchia* once assigned to Justin,¹⁹ and thus the conclusion is that both witnesses used a Christian or Jewish florilegium. Such collections are regularly posited when the same citations from ancient texts occur in a number of authors of only moderate learning;²⁰ this one must have been copied under indifferent supervision, since couplets of one testimony in Clement will belong to another in the *De Monarchia*, and in a sequence of quotations of the same passages from New Comedy scarcely one is attributed to the same hand. Some could not be attributed with confidence to any classical author: the homiletic fustian laid at the door of Aeschylus and Sophocles is as spurious as the songs that a pure and monotheistic audience is made to intone to the Deity in these and other apologetic texts.²¹

¹⁸ E. Bevan's citation of Heraclitus B5 D.-K. in *Holy Images* (London 1940) 65 therefore seems incautious.

¹⁹ Text edited by C. Otto, *S. Justini Opera Addubitata* (Jena 1879) 126-58; *De Monarchia* 104b-09c corresponds to Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.119.2-126.1.

²⁰ See H. Chadwick, "Florilegium," *RAC* 7 (1969) 1144f.

²¹ *De Monarchia* 104e-105b (=Kern, *Orph. fr.* no. 245), 104af (= [Aesch.] fr.464 Nauck), 104cf (= [Soph.] fr.1025 Nauck). On the citation attributed to Euripides see now C. Riedweg, "TG rF 2.624—A Euripidean Fragment," *CQ* n.s. 40 (1990) 124-36.

A similar collection is employed in the *Cohortatio ad Gentiles*, also falsely attributed to Justin.²² Many Jewish or Christian impostures were clad with the name of Orpheus, and that of the Sybil covered even more than the fourteen books that now survive.²³ In these fraudulent lucubrations the traits noted above as untypical of Xenophanes and his period can be illustrated, even to excess:

(1) The trimeter was one of the tools most frequently employed in Christian forgery, since tragedy and comedy were among the most freely imitated models. Hexameter, on the other hand, was the staple of Sibylline and Orphic poetry, and had been the only meter permitted to philosophers (*i.e.*, Parmenides, Empedocles, and Lucretius).²⁴ A forger with little skill in composition might have aimed to write hexameters, yet would be obliged to let trimeters stand in place of the line that his abilities did not equip him to construct.

(2) The formula εἰς θεός was the cornerstone of many Christian and Jewish fabrications of late antiquity:²⁵

- (a) εἰς ταῖς ἀληθείαισιν, εἰς ἐστὶν θεός
- (b) εἰς ἐστ' αὐτογενής, ἐνὸς ἔκγονα πάντα τέτυκται
- (c) εἴ τις ἐρεῖ θεός εἰμι πάρεξ ἐνός οὐτος ὀφείλει
κόσμον ἴσον τούτῳ στήσας εἰπεῖν Ἐμὸς οὐτος.

All these specimens differ from fr.1 above in declining to allow the existence of another deity. The florilegium was, however, prepared to admit such genuine examples of Greek piety as a passage from the *Ion* of Euripides, commending sincere devotion to “the gods” (452ff *ap. De Monarchia* 108bf), and Clement transcribes a passage in which Orpheus pays his

²² Text in Otto (*supra* n.19) 18–127 at 15c–18d (=chapters 15–19).

²³ See the editions by J. H. F. Friedlieb (Leipzig 1852) and C. Alexandre (Paris 1841) with commentary (Paris 1856); for translation and commentary, R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament II: Pseudepigrapha* (Oxford 1913), remains the most informative. On the composition of the Sibylline Oracles see now D. Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1990) 94–140.

²⁴ Xenophanes is the exception, if indeed his elegiac fragments can be called philosophical.

²⁵ For the following see *De Monarchia* 104c (=Cohortatio 18a=Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.113.1=[Soph.] fr. 1025 Nauck), 105a (=Cohortatio 15d=Orph. fr. 245.8), 105c. I cite only texts appearing in the common florilegium; examples from the *Sibyllina* are barely numerable.

devoirs to "the greatest of the gods," who causes earth and heaven to tremble (*Strom.* 5.125.1=*Orphica fr.* 248.3 Kern). When Moses speaks at Exodus 7.1 of his being made a god to the Pharaoh, Philo remarks that the sacred Word is not so superstitious as to withhold from man a title that was not, in any case, a true appellation of the Deity; and even in the Old Testament a celebrated psalm (82.1, 6) described a parliament of the *elohim* in which Yahweh was supreme.

In the Roman era it would have been thought legitimate to speak of God as single, yet conceive him as one of many. As seen from the acclamations showered upon the hero of Lucian's *Death of Peregrinus*, to style a man 'the one' of his kind might signify that he possessed a certain property, not uniquely, but in an unusual measure.²⁶ The One God and the many, as we have seen, appear to have been alternative formulations in Xenophanes; but in a later period, the formula εἷς θεός would allow a man to retain belief in many gods, while asserting the supremacy of one.

(3) The attacks on the use of images came from all quarters during the Roman Empire, when Dio of Prusa, Maximus of Tyre, and Philostratus were all required to devise new arguments in its defence.²⁷ As the chief concern here is with forgeries, the sarcasms of Christians and Jews (not the sole accusers) may be illustrated from Orpheus and the Sibyl:

θητοὶ δὲ πολλοὶ καρδίαν πλανώμενοι
 ἰδρυσάμεσθα πημάτων παραψυχᾶς
 (*De Monarchia* 104c=[Soph.] fr.1025 Nauck).

ἔργα δὲ χειροποίητα γεραίρομεν ἄφρονι θυμῷ
 εἶδωλα ξοάνων τε καταφθιμένων ἀνθρώπων
 (*Sibyllina, Proem.* 1.6=*Cohortatio* 16e).

Such examples are indeed superfluous, for what Jew or Christian did not think it his duty to declaim against idolatry?

²⁶ See the commentary of E. Schwartz (Paris 1951) 97f on *Peregrinus* 15; E. Peterson, *EIS ΘΕΟΣ* (Göttingen 1926).

²⁷ Dio Chrys. *Or.* 12; Max. Tyr. *Philosophumena* 2 (Hobein); Philostr. *VA* 6.19. The reference to Phidias in these discussions is not proof of their antiquity; the absence of a common argument, however, may suggest that they are new.

The works of the apologists might be opened at any page for corroboration of this charge, always the first leveled, whether in ignorance or with disingenuous scholarship, against the pagan culture of their own or a previous day.

An objection to the theory of Christian provenance might be founded on a certain interpretation of fr.1, according to which God is unlike man in intellect and body. Darcus infers that since he has an intellect, though unlike man's, he will also have a body of his own.²⁸ Would not a Christian forger (or a Jew) have been at pains to make it obvious that God does not have a shape of any kind?

The objection can be met by one or a combination of four replies: (1) the resources of the forger would be too limited to allow so close a reading of his verses; (2) not to possess a body is one way in which a being may be unlike humans 'in respect of body'; (3) not all Christians held that God is strictly incorporeal, though all agreed that any body assigned to him would be more refined than ours;²⁹ (4) at least one Orphic fragment, known to be a forgery, asserts that the body of God enfolds the world.³⁰

IV

Thus Christian fabricators of such testimony used all the unusual traits of Clement's testimonies from Xenophanes. It is plausible to conclude that, if Clement differs from other sources on Xenophanes, it is because he is not a true source. As the first Greek, or at least the first known Greek, to have denied that a god partakes of vice or weakness, Xenophanes could not evade the hospitality of Christian handbooks. This new society forced him to renounce his archaic manners: trimeter and hexameter took the place of elegiacs, new tropes and new vocabulary supported a novel quarrel with the idols,

²⁸ Darcus (*supra* n.6) 26; cf. Guthrie (*supra* n.4) 376f, who adduces texts indicating that the body of the Deity would be spherical. There is, as I show, no reason to dispute the authenticity of these testimonies, but exact quotations are wanting.

²⁹ On Tert. *De carne Christi* 11 etc. see J. Daniélou, *The Origins of Latin Christianity*, tr. J. A. Baker (London 1977) 214-23.

³⁰ Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 13.12, citing Aristobulus; cf. *Cohortatio* 18.

and to the one God of theism were addressed the acclamations that his Presocratic verses had bestowed upon the All.

VI

Pagan and Christian Monotheism in the Age of Constantine

Among the chapters in this volume, the present one is unusual in that its subject is a decisive moment, not a smooth continuum of change. That moment was the reign of Constantine, who advanced his own religion by the suppression of idolatry and the multiplication of written documents. It might be said in general that the history of early Christianity is a story of words and images—one subject rather than two, perhaps, if Plato is right to say that words are images of meaning. Plato also said that words are seeds,¹ and I shall argue here that this spermatik metaphor enabled a Christian sovereign to tolerate many religions in his Empire while he aimed at the final victory of one. Finally, he warned us that when words begin to germinate they lose their truth as images, and this I believe to have been the fate of ‘monotheism’ in recent scholarship. A monotheist, as we apply that term to Muslims, Jews, and Christians, is one who believes in a single god, or supramundane being, who governs the world omnipotently and either without an instrument or with those of his own creation. I shall argue in the first part of this chapter² that there was no such thing as pagan monotheism in the Roman Empire, even where the pagan was, like Porphyry, a monist in a certain sense and in every sense a theist. In the second part, where I follow the coalescence of autocracy and monotheism in Constantinian government, I am entering land that has been well charted already by Garth Fowden;³ I hope to show more

¹ I allude of course to *Phaedrus* 275–6, a seminal text for modern interpretation both of Plato and of the purpose of philosophy. The application of the same terms to Christ, with scriptural warrant, in the New Testament (Gal. 4: 16, Col. 1: 15) is one instance of a recurrent homonymity that, when taken for synonymity, tempts Christians to make a saint of Iato and others to make a Platonist of Paul.

² Responding to arguments in Athanassiadi and Frede.

³ Fowden (1993).

clearly, however, what was entailed by the worship of a single God who also has a Son.

I

The authors cited in the present chapter agreed on little, but on one point, I suspect, they would have been of a single mind. They would all have declined to make peace on the terms proposed by Michael Frede in an article on Origen's *Contra Celsum*, which may be taken as a foreword to his subsequent study of pagan monotheism.⁴

Christian doctrine, as it came to be articulated, at least at first sight, looks very much like a form of Platonism, as it was understood in late antiquity... [T]he issue here is not of monotheism versus polytheism. For Platonists such as Celsus were monotheistic in that they believed in one ultimate divine principle.

He goes on to suggest that Platonists could have reconciled themselves to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, were it not for the Incarnation and the obstinate refusal of Jews and Christians to concede that the 'ultimate principle' of pagans was as single as their own. Yet the doctrine of God's becoming man is not, as I shall try to show, a causal increment to Christian theism, but the heart of it, and indeed it is the doctrine which entails that Christianity is essentially theistic, as philosophies seldom were. Even if they had been, that would not have put an end to controversy. Frede is no doubt correct to say that monotheism was not the issue, if only because Antiquity did not possess the word. A term of classification, not devotion, it is serviceable to the student of comparative religion, but useless to the enthusiast who believes that no religion stands comparison with his own. The Christian evangelist preached not monotheism, but God; if others too adored a single deity, that did not mean that their god was the same as his. Similarly, the Church proclaimed not trinitarianism, but the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was not disposed to agree with the modern pluralist for whom any two faiths are congruent if they posit a threefold order in the transcendent source of being.

⁴ Frede (1997) 220.

In a subsequent article,⁵ Frede contends that Platonists were monotheists in so far as they traced all things to a single origin, and because they held that providence and creation were the work of one benevolent overseer. The ease with which he passes from one definition of deity to another hides a profound equivocation. Nothing in logic, nothing in the history of ancient thought, compels us to suppose that the Creator and the first principle are identical; indeed the two appear to be distinguished in the cosmogony of Plato's seminal dialogue, the *Timaeus*. It is true that later commentators often conflate the Demiurge with the Forms that he contemplates; but it is also true, as Frede notes, that Neoplatonism desiderates a third principle, superior to both and beyond the grasp of thought or speech. I doubt whether Frede, even if it were his custom to do so, could supply any evidence to justify his assertion that the Second hypostasis of Plotinus, generally called the intellect or *Nous*, is merely an aspect of the First, which he habitually styled the One or the Good. It remains a fact that, while the First and Second in Plotinus—and even a Third in some of his precursors—were entitled to the appellation *theos*, each of these, unlike the transcendent being who was worshipped as Creator and Lord by Christians, was more accurately denoted by another name than 'God'.

Other classicists too adduce the doctrine of the Trinity as a proof that Christianity could accommodate polytheism; the acumen of the greatest Christian writers in the fourth century was devoted to showing that this was not so. Before the political triumph of the Church, the triune nature of God was not so frequently proclaimed by Christian preachers as his unity. When the apologists dwelt upon the Trinity, it was either to defend themselves from a charge of tritheism or to find a specious analogy with some philosophic doctrine that would furnish an additional confirmation of the faith. Nowhere is the Trinity confessed with the provocative repetition that accompanied their statements on the unity of God. These frequently commenced with an attack upon idolatry, and we, who are so familiar with the coupling of the First and Second Commandments, fail to notice that the conjunction of these arguments is far from being a logical necessity. It was possible, with Porphyry and Maximus of Tyre, to defend the use of cultic images

⁵ Frede (1999a).

while professing the worship of a single deity; and equally it was possible to join Lucian in scoffing at the idols without adopting any religious view at all. Two illustrious pagans were reported to have combined their monotheism with a denunciation of images; but Xenophanes, even if everything ascribed to him is genuine, lies well outside our period, and we owe our only account of Apollonius of Tyana to Philostratus, who can hardly have been untouched by Christianity. Plotinus was perhaps the first professional philosopher whose theology forbade him to engage in public cults (Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 10.35).

Even to credit Plotinus with a theology is misleading, if it tempts us to shift the language of religion from the periphery to the centre of his thought. As a loyal expositor of Plato, he could not espouse the popular style of Apuleius, Maximus, and Plutarch, who employ the title *theos* as the proper name of the highest principle. Neither the Good in Plato's dialogues nor the One in his unwritten doctrines was identified with the world-creating *theos* of his *Timaeus*. In the *Enneads* of Plotinus, the One is sometimes *theos*, but less often than the demiurgic Mind.⁶ On the rare occasions when the term is applied to soul, the third member of his triad, 'divine' would be the most adequate translation; and thus, if we insist on speaking of a Plotinian trinity, we cannot say that his Trinity is God. And since, for different reasons, we cannot predicate unity of either the One or Mind,⁷ we can sometimes say that the One is God, but never that God is one. Finally, whatever we described as God, we could not make Plotinus honour it in the way that common piety would prescribe for such a figure: there is no room in his system for cultic offerings, public hymns or private prayers.

For Christians the name of God could never be adjectival. The personal designation, while not adequate to his nature, was peculiarly his, and therefore prior to any such attributes as unity and goodness, which he imparts in some degree to all his creatures. Our own existence being dependent on his will and favour, should

⁶ Rist (1962) suggests that there is an incipient distinction between *ho theos* and *theos*, corresponding to that between Father as *autotheos* and Son as *theos* in some Christian interpreters of John 1: 1. He is, however, far more aware than Frede of the gulf between the two religious views.

⁷ That is, (a) we cannot strictly predicate anything, even unity, of the One, and (b) Mind is not a perfect unity, but one-many.

evoke gratitude; there is no belief without worship, no worship due to anyone but God. The divinity of the Spirit, though not defined until the fourth century, can therefore be inferred from the doxology and baptismal invocation of the apostolic church, in which he shares the incommunicable prerogative of the Father. Speculating later and without the help of liturgy, Plotinus could have done no more than influence the interpretation of the Christian doctrine; even this seems improbable in the light of modern study. The Father bears some likeness to the One, in that they are both incomprehensible; the Son, as the Word and Wisdom of the Father, resembles Mind; but we cannot equate the soul, which is common to all humanity, with the Spirit, who in Irenaeus, Origen, and Tertullian, confines his saving action to the Christian elect. These authors never argued that there were three gods in the Trinity. Those who affirmed that Christ was God insisted that they were using the term univocally, and yet that there was only one divine being. Only in the Old Testament was there talk of a plurality of gods, and then the usage was construed quite differently, as reference to angels, who as creatures of the one true God were entitled to a certain honour, but not the same degree of veneration. Celsus averred that Christians had transgressed this rule by letting Christ enjoy the worship due to the foremost god; but such a charge assumes the polytheism which all speculation on Christ and on the Trinity was labouring to exclude. I say 'on Christ' as well as 'on the Trinity', because Frede's sketch of a common Trinitarianism not only obscures the different names and functions of the elements in each triad, but ignores the Christian claim that the Second Person of their own became a man. This is not such a trifle as many Classicists imagine, for without the Incarnation there would have been no Christian doctrine of the Trinity, while with the Incarnation there was no possibility of coming to terms with either Greeks or Jews. This truth was clearly seen by Paul and recognized once again by Athanasius when he addressed himself to the Platonists in defence of this one point. For Augustine the humanity of Christ was the one great truth that evaded Platonists a full three centuries after the proclamation of the Gospel, and the complementary worship of the man Jesus was regarded by our earliest pagan witnesses as the heart of Christian piety. Thus Lucian scoffs at the sect of the 'crucified sophist', while Pliny, who reports that they sang hymns to Christ 'as though

to a god', obliged them to cement their recantations with a curse upon his name.⁸

It was this, the cult of a divine man, that forced Christians into conflict with the ambient society. As Jews they could have tolerated Gentiles; as Gentile monotheists they could have tolerated idols. The latter course, however, was not possible for those who held that god himself had chosen to be represented under a living form. Nor was it now possible to reconcile the one God with the many by supposing that he delegated tasks to lesser deities. The Septuagint declares that God distributed the nations among his angels, while in Plato it is the acolytes of the Demiurge who allot rewards and punishments to the soul.⁹ If the God of Judaism is nevertheless more personal than his ministers, Christians went further and alleged that the Incarnation has made everything subservient to man.

This is another consequence that was better understood by ancient than by modern pagans. Celsus asks how Christians can imagine that the world was made for humanity and not also for the beasts. Origen responds with an argument that might have been employed by Stoics disputing with the Platonists (*Contra Celsum* 4.40 etc.), but here he seems for once to have lost sight of the primitive doctrine. Almost any Greek would have agreed that human beings are closer to God than any animal because of our capacity for reason: the Stoics declared that everyone participates in reason or the *logos*, the Platonists that everyone has a particle of divinity, a daemon, as his intellectual soul. Paul and Irenaeus, on the other hand, asserted that the image of God is in us only partially and proleptically, to be made complete by fellowship with Christ.¹⁰

Even in the mid-third century, therefore, Christianity and Platonism were easily distinguished. God in Christianity is a personal name, in Platonism an epithet of varying application. One maintained that God had become a man, the other that every human is potentially divine. One seems to have leapt with a single bound from the Incarnation to the Trinity; the other took centuries to deduce a triad from the premises of ontology. One saw nothing but blasphemy in images, the other assumed that images and worship

⁸ Pliny, *Letters* 96.7; Lucian, *Peregrinus* 13.

⁹ See Deuteronomy 32: 8 in the Greek, with the admonitions of 32: 16-17.

¹⁰ 1 Cor 15: 45; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1.

were inseparable, though a true proficient might dispense with both. Hence it was that the Christian was a discontented stranger in the Empire where the Platonist enjoyed at least a temporary home.

II

Neither Christians nor their pagan critics were inclined to understate their differences. It is true that Christian martyrs seem to have practised some reserve before the magistrates, proclaiming only the unity of God and the profanity of idols; but if this simple compound of philosophy and Judaism had been their only crime, they would indeed have died for nothing. As we have seen, our leading pagan witnesses in the second century knew that the Galileans died for Christ. Had it been otherwise, the sneers of Lucian would have carried no more venom than his ridicule of other Greek philosophers, and the irony of Celsus would prove only that a Platonist saw Christians, like Stoics or Epicureans, as proper objects of polemic. The attack on Christianity by philosophers is of a special kind: for once, it seems to aim at the extinction of its target, yet entails at least a provisional recognition of Christianity as philosophy—a courtesy not extended by all writers of this epoch to the Jews. Celsus knew well enough that his adversaries were a race apart, and introduced a Jewish mouthpiece to upbraid them for their apostasy. Having read the Gospels carefully, he denounces Christ as a charlatan who exhibits human weakness while pretending to be a god. He avers that Christianity makes bad citizens, and asks why God cannot control the world through his subordinates, as a king will rule his empire through his governors. The tenor of his remarks is clear enough when we reflect that he and Lucian were both writing (perhaps in concert) in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and within ten years of the outbreak that produced a host of martyrs in Lyons. Both local and imperial assaults in the second century were sporadic, but in the third attempts were made by the emperors to root out Christianity. In this new climate, fifteen books were written against the Christians by Plotinus' student, Porphyry of Tyre.¹¹ The evidence that he

¹¹ The figure of 15 is given by a late lexicon, the *Suda*, though some scholars have proposed that the tripartite work, *Philosophy from oracles*, is either identical

wrote under Diocletian, though still not universally accepted, seems stronger than any argument for a date around 270. For one thing, the latter theory rests primarily on a false inference from Eusebius; for another we can only think of Porphyry and Hierocles when Lactantius censures two illustrious writers for inflaming the tribulation of 303.¹² Even if the earlier date is sound, it suggests that Porphyry was the mouthpiece of Aurelian, who died before he could add his name to the list of persecutors. Thus we see a consistent pattern, men of letters taking up their pens against Christianity as their masters took up arms against the Church.

Porphyry was more of a philosopher than the earlier polemicists. Where Lucian had confined himself to ridicule, and Celsus to the assertion of his own tenets, Porphyry married the rational mysticism of Plotinus to the common religious feeling of his age. In his account Plotinus fights his way to truth with the guidance of the immortals; having not a daemon but a god for his guardian spirit, he retains an abiding consciousness of divinity, not least in the hour of death. At this point in the *Life of Plotinus*, we are told only that he was bringing back the divinity or deity in himself to the divinity or deity in the All; but later we hear that even during life he enjoyed communion with the being whom his disciple knows as God:

[T]o Plotinus—God-like and lifting himself often, by the ways of meditation and by the methods Plato teaches in the Banquet, to the first and all-transcendent God—that God appeared, the God who has neither shape nor form, but sits enthroned above the Intellectual-Principle and all the Intellectual-Sphere. (*Life of Plotinus* 23 Mackenna)

Christians rarely spoke of such translations in the third century, but Origen, in a homily on the Song of Songs, alludes to his encounters with the Bridegroom, 'which the inexperienced cannot understand'. Origen, in Porphyry's view, was less to be com-

with or an early draft of the same polemic. The title *Against the Christians* is corroborated only by Augustine, *letter 102*, and the relation between both works and *The Regression of the Soul* (which is cited copiously in Augustine, *City of God* 10) is also in dispute. Even those who believe in a 15-volume work entitled *Against the Christians* are divided as to the authenticity of certain fragments which were assigned to it by Harnack. For recent bibliography and discussion see Digeser (2002).

¹² Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 5.11.5. See further Frede (1999b).

mended than his tutor, who had deserted Christianity for a 'life more in accordance with the laws' (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.19). Despite this hint to the magistrates, he does not deny that Origen made full use of a Greek education, and Porphyry the philosopher was not ashamed to rob the man whom Porphyry the courtier had branded as an outlaw. The title which he attached to one of his master's works includes the phrase 'three hypostases', which was Origen's contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity; and in naming the highest principle as 'God above all' (*ho epi pantōn theos*), he was culling a phrase which Origen had adapted from St Paul.¹³ Some insinuations against the Church were to be expected in the edition of the *Enneads* and the accompanying *Life*, which were produced either on the eve or in the course of Diocletian's persecution. I have argued elsewhere that the Gnostics, whom he accuses in the *Life* of having turned 'the old philosophy' into a heresy for Christians, were also the unnamed target of his essay on the Cave of the Nymphs in Homer's *Odyssey*.¹⁴ Its principal thesis is that we acquire knowledge of the invisible by sublation from the visible: as cults entrust their secrets to initiates, as e texts unseal their wisdom to the persevering scholar, so the material icon, rightly scrutinized, is found to bear the impress of the Forms. In his book *On the Statues* (*Peri Agalamatōn*) however, he is plainer and more polemical, defending the use of images in stronger terms than Maximus of Tyre.¹⁵

The premiss of this treatise is that God, being one and strictly incomprehensible, consents to be revealed to our weak intellects under divers names and symbols. So far, this might be an answer to the iconoclastic sermons which Philostratus ascribed to Apollonius of Tyana; but Philostratus was Greek to the point of vanity, a witty and polished stylist who could never have been thought to deserve the epithets that Porphyry heaps upon his adversaries:

It is no surprise that statues are thought to be nothing but wood and stone by the most uneducated, just as those who are ignorant of writing see pillars as stone, tablets as wood and books as woven papyrus. (*De Statuis* Fr. 351 Smith)

Celsus had styled the Christians *amathestatoi*, while *agrammatos* is a word that the New Testament applies to the first apostles (Acts

¹³ *Enneads* 5.1, Rom. 9: 5. ¹⁴ Edwards (1996).

¹⁵ See now Smith (1993) 407–34 and Maximus, *Oration* 2.

4:13). Porphyry, who knew that the apostles in their simplicity had spoken of the immaterial nature as light and spirit, contrast the ethereal radiance of God with his crepuscular appearances in matter:

Now the divine is fiery in aspect and dwells in a circumfusion of ethereal fire, and is not apparent to the limited perception that we enjoy in mortal life; nevertheless, through translucent matter, like that of crystal or Parian stone or ivory they obtained a notion of his light; and through that of gold, a conception of fire and his incorruptibility, since gold suffers no corruption. (*De Statuis* Fr. 353 Smith)

As the fifth element of Aristotle, who was perhaps the first Greek monotheist, aether was equated by some readers both with the God and with the entelechy or formal perfection of the universe.¹⁶ Some form of the claim that God is light is attested in the Hermetica, another in Mithraism; but the sun-cult of the emperor Aurelian was perhaps its most intelligible and popular manifestation. Porphyry, who knew that God is not a physical luminary but an intellectual being, must be practising some economy in this paragraph; it is reasonable to suppose that his intention is at the same time to discredit Christianity and to befriend the Roman state.

The alliance of philosophy and religion is cemented by the quotation of an Orphic hymn to Zeus (Fr. 354 Smith = Orphica Fr. 168 Kern). The tradition of expounding Orphic poetry was an old one, as was the equation of Zeus with aether. Both were used by the Stoics to support their teaching that the world is permeated by a fiery and sentient logos; the corollary that Zeus is God was taken up by Jewish historiographers, through whom it reached St Paul. Nevertheless, no Christian ever chose to speak of God by a pagan name; neither, for that matter, did Plotinus ever speak of the one as Zeus or subscribe to the pantheism of the Stoics. Before Porphyry, it was generally the expositors of mysteries who claimed to have found the key to all religions; he was perhaps the first accredited thinker to derive a whole philosophy from oracles, drawing on Chaldaean and Jewish sources as well as Greek ones, and declaring that he knew no universal way to liberate the soul.

Porphyry's demonstration that the so-called book of Daniel is a Maccabean forgery may be ranked among the glories of ancient

¹⁶ For defence of the doxographical tradition see now Bos (1999).

scholarship;¹⁷ yet this proof of the defects in Christian learning did not lead him to dispute the antiquity of the Hebrew canon. Even when he traced back the cosmogony of Genesis to Philo of Byblos, his quarrel was not with Moses but with Christ. By robbing the Church of Daniel, he deprived it of its most persuasive evidence that the nations were under judgment. There was now no ancient testimony that a sequence of four empires would conclude with the enthronement of the saints, and there were only recent prophecies to support the equation of a pagan monarch with Antichrist.

Porphyry wrote a biography of Pythagoras, which included the list of races who are said to have been his teachers, but augmented it with a reference to his countrymen, the Phoenicians. He even surmised that the object of Plotinus, when departing from Alexandria, was to acquaint himself with the teachings of the Magi and the Brahmins, as Apollonius had already done (*Life of Plotinus* 3). Such principles were suited to a time when every freeborn man was a citizen, a time when every citizen could be asked to give a proof of his goodwill to the Roman state. Diocletian expected all his subjects to be married by the Roman form, to abhor the foreign practices of the Manichees,¹⁸ to sacrifice to the right gods on demand. This did not entail the annihilation of ethnic difference: for a people to remain distinct, yet loyal, it was necessary only to go on doing as its ancestors had done. The Jews, the Greeks, the Phoenicians, the Chaldaeans, and the Egyptians each produced their own apologies; each, by making the most of itself and the worst of others, sought to raise its standing in the Empire. Only the Christians, who were not a race, declined to play this game with equals. If they wrote in Greek, they denounced all Greeks (which would include of course all educated Romans); if they were Latin-speakers, they did not stop short of Rome.

Arnobius, a late convert who taught rhetoric in the age of Diocletian, wrote seven books against the Romans, arguing that the conquerors are responsible for everything that was practised or permitted in their domain. They cannot, for example, disclaim the barbarous rites of Attis, merely because they originated in Phrygia and were put into a Greek literary dress. In any case, as Varro says

¹⁷ Even if he was assisted by the labours of Christian scholars, as is argued by Casey (1976).

¹⁸ On his 'Romanizing' measures see Corcoran (1996) 135-6 and 173-4.

and Ovid proves, the springs of their own religion are polluted by the same ignorance and folly. Against these human impieties, the Church can set the austere and reverent worship of the one God:

O greatest one, O most high procreator of things invisible, thyself unseen and apprehended by no nature, worthy, worthy thou truly art . . . For thou art first cause, the place and seat of things, the foundation of all that is, infinite, ingenerate, immortal, ever alone, denied by no corporeal form, uncircumscribed by any principle. (Arnobius, *Adversus Nations* 1.31)

Some of this language strikes us as Platonic, or Philonic, even Gnostic; it is therefore all the more striking that Arnobius makes the life of Jesus Christ the principal subject of his first book. The apologists of the second century stipulate the attributes of God, and then perhaps go on to speak of his Incarnation; Arnobius follows the logic of the New Testament, which makes Christ, in his humanity, the only way to God. It has been maintained that Arnobius conceived his work as a refutation of Porphyry, whose attack upon the Christians had given due prominence to the life of Jesus. Porphyry and Arnobius are certainly at opposite poles in their estimate of barbarian religions, and Porphyry could well have been the mentor of the new sect of philosophers (*novi viri*) whom Arnobius condemns in his second book. These, it seems, were Greeks who had fallen into the vice of novelty by marrying the Hermetic lore of Egypt with Etruscan divination and the recent errors of the Pythagoreans.¹⁹

Yet Porphyry is not the only candidate: another would be Iamblichus of Chalcis, a contemporary, and perhaps an exact contemporary, of Arnobius. He was a pupil of Porphyry, and when the latter propounded a series of questions about the mysteries of Egypt, it was Iamblichus who answered in the name of the Egyptian priest Abammon. According to this mouthpiece, the first cause is wholly ineffable and unparticipated, but is present in the world through lower agencies, who are subject to our own passions and must be appeased with prayers and sacrifices. Once it has made peace with the lord of matter, the soul is free to pursue the higher levels of contemplation, which, to judge by other writings by Iamblichus, are approached through the symbolism of mathematics. There may be a higher way still for the rational soul, but the grades of ascent are numerous and nothing can be styled impious in itself.

¹⁹ On Arnobius see further Edwards (1999a).

Iamblichus, despite his curious subject, was a disciplined philosopher in the tradition of Plotinus. It need cause us no surprise, then, that while he uses *theos* as a predicate, he has no proper appellative that we might translate as 'God'. The first cause is styled 'one God, prior even to the first God who is also King'; the latter is a self-sufficient deity (*autarkēs theos*), whom we may call the God of gods. Some lesser gods are then enumerated under Egyptian names with Greek equivalents (*On the Mysteries* 8. 1 ff.). Abammon displays a certain nationalism, devoting a book to hieroglyphs and arguing that Egyptian incantations lose their power if they are rendered into Greek. Yet this can hardly have been the finished doctrine of Iamblichus, who was not Egyptian and demonstrates no more knowledge of that language than Porphyry of his own Phoenician tongue. The very use of Greek is prejudicial to a national monopoly, and the early books of the treatise are, if anything, more beholden to Chaldaeia than to Egypt. The Egyptians may provide us with a fine specimen of theosophic reasoning, but how can any language be the sole vehicle of a knowledge which is better expressed in silence than in words?

We cannot speak in the reign of Diocletian (if we ever could) of a war between monotheism and polytheism; but, perhaps for this very reason, the conflict between philosophers and Christians in the same period was all the more intense. For Christians any tolerance of idolatry, and sanction for the worship of lesser gods, was blasphemy; for Platonists, the higher the conception, the lower was the propensity to worship. Platonism ennobled all religions by suggesting that all were avenues to wisdom; Christianity levelled all religions by maintaining that all were equally far from Christ. Platonists aspired to set the soul free from the body, but could use the material instruments of a polyglot and polytheistic Empire. Christians proclaimed the unique and instantaneous descent of God to matter, and this, as the book of Daniel assured them, was the great stone that would shatter all the idols and all the kingdoms of the world (Daniel 2:44-5).

III

Thus we need not suppose that Diocletian, the ablest Roman emperor since Severus, had succumbed to old age or illness when he launched his persecution against the Christians. To adapt the

words of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, he knew which way the wind was blowing, even if he did not know whence it came. It may seem strange that the still more able ruler who eventually succeeded him should have taken Christianity as his personal religion. In Constantine the king and pontifex maximus became a layman in the royal priesthood; the ruler of many peoples forsook the ancestral principles and enacted laws in favour of a new, adoptive race. Few would agree with Burckhardt²⁰ that his conversion was not genuine; to say that it arose from policy rather than conviction is almost equally implausible. In any case, the antithesis is a false one, for there are men in whom sincere and scrupulous piety conspires with the most incontinent of political and material ambitions. Constantine's religion shaped his policy and his policy shaped religion, to produce in him the inalienable certainty that whatever seemed good for him was the will of God.

I shall argue here that Constantine was faithful to the predecessors who taught him the arts of government—so faithful, indeed, that far from relinquishing the ancestral principle, he promoted its extension to Christianity. He and the theologians of his era developed an account of human history, or rather of inexorable providence in history, which began and ended with the Word of God. As pre-existent Logos he was the author of creation; as the incarnate Logos he was the saviour and exemplar of humanity; as the exalted Logos he was the source, the overseer and the pattern of oecumenical sovereignty. Yet, though he ruled on earth as a second Logos, Constantine's theology allowed him to depart from the archetype in two respects: he did not feel bound to practise the milder virtues, and he made himself ubiquitous through images, as well as through his laws.

The principle that everyone should follow the religion of his fathers was enunciated in Diocletian's edict against the Christians in February 303. At first sight, it would hardly appear compatible with that emperor's general scheme of making everyone a Roman, which was tacitly presupposed in his decree of the previous year against the Manichees. It seems, however, that just as every people within the Empire was now Roman, so was the religion of that people in the eyes of Diocletian. A Christian was not yet a Roman, even when his religion was inherited, because Christians had no

²⁰ Burckhardt (1949).

territory and were therefore not a race. Diocletian's laws required that everyone should remain true to his territory, his religion, and his standing in society; Christian and Roman were the only words coterminous with the Empire, the former making possible a mobility that the latter was intended to forestall.

Diocletian's policy is upheld in one of the earliest extant documents to bear the name of Constantine, an edict for the repeal of persecution. The signatories, while urging that the writ of the previous emperors was justified, declare that it has now become expedient to revoke it, as it has brought distress and peril on too many of their subjects. The grandiose appellation which precedes those of Licinius and Constantine may belong either to Galerius, who died in 311, or to Maximinus Daia, who after the death of Galerius shared the Empire with the other two until Licinius overwhelmed him in 313. Constantine's conversion occurred between these dates, on the eve of his capture of Rome in 312. From this time on, his adherence to the Christian religion was unequivocal, at least when he was speaking to the Church. In his own acts of repeal, he denounced the persecution; in 314 he responded to a Donatist petition by endorsing the authority of bishops and declaring that he himself could give no judgment, since he awaited that of Christ. In 315 he told an African magistrate, whom he took for a fellow-Christian, that he wished the catholic faith to become the religion of all his subjects. And yet against this we may set the notorious evidence of ambiguity in his public symbols. He struck coins with solar images and referred to Sunday as the *Dies Solis*; he put an end to private, but not to public divination; circuses were not proscribed along with gladiators. Fowden claims, with an innuendo worthy of Burckhardt, that the porphyry column portraying Constantine as a solar deity was not a modification of an existing pagan statue, but an original design.²¹

Nevertheless, to accuse him of syncretism, whether wilful or unwitting, is to overlook the *Oration to the Saints*. Little need be said here on behalf of its authenticity—only that the arguments which favour this also point to an early date in the career of Constantine.²² The use of Virgil indicates a Latin speech, and therefore a Roman audience; the praises showered on the 'dearest city' echo those with which the panegyrists reconciled the Italian

²¹ Fowden (1991).

²² For bibliography see Edwards (1999b).

capital to Constantine's success. These compliments would ring hollow after 316, when Serdica became his 'second Rome'. Consonant with an early date is Constantine's admission that he was not brought up as a Christian. Later admirers, following Roman principles, alleged that his conversion was more properly a reversion, a return to his father's piety, and credited his mother with the aptly-named Invention of the Cross.

If we assign a date of 314 or 315 to the Oration, it reveals that the Christianity of Constantine entailed an almost immediate rejection of pagan deities, even if guile or charity induced him to permit the worship of them among his subjects. The pagans may go back to their sacrifices, but only so long as ignorance protects them: in the next life they will be judged without mercy by the Saviour whom they put to death in this. Constantine supports his threat by quoting a Sibylline Oracle, which contains the acrostic *Jesous Christos Theou Huios Soter*—'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour'—together with a stanza which is not found in all versions and spells out the word *Stauros* (Cross). This, the infamous sign of contradiction, does not figure so much in early Christian texts as in the New Testament; but Constantine, professing to have seen it in a vision on the eve of battle, made it the insignium of his army, and put it at the centre of the pageant devised to celebrate his entry into Rome.

Thus Constantine anticipated the work of his mother Helena. Surely, it will be said, this veneration of an outrageous symbol proves the sincerity of its conversion. It might have done, the sceptic answers readily, if the emblem inscribed on the shields of the emperor's troops had been a crucifix; but why, if he were a Christian, did he borrow the *labarum*, which had served the Roman state for generations as an emblem of the sun? This is not the place to revive the old debate concerning the shape and provenance of the *labarum*; we need only demonstrate that it was possible to adopt a pagan symbol without being guilty of either apostasy or syncretism. Since it contained the letters X and P it is legitimate to describe it as a verbal sign or *logos*; and it was in the age of Constantine that Christian theologians first spoke plainly of a truth revealed by the universal *logos* even to those outside the covenant. As the sole Creator and redeemer of the mind, he is its only source of knowledge, and therefore must have visited the philosophers before his last theophany in Christ.

The novelty of this theory is too often overlooked. Scholars have attributed their own humanism to Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, all of whom do hint from time to time that the pagan intellect was prompted by the all-pervading *logos*.²³ Yet this cannot be called their settled opinion, for they regularly teach that the Word of God was given only to the prophets and to one elected people. The gentiles had indeed a rational faculty, but no inkling of the truth except for what they could derive by plagiarism from the scriptures. Only through Christ incarnate was the Word communicated in its fulness to the nations, and this was not the climax but the confutation of all philosophy.

Thus, while others had turned to Greek philosophy as a school of hermeneutics, or had ransacked it for instances of theft from Hebrew oracles, Eusebius was the first to represent the thought of Greece as a preparation for the Gospel. To his monstrous treatise of this name, whose fifteen books match those of Porphyry, we owe almost all our knowledge of the Platonists Numenius and Atticus, a version of Porphyry's Letter to Anebo, and a host of other citations, from the recent or the distant past, which are not adduced as evidence of plagiarism, but rather of a perennial suffusion of divine truth into pagan intellects. This seems to us so natural a strategy in apologetic writing that we are only surprised by the scarcity of precedents; we begin, however, to scent peculiar motives when it recurs in the *Tricennial Oration*, composed to mark the thirtieth year anniversary since Constantine became his father's heir. If we find its length inordinate, that is partly because the emperor is not its only subject: his reign is the peroration of a sermon which the Logos has been preaching since he first created minds.

Of course the work of the Logos can be traced in the very fabric of the world, with its perfect harmony of four elements, its procession of days and seasons, its celestial luminaries, its teeming creatures, and its fragrant robe of flowers. But the latest and most honourable of all creatures is humanity, because it is endowed

²³ Where they are not accusing pagans of plagiarism from the written word, they appear to mean either that pagans were endowed with natural reason (which is not to say that they had any a priori knowledge of God), or else that God elected certain prophets, notably Hystaspes and the Sibyl, to rebut the false teachings of philosophers. See Justin, *First Apology* 44-45; Clement, *Stromateis* 6.42-3; Origen *Philocalia* 13.

with a 'logical' faculty that enables it to honour, serve and imitate its Maker. When humanity fell away a remedy was needed; and, as though to reveal the gulf between the pagan and Christian notions of divine governance, Eusebius has already described the moral illumination of the universe before he speaks of its physical constitution. In words reminiscent of Socrates, he declares that mortal eyes cannot detect supernal beauty, but the Logos, in his unique bond with the Godhead, is the parent of every being imbued with reason, and imparts to all his offspring the emanations of his father's majesty. In Jewish scripture, Wisdom is the Father's emanation, and means primarily the religion of the Law; Eusebius states, however, that the seeds of virtue and the arts of life have been dispersed in equal measure by the Logos, not only among barbarians, but even to 'all the Greeks'.

The seeds were nonetheless distributed sparingly, and only to philosophers. The founders of religion (with a few exceptions mentioned in the Old Testament) began by paying honours to created beings, especially to their own dead. Their rites at first were veiled in allegory, and when historians traced them to their sources, the priests revived them under the more elaborate form of mysteries. Thus the vaunted key to all religions is discovered to be no more than a universal superstition. At a time when philosophers were seeking confirmation from religions, Eusebius treats religion as the antithesis of philosophy, arguing that only the latter had inklings of the truth. He thereby made it possible for Christians to extend to pagan thought the same esteem that was habitually accorded to the Old Testament; but at the same time, he argues that, by cleaving to their dogmas without acknowledging the Logos, the philosophers had fallen into the errors of the Jews, who had falsified the scriptures by their obstinate rejection of the Lord.

Two saviours, Christ and Constantine, could be said to have made one people of all the nations. To Eusebius one is the archetype, the other his present image:

Now the unique Word of God, ruling as his Father's colleague from ages without beginning, will continue for infinite and endless ages; while the one who is dear to him, led by royal emanations from above and empowered by the one who bears the title of divinity, rules the things on earth for long spans of years. (Eusebius, *Triacontaeticus* p. 199 Heikel)

Here we see, incidentally, a refutation of Frede's claim that Trinitarianism was not 'the issue'. How could it fail to be an issue between Christians and pagans when, even after the Council of Nicaea in 325, it was still giving rise to factions in the Church? Eusebius is careful here to speak of the Logos rather than the Son, and he does not say that he is eternal in his origin or nature; above all, he employs a laborious periphrasis to avoid any duplication of the name 'God'. The same passage shows that monotheism was also an 'issue', now that it had become the creed of a theocratic monarchy. Twenty-five years before, in his *Preparation for the Gospel*, Eusebius had noted that the preaching of the divine monarchy by the Church had coincided with the extinction of 'plural kingship' (*poluarchia*) by the Empire of Augustus. Constantine himself, in his *Oration to the Saints*, employed the same arguments to demonstrate our inveterate propensity to sin, and the astonishing philanthropy of the God who came to redeem us at his own cost. This God, though born on a certain day in Bethlehem, is nonetheless eternal, and was already known to Plato:

He posited first the God who is above being, in which he did well, and to him he subordinated a second also, and distinguished the two beings arithmetically, both sharing one perfection, though the being of the second god owed its existence to the first. For the former is clearly the transcendent creator and governor of all things, while the one after him, ministering to his decrees, brings back to him the origin of the universe fabric. (Constantine, *Oration* p. 163 Heikel)

While Constantine, in contrast to Eusebius, is prepared to call Christ God, he continues to subordinate him more than later authors with a care for orthodoxy would have done. Yet scholars who have looked here only for evidence of a leaning to Arianism in the author (or an interpolative editor) have failed to observe the function of this passage in the 'Speech'. Neither in Platonism nor in the extant letters of Arius is Logos a habitual designation of the second God, or cosmocratic agent; yet Constantine not only foists the term on Plato here, but seems to have required Arius to confess it in the wake of the Nicene Council. In the first case he has not so much made an error as applied the Eusebian doctrine that Greek thought was a preparation for the Gospel; in the second he indicated that the root of the matter lay for him in providential government, rather than in the relation between two supramundane

powers. Scarcely less essential than the Cross itself to his faith was the belief that God had handed the reins of nature to a personal being, equal in jurisdiction though subordinate in will. At the end of his speech, he draws the pleasing inference that his own dominion rested on, and therefore ought to imitate, the monarchy of God.

This profession of servitude did not diminish, but rather elevated, his authority. It is when the honours due to gods are paid to the names and persons of the emperors that the gods themselves contract to human stature: the persecutor Maximinus Daia proclaimed that gods were necessary to the order of the cosmos, but did not proceed to the Aristotelian commonplace that many gods would lead to strife, and therefore that we must posit only one. Neither, we may imagine, did Licinius, for his brand of monotheism, the belief in a single unnamed God, could easily be reconciled with the claim that God controls his world through a number of human agents. Aristotle's argument had also escaped defenders of Christianity before Lactantius drew it to the attention of Constantine; after him, it was taken up by his subjects Athanasius and Eusebius, but without the hidden motive that we perceive in his *Oration*. By hinting that plurality in high places was as dangerous to the state as to the universe, the partner of Licinius discreetly avowed, at least to Latin-speakers, his aspiration to undivided rule.

It may appear strange that one who was so pious in his own interest failed to cultivate the salient virtues of his prototype. These, according to his own *Oration*, were *megalopsuchia* (patience under injury) and *philanthrōpia*, unqualified benevolence toward the human race. These were not the traits of Constantine in Christian eulogy. For Lactantius he was a bold campaigner, dextrously pursuing his own ambitions and infallibly disposing of his rivals. Eusebius admires his ruthless vigilance in uprooting superstition from his realm. After describing the atrocities inflicted on the Church by devotees of Aphrodite, he continues:

When things stood thus, what ought the king of those who were suffering to have done? Should he have passed up the chance to save those dearest to him, and overlooked his own people under this siege? But even a helmsman who acted thus would not be deemed wise . . . nor would a good shepherd have overlooked the wandering scion of his own flock without suffering for it. (*Triacontaeticus*, p. 214 Heikel)

Heikel has deleted from his text the word 'God' which stood in apposition to 'king'. No doubt he is correct, but the scribe divined Eusebius' meaning well enough. The metaphor of the helmsman is Platonic, that of the shepherd conflates the parables of all four Gospels. On the next page we are told that the Great King in heaven appointed his retainer Constantine to wage the battle against impiety. Where Celsus and Apuleius imagined God as a Persian king with many satraps, Eusebius holds that a single God in heaven carries out his will through a single man on earth. Before Constantine professed his faith, the Latin panegyrics represent him as a half-reluctant warlord, whose enemies maliciously forbade him to temper victory with mercy; after his conversion, we never hear that it crossed his mind to spare them. Yet this was a sign of his Christianity, not a defection from it. The pagan ruler aspires to be exactly like his gods because he is one of them; the Christian is a servant with other duties to fulfil. Christ's precepts sometimes differed from his practice, and Constantine believed that he would wear a fiercer aspect on the day of his return.

Once we accept that Constantine could look upon the past as a *praeparatio evangelica*, we can readily acquit him of duplicity in his use of the *labarum* and the iconography of Apollo Helios. Even if the *labarum* had not contained the first two letters of the Messianic title, the sun was as legitimate and natural an image in Christianity as it was in Platonism. If Plato could maintain that the Good is the source of life and nourishment, to which all beings owe both their existence and the knowledge of existence, Christians could say as much of Christ, who had already been styled the 'sun of righteousness' in ancient Scriptures (Malachi 4:2). When they employed such metaphors, and turned eastward in the act of prayer, it is easy to understand why their religion, even in the second century, had been mistaken for a solar cult. For Constantine to represent his own person under the aspect of Apollo Helios was, of course, a striking innovation, but not an inexplicable one in a ruler who perceived himself as a second Christ on earth.

Nevertheless, no Christian could be ignorant of, or indifferent to, the dangers of uninterpreted iconography. Aware that Orthodox Christians made no use of sacred images, while orthodox flattery still paid homage to an emperor's statues, Constantine showed himself conservative in both respects. As Grigg has

shown,²⁴ he encouraged the veneration of relics, thus forestalling rather than promoting the spread of images. At the same time, he maintained the illusion of his own ubiquity through statues, yet did not make either his person or its replicas the object of a cult. For him and his admirers, who agreed in this if nothing else with Plato, the living archetype is best expressed through a living image. In keeping with biblical precedent, but in contrast to Diocletian, the Christian ruler made his sons vicegerents in his own lifetime and his sole heirs after death. After describing Constantine's dissemination of statues through the inhabited world, Eusebius records that his three sons were all made Caesars, each assuming power in a different portion of the realm.²⁵ At first they were under guardians, but as they increased in years they took their father as their sole model, and continued to receive his royal commands (*Life* 4.51). Yet as copies remain inferior to the original, so the son remains inferior to the father; in his treatise against Marcellus Eusebius stresses the difference between an emperor and his statues to illustrate the disparity between God the Father and his living Word.

Under the weak and little-loved Constantius, Athanasius used this simile for a different purpose, arguing that whatever is done to the statue is done to the emperor, and therefore that when we worship Christ we truly worship God (*Against the Arians* 3.6). But tradition ascribes to Constantine the opinion of Eusebius, for when he heard, says Chrysostom, that a statue of his had been cast down and broken in many pieces, he merely passed his hand across his countenance, and smiled as he informed his cowering satellites that he could not feel any change (*On the Statues* 21.11). True or false, this anecdote is worthy of his political sagacity. To be visible is also to be vulnerable: if the king lives in his images, any blow to them impairs his glory, even when it is not perceived as an insult to the whole people. That Diocletian lived to see the defacement of his statues is for Lactantius the clearest proof that he was under the curse of God. The least fragile, the least tangible and the most pervasive instrument of monarchy is not sculpture but legislation.

²⁴ See Grigg (1977).

²⁵ He goes so far as to liken them to the Trinity at *Life* 4.40.2—a curious simile for one who denied the equality of persons in the divine triad.

As Porphyry's sneers at Origen remind us, no iconoclast is so publicly resented as a transgressor of the laws. European kings who were great iconoclasts were great legislators also, as we see in the case of Charlemagne and Leo the Isaurian. Constantine had more to gain than either from the cunning elasticity of language. A marriage between his form and that of Helios could be seen, both then and now, as double idolatry; but if his Sunday statute was as beneficial to pagans as to Christians, that made it all the better as a law.

The preference for language over images also guaranteed the uniqueness of Christ as the true and perfect image of the Father. If we repeat another's words exactly, we produce not an imitation but the same words over again; a man may speak the words of God without violence to the integrity of the Logos. But if I make a replica from matter, it remains distinct from its archetype, and the eye that looks on one cannot see the other. Every word of Scripture, Origen tells us, is the Logos; no one at this period would have said that every statue of Christ is Christ. Monotheistic doctrine cannot allow for an imparting of divinity which is not also a communication of unity, and the goal of Trinitarian speculation in this period was to show that Christ can be the Father's image without entailing any multiplicity in his nature. Whatever was true for emperors, the Athanasian principle was generally agreed to hold good of incorporeal being: Christ is truly God, because (as Paul declared) the fulness of God is embodied in him (Col. 2:9), and conversely it is only this divine miracle, not any inherent duality in the Godhead, that makes it possible for there to be a 'second God'. Thus, whereas a single Christ can be the plenipotentary of the Father, a plurality of ministers would inevitably be inferior by the mere fact of being many; Christ is divine because and not in spite of the unalterable simplicity of God.

Theology had lent Constantine two models for the government of his kingdom. It taught him, first, that the monarchy of God was indivisible, that Christ was his only viceroy in the elements, that the same creative Word had inspired philosophers in antiquity, proclaimed the Gospel in recent times and would execute justice in the world to come. It was thus an act of piety to refuse himself a partner; and when the frailty of nature forced him to devolve his power, theology was at hand once more to show him that he could

still be present, fully and inviolably, in his sons and in his word. The names of his many acolytes were concealed by his biographer—and quite properly, for he was above all an instrument of unity, drawing together all peoples by a shrewd assimilation of their customs, just as the incarnation of the Logos superseded and subsumed all previous avatars of truth.

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VII

NOTES ON THE DATE AND VENUE OF THE *ORATION TO THE SAINTS* (CPG 3497)

Constantine's *Oration to the Saints*, which I shall here take to be genuine, is the apology of a convert and the first of an inexhaustible line of apologies to the converted. It set a fertile precedent with its false but seductive reading of his *Fourth Eclogue*; at the same time it hinted, by reviving a pagan argument against collegiate governance in the physical world, that only a Christian monarch, ruling singly, could be the image and plenipotentiary of God. The first of these innovations is a token of his Latin culture, the second a manifesto of his ambition, or perhaps the imprimatur to an ambition already realised if the speech was delivered after the submission of Licinius, his last rival, in November 324. Although there is reason to think that it was drafted in Latin, the text survives in Greek, and if delivered in that language, will of course have been destined for an eastern venue. Unfortunately, we learn nothing of the venue from the *Oration*, except that, at the time of composition, it was the Emperor's "dearest city" (1). Most scholars have surmised that it was written in the wake of one of Constantine's incursions into the territory of Licinius: Piganol assigns it to Thessalonica in 323 (2), Mazzarino to Byzantium in 324 (3), De Decker and Lane Fox to Antioch

(1) We have used the edition of I. A. HEIKEL, *Eusebius Werke, I, Über das Leben Constantins. Constantins Rede an die heilige Versammlung. Tricennatsrede an Constantin (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller)*, Leipzig, 1902. See here *Oration 22*, p. 188, 2, where the city is apostrophized.

(2) A. PIGANIOL, *Dates constantiniennes*, in *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*, 12 (1932), pp. 360-372.

(3) S. MAZZARINO, *Antico, Tardantico ed èra Costantiniana I*, in *Storia e Civiltà*, 13 (1974), pp. 98-150. Mazzarino notes the predilection of Constantine for this city, as evidenced in some passages of John Lydus, and the similarity between the *Theodosian Code* (7, 20, 2) and the peroration to the speech (MAZZARINO, p. 109). He does not, however, explain why the praises lavished by the Emperor on his "new Rome" after 325 might not come to his lips when addressing the old Rome ten years earlier.

in 325 (4), Barnes (most recently) to Nicomedia in the same year, Bleckmann to Nicomedia on a somewhat later occasion (5). Theories of an earlier date, however, are not untenable, since Barnes had argued previously for 317 and 321, with Serdica as the venue (or at least the most probable venue) on both occasions (6), while Drake, had he forced his tentative case for Rome to its logical outcome, would have been obliged to offer dates as early as 314 or 315 (7).

As has been shown elsewhere (8), this last position derives support from the presence in the speech of a detailed commentary on the *Fourth Eclogue* (not yet a classic text in the Greek world) and of an oracle attributed to the Sibyl, whose books had hitherto been monopolised in Rome by pagan scholars. If it has none the less failed to win assent, that is partly because objections of some substance have not yet received a satisfactory answer, but primarily because it has been eclipsed by the recrudescence of an old theory that the *Oration* was designed for Nicomedia, and is hence to be dated after 324. The most recent defence of a Roman venue, *Constantine and Christendom* by Mark Edwards, appeared too soon after Timothy Barnes's palinode in favour of Nicomedia to take more than passing notice of it; Barnes, in his review of this book, maintains that its central thesis cannot be matched with the known itinerary of Constantine, and notes a number of superficial errors which, in his view,

(4) D. DE DECKER, *Le discours à l'assemblée des saints attribué à Constantin et l'œuvre de Lactance*, in J. FONTAINE and M. PERRIN (eds.), *Lactance et son temps*, Paris, 1978, pp. 75-79. R. LANE FOX, *Pagans and Christians*, Harmondsworth, 1986, p. 643.

(5) T. D. BARNES, 'Constantine's Speech to the Assembly of the Saints: Date and Place of Delivery', in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 52 (2001), pp. 26-36. B. BLECKMANN, *Ein Kaiser als Prediger: zur Datierung der konstantinischen 'Rede an die Versammlung der Heiligen'*, in *Hermes*, 125 (1997), pp. 183-202.

(6) T. D. BARNES, *The Emperor Constantine's Good Friday Sermon*, in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 27 (1976), pp. 414-423; ID., *Constantine and Eusebius*, Cambridge (MA), 1981, pp. 73-77.

(7) H. A. DRAKE, *Suggestions of Date in Constantine's Oration to the Saints*, in *American Journal of Philology*, 106 (1985), pp. 335-349; ID., *Constantine and the Bishops: the Politics of Intolerance*, Baltimore, 2000, esp. pp. 192-205. No date is allotted to the speech in either study.

(8) DRAKE (1985); M. J. EDWARDS, *The Constantinian Circle and the Oration to the Saints*, in M. J. EDWARDS - M. D. GOODMAN - S. R. F. PRICE (eds.), *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, Oxford, 1999, pp. 251-276.

compound the weakness of the argument (9). In the course of the following paper, I shall attempt a complete review of all those passages in the speech which are agreed to be indices of its date and venue. I shall argue, on the one hand, that there is none that requires us to date it to the period after Constantine transferred his seat to the East in 317, and on the other, that its cryptic sneers at Constantine's dead rival would have been most readily understood by an audience which could still recall the events which had preceded and cemented his enthronement in Rome as monarch of the West.

THE SUPERScription

All the commentators named above believe the speech to be authentic ; those who do not, if any still exist, have allowed their case to go unheard in recent years. It can certainly not be argued that the speech is too ornate, or too abstruse to be the work of a layman, a neophyte, a soldier or whatever name his detractors choose to throw at Constantine. Suffice it to say that in eloquence and cogency it is easily surpassed by the works of Caesar, Augustus, Alfred, Cromwell and Frederick the Great ; its grasp of Christian dogma is rudimentary in comparison to the standards achieved after eight weeks' study by undergraduates at any university where patristics is a core paper in theology. Cameron and Hall observe that in content and design it fits the pattern which Eusebius declares to have been typical of the Emperor's apologetic essays. It is no index of learning and reflection, but a measure of the royal neophyte's sincerity and his patience under instruction that this order of exposition should be one prescribed in the longest surviving manual of ecclesiastical discipline from the fourth century (10).

When someone is to be catechized in the word of piety, let him be taught before his baptism the knowledge about the Unbegotten, the understanding of the only-begotten Son, and the full truth about the Holy Spirit. Let [the cate-

(9) T. D. BARNES, review of M. J. EDWARDS, *Constantine and Christendom* (*Translated Texts for Historians*, 39), Liverpool, 2003, in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 55 (2004), pp. 351-355.

(10) Translating the text of C. K. J. VON BUNSEN, *Analecta Ante-Nicaena*, London, 1854, p. 360. My argument does not require me to form a view on the date or genesis of this compilation, which is cited as a representative document of ancient Christianity.

chumen] learn the economy of creation in its diversity, the chain of providence, the righteous administration of diverse laws. Let him be taught for what purpose the world came into being, and why man was given his place as a citizen of the world. Let him come to understand what sort of thing his own nature is. Let him be taught how God punished the wicked with water and fire, but glorified the saints in each generation ... and how in his providential government God did not repudiate the human race, but called it from error and vanity to the understanding of truth, leading it at diverse seasons from servitude and impiety to freedom and piety, from unrighteousness to righteousness, from eternal death to eternal life (*Apostolic Constitutions* 7, 39).

Whether Constantine was ever a catechumen we do not know, but he could have heard a similar lesson from Lactantius, or from Hosius of Cordova, or from any private mentor. The speech ascribed to him celebrates the fecundity of creation (p. 160, 22 of the edition of Heikel), ridicules those who attribute its benign vicissitude to fate or chance (p. 159, 9 and p. 161, 19), and declares that nature abhors impiety (p. 160, 4). As an illustration of this it cites the innocence of the first humans (p. 158, 19-20), who were endowed with reason enough to maintain the order and felicity of the living world, but fell into impotence, misery and vice when they preferred their own crooked ways to those of providence (p. 166, 28-30). Hence the mission of Christ, who as the Word was the Father's viceroy in the cosmos (p. 163, 18-31), but took on a human form to bring back health to the invalid, sight to the blind, and virtue to the soul (p. 169, 10-15). Those who have learned through him to subject their appetites to reason in obedience to the Spirit (p. 164, 12) will attain everlasting life; those who persist in unbelief and wickedness are equally sure of hell. Even the appeal to the pagan sibyl as a witness to the truth of Biblical prophecy (p. 179, 19 - p. 181, 2) is authorized elsewhere in the *Apostolic Constitutions* ⁽¹¹⁾, and it is therefore hardly possible to argue that there is anything in the speech too bold, too arcane or too original to have been contrived by a novice in the faith.

We may reasonably assume, on the authority of Eusebius, that the text was drafted by the Emperor in his native Latin ⁽¹²⁾. This does not mean that any bold conjectures should be founded on a reconstruction of the original Latin or, for that matter, on any faults in the Greek translation of

(11) *Apostolic Constitutions* 5, 7, p. 166 of the translation.

(12) Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 4, 52; MAZZARINO (1974), p. 111; EDWARDS (1999), pp. 254-260.

the *Fourth Eclogue* (13). Even where translators do not err, they may correct, expand or modify the archetype. Such changes, then as now, will often accompany the mere process of transcription, and we cannot be sure that our written text bears any more resemblance to the speech on its first delivery than the canonical *Pro Milone* bore to Cicero's faltering plea before the senate (14). The Sibylline testimony, for example, takes the form of a long acrostic, which could hardly have been deciphered on first hearing whatever the language of delivery; we may therefore presume that only the reader's version will have contained the full poem – perhaps with no translation to mar the acrostic even in the Latin text of the *Oration*. To add another caveat, we can hope at best to ascertain the implied or intended occasion of delivery; we cannot prove that the speech was in fact delivered, or indeed that it was more than a hypothetical exercise.

Yet even in a fictitious or unconsummated performance, for example, a speaker would not be likely to waive a title which he had come to employ habitually in public affairs. Some significance therefore must be attached to the name that he gives himself in the rubric: "Constantine Augustus, to the assembly of the saints". The modesty of the nomenclature in this rubric was once thought to present an insuperable obstacle to any dating after 324. It was in November of that year that, having won the east by the overthrow of Licinius, Constantine assumed the title *victor* (νικητής), which he never waived thereafter in other letters and orations to his subjects (15). Barnes, who endorsed this argument in 1976, disowns it 25 years later without explaining why it is now invalid (16). Perhaps he

(13) See the notes to EDWARDS, *Constantine and Christendom*, pp. 44-53.

(14) Harold Drake inclines to the view that the present text is a palimpsest, revised since the first delivery for publication or for performance in a new locality: see most recently his review of EDWARDS, *Constantine and Christendom*, in *The Classical Review* 55 (2005), p. 155.

(15) C. T. H. R. EHRHARDT, "Maximus", "Invictus" und "Victor" als Datierungskriterien auf Inschriften Konstantins des Grossen, in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 38 (1980), pp. 177-178, though he notes that November 324 marks not the first appearance of the epithet, but the point at which it became prescriptive. BLECKMANN (1997), p. 190 remarks pertinently that a title which would be almost sure to survive in an inscription might be lost in the transmission of a manuscript (as indeed at *Life of Constantine* 4, 9).

(16) BARNES's palinode (2001), p. 27, rebutting BARNES (1976), p. 417. For Constantine's use of the epithet in proclamations addressed to Christians after

was persuaded by Lane Fox's observation that the title *victor* does not appear in a letter addressed by Constantine to the Persian king Sapor. This letter in fact has lost its superscription, and it might be said in any case that reticence in his correspondence with another monarch would be no precedent for his dealings with the Church. More germane to this question is the omission of the title a catholic epistle enjoining the Roman date for easter after the Council of Nicaea in 325. Even this, when set against other evidence, can establish nothing more than a *possibility* that the *Oration* is a document of the same era. Historians customarily attach more weight to probabilities than to possibilities, and it remains a statistical truth that any undated text by Constantine which lacks the term *victor* is most likely to have been composed before this would have been felt as an omission – that is, before November 324.

CHURCH AND PRIMATE

Who are the saints addressed in the superscription? D. Woods has proposed that they are the product of an erroneous translation, the original Latin being *ad sanctum coetum*, and a common designation for the senate (¹⁷). From the second paragraph, however, it is clear that the implied addressees are leaders of the Church. It is possible that the first sentence of this chapter salutes the primate himself; the inference, however, is contingent upon a choice between three variants (¹⁸). The reading

324, see Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 2, 64; 3, 30; 3, 52; 3, 60; 3, 61; 3, 62; 3, 64; 4, 35; 4, 36; 4, 52. But cf. 3, 17, where the style appears to be simply "Constantine Augustus".

(17) D. WOODS, review of EDWARDS, *Constantine and Christendom*, in *Peritia*, 16 (2002), p. 498. His conjecture implies that the correct title of the speech is the one accorded to it by Gelasius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2, 7. Gelasius is, however, an author of little repute, except where he transcribes his predecessors accurately, and the title that Eusebius gives to the speech is "About the Assembly of the Saints": *Life of Constantine* 4, 32.

(18) See BARNES (2001), p. 34n, and BARNES (2004), p. 353, rightly chastising both Lane Fox and Edwards for their failure to interpret Heikel's apparatus correctly, or to take account of Valesius at *PG* 20, 1237, n. 94. On questionable readings in Heikel's edition (still, by common consent, the best available), see F. WINKELMANN, *Annotationes zu einer neuen Edition der Tricennatsreden Eusebs und der Oratio ad Sanctum Coetum in GCS (CPG 3498. 3497)*, in *ANTIΔΩ-PON. Hommage à Maurits Geerard pour célébrer l'achèvement de la Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, I, Wetteren, 1984, pp. 1-7.

of Valesius in the earliest printed edition of the speech is : ἄκουε τοίνυν, ἀγνείας παρθενίας τ' ἐπήβολε ναύκληρε, ἐκκλησία τε ἁώρου καὶ ἀδαοῦς ἡλικίας τιθήνη. Confirmed though it is by three of five extant witnesses, this text is rendered suspect by a grammatical anomaly. The imperative ἄκουε is in the second person singular, but subtends two terms, ναύκληρε and ἐκκλησία. This would cause no offence if the second object were an afterthought – for example, if it were preceded by the words καὶ σύ, whose Latin equivalent, *tuque*, Valesius smuggled into his own translation. In the Greek, however, there is nothing to indicate a new addressee except the particle τε, and only then if we place it where Valesius has it. Perhaps it was the inelegance of the Valesian reading that persuaded Heikel, who is agreed to have set new standards in his edition of Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, to print a variant from a sole manuscript, in which the particle τε is divorced from ἐκκλησία, and the latter term now stands in apposition to ναύκληρε : ἄκουε τοίνυν, ἀγνείας παρθενίας τ' ἐπήβολε ναύκληρε, <ἐκκλησία> ἁώρου τε καὶ ἀδαοῦς ἡλικίας τιθήνη. This makes good sense and tolerable syntax, though Heikel himself was so distressed by the ugly juxtaposition of ἐκκλησία and τιθήνη that he proposed in his apparatus to delete the former term.

This conjecture carries little weight for me, not only because it suppresses a word attested in all our manuscripts, but because ἐκκλησία is the one term that could function simultaneously as the referent of the metaphors ναύκληρος and τιθήνη. The second, which is feminine and means “nurse”, could hardly be used of a man ; on the other hand, ναύκληρος πόλις (“a maritime city”) seemed an acceptable usage to Philostratus, a third-century connoisseur of rhetorical diction. Thus we need not suppose that there would be any inconcinnity in coupling the term ναύκληρος with the feminine noun ἐκκλησία. Where, as in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, ναύκληρος connotes direction and guidance, “pilot” is the most satisfactory rendering, and this indeed was one sense of the word when it passed into Latin nautical usage ⁽¹⁹⁾. That a church should be commended as both pilot and nurse seems credible enough, whether by church we mean a particular assembly or the entire commu-

(19) Ναύκληρος as “pilot” (in metaphorical sense of “guide, director, steersman”) : Aeschylus, *Supplices* 177 ; Euripides, *Hippolytus* 1224. BARNES, review (2004), p. 353, prefers “sea-captain”, and cites Liddell and Scott in a manner that appears to deny the presence of a metaphor.

nion of saints. If the whole communion of saints is meant, the church at large is apostrophized as the pilot and nurse of the world for which Christ suffered ; if Constantine is speaking of a particular assembly, he will mean that he is addressing a congregation which is the pilot and nurse of all other Christian bodies. Rome was the one community to which he, or any Christian of his time, would have accorded that distinction ; a magisterial status had already been conferred on Rome in his dealings with the Donatists, and was acknowledged with some irony by the bishops of the West when they lamented the failure of Pope Silvester to take his seat at Arles in 314. No doubt there were other prelates, such as Hosius of Cordova or the Alexandrian patriarch Alexander, who could be said to guide the Church by their sagacity ; to my mind, it is difficult to imagine that Eusebius of Nicomedia could have been thought to merit this accolade in the Eastertide of 325, when his patronage of Arius had already exposed him to censure⁽²⁰⁾. This objection does not hold against Bleckmann's dating of the speech, since the refusal of Eusebius to sign the anathemas to the Nicene Creed resulted in his deposition before the end of 325 ; but this event deprived his see of any claim to primacy, and by the time of his restoration in 327 or 328 the Emperor's thoughts were already bent on the creation of a new capital in Byzantium. If we were after all to follow Heikel and Valesius in attaching the term ναύκληρος to an ecclesiastical dignitary, there was no congregation – certainly none that could have provided an audience for this speech – whose leader stood so high in Constantine's esteem as the bishop of Rome.

EASTER AND AUTHORITY

The occasion, as we gather from the exordium, is a solemn one : “The splendour that outshines day and the sun, the day of the passion is here.” David Woods again differs from the majority, arguing that these words could betoken any celebration of the eucharist⁽²¹⁾. Comparison with the opening of a homily on the pasch ascribed to Hippolytus, however, suggests that a preface of this kind was ordained by custom for Easter-

(20) If the acerbic letter ascribed to Constantine at Theodoret, *Church History* 1, 19, is authentic, Barnes's theory convicts him of impolitic partiality before the Nicene Council and of crude tergiversation in its aftermath.

(21) WOODS, review of EDWARDS, p. 498.

tide (22). Since it would be impossible to convene an assembly of prelates on a holiday which required them to be present in their own sees, the day must be one that was recognized, but not yet sanctified, in the ecclesiastical calendar. Good Friday seems to me to be indicated, since there is evidence of a fast but not of liturgical celebration (23); others prefer the Saturday, but the question need not detain us, as an answer to it would not help to determine the date or venue of the speech. We can at least say that the date would not have coincided with that of any council in this Emperor's reign, unless we accept the thesis of Lane Fox that the council of Antioch which preceded the Nicene synod was in session at Eastertide in 325. It is frequently assigned to an earlier date, because the great council at Ancyra that it anticipates was in fact held at Nicaea in June 325, and it seems unlikely that all the prelates invited to that gathering could have been told within two months of a change of venue. Barnes, furthermore, will not allow that Constantine could have visited Antioch at any time after the winter of 324 – a plausible date for the council, but not for Easter by any calendar.

If, as seems more probable, the speech addressed an extemporary gathering of clerics who were expecting to serve their own congregations on the following Sunday, it is clear that they cannot have travelled far. But this is to say no more than that the venue was a large centre of population, as every theory has presupposed. Wherever they met, these prelates must have regarded the man who summoned them as an autocrat set over them by God. We have noted above that the rule of one on earth was the tacit corollary of the arguments for the rule of one in heaven which are advanced in the apologetic portion of this speech. If there were more than one divine suzerain, says the Emperor, how would we know which one to approach for succour? How could we be sure of pleasing one without

(22) "Now already the sacred rays of the light of Christ shine forth and the pure torches of the holy spirit are raised, and the celestial treasures of divine glory are open" (*Paschal Homily*, dated to the fourth century by P. NAUTIN, *Homélie pascales*, I, *Une homélie inspirée du traité sur la Pâques d'Hippolyte* [SC, 27], Paris 2003², p. 47).

(23) K. GERLACH, *The Antenicene Pascha: a rhetorical history* (*Liturgia condenda*, 7), Leuven, 1998, pp. 312-330. The same consideration has induced Barnes to postpone the delivery to the Saturday, notwithstanding the clear allusion to the passion and the echo of *Matt.* 27, 45. A hiatus in the liturgy is, however, the opportunity of the lay preacher.

giving exciting the malevolence of the other? The logic is clear, the application dubious. Did it serve as a proem to war against Licinius or as the peroration of victory (24)? Those who have held two opinions on this question have good reason to halt between them for a cognate of this argument in Lactantius must be dated to the joint reign of Licinius and Constantine, while another in Athanasius can be plausibly assigned to any phase in his career from 318 to 373 (25).

SECOND GOD

At the risk of throwing good ink after bad, we must pause to ask whether any terminus for the dating of the speech can be inferred from the Christology of chapters 9 and 10. Constantine is writing as an apologist, whose tenets do not seem to him any less orthodox because he thinks them partially reconcilable with Plato's. The latter, we hear, set one god over all as the crown and measure of perfection, while deputing to a second god the creation and governance of the physical realm. So too it is with God and the son of God, who orders all things at his Father's will and returns them to him at the consummation. This is good Pauline doctrine, but some readers have maintained that the term "second god" betrays sympathy for the position of Arius, which was publicly reprobated by the Council of Nicaea in 325 (26). Since Constantine himself convened this council and enforced its resolutions, it is inconceivable (so the argument runs) that he would willfully have taken up a position that

(24) At *1 Clement* 20-21, the periodicity of nature and the unvarying revolutions of the stars are adduced as symbols of a harmony which prevails in heaven but *not yet* in the Church.

(25) Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 1, 3, 18-19; Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 36-38; see also EDWARDS (1999), p. 272.

(26) J. M. RIST, *Basil's "Neoplatonism": its Background and Nature*, in P. J. FEDWICK (ed.), *Basil of Caesarea, Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, Toronto, 1981, esp. pp. 155-158; but he sees that it is not the subordination of the Son but the affirmation of two essences that would contradict the "homoousian" teaching of Nicaea. BARNES (2001), p. 35 maintains that the term "second god" implies subordination, and that this is an unequivocal token of Arian sympathies. M. J. EDWARDS, *The Arian Heresy and the Oration to the Saints*, in *Vigiliae Christianae* 49 (1995), pp. 379-387 points out that the term is not used as a dogmatic formula, but only in the exposition of Plato, who is expressly said to have fallen short of truth in some particulars.

it condemned. If this passage is not a fabrication by some opponent of the council, Easter 325 is thus the latest possible date for its delivery. If this was indeed the occasion, as both Lane Fox and Barnes contend, we must suppose that two months later he turned his coat at the Nicene council, leaving his Arian friend Eusebius of Nicomedia to suffer for views that both had once professed.

This argument will not move theologians, as its premises are denied in almost every book on Arius or Nicaea that has appeared in the last three decades under an academic imprint. Of the speech itself such works say little : why should they, unless the Emperor had spoken of Christ himself as a second god ? In fact it is only Plato – meaning, of course, the Plato of second century exegetes like Numenius – who is said in the *Oration* to use this title of the Demiurge ; it could not have been applied to Christ by Constantine unless he was ready to postulate two gods and thus to contradict his own strictures on the polytheism of the Greek philosopher. Although it is supposed to be proved by a battery of evidence that the Arians were the only group to posit a δεύτερος θεός in the later years of Constantine, the evidence is never derived from Arius himself or from any avowed opponent of the Nicene creed. Most of it, in any case, states only that Christ is second to the Father, not that he is a second god. Eusebius employs the epithet δεύτερος on several occasions⁽²⁷⁾, δεύτερος θεός only once, in a passage unaccountably neglected in recent work that represents this term as an Arian shibboleth⁽²⁸⁾. Even had Eusebius been an Arian, it is clearly no such thing, because, when opponents whom he quotes in his writings after Nicaea condemn the phrase δεύτερος θεός, it is not because it implies subordination but because it

(27) Especially *Gospel Demonstration* 5, 4, 8, where the Father is the first God, and the Son second, but not second god. See further BARNES (2001), where Origen is cited as a precursor of “Arian” usage. But Origen did not deny the eternity of the Son or his affinity with the Father, and at *Against Celsus* 5, 39 and 6, 61 he appears to be retorting the phrase “second god” upon his adversary, dwelling on the noun “God” where Celsus had urged that the epithet “second” lowered the dignity of the Son. At 7, 57 the Son is to be honoured with worship second to the Father’s, but is not called second god.

(28) *Gospel Demonstration* 5, 30, 3, where he concludes that prophets testify to a “second god after the Father”. It is clear that he is second because the Father was already known ; it is the next clause, “after the Father” that bespeaks inferiority.

entails two gods ⁽²⁹⁾. To entertain belief in two divine beings was a heresy to all Christians, and to Arius above all ; in his willingness to admit the phrase before the Nicene Council, Eusebius shows that whatever he was he was not a disciple of the Alexandrian presbyter who maintained that Christ was created out of nothing, and hence not worthy of the appellation θεός in the same sense as the Father. Only in an improper or “cat-achrestic” sense would Arius have asserted the divinity of the Son ; to style one πρῶτος (“first”) and the other δεύτερος (“second”) was to imply that they were beings of the same class, albeit not of equal rank ⁽³⁰⁾.

But is the subordination of Christ to the father an unmistakable token of Arian sympathies ? The Council of Nicaea asserted only a *homoousiotês* or consubstantiality of nature between the Father and the Son, which does not logically preclude subordination ⁽³¹⁾. Eusebius, when he continued to maintain the subordination of the Son after the Council of Nicaea, incurred the censure of no-one but the heretic Marcellus. Even Athanasius, when he appointed himself the steward of Nicene orthodoxy, employed the term *homoousios* asymmetrically, and allowed that the Father is greater insofar as he is Father ⁽³²⁾. It was not his “homoousian” supporters but their “homoiousian” rivals who were thought to have made equality their watchword ; when, conversely, Basil of Caesarea took up

(29) See Marcellus of Ancyra, *Fragmenta e Libro contra Asterium* (CPG 2800) : fragm. 80 on the second God in Narcissus, and fram. 85 for the comparison of Eusebius to Valentinus.

(30) Note that even the second letter of Plato avoids such leveling : “all things are around the king of all [not, “the first], the second around the second and the third around the third” (p. 323, cited by Eusebius, *Gospel Preparation* 11, 20, 2). At *Gospel Demonstration* 6, 4, Eusebius has a “first god” and a “second”, but no “second god”.

(31) Subordination of Son in orthodox writers : G. BULL, *De Subordinatione Filii*, reprinted in *Works*, V, ed. E. BURTON, London, 1846, pp. 685-811 ; R. P. C. HANSON, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God : the Arian Controversy, 318-381*, Edinburgh, 1988, pp. 64, 274 etc. ; L. AYRES, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, Oxford, 2004, pp. 206-207. B. WARFIELD, *Calvin and Augustine*, Princeton, 1909, shows that even the Nicene Creed and its adherents have often been taxed by Reformed theologians with a residual tendency to subordinationism.

(32) See especially *Contra Arianos* 1, 58, in which he allows that the Father is great than the Son, as *John* 14, 28 affirms, though only by virtue of being Father. He goes on to deduce that, since the two can be compared, they are of one nature. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 1, 203-204 : only beings of the same nature lend themselves to enumeration.

the cause of the *homoousion*, he was not afraid to speak of the Son as *deuteros* to the Father⁽³³⁾. For this he was called an Arian by some in his time and not a few today ; for our purpose it suffices that a man of deep intelligence and probity, some fifty years after the Council of Nicaea, did not think that his profession of orthodoxy was imperilled by his adoption of the term. Even had Constantine expressly declared the Son to be second to the Father, there is no reason to suppose that this pronouncement would have favoured either party in an ecclesiastical quarrel, before or after 325.

A SEASON OF TOLERATION

But if scholars have worked an empty vein in chapter 10, the majority seem to me to have missed a streak of gold close by. It is generally agreed that as his tenure of the throne became more secure the Emperor took more vigorous measures against those cults which he deemed offensive to his own deity. Eusebius purports to know of a law suppressing all sacrifice, and while no formal record of this survives, we can find corroborative testimony in Optatus and perhaps an allusion to it in the ban on sacrifice issued by his sons in 341. It is hard to believe that any such legislation was in force, or even in prospect, when Constantine delivered this aside to the unconverted in chapter eleven of his *Oration to the Saints*⁽³⁴⁾ :

Away with you, impious ones (for this command is laid on you on account of your incorrigible sin) to the slaughter of nations and sacrifices, your revelry and feasting and carousing, as you profess to offer worship while you devise unbridled pleasures and debaucheries, and pretend to make sacrifice while you are in thrall to your own pleasures.

The addressees are fictitious, the imperatives rhetorical. But even autocrats, when they turn to rhetoric, are subject to the canons of verisimilitude ; would these have permitted Constantine after 324, at the head of a

(33) For δεύτερος in Basil see *Contra Eunomium* 1, 20, with the tacit apology of Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 1, 197-204. This has failed to reconcile M. V. ANASTOS, *Basil's Lapses into Arianism and How Athanasius had Avoided Them*, in J. CHRYSOSTOMIDES (ed.), *ΚΑΘΗΓΗΤΡΙΑ. Essays presented to J. Hussey*, Camberley, Surrey, 1988, pp. 153-171.

(34) P. 167, 29-33 of the edition of HEIKEL, trans. EDWARDS (2003), pp. 22-23.

Christian assembly, to extend the same indulgence to the pagans that he had been obliged to grant at the time of the Edict of Milan ?

THE VEIL OF ANONYMITY

The next indication of date occurs in chapter 22, where Constantine celebrates the deliverance of the city from a false champion ⁽³⁵⁾ :

For my part, I ascribe to your goodwill all my good fortune, and that of those who are mine ... For the great city is conscious of it, and gives praise with reverence, while the people of the dearest city approve, even if it was deceived by unsafe hopes into choosing a protector unworthy of it, who was suddenly overtaken in a fitting manner worthy of his atrocities, one that it is not right for me to recall, least of all for me as I speak with you and strive with all solicitude to address you with holy and auspicious speech.

“The great city” is an honorific sobriquet for Rome in the panegyric which Eusebius composed to mark the thirtieth year after Constantine’s accession. Bleckmann, however, urges that in the days when Nicomedia was the metropolis of the East, it will have been manifestly the greater of the two cities ⁽³⁶⁾. This reasoning would compel us to award the *Oration* to Nicomedia only if it were shown, against the more natural construction of the syntax, that the great city and the dearest city are one. If they are distinct, and Nicomedia is the great city, the success of Bleckmann’s argument here will cost him his thesis elsewhere.

It is easy enough to cull letters from Eusebius’ *Life of Constantine* in which the conqueror uses similar terms to denounce the cruelties of Licinius and to extend the mailed hand of clemency to his shipwrecked partisans ⁽³⁷⁾. Since, however, documents from the time of his capture of

(35) *Oration* 22, p. 187, 28 - p. 188, 7 of the edition of HEIKEL, trans. EDWARDS (2003), pp. 53-54.

(36) BLECKMANN, pp. 194-197. Cf. Eusebius, *Tricennialian Oration*, p. 239, 5-6 of the edition of HEIKEL ; MAZZARINO, p. 114.

(37) See e.g. Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History* 1, 14 ; Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 2, 27, 1 ; 2, 49, 1 ; 2, 43. The Emperor’s complaints against Apollo at *Life* 2, 50 and *Oration* 18 give nothing more (if the anecdote recounted in the *Life* is true) than that Christians had had cause to abhor this god since 303. No scholar in recent years has followed R. P. C. HANSON, *The Oratio ad Sanctos Attributed to the Emperor Constantine and the Oracle at Daphne*, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 24 (1973), pp. 505-511, in deducing from the allusion to the Daphne of myth that the speech is a forgery of Julian’s reign.

Rome do not survive, we cannot be sure that the occasion on which these phrases are first attested is the occasion on which he coined them. If Rome had fallen in 312 after trafficking with Maximinus Daia, and Nicomedia in 324 after harbouring Licinius, why should he cultivate a different idiom when he had the same indiscretion to forgive, the same motive for dwelling on the penalties of sedition? The history that he goes on to rehearse is certainly that of his rise to sole dominion in the West when he speaks of a field prepared in Rome for truceless war, and hurls a late salvo at the anonymous "monster" who perished in these times⁽³⁸⁾.

This figure is named in the ancient rubric as Maximinus Daia, and most scholars now agree that he is the tyrant whose defeat in 313 made Licinius master of the East⁽³⁹⁾. Maximinus had not undergone a formal coronation, it was said (as it was always said in the victor's manifesto) that he had taxed his subjects cruelly, and he had certainly enforced Diocletian's edicts against the Christians with a singular ferocity, even after the promulgation of an edict of repeal. Constantine professed to have discovered a correspondence between this tyrant and Maxentius⁽⁴⁰⁾, whose unconstitutional rule in Italy he himself had extinguished in 312 at the Milvian Bridge. Thus in 313 he detached the Christians in the capital from that party which had acquiesced in the government of Maxentius; but could this alliance have been so notorious, or its consequences so lasting, that no names were required to assist the memory of the audience when a speaker alluded to it a decade later and in a locality far from Rome? Even in Serdica, even before the irredeemable rupture between Licinius and Constantine, this reference to a plot that failed to mature in Rome would have been a puzzling detour; all the more so for an audience in Byzantium, Thessalonica, Nicomedia or Antioch after 321. In the Rome of 315, on the other hand, there was a clear object to be gained by the recollection or invention of a history which, while it flattered the partisans of Constantine, was at once a sop and an admonition to Christians who had not yet seen the hand of God in his seizure of the throne.

(38) *Oration*, p. 188, 11-12 in the edition of HEIKEL.

(39) The theory that the champion is Licinius was last upheld by MAZZARINO, p. 115.

(40) See Lactantius, *Deaths of the Persecutors* 43 on the conspiracy of the two tyrants. On this and the consultation of the Sibylline books in Rome (*ibid.*, 44), which would add some piquancy to Constantine's citation of the acrostic, see DRAKE (1985).

In chapter 25 we meet another allusion to an unnamed pretender, who must have ruled the East or a portion of it, since his death is interpreted as a divine assize upon the hitherto unpunished Diocletian ⁽⁴¹⁾ :

For all that at last the providence of God came to judge the unholy deeds, not indeed without harm to the people. There was slaughter on a scale that, had it occurred among barbarians, would have sufficed to bring about eternal peace. For the whole army of the aforesaid king [Diocletian], subject to the authority of some good-for-nothing who had seized the Roman Empire ⁽⁴²⁾ by force, was exterminated by many wars of all kinds.

It would have taxed the memory of any audience to decipher not one but two anonymous references, and to men whose deaths were separated by eleven years. Yet that is what we must surmise if – as Barnes, Lane Fox and others maintain – the usurper who is said in chapter 25 to have dissipated the army of Diocletian in useless warfare is Licinius. Of all the warring despots of this period, Licinius was the one who could not be said to have seized the purple. Lawfully installed in 308 to replace Severus, the late Augustus of the West, he became trustee to the wife and children of the dying Galerius in 311. Maximinus had meanwhile proclaimed himself Augustus, and there is nothing in ancient sources to prove that he had fewer of Diocletian's troops under his authority than Licinius. Lactantius writes that a garrison established by Licinius was coerced into the service of the usurper, and that, while this was not sufficient to repair a force depleted by an injudicious march through snow and tempest, Maximinus was still able to bring an army of 70,000 into the field against the 30,000 mustered by Licinius ⁽⁴³⁾. Subtracting what is hostile or invidious in this testimony, we may infer that when Maximinus assumed the government of Asia he became master of the troops already stationed there, who had hitherto acknowledged Galerius as their chief of staff.

(41) *Oration* 25, p. 191, 24-27 in the edition of HEIKEL, trans. EDWARDS (2003), p. 61.

(42) Or “the government of Romans”, no doubt translating *imperium Romanum*.

(43) Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 45. Lactantius may be suspected of extravagance, but it would not be strange if Constantine, as a prophet in his own interest, were to surpass the volubility of his evangelist.

Of course he could not be said without hyperbole, to have inherited the whole army⁽⁴⁴⁾, whereas Licinius had reunited Diocletian's legions by his defeat of Maximinus in 313. But neither could this defeat of an aggressor by the nominated heir to Galerius fairly be described as a usurpation – and least of all by Constantine, who, a mere three chapters earlier, had said of Maximinus that he had suffered an end in keeping with his deserts. We must remember that this text is not designed to supply posterity with matter for a disinterested chronicle ; if Constantine, in his zeal to show that God had judged Diocletian through his heirs, gave Maximinus the charge of troops whom he had never led, he had no reason to fear in 315 that a Roman audience would be well enough acquainted with the vicissitudes of military command to detect the lie.

THE CASE AGAINST ROME

Yet an argument against a Roman venue for the speech can be derived from the mere occurrence in this chapter of the name Rome⁽⁴⁵⁾ :

A war without a treaty was proclaimed against you by tyrants, O godly piety, and against all your most holy churches ; and there were not wanting⁽⁴⁶⁾ some in Rome, who delighted in the magnitude of these public evils, and a field was prepared for battle. But you, coming forward, gave yourselves up, relying on your faith in God.

This passage commemorates the bloody capture of Rome in 312, but is preceded, as we observed above, by a diatribe against the unworthy champion of the “dearest city”, and followed by a satire on the eastern despot Maximinus Daia. The logic would have been clear enough in the

(44) It could be said, on the other hand, that between Maximinus' irruption into Asia in 310 and his reluctant cession of Thrace to Licinius in 311 he was (in his own eyes) master of that portion of the realm in which Diocletian had conducted his campaigns. The same pretension could have been advanced when he occupied Thrace in 313. If one were to urge that, as senior Augustus, Diocletian was the commander of every legion in the east, the same logic would demand that his jurisdiction be extended to include all western forces. In that case, it would be fantastical to say of anyone before Constantine that he had secured the “whole army of the aforesaid king”.

(45) *Oration* 22, p. 188, 10-14 in the edition of HEIKEL, trans. EDWARDS (2003), p. 54.

(46) A Greek calque on the Latin *non defuerunt*.

Rome of 315, where Constantine's apologists were busily disseminating evidence of a pact between Maxentius and this enemy of the Church (47). On this view there would be nothing artificial or obscure in the final sentence, which contrasts the recalcitrance of "some in Rome" – the pagan majority, dismissed in chapter 11 – with the complaisance of the Church in the same metropolis. In 325, on the other hand, there would surely have been few in Rome, let alone in Nicomedia, who would recall the brief alliance between a faction in that city and Maximinus. But why, if Rome is the "dearest city" of Constantine's oration (48), does he let the name transpire in a parenthesis? Lane Fox, who reduced this argument to half a dozen words some twenty years ago, informs me that he is not satisfied by the parallels that can be adduced from a Latin panegyric (49). The majority of scholars, it would appear, do not need to be satisfied on this point, since the theory that the *Oration* was delivered in Nicomedia has all but won the field, and among the "proofs" advanced in support of it is the speaker's open naming of that city in his account of the dismay which followed the fire of 303 (50).

It is also urged that Constantine could not have been in Rome in the Eastertide of any year between his entry into the capital in 312 and his death in 337 (51). In 316 he transferred his seat to Serdica, then after 324 to Nicomedia, and at last to Constantinople. In 314 if all our texts have been soundly edited, the evidence which puts Constantine in Trier both before and after Easter, will not allow for a visit to Rome (52). In 315, we

(47) Lactantius, *Deaths of the Persecutors* 43. This intrigue, and Maxentius' consultation of the Sibylline books (*ibid.* 44) are among the facts adduced by Drake (1985) to support the identification of Rome as the venue of the *Oration*.

(48) And also the "royal city" of chapter 22, p. 182, 19, where the honour is perhaps accorded to Rome in the age of Virgil rather than in that of Constantine. It should be observed, however, that the same designation is not used more than once of any city in the *Oration*, and it may be that when Constantine named Rome, he had simply run short of sobriquets.

(49) LANE FOX, *Pagans and Christians*, p. 778, n. Cf. EDWARDS (2003), citing *Latin Panegyrics* 2, 1 and 10, 1, 1.

(50) BARNES (2001), p. 29: "the fact that Constantine names Nicomedia and subsequently, in a closely parallel passage, appeals to the knowledge that the 'great city' has of his successes, might together be considered to constitute almost a formal proof that Constantine was speaking in that city."

(51) So BARNES (2004), p. 354.

(52) *CTh* 3, 30, 1 places him at Trier on March 26. At 13, 5, 2 he is at Trier on June 1, 314. The unemended version of 13, 5, 3, however, places him in

are told he was at Trier. The evidence for the latter claim, however, seems equivocal : it consists of a letter to Donatist petitioners, signed not, according to wont, by Constantine but by two deputies⁽⁵³⁾. If we knew on other grounds that he was in Trier on this occasion, we might assume that he was driven to this uncharacteristic use of intermediaries by illness or the embarrassments of business ; so far as our evidence goes, however, it is at least equally probable that he sent this letter by proxy because he was no longer present to supervise the departure of the men whose case he had heard while he was still resident in the city. If this note, then, tells us only where he was not in the spring of 315, we can entertain the possibility – and of course it is no more than a possibility – that he passed the Easter of that year in Rome.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined a number of questions which have either been left open or (in my view) too precipitately resolved in previous studies of the *Oration to the Saints*. I have urged that the omission of the term *victor* or νικητής in the rubric is still a ponderable, though not a decisive, argument against dating the *Oration* to any year after 324. Endorsing the common view that it is a homily for Eastertide, I submit that the case for delivery on Good Friday is strengthened rather than compromised by the want of evidence for liturgical celebration of this holiday in the age of Constantine. I have noted that the locution δεύτερος θεός, sometimes thought to be a token of Arian sympathies, does not occur in Christian texts addressed to other Christians, that its sense is “second in order of knowledge” rather than “second in rank”, and that those writers who took offence at it were not so wary of making the Son inferior to the Father as of positing two gods. It would therefore (I maintain) have served an Arian no better than a catholic as a dogmatic formulary, and its function in the speech is to promote a frail analogy between Platonism and Christian teaching rather than to take sides in any controversy debated by a Church

Constantinople on May 28. See further T. D. BARNES, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, Cambridge (MA), 1982, p. 71.

(53) BARNES (1982), p. 72, cites Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, Appendix 8, which is dated to April 28 at Trier, and adds that the year (not stated) is certainly 315, because Domitius Celsus is named as *vicarius Africae*. At p. 243 BARNES describes this (accurately) as the letter of Petronius Annianus and Julius Julianus to Domitius.

council of this epoch. I have argued that the Emperor's allusive strictures on his predecessors would have been difficult to parse if they were not directed against a single man within a few years of his fall ; I have added that if history forbids to recognise Maximinus Daia as the prodigal who squandered the whole of Diocletian's army, it would likewise have forbidden Constantine to denounce Licinius as an adventurer who had seized the realm by force. I have tried to show that neither the appearance of the name Rome in the *Oration* nor the known itinerary of Constantine in 315 subverts the theory that it was delivered in, or at least intended for, the western capital in that year. At the same time, it does not seem that proponents of a Nicomedian venue, who attach the grand salutations of the second chapter either to this Church alone or to bishop and Church together, have produced evidence that this see vied with Rome in the estimation of other Christians or that the formidable Eusebius, its leader in 325 and 328 enjoyed the full confidence of the Emperor – let alone of the Church at large – in either year.

I have not developed the argument for Rome that might be based on the long citation of the *Fourth Eclogue*, which could not have been expected to stir a Greek audience any more deeply in its own tongue than in the original ; one might say in reply that the Greekless autocrat would have neither the will nor the means to woo the tastes of men unknown to him, whose loyalty was of greater moment to him than their culture. Nor have I dwelt on the fact that demonstrations like the one described in chapter 22 are said to have taken place throughout Italy after Constantine's occupation of Rome in 312 ; every city that fell to him will have staged such exhibitions of docility, though we cannot be sure that any seat but Rome played host to a triumph in which the Cross enjoyed the same prominence that is given to the Sibylline acrostic in the *Oration*. It ought by now to be evident that I do not profess to find anything in the text that puts the date beyond controversy. A date of 325 in Nicomedia can certainly be defended if a satisfactory answer can be returned to the questions raised in the present paper. But if the speaker is Constantine, if he had any skill in playing on the sympathies and interests of his audience, and if his mockery of late tyrants is intended to quicken rather than cloud the memory, I cannot think of any venue so propitious to this defence of his conversion and career than the western capital which he had wrested from Maxentius in 312.

VIII

Dracontius the African and the Fate of Rome

If Boethius was, as Gibbon thought, the last great name in Roman literature ⁽¹⁾, we might style his older contemporary Dracontius the last of the Latin-speaking Africans. For part of his life a prisoner, like Boethius, he was also, like Boethius, for part or all of his life a Christian. He saw himself as a poor man at the mercy of rich oppressors, but he none the less enjoyed the acquaintance of some powerful friends, whose names would have been lost to us had his verses not survived. To judge by the coda to his *Satisfactio*, his jailer was King Gunthamund of the Vandals (484-496) ⁽²⁾, though he is careful not to immortalise the name in his own laments. Today we know Dracontius through his writings, whose date would have condemned them to obscurity even had they shown more than the bare sufficiency of merit that accounts for their preservation. Scholarship, which cherishes the arcane and the mediocre, cannot be said to have neglected them, but they have yet to receive a critical monograph which would take its place beside those of O'Daly on Boethius, of Malamud and Palmer on Prudentius or of Roberts on the jewelled style of late antiquity ⁽³⁾. The epic hexameter was his chosen form, and one that (we might presume) would admit of little experimentation in the fifth century A.D. Nevertheless one object of this paper is to show that it was possible even for a minor poet, at least if he was neither a native Roman nor a pagan, to innovate with some purpose in this medium. The minor poet will often command the interest of historians because he is more likely than his great contemporaries to be the mouthpiece of the age whose

(1) E. GIBBON, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. O. SMEATON, London, 1910, vol.4, p.139.

(2) F. VOLLMER, *Poetae Latini Minores*, vol. V, Leipzig, 1914, p. 107. Cf. Cl. MOUSSY, *Dracontius : Oeuvres*, vol. 1, Paris, 1988, p. 18-9. If the *Satisfactio* alludes to Theodorik's murder of Odoacer as a recent event (MOUSSY, p. 23n), it may be dated to 493. As Moussy observes (p. 29-31), the "pagan" *Romulea* VI and VII were written after the end of the poet's captivity ; therefore the disparity in his work is not the consequence of his turning to Christianity in prison, unless he was merely flirting with the faith or suffered the "literary conversion" postulated by F. ROMANO, *Studi Draconziani*, Palermo, 1959, p. 47. I do not know whether anyone has suggested that conversion (or reconversion) to paganism was a condition of his release, or that adversity at last destroyed his faith.

(3) G. O'DALY, *The Poetry of Boethius*, London, 1991 ; M. A. MALAMUD, *The Poetics of Transformation : Prudentius and Classical Mythology*, Ithaca, NY, 1989 ; A.-M. PALMER, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, Oxford, 1989 ; M. J. ROBERTS, *The Jeweled Style : Poetry and Poetics in late Antiquity*, Ithaca, NY, 1989.

taste he flatters. Therefore a second object of this paper is to find what is distinctive in the poetry of Dracontius, and to understand this not as an eccentric deviation from the classics, but as the hallmark of a time in which the poet, his audience and the world's great cities all appeared to a pagan eye to have been crushed on the wheel of fate.

This study will begin with the *Romulea*, a sequence of ten poems so conspicuously in debt to pagan models and so empty of explicit Christian teaching that we are tempted to doubt the allegiance of the author. I shall argue that they express, and may have been designed to parody, the popular conviction that the tale which we call history is a shadow-play devised for the entertainment of unfeeling and inexorable gods. The captivity of the poet, the subjection of his genius to the ancients, his recurrent inability to complete or even at times to commence a narrative, are all personal affidavits to the vigilance of these unseen puppeteers. I shall then turn to his longest work, *De Laudibus Dei*, which teaches that the world from its creation has been directed by a providence that rewards the just and punishes the guilty, and that, far from being indifferent to our projects, God reserves for an end that we could not have foreseen before the Incarnation⁽⁴⁾. In the meantime, Rome's fortune is the misfortune of the species, and her fall anticipates the consummation of a universal plan. I shall argue in conclusion that this easy renunciation of Rome's destiny is peculiar to, and typical of, African Latin writers, who were always apt to see the present world as a place of bondage and estrangement, and to put their trust in a power whose ways, though wiser, were as arcane and irresistible as fate.

I. — The shortest of the *Romulea*, the first and third, are prefaces to others, in which, as the poet avers, whatever merit they may have is to be traced to his addressees⁽⁵⁾. Whether they inspired, remunerated or merely seconded his labours it would be hard to say, but he certainly implies that the attrition of his powers is not the consequence of temporary grief or lack of books, as had been the case with the elder poets, but a permanent state that only another agent can relieve. Even such a friend is useless to him in the seventh poem, where he finds himself a prisoner and unable to recite the epithalamium that he feels impelled to write. In fact he never writes it, though his forty-line description of the revels that attend the composition and delivery of such pieces might be deemed an

(4) Therefore I do not agree with E. RIPISARDA, *Il poeta della misericordia divina. I. L'unità del mondo religioso di Draconzio* in *Orpheus* 2, 1-2, 1955, p. 2 that Dracontius portrays one universe, governed throughout by providence, faith and time. Nor would it have been to his purpose to "Christianize" his myths, as Chatillon argues, *Dracontiana* in *RMAL* 8, 1952, p. 177-212. His two worlds are, as ROMANO argues, utterly at variance (*Studi Draconziani*, n. 3 above, p. 48); if they are studied in juxtaposition, however, we shall see that he was not the "double-souled" character that G. BARDY makes of him in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, Paris, 1959, p. 1711.

(5) See *Romulea* I, 13 at VOLLMER (n. 2 above), p. 109; III, 17-18 at 114.

epithalamium by proxy. He girds himself for his own task with three similes that prove to be more retarding than invigorating. First he is like a veteran roused to warlust from his sickbed by the braying of a trumpet (VII, 73-79); next like a stabled horse who stamps and whinnies at the rumour of new contests (80-95); finally, like a bird caught in a fowler's net, who cannot restrain his own voice when the song of a free companion strikes his ear (96-105). The first two images are much alike, and both for the poet purely wistful; the last, in which the bird remains a prisoner, is the nearest to his case. At last it seems he is ready to strike a note in honour of the wedded couple (106-7); but first he must bewail his impotence once again, and then he must set events in train from the point where Venus sets out for the ocean (137ff); as soon as Neptune rears his head to welcome her (153), the poem is at an end.

A sorry abortion, some might say, if the poem stood alone. But in the *Romulea* this ousting of human agents by their overlords is so frequent that it must bespeak a view of the world or at least a view of poetry's function in it. One function is to imitate, as we see from an apparently gratuitous allusion at line 112 to the *cana fides* of Jupiter's great prophecy to Venus in the *Aeneid* (6). In Virgil faith is the guarantee of the liberty that supervenes for the poet and his countrymen at the end of civil war; in Dracontius she convenes the nuptial rites in which the poet himself is unable to play his part. Poem 6 may stand as an example of what Dracontius might have written in a more propitious season, as it is also an epithalamium and does not make any reference to captivity. Yet even here the event, as well as the literary commemoration of it, are staged by gods, and more for their delectation than for any human end. The author proclaims the love-match in a speech of 56 addressed to Venus and her son. A rollicking Cupid intervenes, and the mere enumeration of his retinue consumes the next twenty verses (57-79), though it does not include one unexpected name (7). Venus his mother plots to cement a union within the walls of Carthage, as she did in the age of legend when her son Aeneas made landfall on that coast (8). This time there is no chaste widowhood and no divine remonstrance to withstand her; assisted by personified joys and Neptune, she easily puts virginity to flight (VI, 90-120). The current fashion for allegory (9) is much in evidence here; but for the rest, it seems

(6) *Aeneid* I, 292. Allusions to this symbolic figure are frequent in Latin literature, and in general the use that Dracontius makes of *Aeneid* I is a sign that he did not affect originality even in plagiarism.

(7) Thus pleasure, faith and modesty, who appear at VI, 61-64, demand comparison with piety, faith and pleasure at VII, 59. Ovid's *Amores* I, 1, 3-4 and I, 2, 25-52 supply the model, but Ovid, unlike Dracontius, was at pains to be original.

(8) *Romulea* VI, 80; cf Virgil, *Aeneid* I, 295ff.

(9) C.S LEWIS, *The Allegory of Love*, Oxford, 1936, p. 44-83 gives a brilliant, if unsympathetic account of this development, which received a strong impetus from Christianity.

as though the wreck of ancient literature had left the poet no pabulum but epic and no subject for his talents but the gods.

In one respect he shows a little pride in his own locality. Although the poem is numbered among the *Romulea*, Carthage is not treated here, in the manner of the *Aeneid*, as an obstacle that steals between the Roman and his destiny ; she is herself the place ordained by destiny, at least for the satisfaction of private love. But such affairs are not the stuff of epic, and in the tenth poem ⁽¹⁰⁾, on Jason and Medea, the lovers are not created for the happiness that the poet can grant to his own contemporaries. In life they were the toys of fate, and now the speechless mannequins of poetry ; the poet assumes the voice of fate and the tragedy is conveyed through a series of divine soliloquies. After a lengthy proem, which appeals in turn to the Muses of dumbshow, tragedy and epic (X, 16-31), the Argonauts are swiftly conveyed from Greece to Colchis, home of the golden Fleece. Here, in a deviation from the usual story, Jason is put in fetters, for the purpose, as we later hear, of making him a sacrifice to Diana (48 ; cf. 64). This detail, being no true innovation but a borrowing from the *Iphigeneia in Tauris* of Euripides, is further proof of the poet's inescapable subservience to the ancients. As Jason's human acolytes forsake him, his only friend is Juno, whose petition to Venus occupies 29 lines (52-80). Venus replies in kind, and spends almost as many words exhorting Cupid to make Medea, the Colchian princess, fall in love (127-44). Cupid does her bidding, with a short speech of his own (150-155). Medea, who is a servant of Diana in her character as Hecate of the underworld (194), prepares to sacrifice Jason in the temple. The reader learns, however, that Jason has already become a favoured suppliant to the god of love (200-215). Falling in love with the countenance of her intended victim, Medea offers Jason the choice of marriage or death ; his answer, more shrewd than amorous, is that a slave has little choice (247-252).

In the company of the usual mob of deities, they are married (262-275), but almost at once Diana is upon them, and they take to flight, pursued by her prophetic maledictions (288-300). Such omens cannot fail, and, after Bacchus has appeased Medea's father with false promises (321-327), one sentence is enough to add four years to the story and convince Medea that her spouse has set his heart on another prize (340-344). The pair are brought to Thebes, whose tyrant Creon has been purposely confused with his Corinthian namesake in the original legend (366-367). It seems that the poet's intention is to marry the *Aeneid* with the *Thebaid* ⁽¹¹⁾, or else simply to illustrate the plasticity of song. Just as Jason

(10) Though VOLLMER (n. 2 above), p. 171 has placed the name of Dracontius in square brackets, his doubts as to the authorship of the poem are not sustained by other critics, and to me at least it seems to be of a similar style and tenor to the rest.

(11) The *Thebaid* was composed in the late first century by Statius ; Creon is the villain of the twelfth book, where he attempts to prevent the burial of Polyneices because he made war on Thebes.

knew that Cupid was his impresario, so Creon, when he proposes to wed his daughter to his guest, perceives that marriages are in the hands of fate :

*Si Iuppiter auctor,
Si Lachesis, si fata iubent, nil ipse morabor* (374-5).

«If Jupiter is the cause, if Lachesis and the fates command it, I myself shall make no delay».

None the less he has reckoned without Medea, who concocts a fatal ointment as a gift to Jason's bride. Her magic, though her own, has to be prefaced by a long prayer to the Moon (396-430); when this fails to take effect, she takes her petition to the infernal powers (435-460). For once the deaths of the new bride and the children of the sorceress take longer to narrate than they did to prophesy (464-569); but we learn from the poet's epilogue that the culprits were not so much the human agents as the immortal vices Envy and Insanity (571-572), and that this is not the first or the worst atrocity that has taken place in Thebes (583-592; cf. 449-451).

The poem is six hundred lines in length, although the whole of the distance traversed in the epics of Valerius Flaccus and Apollonius Rhodius has gone by in the first three hundred. Subtract from this 300 the 150 that are either uttered by or addressed to gods, and what remains is a bloodless history in which the Argo's mariners are anonymous, battles and storms are swallowed in vaticination, boasts and dialogues give way to prayer. It is true that two Greek versions, the *Orphic Argonautica* and the fourth of Pindar's *Pythian Odes*, were couched entirely in mantic speech, but even there the narrative was more lively and the characters more diverse. The same level cloud of irony hangs over the Trojan legend in the ninth of the *Romulea*. Everything that occurs is the work of Venus after Paris has adjudged her the most beautiful of three goddesses (IX, 31-56); yet she is merely a catalyst, for the plot was inscribed already in the stars (132), and more importantly, in the memory of poets (12, 16). Dracontius purports to be telling only what Homer and Virgil have omitted (22-23), yet he models the cardinal episode on the tale of Aeneas and Dido⁽¹²⁾. The ship of Paris is blown off course (385-452), he falls in with, then falls in love with Helen, and the two cement a union in defiance of an existing nuptial bond (494-585). Helen's case is unlike that of Dido in that her husband is alive to wage the war that the fates have already declared to be inevitable (57-60)⁽¹³⁾.

(12) Even in detail: thus VIII, 402 echoes *Aeneid* I, 94, at 471 Paris turns to Venus as his guardian, at 482 he is dressed in the "Tyrian" garments that are frequently attributed to the Trojans in the *Aeneid*, at 545 he calls Helen "queen" (*regina*), as Aeneas does when reciting his woes to Dido at *Aeneid* II, 3.

(13) The denunciation of the "impious" fates at I, 57 is the stroke of a Christian author.

II. — The question “Who is the author of our destinies ?” is a leading theme of the poem *De Laudibus Dei*, or *On the praise of God*, which, with its keel of over 2000 verses, is evidently meant to hold the poet’s finest cargo. The reference to “the thunderer” in the opening line half dupes us into supposing that its subject will be Jupiter, but it quickly becomes apparent that the Christian God is the one who bears this title in his capacity as judge. Two riddles force themselves upon his faithful subjects : why do the wicked not receive their due, and why is the natural order upset by monstrous births and other prodigies ? The pagan might reply that fate takes no account of either retributive or distributive justice ; the answer of Dracontius is that God’s forbearance spares the guilty only to give occasion for repentance (I, 97-8), and that to this end he sows the world with omens of his inevitable wrath (I, 101-2). These proofs of divine omnipotence are the pretext for an excursus on the six days of creation (I, 118-328) and the fashioning of Paradise as a home for the human race (I, 329-437). If the earth no longer yields the same spontaneous plenty, the fault lies not with God or his creation, but with the sinful choice of the human will in Paradise and in every subsequent generation of our exile (I, 459-561). Virgil had given a different explanation, styling Jupiter our father and asserting that he made agriculture difficult to foster skill and virtue ⁽¹⁴⁾ ; he had also said that some beasts have the power of divination, and Dracontius takes up this point to urge *a fortiori* that humans too possess this faculty (I, 502-520). John the Baptist is introduced as the harbinger of wrath and the means appointed for escaping it ⁽¹⁵⁾, and the cycle of birth and death becomes an emblem of the day of resurrection, when all debts will be repaid (I, 621-743).

Thus the first book concludes. The second turns to the miracles of the Exodus to illustrate the might of God and the turpitude of the unregenerate (II, 165-181). Once again the human race is taxed with the causes of its own decline (II, 248-54) and the corruption of the world. Virgil, quoting the Sibyl, had foretold that a new sidereal revolution would bring back the uncultivated abundance of the Golden Age, and even render the use of dyes superfluous ⁽¹⁶⁾. Dracontius retorts that we have lost these gifts irreparably through sin, and are now so impotent as to have no hope of restoration except through the death of God’s son Jesus Christ (II, 469-504). Though Christ displayed his majesty by invading the realm of Satan from the Cross (II, 505-46), the freewill of fallen humans is still capable of rejecting the call of him whom all the elements, and even hell, obey (II, 563-623). The book concludes with a eulogy on those who have found salvation through their faith, from Abraham to the modern saints (II, 625-818).

(14) VIRGIL, *Georgics* I, 121-36.

(15) Cf I, 521 with Matthew 3.7.

(16) *Eclogue* IV, 6 and 44 ; cf *Praises* II, 440-64.

The third book undertakes to show that the vagaries of fortune in the present life are corrected by the scrupulous economy of the next. The sybarite, who ransacks foreign markets for his purple robes, will see from hell that the poor man whom he mocked now rests in the bosom of Abraham (III, 36-85). Lest we should miss the import of this parable, the history of Rome is brought before us (III, 147). As the Persian monarchs bowed to Daniel ⁽¹⁷⁾, so the Romans, yielding to the gospel of St Peter (III, 222-239), have become the heirs of Abraham and know better than to praise the inhuman rectitude of Brutus and Virginius, who, unlike the patriarch, spared not their own kin ⁽¹⁸⁾. Nor will they be edified by the obstinacy of Regulus, the vainglory of Torquatus or the horrors of the Numantian war, which gave the lie to Roman boasts of clemency even before the period of fratricidal strife ⁽¹⁹⁾. As in the *Romulea*, the poet is writing from his cell, yet he knows that God has not abandoned him, for otherwise he would not have let him live and thus created an opportunity for repentance. He ends by echoing Juvenal's tenth satire ⁽²⁰⁾ and the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil ⁽²¹⁾, two poems which continued to form part of the appropriated wealth of Christianity. Length of years and health in mind and body may be prayed for by a Christian, yet not as absolute goods but as prerequisites for purity of soul.

III. — In the two longest specimens of his work that survive, Dracontius presents two worlds both teeming with misfortune, vice and misery. But whereas one, patrolled by fate, is a bedlam for the incurable, the other is a hospital devised by Providence for our redemption. The poet, himself a captive in the world of his *Romulea*, bewails his loss of liberty and poetic enterprise ; his human agents, if

(17) III, 184-190, confusing Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3 with "Darius the Mede" in Daniel 6.

(18) *Praises* III, 324-361. Brutus, who liberated Rome from the tyranny of Etruscan kings, put his own son to death for disobedience, while Virginius slew his daughter after she had been raped by a Roman magistrate. Contrast 1 Samuel 14.24-36, where Saul is forced to spare his son Jonathan after his breach of an oath, and Genesis 22, where Abraham is released from the command to sacrifice Isaac. The needless death of Jephthah's daughter at Judges 11.29-40 is discreetly overlooked.

(19) As a prisoner of the Carthaginians, Regulus (III, 419-438) elected to suffer fatal tortures rather than advise Rome to make peace ; Torquatus (III, 362-70) risked his life in battle, only to incur the wrath of his father ; the Numantians (III, 456-469) escaped the yoke of Rome by a general suicide.

(20) Christians of the late antique and mediaeval periods never tired of quoting and transcribing Juvenal's strictures on the immorality of his fellow-Romans : see E. CURTIUS, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, Princeton, 1973, p. 49. At *Satire* X, 356 he advises us to pray for a sound mind in a healthy body ; Dracontius presents the some petition to his maker at *Praises* III, 374-5.

(21) At *Praises* III, 734-5 Dracontius prays for length of years to sing the praises of God ; *Eclogue* 4, 53-4 expresses the wish that Virgil will live long enough to hymn the birth of a child whom many Christians, beginning with Lactantius (*Divine Institutes* 7,26), identified as Christ.

they speak at all, can avoid futility only by craven adulation of the gods. Even this touch of dramatic colour is absent from the three books *On the Praises of God*, and throughout the poet maintains a tone of adoration and thanksgiving ; nevertheless, the God who now replaces fate does not suppress the freedom of his creatures, but on the contrary gives his own Son to deliver them from self-inflicted slavery. For a parallel to this juxtaposition of providence and fate, we need look no further than the cell of his fellow-Christian Boethius, who wrote his *Consolation of Philosophy* as a prisoner of Theodoric. In this role he meditates in verse on the unequal distribution of goods and evils ; but he is gradually weaned from his despair by lady Philosophy in five books of alternating prose and metre. He learns from her that the universe is governed not by fate but by a providential deity, whose omniscience assures the soul of victory even though his omnipotence does not constrain the will.

The line of thought that is plotted in this paper for Dracontius is completed by Boethius in the span of a single volume ; it is obvious that the aim of the *Consolation of Philosophy* from the outset was to lead us from the atheistic to the theistic view, though it is not clear that the view at which he arrives is that of authentic Christianity ⁽²²⁾. What we find in Dracontius, by contrast, is theodicy in one poem and fatalism in another. Such a contrast might be thought to betoken a conversion, but it is difficult to imagine what the motive for embracing Christianity would have been in vandal Africa, and his epic *On the Praise of God* does not appear to be the work of a neophyte. Had he been converted to paganism, on the other hand, one might have expected him to derive some hope or comfort from his new religion. Therefore a third hypothesis demands consideration : that he wrote the *Romulea* as a Christian, that his intention was to demonstrate the futility of mythical and polytheistic teaching, and that he wrote two poems rather than one because, for him as for many other Africans, there was no bridge to be built between pagan error and Christian truth.

The Christians of Africa had often remained belligerently sectarian while their Italian co-religionists had enjoyed a more peaceful commerce with the wisdom of the flesh. Ambrose of Milan availed himself of the thought and language of Plotinus ⁽²³⁾, while Jerome of Aquileia peppered even his dogmatic works with tags from Cicero, Virgil and Quintilian. We do not suspect them of imitating only to refute, as the Numidian Minucius Felix does in his *Octavius*, where the Ciceronian vehicle and the Ostian setting show what is at stake in this dispute between a Christian and a pagan. Tertullian of Carthage, both in the diction and in the content of his writings, stands as far as it was possible to be from the equanimity of Cicero ; although by no means ignorant of philosophy, he tells us that

(22) See O' DALY, *Poetry of Boethius* [n. 3], p. 26-28.

(23) See especially the unsignalled and lengthy quotation of *Enneads* 1,6,8 at *On Isaac* 79.

the mortal realm is a pageant of the devil and that Jerusalem has nothing to do with Athens⁽²⁴⁾. Taking up his pen against the Platonists, Arnobius of Sicca mocks their doctrine of a pre-existent soul on the grounds that no soul would be sent by God, or willingly descend, to the den of squalor and iniquity that we call the present world (*Against the Nations* II, 42). Many have detected a Gnostic tenor in his rhetoric, and his orthodoxy can be defended only by supposing that he is arguing *ad homines*, in the manner that Dracontius later copied, and depicts the world of pagans as the pagans represent it to themselves.

Lactantius is more urbane, sketching a natural theology in respectful emulation, rather than parody, of a Ciceronian dialogue. Even he, however, predicts the fall of Rome with only specious tears (*Divine Institutes* VII, 15). Augustine turned to Cicero's *Republic* for his model, but his purpose in the *City of God* was to adumbrate a contrast between the asylum built by Romulus for outlaws and the true eternal City, which was formed by God's election, sanctification and deliverance of the just throughout history. Augustine in maturity repudiates the classics which beguiled his godless youth, as he also rejects the materialistic fables of the Manichees and the astral determinism which for many pagans took the place of providence⁽²⁵⁾. Yet the faith that he knew as catholic did not teach that the human will was free to shape an undetermined future ; it stated that the reprobate had received their sentence in the loins of Adam, and that the saved owed both their election and their merits to the fixed decree of God. This tenet, upheld with force against Pelagius the Briton, was hesitantly endorsed in Rome and never became the unanimous teaching of the Gallic churches. It was, however, the one that prevailed in Africa, and some would say that it merely substitutes the name of God for that of Saturn, the monstrous idol of the native and Punic cults⁽²⁶⁾. Be that as it may, the doctrine finds its counterpart in the words of an African pagan, also writing like Dracontius in the sixth century : Martianus Capella, in the first book of his *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, affirms with Delphic brevity that the world is governed by decrees so rigid that the gods cannot revoke them (I, 31-330). A pagan brought up in Africa was therefore almost certain to be a fatalist or a pessimistic theist ; a Christian would be taught that the world was in the hands of a deity who differed from fate in being more inscrutable, since piety declared him to be just.

This sense that the world is morally opaque, at least to carnal minds, could only have been deepened by the Vandal occupation of Africa. When the barbarians turned their arms against Rome in the mid-fifth century, it was Bishop Leo who stood between that city and destruction. In Africa the Church succumbed, partly because the invaders came in greater numbers, partly because there were

(24) *On the Shows* 12 and 24 ; *On the Proscription of Heretics* 7.

(25) See *Confessions* 1,3 ; 3,10 ; 4,1 etc.

(26) W. H. C. FRENCH, *The Donatist Church*, Oxford, 1952.

some who preferred a barbarian kingdom to a Roman province, partly because theology, as exemplified in Letter 111 of Augustine, maintained that in a fallen world prosperity and adversity come alike from the hand of God. Victor of Vita's tract against the Vandals of the sixth century makes no attempt to play down the woes of Africa, as the Spaniard Paulus Orosius had urged a century earlier that earthquakes, wars and famines had diminished since the rise of Christianity. The refutation of fatalism did not lie in affirming, with the Platonists, that the world was a better place than its detractors thought it ; rather it lay in accepting their account of the phenomena, with the rider that behind all these calamities was a benign and omnipotent overseer, whose purposes were known only to the saints. Of these Dracontius makes himself the spokesman in his *Praise of God* ; when he poses as the mouthpiece of the pagan view in his *Romulea*, he need not be professing a different faith. Even in his *Satisfactio*, certainly a Christian work, he believes (or finds it politic to pretend) that God, in his benign asperity, is the author of our sins :

*Sic mea corda deus, nostro peccante reatu
Temporis immodici, pellit ad illicita (19-20).*

«Thus God drives my soul to unlawful acts, although the fault lies with my own guilt over untold years».

The argument, clearly redolent of Augustine, is that since my fathers sinned, God is just in forcing me to be a sinner ; yet sin – once known – is the herald of repentance, and thus what the doomed philosopher, in his struggles with the body, calls his fate is seen by Christians as the providential chastisement of God. If these poems are not so redolent of hope as the works that Paul, Ignatius, Cyprian and Boethius wrote in their years of captivity, the reason is that he wishes to depict, not a different world, but the selfsame world as it appears to those who linger in the fetters of infidelity, and are prisoners in spirit even while their limbs are free.

IX

GNOSTICS AND VALENTINIANS IN THE CHURCH FATHERS

A. PHILOLOGICAL

PROFESSOR MORTON SMITH, in a recent article,¹ has argued that the term 'Gnostic' is designedly employed by Irenaeus in a manner that precludes any fixed or precise determination of its meaning. Having accounted in this way for the fluctuations of modern usage,² he pronounces some harsh reflections upon the practice of Irenaeus:

I think it fairly easy to see what St Irenaeus did. With characteristic concern for veracity he picked a few outstanding unpopular heretics . . . and he set out to represent all other heretics as descendants and secret followers of these loathsome ancestors . . . In the east . . . 'gnostic' remained a term of praise . . . In polemics against the sects attacked by Irenaeus, however, his usage was followed.³

The mendacity of the Fathers, it would appear, is so well known that Professor Smith can condemn them as soon as he names them, offering only the most desultory of commentaries on the most exiguous of quoted texts. In the course of a single paragraph he has produced three striking judgements, all of which are endorsed or anticipated in the works of other scholars, though none of them has yet been put to the test of a complete and unprejudiced scrutiny of the sources to which they allude:

1. That Irenaeus effects a deliberate confusion by his usage of the term 'Gnostic', either blackening all his enemies with the name or else presenting them as the infamous 'descendants and secret followers' of the creed.

2. That the western fathers followed him in this indifferent application of the word to all the opponents of orthodoxy.

3. That in the east the word retained a favourable sense which was lost in the west.

These claims I propose to examine in the order in which I have stated them.

I

Professor Smith's convocation of 'all other heresies' has the support of Lampe's *Patristic Lexicon* in so far as the expression covers 'Ophites, Carpocratians and Valentinians'. There is no need to labour the proofs for any except the last of these three. The Valentinians are

¹ 'History of the term *gnostikos*' in B. Layton (ed.) *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* (Leiden, 1981), ii. 796-807.

² See the definitions of the Messina Colloquium, considered below.

³ Smith, pp. 804-5.

the first group to be connected with the name 'Gnostic' by Irenaeus, who does not appear inclined to distribute either term too widely:

ὁ μὲν γὰρ πρῶτος ἀπὸ τῆς λεγομένης γνωστικῆς αἵρέσεως τὰς ἀρχὰς εἰς ἴδιον χαρακτήρα διδασκαλείου μεθαρμόσας Οὐαλεντίνος . . .
(*Adversus Haereses*, I. xi. 1).

Irenaeus indicates that the name of the γνωστικὴ αἵρεσις is conventional (λεγομένη), though he does not say by whom or at what time it was first applied. He implies that the sect was earlier than Valentinus, since its principles were sufficiently mature to be adapted to his own system. Since Irenaeus wishes to convict the heretics at once of plagiarism and of excessive originality, he divorces the λεγομένη γνωστικὴ αἵρεσις, already known and defined, from the ἴδιος χαρακτήρ whose content was not conventional, and which therefore fell outside the definition of the older heresy. The Valentinian system was produced, in short, by a transformation of Gnosticism. It does not follow that the name was not, or ought not to be, used of it, but certainly it cannot be said that Irenaeus uses it of Valentinus here. The only certain inference from this sentence is that the appellation 'Gnostic' could be applied without including Valentinus to some antecedent heresy, so styled before Irenaeus, and still considered by him as a sect apart.

Professor Smith, however, discerns a calculated confusion of the 'Gnostics' and Valentinians in the next reference:

ἄριστον ἄρχοντα ἐδογματίσεν ὁμοίως τοῖς ἠθησομένοις ὑφ' ἡμῶν ψευδωνύμως Γνωστικοῖς
(I. xi. 1).

'This seems an attempt to suggest that the Valentinians were gnostics without quite saying so'.⁴ But what Irenaeus says, in fact, is that they were similar; what he therefore suggests is that they were not the same. It would perhaps be more helpful to note the tense of ἠθησομένοις, which indicates that the description of the true 'Gnostics' is yet to come. A third reference follows almost immediately:

ἵνα τελείων τελειότεροι φανώσιν ὄντες καὶ Γνωστικῶν γνωστικότεροι
(I. xi. 5).

'Again the implication is that the Valentinians are gnostics even when he distinguishes them from the gnostics!'⁵ declares the exasperated critic. Careful readers will find that the distinction is in

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 803.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 804.

the text, the implication in Morton Smith. To write that the Valentinians were the most 'Gnostic' of the 'Gnostics' would be to state what the modern reader would anticipate; to write that they exceeded them, as Hamlet exclaimed that the players out-Heroded Herod, is to say something equally clear, but quite distinct. Even Professor Smith, one fears, had he liked his author better, would not have been so insensitive to the difference between a statement that Valentinians are 'Gnostics' and a statement that they affect the traits of the 'Gnostics' in an exaggerated degree.

Irenaeus certainly denounces the Valentinians as the professors of a 'γνώσις falsely so called' (*A. H.* ii *Prologue*). The appellation 'γνωστικὸς' should therefore be all the more difficult to withhold from them; yet Irenaeus withholds it whenever he writes as though the bearers of these names could be placed in sequence or compared.

If Irenaeus appears to have the start of modern scholars in his separation of Gnosticism and Gnosis, he would seem to have been assisted by an equally discriminating nomenclature in his opponents. He denounces them for a 'gnosis falsely so called', he speaks of a 'λεγομένη γνωστικὴ αἵρεσις', and, when he styles the Carpocratians 'Gnostics' he is equally unwilling to use the name on his own authority:

Alii vero ex ipsis signant. . . . Gnosticos se autem vocant (I. xxv. 6).

Thus Irenaeus gives to the Carpocratians as their own catchword the name that he denies to the Valentinians whom he appears to be most eager to impugn. We may reasonably infer that when he bestows it upon a second group of adversaries, his intention is to identify and not merely to defame them:

Super hos autem ex his qui praedicti sunt Simoniani, multitudo Gnosticorum Barbelo exsurrexit (I. xxix. 1)

The parsing of the name Barbelo in this sentence is as obscure as its etymology,⁶ but it seems plain from the length and content of the subsequent exposition that these are the 'Gnostics' proper, the ἔηθησομένοι Γνωστικοί who are promised in the remarks on the Valentinians. Chapters xxx and xxxi contain accounts of certain 'others',⁷ whom Irenaeus does not define more closely, and who may therefore be regarded as further offshoots of the 'Gnostic' heresy. They occupy the position which was previously accorded to the 'Gnostics' in the genealogy of Valentinus. Thus in chapter xxx:

⁶ On which F. C. Burkitt, '*Pistis Sophia*' in *JTS* xxiii (1921-2), 283 and '*Pistis Sophia* Again' in *JTS* xxvi (1924-5), 398, still repays study.

⁷ *AH* I. xxx. 1; I xxxi. 1. See also I. xxx. 15 ('*Quidam enim*', etc.)

Tales quidem secundum eos sententiae sunt, a quibus, velut Lernaes hydra, multiplex fera de Valentini schola generata est (I. xxx. 15).

and in chapter xxxi:

A talibus matribus et patribus et proavis eos, qui a Valentino sint . . . necessarium fuit arguere . . . (I. xxxi. 3).

Although Irenaeus adds no new sects to the catalogue in his next four books *Against the Heretics*, he does have many occasions to use the term 'Gnostici', and sometimes in a manner that invites us to extend its sense more widely. Nothing should be made, perhaps of his cursory incrimination of 'eos qui a Basilide sunt . . . et reliquos Gnosticos' (II. xiii. 8), or of 'eos qui sunt a Saturnino et Basilide et Carpocrate et reliquos Gnosticorum' (II. xxxi. 1). These expressions evidently render the Greek word 'λοιπούς',⁸ which is not always employed with the logic of English usage, so as to indicate that the following term contains the antecedent one. Nevertheless, the brief survey of his preliminaries at the opening of the second book might seem to make the adjective do duty for an unspecified number of Christian deviations:

omne ab eis, qui sunt a Valentino, per multos et contrarios modos adinventum esse falsiloquium . . . Et Marci quoque magi sententiam, quum sit ex his . . . et progenitoris ipsorum doctrinam, Simonis magi Samaritani, et omnium eorum, qui successerunt ei, manifestavimus. Diximus quoque multitudinem eorum, qui sunt ab eo Gnostici . . . quaeque ab eis haereses institutae sint, omnes exposuimus.

The vocabulary is clearly not so discriminating as that of the opening book; the plan is followed closely enough, however, to show that Irenaeus is by no means writing at hazard. If we may assume a complete uniformity of nomenclature, and a strict correspondence of order, between the first book and the paraphrase, we shall expound this passage as follows:

1. 'qui sunt a Valentino': chapters i–xii (includes Ptolemaeus and Secundus).
2. 'Marci quoque magi sententia': chapters xiii–xxii.
3. 'Simo magus Samaritanus et qui successerunt ei': chapters xxiii–xxiv (Simon, Menander, Saturninus, Basilides), and possibly xxv–xxvii (Carpocrates, Cerinthus, Nicolaus, Cerdon, Marcion, Tatian).
4. Perhaps chapters xxv–xxviii, and certainly xxix, where the 'Gnostici' are introduced immediately under that name. In order to

⁸ See Rousseau and Doutreleau at II. 1, pp. 247–9 in their commentary (Paris, 1982). The treatment of usage in Book I (Vol. I. 1 p. 300) is insufficiently analytical and needlessly denies the technical sense of Γνωστικῶν in the third citation above.

compose a 'multitudo', of which Irenaeus goes on to assert 'et differentias ipsorum et doctrinas et successiones annotavimus', we must also add the sects of chapters xxx–xxxi.

5. 'quaeque ab eis haereses institutae sunt omnes': not a new collection, but a recapitulation of those already considered, matching the peroration of Book I (xxx. 3–4).

The very weakest conclusion that must be drawn from the text here cited is that the appellation 'Gnostici' can be used without any sense of inconcinnity in a manner that seems to exclude the Valentinians, Simon Magus, and the successors of Mark the Mage. Must not Simon at least have been a 'Gnostic' if the name covers such a multitude, who appear to be united by little more than their derivation from his school? If we are to limit ourselves to what may be surmised from usage alone, we cannot give as confident an answer to this question as Morton Smith, and we ought not to forget that in our first citation Irenaeus asserts that Valentinus was the first to borrow the tenets of the 'Gnostics'. He may be taken to mean what he says only if we allow that the name did not cover Simon, from whom most of the earlier heresies are said to have been derived.

If any more proof were needed that Irenaeus exempts the Valentinians from the charge which he prefers against so few others, we should find it in another text from Book II:

De ea autem, quae est ex his, secunda emissione Hominis et Ecclesiae, ipsi patres eorum, falso cognominations Gnostici, pugnant adversus invicem . . . aptabile esse magis emissioni dicentes, uti verisimile, ex Homine Verbum, sed non ex Verbo Hominem emissum (II. xiii. 10).

No information, either in this book or the first, gives any more precise a character to the author of this objection, but it has at least been shown that the Valentinians could differ, and on a matter of some consequence, from the teaching of one who assumed the title 'Gnostic' as his own.

The term 'Gnostic' in Irenaeus thus denotes a cluster of heresies, loosely bound together by common images and opinions, but none receiving definite form in the works of any named heresiarch. The Valentinian heresy is indebted to them at some points, but the dependence cannot be said to amount to identity. Thus we find that in his first book, where he takes some pains to draw the physiognomy of what is now described as 'Gnosticism', and in the second, where he embarks on a compendious refutation, Irenaeus continues to agree at all points with himself. Such agreement is no proof of veracity, but clear and consistent thinking is not even now so universal in books on Gnosticism as to justify Professor Smith's caricature of this earliest and best-informed of studies.

II

How the 'practice' of Irenaeus 'was followed' we see from the Refutation of Hippolytus, who writes as though he had access to other sources,⁹ and might therefore have been expected to be of some help to Professor Smith. When Hippolytus tells us that Theodotus drew his principles 'ἐκ τῆς τῶν γνωστικῶν καὶ Κηρίνου καὶ Ἐβίωνος σχολῆς' (Ref. x. 23. 1. = p. 282. 3 Wendland) and that he formed a conception of Christ 'ὁμοίως τοῖς προειρημενοῖς Γνωστικοῖς' (viii. 35. 1 = p. 222. 4) we deduce that there was a determinate group of 'Γνωστικοί', so called by Hippolytus and others, to whom the Valentinian Theodotus stood in much the same relation as his master, and the Jewish heresiarchs Ebion and Cerinthus in no relation at all. When he proclaims that Elchasai 'τῷ δὲ ὄντι Γνωστικοῖς δόγμασιν . . . πρόκειται' (ix. 1 = p. 240. 6), he evidently does not treat the relation between this heretic and the 'Gnostics' as one which any reader of his inquiry would be entitled to assume.

The statement that Nicolaus merely augmented the 'Γνωστικῶν διάφοροι γινῶμαι' (vii. 36. 2 = p. 223. 3) does nothing to augment our understanding of the term. The very brevity of the allusion compels us, however, to look for some antecedent definition, for the 'προειρημένοι Γνωστικοί'. These 'Gnostics' we shall find only in the Fifth Book, where the author describes two heresies, that of Justin and that of the Naassenes, with which only he would appear to be acquainted:

1. τίνα οἱ Ναασσηνοὶ λέγουσιν οἱ ἑαυτοὺς Γνωστικούς ἀποκαλοῦντες
(v. 2 = p. 77. 4).
2. μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐπεκάλεσαν ἑαυτοὺς Γνωστικούς
(v. 6. 4. = p. 78. 2)
3. τούτοις καὶ τοῖς τοιοῦτοις ἐπόμενου οἱ θαυμασιώτατοι Γνωστικοί
(v. 8. 1 1 p. 89. 5).
4. οὐδεὶς τούτων τῶν μυστηρίων ἀκροατῆς γέγονεν εἰ μὴ μόνοι οἱ Γνωστικοὶ
τελείοι
(v. 8. 20 = p. 94. 24).
5. οἱ Ναασσηνοὶ ἐπιχειροῦσιν, ἑαυτοὺς Γνωστικούς ὀνομάζοντες
(v. 11 = p. 104. 4).
6. οὗτοι δὲ ἰδίως, οἱ πάντες Γνωστικούς ἑαυτοὺς ἀποκαλοῦσι
(v. 23. 1 = p. 125. 23).

⁹ Especially in Book V. On the sources of Hippolytus, see the introduction to the edition of Marcovich; also G. Salmon, 'The Cross-References in the *Philosophumena*' in *Hermathena*, v. (1885), 389-402, and (on the authenticity of the accounts in Book V) E. de Faye, *Gnostiques et Gnosticisme* (Paris, 1925), pp. 425 ff.

Hippolytus does not reproduce the account of the 'Gnostici Barbelo' as he imitates and enlarges the other chapters of Irenaeus. No doubt he believed that in his exposure of the Naassenes he had already subjected the 'Gnostics' and their ancestors to an adequate refutation. That the Naassenes of this author were the 'Gnostici Barbelo' of his predecessor we cannot demonstrate from the text, although Theodoret all but affirms it;¹⁰ it is, however, easy to see that Justin and the 'Gnostici' were indebted to the Naassenes for their inversions of biblical imagery,¹¹ their ambiguous veneration of the serpent¹² (for which the Hebrew name is Naas),¹³ and their extravagant attempts at the fabrication of Jewish names.¹⁴

When the subject of Gnosticism is opened, the names of Basilides and Valentinus are the ones that occur most readily to the minds of modern authors. If Hippolytus does not associate the word 'Gnostic' with either of these, we cannot suppose him ignorant of what is now so universally known, and it would surely be a fatuous duplicity, exceeding even the 'characteristic' deceptions of Irenaeus, to withhold the invidious epithet from those sects which, since they are flourishing, known and contemporary, could be maligned with the greatest effect.

After so much controversy, one is glad to be able to vindicate the judgement of Morton Smith: Hippolytus adheres with great fidelity to the practice of Irenaeus, and is perhaps the only student of 'Gnosticism' to imitate his attention to the language of his antagonists and his meticulously restricted application of their own terms.

From Tertullian, of course, we expect the delicate confusions of the practised rhetorician:

Tunc Gnostici erumpunt, tunc Valentiniani proserpunt, tunc omnes martyriorum refragatores ebulliunt . . . (*Scorpiace*, i. 5).

Tertullian writes 'proserpunt' because he wishes to remind us that the Valentinians partook of the Gnostic legacy; but the sentence is a crescendo, which culminates in the term of widest possible extension. Only a rapid writer would have weakened this series by speaking first of the 'Gnostici' and then of a smaller party which he regarded as merely one of the many branches of that sect. In his *Adversus*

¹⁰ Harvey quotes Theodoret, *Haeret. Fab.* xiv on *AH* I. xxx. 1.

¹¹ *AH* I. xxx. 6-14 and *Refutation*, v. 26 (Wendland pp. 126-33) are the best instances.

¹² *AH* I. xxx. 8; *Ref.* v. 24. 4 (= p. 127. 14) makes Naas divine, but v. 24. 6 (= p. 127. 24) discloses his pernicious character.

¹³ *Ref.* v. 6. 3 (= p. 78. 1.)

¹⁴ On Jewish names see Burkitt, (cf. n. 6 above), and G. Scholem, 'Jaldabaoth Reconsidered' in *Melanges Puech* (Paris, 1974), pp. 405-21.

Valentinianos Tertullian is a sedulous imitator of Irenaeus,¹⁵ even to the point of drawing a similar distinction between Valentinus and his forebears in the last sentence: 'doctrinae Valentinianorum in silvas iam exoleverunt Gnosticorum'. In the passage quoted above from the *Scorpiace* he intimates that while the Valentinians were the genuine brood of the Gnostics, they were known as a distinct group, and one that offered a greater, or at least a more lively, temptation to those who lived in the Christian faith.

III

It is certainly true that Clement of Alexandria wears the name 'Gnostic' as the badge of a mature Christian, and that this is a usage foreign to Irenaeus. We ought also to remember, however, that Irenaeus rarely employs the name except to make a specific reference to those who already avowed it. He does not belittle the acquisition of 'gnosis'; what he deprecates is the flaunting of a 'gnosis falsely so called'. If he would never acknowledge the existence of any 'Gnostics' within his own fold, it is surely because he regards the word as a complimentary label which has been compromised by abuse. Hippolytus is so far from applying the name as a calumny that he denies it to those who claim it, and substitutes a foreign and more obscure one, which cannot have excited any immediate prejudice in a reader who knew only Greek:

(The Naassenes) are so called in the Hebrew tongue . . . but style themselves Gnostics, professing to have a knowledge of the depths (v. 6. 3 = p. 78. 1).

Clement deplores the name when it is used by certain pretenders, whom his reticence does not allow us to identify, but whom he rebukes as severely as any Father of the West:

σφᾶς τελείους τινὲς τολμῶσι καλεῖν καὶ Γνωστικούς, ὑπὲρ τὸν ἀπόστολον φρονοῦντες
(Vol. I, p. 121. 9 Staehlin).

ὁ γενναῖος οὗτος Γνωστικός (ἔφασκε γὰρ δὴ αὐτὸν καὶ Γνωστικὸν εἶναι)
(Vol. II, p. 176. 26).

ἀνεμνήσθη τινὸς φάσκοντος ἑαυτὸν Γνωστικὸν
(Vol. II, p. 293. 23).

He makes particular reference to the followers of one Prodicus (Vol. I, p. 209. 30: ψευδωνύμως Γνωστικούς σφᾶς αὐτοὺς ἀναγορεύοντες).

¹⁵ See T. Barnes, *Tertullian* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 220-1.

This heretic is known is also from Tertullian, who makes sure that the reader can distinguish him in name from his intellectual cousin Valentinus:

cum alius deus infertur . . . cum plures, secundum Valentinus et Prodicos
(*Adversus Praxean*, iii. 6).

Origen, like Clement, offers few pejorative applications of the word 'Gnostic' but once at least he fastens the stigma of heresy on a sect that goes by the name:

Ἔστω καὶ τρίτον γένος τῶν ὀνομαζόντων ψυχικούς τινες καὶ πνευματικούς ἑτέρους, οἶμαι δ' αὐτὸν λέγειν τοὺς ἀπὸ Οὐαλεντίνου . . . ἔστωσαν δέ τινες καὶ ἐπαγγελλόμενοι εἶναι Γνωστικοί . . . ἔστωσαν δέ τινες καὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀποδεχόμενοι . . . κατὰ τὸν Ἰουδαίων νόμον.
(*Contra Celsum*, v. 61).

According to the syntax we have here a threefold division; and, since no one could take the third term as a rhetorical iteration of the first, the second should be equally distinct. If Origen is inclined, like Irenaeus or Tertullian, to speak of 'Gnostics' when he speaks of Valentinians, it is, with him as with them, because each of the two names has its own meaning.

Thus all five of our contemporary witnesses conspire to deny the term 'Gnostic' to the more familiar heresies, and reserve it for a congeries of obscure and related sects. All five are concerned to proscribe, not the name itself, but its abuses, and all five would appear innocent of the confusion which is so fiercely pressed upon them by some modern annotators.

B. PHILOSOPHICAL

I

There are three ways of accounting for the denial of the name 'Gnostic' to a man who would appear so worthy of it as Valentinus:

1. That the name is introduced only where it is difficult to form a suitable eponym from the name of a single heresiarch. It is certainly true that 'Gnostic' tenets are rarely derived from any named founder, and that the followers of Justin and Carpocrates are not called 'Gnostics' except on their own authority; but the Naassenes at least can be denoted by a more specific appellative, as can the Sethians and the Peratae who are conjoined with them,¹⁶ and later commentators on Irenaeus lost no time in supplying such terms as 'Cainites', 'Ophites',

¹⁶ See *Ref.* v. 14. 1 (= p. 111. 6) and v. 19. 1 (= p. 116. 7).

and 'Barbeliotes' for the rest.¹⁷ In any case, such a voluntary restriction of the name to those who could not be spoken of otherwise would be as foreign to the real purposes of the apologist as to those imputed to him by Morton Smith. Irenaeus will naturally have given the widest possible extension to a name which appeared so redolent of a 'gnosis falsely so called'.

2. That Valentinus simply never availed himself of the name as others had done. This is to explain the fastidious usage of the Fathers by providing another fact to be explained.

3. That the system of Valentinus was so different in essentials from that of his 'Gnostic' predecessors that neither he nor even his detractors felt that the name could be legitimately extended to include him.

We can support this last conjecture by considering the most thoughtful and comprehensive of the modern definitions of Gnosticism, which was prepared by a committee of eminent scholars in 1966:

The Gnosticism of the second-century sects involves a coherent series of characteristics that can be summarised as the idea of a divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into the world of birth and death, and needing to be reawakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be finally reintegrated. Compared with the conceptions of a devolution of the divine, this idea is based ontologically on the conception of a downward movement of the divine whose periphery (often called Sophia or Ennoia) had to submit to the fate of entering into a crisis, and producing—if only indirectly—this world, upon which it cannot turn its back, since it is necessary for it to recover the pneuma—a dualistic conception on a monistic background, expressed in a double movement of dissolution and reintegration.¹⁸

The 'devolution of the divine' in Gnosticism is duly compared with Neoplatonism, where matter is only the last (viz. the lowest) emanation of the light Divinity, without essential rupture in the cosmos.¹⁹

The 'anticosmic dualism' of the movement is contrasted with 'Zoroastrian dualism, favourable to the cosmos'.²⁰ We are to understand as the hallmark of Gnosticism that in this impressive cosmogony 'what is evil is the world'.²¹

This definition was meant, not to reproduce, but to supersede the nomenclature of the early Fathers, to delineate with bold lines the

¹⁷ Theodoret, *Haeret. Fab.* xiii and xiv.

¹⁸ U. Bianchi (ed.) *The origins of Gnosticism: The Colloquium of Messina* 13–18 Apr. 1966 (Leiden, 1967), pp. xxvi–xxvii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26 n. (a).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26 n. (b).

important and widespread philosophy which these hasty and ignorant witnesses had obscured. Imagination and scholarship were exercised together, with no intention of contradicting what the best informants could be plainly and securely shown to have said.

It seems that not one scholar who subscribed to this definition has felt any impropriety in applying it to the school of Valentinus.²² It would be the height of pedantry to deny that the Valentinians were true Gnostics if the essence of their cosmogony was (a) the descent of some divine spark from the confines of the pleroma into a world of generation, which (b) retained part of it as a blind artisan or demiurge, but only (c) to be fashioned into a new world as empty of goodness as it had previously been destitute of form.

Such a doctrine can certainly be extracted from the abstruse and prolix hints of the *Naassene Sermon*.²³ The text that most clearly illustrates the verdict of these 'Gnostics' upon the universe runs as follows:

They (the souls) were borne down into this murky fabrication (πλάσμα) in order that they might be enslaved to Esaldaeus, the Demiurge of this creation (κτίσεως), a fiery god, the fourth in number (*Ref.* v. 7. 30-1 = p. 86. 7-11).

Here the speaker requires us to assume: (a) that the soul is a heavenly substance locked in the dark and turbid underworld of matter; (b) that the creator of the universe is the source of all its evils; and (c) that the handiwork or κτίσις of the demiurge is an instrument of oppression, not of relief. In the hymn that concludes the *Sermon*²⁴ we are given to understand that our present adventures in this 'labyrinth' merely prolong the vicissitudes of the first soul, the third and lowest emanation from Mind:

Νόμος ἦν γενικὸς τοῦ παντός ὁ πρωτό(τοκο)ς Νόος,
ὁ δὲ δεύτερος ἦν τοῦ πρωτοτόκος τὸ χυθὲν χάσις,
τριτάτη(ν) ψυχή δ' ἔλαβ' ἑξ(ε)εργαζομένη νόμον.
. . . (κ)ἀνέξοδον ἢ μελέα κακῶ(ν)
λαβύρινθον ἐσήλθε, πλανωμένη.

Consonant with Hippolytus on all three points is Irenaeus' report of

²² Not even Bianchi, whose remarks on the Valentinian demiurge in Layton (ed.) op. cit., i. 107-9 are useful and perceptive. He correctly finds in Valentinus a 'qualified anticosmism', but without explaining how this differs from the 'anticosmism' of others, such as Plato, who are evidently not 'Gnostics'.

²³ *Refutation*, v. 6-10 (pp. 78-104.) On the integrity of the Sermon see J. M. Creed, 'The Heavenly Man' in *ŶTS* xxvi (1924-5), 118, against R. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres* (Leiden, 1904), pp. 81-102.

²⁴ *Ref.* v. 10. 2 (= pp. 102. 23-103. 11). On the authenticity of these verses see M. Marcovich, 'The Naassene Psalm in Hippolytus' in Layton (ed.), op. cit., v. ii. 770-9. I follow Marcovich's brackets. There is no doubt as to λαβύρινθον, or the highly pessimistic character of these lines.

the 'Gnostici Barbelo'. One myth which is recounted by Irenaeus²⁵ is now extant in four much longer Coptic versions under the title of the *Apocryphon of John*,²⁶ and comparison shows that he was an honest reader and capable critic. Both text and summary tell us that Sophia was the last in a procession of celestial luminaries,²⁷ and that she brought forth in sudden recklessness a child that she herself abhorred as a wretched parody of the Father's work.²⁸ Only the Coptic informs us that Sophia's son alarmed her by the brilliant incandescence of his eyes²⁹—that he was, in short, the θεός πύρινος of the Naassenes³⁰—but both agree that the offspring was cast out into nether darkness,³¹ and that he inherited from his mother such a measure of intelligence and energy as enabled him to create a world from matter and subject it to a conspiracy of seven personified vices.³² In these we have no difficulty in recognizing the rulers of the planets,³³ and, when the Demiurge begins to proclaim 'There is no other god beside me',³⁴ we see that he has cut the world adrift from its divine source.

The tenets of another group of 'Gnostici' remind us even more forcibly of the Naassenes in Hippolytus and of the definitions of 1966.³⁵ According to these: (a) Sophia, a brilliant ebullition from the great mother, is borne down into the nether domain of darkness, whose excited waters rush to secure the prize. Though the light at last recovers its own, (b) a son of Sophia is left, who sets to work with his impoverished resources, and (c) produces what the untimely generation of such a parent might be expected to make for himself: 'inde generatam omnem oblivionem et malitiam et zelum et invidiam et mortem' (*AH I. xxx. 5*).

This, then, is the cosmogony of the true Gnostic, preserved by the invective of the Fathers; it agrees, not only with the definition propounded above, but with the criticisms pronounced by a Greek philosopher upon 'those who hold that the author of this universe is malign'. This is the rubric given by Porphyry to the treatise by Plotinus (*Enneads*, ii. 9) which is better known by the title *Against the*

²⁵ *AH I. xxix.*

²⁶ See Giversen's edition, Copenhagen 1963; citations here are all from J. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden, 1977).

²⁷ *AH I. xxix. 3*; Robinson, p. 103.

²⁸ *AH I. xxix. 4*: 'Generatis autem his mater Sophia contristata'; Robinson, p. 104. 1 ff.

²⁹ Robinson, p. 104. 13.

³⁰ *Ref. v. 7. 31* (= p. 86 10).

³¹ *AH I. xxix. 4*: 'et abstittisse ab ea in inferiora'; Robinson, p. 104. 14.

³² *AH I. xxix. 4*: 'Deinde dicunt adunitum eum authadiae, generasse kakian, zelon et pthnonon et erinnyn et epithumian'; Robinson, p. 105. 6 ff.

³³ Cf. *AH I. xxx. 5*.

³⁴ *AH I. xxix. 4*; Robinson, p. 106. 2.

³⁵ *AH I. xxx. 1-5*.

Gnostics. Porphyry informs us that these 'Gnostics' were an heretical body of Christians,³⁶ and it seems that he must have called them by their own name, since it is nowhere used in earlier pagan literature to denote the adherents of a particular sect.³⁷

These 'Gnostics', as they ought to do according to our definition, hold that (a) Sophia either descended or else discharged a part of her radiance into an underlying darkness (*Enneads*, ii. 9. 10. 19 ff.); (b) that she left behind a child of rebellious character and fiery constitution (ii. 9. 10. 31 and 11. 28); and (c) that both this child and its handiwork are incorrigibly depraved (ii. 9. 10. 32-3: ἵνα σφόδρα λαιδορήσῃται ὁ τοῦτο γράψας). It is true that they, like Plotinus, claim the authority of Plato, but the gulf between them and the Greeks is not one to be bridged by a few corollaries drawn from the most debatable passages in the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus* (*Enneads*, ii. 9. 4. 1 and ii. 9. 6. 15). Since we shall nowhere find a Platonist who denies that the world is beautiful, at least in some limited measure, Plotinus has tradition on his side when he replies to the contumelious expressions of the 'Gnostics' directed against the world and all who admire it, with the assertion that this universe is demonstrably the most beautiful after its kind. What is interesting, in the light of our previous summaries, is that, while he insists (at *Enneads*, ii. 9. 9 and 13) on the beauty of the whole material cosmos, he adduces no particular features of it except the stars.

We see that from the nomenclature of the Fathers, and of Plotinus, it is possible to elicit a consistent definition of the word 'Gnostic'; and beyond all doubt the Valentinian heresy is either derived from the Gnostic myth or cognate. Even if there is no unanimity as to the causes of the transgression of Sophia, we are at least informed on all sides that her crime gave rise to the world. Hippolytus makes her produce, in imitation of the Father, a grotesque and repulsive abortion,³⁸ while Irenaeus records a variant in which the abortion results from an immoderate desire to know the Father in his unfathomable solitude (*AH* 1. ii. 2). Common to both accounts, however, and characteristic of the school, is the description of the remedy, for in both we read that the aeons are protected in their sublime impassibility by a boundary of Horos,³⁹ which restores the divine pleroma, and in both the abortion itself is endowed with figure, and a measure of understanding, by the

³⁶ *Vita Plotini* xvi. On the interpretation of this passage see J. Igal, 'The Gnostics and the Ancient Philosophy in Plotinus' in H. J. Blumenthal and R. A. Markus (eds.), *Neo-Platonism and Early Christian Thought* (London, 1981), pp. 138-49.

³⁷ For a review of pagan uses of the term 'γνώσιμός', albeit not an exhaustive one, see Smith, art. cit. p. 796 ff.

³⁸ *Ref.* vi. 30. 8 (=p. 158. 9); see also *AH* 1. ii. 3.

³⁹ *AH* 1. ii. 2 and 4; *Ref.* vi. 31. 5 (=p. 159. 8 ff.).

compassionate hand of Christ.⁴⁰ The abortion would appear to be the duplicate of Sophia, since it bears the Hebrew equivalent of her name,⁴¹ and when deserted by the Redeemer it falls prey to four passions—ignorance, fear, perplexity, and grief—which are identical with those ascribed in one account to its parent. What is agreed in both sources is that these four passions furnished all the elements of this world. The demiurge, a mere condensation of these repentant yearnings, is said by the Valentinians to be the head of the psychic race, which hopes for heaven without the assurance of salvation.⁴²

Have we not, therefore, discovered all the three Gnostic themes: (a) the fall of Sophia, (b) the evil demiurge, and (c) the miseries of a benighted creation? The answer appears to be that we have found them, but with a difference, and that in each case the story is modified by peculiar assumptions which divorce the Valentinian theology both from the system of the Naassenes or 'Gnostic' and from the definitions of 1966:

1. Matter, for Valentinus and his disciples, is the sterile fruit of passion and repentance, and so irredeemably evil; nevertheless, it is not an autonomous medium, and has neither its own substance nor its own place. For the latter it depends upon the confinement of the pleroma, for the former upon the affliction of Sophia.

Indeed, until Sophia or Achamoth is excluded, it is impossible to conceive of any space outside the pleroma, let alone of anything below. Until Horos comes into being the pleroma is not defined. No variant of the Valentinian myth ascribes to Sophia any infatuation with an underlying darkness. Her designs are upon the Father or his prerogative as the source of all being and goodness, and her vision when it strays is directed above. Not only is there no record of any nutation towards a lower region; until the creation of matter there was no spatial world, and no such lower region towards which she might have elected to fall.⁴³

2. The Valentinian Demiurge, notwithstanding his fiery nature, is not the purblind tyrant of the Naassenes. As Ptolemaeus, the successor of Valentinus in the West, explains to Flora (Epiphanius,

⁴⁰ *AH* 1. iv. 1; *Ref.* vi. 32. 4 (= p. 160. 17 ff.).

⁴¹ On the name Achamoth see H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston, 1958), p. 186. For the passions of Sophia see *AH* 1. iv. 1 and *Ref.* vi. 32. 5 (=p. 160. 22-3). On duplication see Stead, 'The Valentinian Myth of Sophia' in *JTS*, NS, XX (1969), 75-104, especially pp. 83 and 89.

⁴² *AH* 1. v. 5. and 1. vi. 2.

⁴³ Stead, art cit. p. 85, maintains that in the original version Sophia or Achamoth wandered out of the pleroma; but the words ἐκτός τοῦ πληρώματος ἐπλανήθη need not imply that she moved from the inside to the outside, rather than wandering when already in a state of exclusion, nor is there any sign that this phrase derives from an earlier variant of the myth.

Panarion, xxiii. 7), he is a being of intermediate capacity, an adulterator of Scripture it is true, but even in that role the author of many prophecies which are not false, and of utterances which communicate a real though limited good. He is not of the material, but of the psychic or animal order, which is swayed between matter and spirit. He has virtue enough to rejoice at the appearance of the saviour (*Panarion*, xxiii. 3), and can be said to occupy a middle position between the benevolent Father and the Cosmocrator, whose nature is wholly malign.⁴⁴

Of the three kinds of substance in the universe—the spiritual, the psychic, and the material—only the last is forbidden to rise. It is true that Hans Jonas belittles Ptolemaeus as an ‘exoteric’ writer, who, when he speaks well of the Demiurge, merely trifles with a ‘variation of mood’.⁴⁵ It is also true that Gilles Quispel, who appears to ignore the presence of the Cosmocrator in the earliest stage of the Valentinian myth, speaks of a ‘rehabilitation of the Demiurge’ in the west.⁴⁶ Do they also propose to confiscate those texts from the Oriental school of Theodotus which promise the psychic deity a heaven beside the pleroma after the final restoration of Sophia?⁴⁷

3. Truly devoid of all goodness is the Cosmocrator, the ‘left-hand’ deity, brother of the Demiurge,⁴⁸ who is called by St Paul the ‘god of this world’. He is an insubstantial figure, who is not the author of form but the lord of matter, and who seems to have no counterpart but the Demiurge in those systems which exclude intermediate powers. There could be little work for this goblin in a world of which we could already say, with Bultmann, that its estrangement from God is ‘complete’.⁴⁹

The firmament of this world, the ‘τόπος’ or ‘ἑβδομάς’, is the Demiurge himself,⁵⁰ and its stars are endowed with intellect which is not said to be malign like that of the planets in the ‘Gnostic’ and

⁴⁴ See point (3) below.

⁴⁵ *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston, 1958), p. 193 and n. 26.

⁴⁶ ‘The origins of the Valentinian Demiurge’ in Quispel, *Gnostic Studies* (Istanbul, 1974), p. 219.

⁴⁷ *Ref.* v. 32. 9. (=p. 161. 16); *Excerpts from Theodotus* 34. *Pace* Lipsius (*Dictionary of Christian Biography*, iv. 1083. 2) I do not find an evil Demiurge in this fragment, or even in 33, where the reference to his excessive ἀποτομία merely ranks him with Marcion’s Demiurge as one who is just but not good.

⁴⁸ *AH* 1. v. 4, where a number of different accounts seem to be conflated. The Cosmocrator is more evil than the Demiurge, a ‘spiritalis malitia’, but at the same time he knows more of the things above. For the ‘left-hand deity’ see *AH* 1. xi. 1: and cf. *Ref.* 32. 7 (=p. 161. 2), where the Demiurge is said to be from the right-hand side.

⁴⁹ *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, trans. R. H. Fuller (London, 1956), p. 199.

⁵⁰ *Ref.* vi. 32. 7 (=p. 161. 6)

Naassene systems,⁵¹ or to exhale that fiery influence so dreaded by the 'Gnostics' of Plotinus.⁵²

Why does the Demiurge figure so much more vividly than the Cosmocrator in our accounts of the Valentinians? The reason must be that the former was already one of the most notorious elements in the systems of his precursors, while the Cosmocrator appeared only when the elevation of the Gnostic Demiurge had left a vacant category of pure evil, to be supplied by reflection upon the orthodox theology of St Paul.

Having acknowledged that the Designer of the world is not the author of all its defects, that in him and his works the likeness of the divine is rather eclipsed than wholly obscured, Valentinus is able to intone a hymn of faith which would have perplexed and disgusted a Naassene. A true dualist would never have succumbed, even in poetry, to the fables which assured the orthodox Christian or the second-century Platonist that all things in the universe, down to flesh, the last and meanest, depended eternally from a single point:

(ἀι)θερος πάντα κρεμάμενα πνεύματι βλέπω
 πάντα δ' ὀχούμενα πνεύματι νοῶ.
 σάρκα μὲν ἐκ ψυχῆς κρεμαμένην,
 ψυχὴν δὲ ἀέρος ἐξεχομένην,
 ἀέρα δὲ ἐξ αἰθρῆς κρεμάμενον.⁵³

The 'monism' is more evident here than the 'dualistic background' and one can hardly forbear to say of such a creed, what has been stated more inaccurately of Gnosticism itself, that it is 'rather the acute Hellenisticization of Christianity than its acute Hellenization'.⁵⁴ If the system of Valentinus was not the only one to mix the apostolic testimony with Plato, it is certainly the one which has invited the most consistent and persuasive of comparisons: with Numenius, who postulates a schism in the divine world but without traducing the harmonies of the lower one;⁵⁵ with the *Chaldaean Oracles*, which make fire the root of a complex and eternal generation of abstract

⁵¹ See especially Origen's account of the Ophites, *Contra Celsum*, vi. 31 (further discussion below). The statement in the *Excerpts from Theodotus* that some stars are evil and some good is an astrological commonplace, to be distinguished from the view that all stars are evil on account of their fiery nature.

⁵² *Enneads*, ii. 9. 13. 11.

⁵³ *Ref.* vi. 36. 7 (=p. 167). On the interpretation see G. C. Stead, 'In Search of Valentinus', in Layton (ed.) *op. cit.*, i. 80-1. The text is dubious, but can hardly be anything but monistic.

⁵⁴ A. D. Nock, Review of Lewy's *Sobria Ebrietas*, in *JTS* xxvi (1929-30), 309. The original phrase is, of course, Harnack's

⁵⁵ See, for example, E. R. Dodds in *Les Sources de Plotin* (Geneva, (Fondation Hardt) 1960), p. 178.

properties;⁵⁶ and even with the whole tenor of Platonic commentary in the second century.⁵⁷ What is more than all this, however, he espouses an opinion which may be described as one of the notes of Platonism in late antiquity, for it was only when philosophy conceived a determination to bring everything in the universe under one principle that it openly rejected the early and natural hypothesis of a matter which was self-existent and so independent of God.⁵⁸

The question deserves a long treatment because the Platonism of Valentinus is often discussed as though it were superficial or episodic, an occasional refinement of Gnosticism. The fact appears to be rather that it was the ἴδιος χαρακτήρ which forced him to disengage himself from his dualistic precursors both in doctrine and in name.

Evidence of borrowing from, and reflection upon, the dialogues can be produced according to the three points set out above:

1. Although it might be misleading to say that Sophia remains unfallen, it is certain that she is never ensnared in matter, which does not exist before she is restored to a higher world. The presence of individual souls in matter was acknowledged by every Platonist, and the notion that they have either sinned in falling or fallen in order to expiate a delinquency is one that even Plotinus cannot exorcise completely from Plato's text.⁵⁹ The 'Gnostics' of Plotinus quoted the *Phaedrus* as the proof-text of their own myth of Sophia, but there is nothing to suggest that they had more than a superficial knowledge of its contents. Valentinus, however, could have appealed for testimonia to the language and thought of the *Phaedrus* at every point in his story of an aeon who desired to be like the Father, and to produce a child as he had, ἐκτεινόμενον αἰεὶ ἐπὶ τὸ πρόσθεν, but, almost dissolved by his overpowering sweetness (1. ii. 2: ὑπὸ τῆς γλυκύτητος αὐτοῦ τελευταίων ἄν καταπεπόσθαι) produced instead an abortion outside the pleroma and a spiritual posterity in the resulting material world. In the *Phaedrus* we read that the soul aspires to conceive its proper offspring in the image of its tutelary divinity (pp. 252d–53c); that it has fallen into the world through upward striving (p. 249d); that here on earth it produces mortal natures in the likeness of the vision that it has surrendered; and that these in turn are stirred by a heavenly impulse which suffuses them with sweetness (p. 251e: ταύτην γλυκυτάτην)

⁵⁶ See M. Tardieu, 'La Gnose Valentinienne et les *Oracles Chaldaïques*' in Layton (ed.), op. cit., i. 194–237.

⁵⁷ See J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, (London 1977), pp. 384–9 and the discussion after Stead's 'In Search of Valentinus', pp. 90–102. Even Jonas (*The Gnostic Religion*, p. 194) allows himself to comment on a parody of the *Timaeus*.

⁵⁸ On the origins of this monistic view see Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, p. 128.

⁵⁹ See J. Dillon, 'The Descent of the Soul in Middle Platonic and Gnostic Theory' in Layton (ed.), op. cit., i. 357–64.

until the intemperance of passion, ἐγκύψας καὶ ἐκτείνας τὴν κέρκον, throws them back into a turbulent disrepair (p. 254d).

Both Valentinus and Plato speak of a home in a ὑπερουράνιος τόπος, and both make the transgressor the victim of a θόρυβος to which its own indiscretions have given rise.⁶⁰ The fact that the soul, according to the *Phaedrus*, can be guilty of the same transgression in heaven and in the world perhaps explains the redundancies which every reader observes in the longer variants of the Valentinian myth. At any rate it would be hard to deny that the heretic was acquainted with the dialogue, or to find any other source for a speculation that makes the fall from heaven result from excessive aspiration towards the good.

2. The Valentinian Demiurge is identical with space and coeval with matter. If he constitutes a mere κενώμα⁶¹ or vacancy, a receptacle for those qualities of which he possesses nothing in his own nature, it is because he is the matrix of creation, the χώρα or ὑποδοχή of the *Timaeus*.⁶² Neither word, as Plutarch notes,⁶³ conveys anything of the recalcitrance which was often ascribed to the prime stuff of the universe; an insubstantial world is generated by the impression of the Forms.

Four terms were regarded by later Platonists as synonymous with matter: of these, space or the receptacle is passive, the Dyad is a cause of generation from the One, while the Other and the Great and Small are inevitably opposed to the shaping hand. Valentinus assigns to his Demiurge the title of place, to the Demiurge and Sophia some of the properties of the Dyad. Since he sees, like Plutarch, that the other attributes belong to matter under a different definition, he makes vacancy the characteristic of soul—a solution which many Platonists would prefer to that of the Chaeronean philosopher, who makes the soul the more evil of the two. He makes the pleroma the source of space and its contents, as the One was the source of the Dyad in Pythagorean systems of that time.⁶⁴

3. Valentinus could not, of course, impose the Platonic Demiurge on the Gnostics, but he could reduce the truly pernicious spirit to the limited scope and capacities of an irrational world-soul. The universal

⁶⁰ Cf. *Phaedrus* 247c and *AH* I. v. 4; *Phaedrus* 248b and *Ref.* vi. 61. 1 (=p. 158. 16).

⁶¹ *Excerpts from Theodotus*, 31.

⁶² *Timaeus*. pp. 49a and 51a. For τόπος as the recipient of the Forms see Aetius i. 19. 1. (Diels, *Doxographi Graeci*, p. 317). On ὑποδοχή as matter see Aristotle, *Physics* p. 209b. 11–17, Nicomachus of Gerasa, *De Comm. Math. Sc.*, p. 16. 18 (Klein). On the Dyad see Stead, 'Valentinian Myth', p. 100. On the character of the χώρα see C. Mugler, 'Le κενόν de Platon et le πάντα ὁμοῦ d'Anaxagore', in *REG* lxxx (1967), 210–19.

⁶³ On the μάλλον καὶ ἧττον as an ἀπειρία κακοποιός see Plutarch, *De An. Proc. in Tim.*, 1015a, also 1014d (matter as Otherness) and 1014 f. (matter in Plato as pure privation).

⁶⁴ See Diogenes Laertius VIII. xxv.

order is said to be impregnated with evil both in Plutarch and in Albinus;⁶⁵ the word-soul of Plutarch's *De Anima Procreatione in Timaeo* is, however, both more evil than Sophia and more enslaved to the world of matter. One might speculate that, according to a scheme which Plutarch professes to draw from the Laws, Sophia would be the benevolent divinity, the Cosmocrator the ἐναντίων δημιουργός and the Demiurge the intermediate being who participates in both.⁶⁶ Plotinus would have noted with approval that while the Christian heretic retains the disorderly principle in matter, he exonerates the Soul.

Even in the first episodes of the Valentinian myth, which cannot be extruded from any stage of its history, we discover thoughts not widely current outside the school of Plato. No one need have given much time to Plato or Pythagoras to discover that the universe was propagated from number, that good and evil issued, one on the right and one on the left hand, that substance arose from the union of a feminine passivity with a masculine rigour of form; but Valentinus must have read more deeply and more reflectively before he found the names Nous and Aletheia for the partners in the first divine pair or syzygy which proceeded from Ennoia and the primordial Abyss (*AH* I. i. 1). The two terms are Platonic in their relation, since the clearest and most veridical perceptions are those that are endowed with form by the contemplating intellect; and the derivation of both from an illuminating mind of a higher order was expounded by a Platonist in the age of Valentinus:

This is the relation that the First Mind (νοῦς) has towards the intellection (νοήσις) of the soul and towards the objects of thought. Not being itself the same as intellection, it gives to the soul the capacity to know and to the objects of thought the capacity to be known, illuminating the truth (τὴν ἀλήθειαν) concerning them.

(Albinus, p. 165. 18 ff., Hermann).

Since Nous is all but synonymous with Ennoia, and should therefore in this first syzygy have retained some of its formative and illuminating properties, we are not surprised to find that the heresiarch should next mate Life or Zoe with the Logos, which, according to the prologue of the Fourth Gospel embodied both the light and the life of men. Man is the leading partner in the third syzygy, and here he is united with the Ecclesia or Church, whose growth into the form of an ἄνηρ τέλειος is anticipated in a Pauline text (*Ephesians*, iv. 13).

The Gnostics showed little knowledge either of Plato or of the

⁶⁵ On Albinus, p. 169. 30 ff. see Dillion, *Middle Platonists*, pp. 204–6.

⁶⁶ For the *Laws* passage see Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* p. 370 f.; on Sophia as the world-soul see Stead, 'Valentinian Myth', p. 101.

Scriptures when they raised the captious objection (*AH* II. xiii. 10) that the man must precede his word, not the word the man. Plotinus would, however, have been pleased to note the systematic correction of their thought by Valentinus, who seems to anticipate his own assumptions: (a) that the divine is by nature infallible, while Soul, the lowest hypothesis, has, strictly speaking, nowhere to fall; (b) that the stars at least cannot be a work of evil; and that (c) the heavens must therefore be exempted from any charge against the world.

II

We can now understand why a thinker like Valentinus should eschew the title 'Gnostic', which implied so much that a Platonist could not allow, and we have only to concede a common measure of integrity to the Fathers to explain why they should defer to his refusal of the name. The keener-eyed might also have perceived the difference of principle which occasioned this difference of terms, since, with the possible exception of Irenaeus, they had all had the opportunity to peruse the *True Logos* of Celsus, the work of an informed but indiscriminating Platonist, who believed that he could refute the Church by impeaching the most bizarre of its deviations. The Demiurge of the Ophites is called an 'accursed god'. The seven planets, his acolytes, though the ascending soul must flatter them with entreaties and opulent titles, are the sentinels of a 'barrier of Malice'. Tartarus and Gehenna are the labels which best indicate the character of his domain.⁶⁷ The Fathers, who congratulate themselves on the discovery that Valentinus was a Platonist,⁶⁸ should not have been unaware that the adoption of Plato's tenets might have made him as much an enemy to the Gnostics as themselves.

Even if this was nothing to them, they can hardly have failed to observe that Valentinus had evaded some of their customary censures by forsaking his Gnostic masters and adopting certain assumptions that no churchman could have disowned. The difficulties of locating the truly heterodox expressions in the *Gospel of Truth* or the *Letter to Rheginus* are well known; and, although the cosmogony of Valentinus could not be mistaken for that of Genesis, his derivation of matter from spirit ensured that he was not exposed to the arguments which were pressed against Hermogenes by Tertullian or against Mani by the more erudite defenders of the faith. The Fathers cannot pretend that this heretic makes a god of matter, taking away the rights of the

⁶⁷ *Contra Celsum*, vi. 28. 2, 31. 5, and 25. 17. On the Platonism of Celsus, see Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, pp. 400-1.

⁶⁸ See *AH* II. xiv. 3; Tertullian, *Adv. Val.* v; *Ref.* v. 3 (=p. 134. 10).

Creator: they must agree that, like Irenaeus, he refers its origin back to the Father of all.

Having (a) testified that matter and space had no existence independent of God, Valentinus continued to court the approval of the orthodox by (b) divorcing the Creator from the Devil, (c) denying the latter all part in the creation of the firmament and baptizing him in the language of St Paul. The Valentinians mingled with believers, and must have held themselves to be Christians, though of a rare and privileged kind. Hence it was that, while Irenaeus could write of the Gnostics as though the mere rehearsal of their opinion would render them odious, the Valentinian heresy, which because it was both more profound and more orthodox, was much the more alluring, could be refuted only by longer arguments and an exposure of its real or supposed antecedents. It is natural that the keenest apprehension should be excited by a school which produced the first extensive commentaries on the New Testament, renouncing the obscure and factitious apocrypha of the Gnostics in order to become teachers of the Church.

We should remember that at the time of Valentinus Christians were unused to philosophical disputation, while Plato provided a battery of arguments, often strikingly easy to reconcile with the Scriptures, upon which even orthodox Churchmen who wished to convert the heathen or sustain the most intelligent of the faithful continued to draw. Valentinus became the greatest enemy of the Fathers because he used Plato, not to repudiate the Gnostics (as both Plotinus and Clement do) but to entice their intractable doctrines into the service of a teaching which claimed the support of St John and St Paul. He was thus the one man who could draw his creed simultaneously from Plato and from the 'so-called Gnostic heresy', yet aspire to the see of Rome.⁶⁹

That any of the early Fathers divined this we have no reason to suppose. But if they saw, as the very length of their refutations shows that they did see, that this heresy was more easily mistaken for Christian doctrine than that of the Naassenes or Justin, and that its innovations rendered some of their weapons ineffectual, they were much less likely than we to regard it as merely part of a large and heterogeneous commotion of ideas.

In conclusion, therefore, I submit: (a) that the term 'Gnostic' was never used by or of the Valentinian heresy at its meridian; (b) that Valentinus eschewed the name both as a Platonist and as a member of

⁶⁹ *Adv. Val.* iv. Even if the anecdote is untrue it could not have been told of a Gnostic.

the Church; (c) that the early Fathers all adhere to his practice without examining his reasons, of which, however, some of them cannot have been entirely unaware.

X

NEGLECTED TEXTS IN THE STUDY OF GNOSTICISM

SCHOLARSHIP has now begun to acknowledge that the word Gnostic is employed with a reserve and discrimination in the Church Fathers which has not often been surpassed by modern critics. The 'Gnostics' of Plotinus, on the other hand, continue to be treated as though they had fished in many waters, gathering in a catch from any or every heretical sect.¹ I believe that Plotinus' treatise *Against the Gnostics* (*Enneads* ii. 9) gives an account of them that is in every respect compatible with the records of the Gnostics in the Church Fathers, and that this work is in fact the most complete and authoritative description of the school. In order to prove and illustrate this position I propose to consider: (a) the account of the 'Gnostics' in Plotinus; (b) the additional information supplied in Porphyry's *Life* of his master; (c) the progress and reception of the Gnostics among the early Neoplatonists; (d) the compatibility of the pagan accounts with the testimony of the Fathers; (e) the agreement between Plotinus and certain texts that are known to be of Gnostic provenance; (f) the heart of the Gnostic doctrine in its relation to alchemy. In conclusion I hope to show that Plotinus, his disciples, the Christian Fathers, and the alchemists are at one in their portrayal of this well-defined and extraordinary sect.

I

The text of Plotinus himself has too often been sifted for evidence on a principle of haphazard association. No doubt it is possible to pick out from such a long treatise many a thought that would have been readily endorsed by the Catholic Church, by a late Pythagorean, by the author of a text from Nag Hammadi, or for that matter by the gymnosophists of India or the astrologers of Iran. A sounder method requires us to construct from the arguments of the treatise as full and coherent an account

¹ The failure to distinguish the Gnostic heresy from its congeners mars even the erudite study by Carl Schmidt: *Plotins Stellung zum Gnosticismus* (Leiden, 1901). H. C. Puech's 'Plotin et les Gnostiques' in *Les Sources de Plotin (Entretiens Hardt V; Geneva, 1960)*, 160-90 gives too much weight to sporadic resemblances to the Valentiniens, and even the appendix in *En Quête de la Gnose* (Paris, 1980), vol. I, pp. 110-16 makes little attempt to press the new evidence to satisfactory conclusions.

of the 'Gnostic' philosophy as Plotinus' copious diatribes can afford.²

They appear first near the beginning of the treatise as men who by their additions destroy the economy of the three hypostases. The result of their speculations is to multiply the lower terms: of anything higher than intellect they know nothing, for though Plotinus briefly advances on their behalf the hypothesis that a distinction between capacity and energy would allow us to accommodate simpler principles than his own, he flourishes this only as a self-evident absurdity which they would be no more disposed than he himself to entertain:

No-one could discover a simpler principle than that which has been stated to obtain. For they will not say that one exists in potential, the other in act, since it would be absurd to multiply natures by distinguishing between act and potentiality in those incorporeal things which exist in act (*Enn.* ii. 9. 1. 23-4).

It is certainly not the 'Gnostics' who wish to transcend the simple unity of the first principle: each of their new hypostases is a rational being encountered, not through wordless apprehension, but at the end of a verbal sophistry, which, as Plotinus remarks, may be infinitely repeated until their logic leaves them stranded at last on a reef of diminishing minds:

But if anyone should adduce some third form of intellection after the second, which we have described as the condition of knowing that one knows—that is what is called the condition of knowing that one knows that one knows—the absurdity would be all the more obvious. In that case, why not prolong the series to infinity? (ii. 9. 1. 55-7).

That the plurality of intellects is more than a philosophical convenience is apparent from the statement of Plotinus (ii. 9. 1. 40) that purely conceptual divisions of these entities would rob his opponents of many hypostases; moreover a real plurality should be engendered by the argument that, since the knowing subject must be distinct from the object of knowledge, one intellect can make itself cognoscible only by generating another. The 'Gnostics' will not, of course, have followed Plotinus in pressing their reasoning to infinity, but the expression 'many hypostases' (ii. 9. 1. 40) may indicate that the number of terms admitted by their system was very large.

However, they appear disposed to limit themselves to three

² G. Elsas, *Neuplatonische und Gnostische Weltablehnung in der Schule Plotins* (Amsterdam, 1975), is an excellent study, but I have not felt it necessary to cite other literature where my own remarks are demonstrably supported by a Greek text. See also, on *Enneads* ii. 9, V. Cilento, *Paideia Antignostica* (Florence 1971).

when they confirm their logical postulates through a tendentious interpretation of the *Timaeus* (39e ff.); the first intellect, they pretend to infer (*Enneads* ii. 9. 6. 16), is at rest, the second contemplates the contents of the first, the third is engaged in the process of discursive ratiocination. We may place this beside their other express borrowing from Plato (*Phaedrus* 246c), the metaphorical *περορρησασα* (*Enn.* ii. 9. 4. 1) which they arrogate for their own purposes, though they apply it, like him, to the fall of the human soul.

The appeal to Plato should not, Plotinus tells us (ii. 9. 6. 50–2), be allowed to obscure their fundamental antipathy to the traditions of the Greeks. Plato may be the quarry for their vivid but conventional images of the world to come (ii. 9. 6. 12, though it does not appear that any debt is acknowledged), and authoritative passages may be cited, as we have seen; yet much of their philosophy is inspired by a perverse determination to differ from him. Rather than defer to the persuasive authority of the ancient masters, they lard their works with fictions and asseverations unmasked by argument (ii. 9. 10. 25 ff.). Their innovations are of an inept and arbitrary character which malignant and distorting abuse of the ancients fails to conceal:

They produce these factitious notions because they do not take account of the ancient philosophy of the Greeks. The old Greek masters were aware, and spoke without pretensions, of the ascent from the Cave and the gradual progress to a clearer vision. Some beliefs the Gnostics take from Plato, but there are other innovations, outside the truth, which they generate in order to produce their own philosophy (ii. 9. 6. 7 f.).

They are far from being materialists, none the less; in fact, their denigration of the world, their constant harping upon its evils, their denial of even so much as human dignity to the stars (ii. 9. 9. 57), excite the particular wrath of Plotinus, who would surely have approved of his editor's second choice of a title for the treatise, 'Against those who say that the Maker of the Universe is Malign' (*Vita Plotini*, 16):

For, even if their bodies are of a fiery constitution, one should not fear them . . . Their bodies excel in size and beauty, co-operating with those things that take place according to nature (ii. 9. 13. 11–16).

They are certainly no more at home in the body than any other disciples of the Athenian philosopher; in fact, they censure Plotinus because his teachings maintain the soul in that pernicious association (ii. 9. 18. 1–3). Once again the objection is presented as an hypothesis, but Plotinus is scarcely likely to have invented so unusual a reflection upon his own ascetic disciplines. Nor, al-

though they ascribe to man a mortal soul composed of the elements of matter (ii. 9. 5. 16), do the 'Gnostics' seem to deny the immortality of a second and higher soul, notwithstanding the present subjection of the latter to what is base and transitory. Where, then, in the opinion of Plotinus, do they depart from the truths of Plato? In order to answer this question, we must investigate their notions as to the nature of soul itself.

The human soul, it appears (ii. 9. 9. 62), has its counterpart in the World-Soul, which is identical with the third intellect (ii. 9. 6. 21-2), and is responsible (ii. 9. 6. 21-2) for the creation of the visible universe. The creation is an event in time, and a regrettable contingency at that; it is not, as for Plotinus (ii. 9. 3. 9), the spontaneous and eternal superabundance of the soul's intrinsic goodness. Neither is matter for them, as it is for him (ii. 4. 14, etc.), the formless half-reality at the vanishing-point of being, but a fundamental constituent of all extant physical objects into which all might again be dissolved. If logic forbids the 'Gnostics' to maintain the generation of matter in time (since whatever necessity caused it to come into being would have caused it to come into being throughout eternity), they would rather deny entirely its procession from divinity:

For if it has nothing into which it can dissolve it will not be destroyed. If it can be dissolved into matter, why is not matter equally capable of dissolution? And if matter can be dissolved, what necessity brought it into being? If they maintain that it came into being by some necessary procession, then the necessity still obtains. If matter is to be left in a place of its own, then the divine is not universal, but in some separate place and, as it were, walled off (ii. 9. 3. 17-21).

A thing but not a substance, inseparable from existence but void of being, matter is a dark no-man's-land between entity and non-entity, and must wait through countless aeons for the chance illumination of the soul (ii. 9. 3. 21).

The 'Gnostics' hesitate whether to describe this illumination as a downward tendency of the soul itself or as an effluence which does not detract from the magnitude or dignity of its source. The image of the soul, we hear in one place, is reflected in the darkness, and then the image of that image, pervading matter, assumes the shaping and ordering functions of the Platonic demiurge (ii. 9. 10. 25 f.). This being, it seems, is bound to a chronological succession, the other elements waiting upon the preparation of fire (ii. 9. 12. 13 f.). He is incapable of the full and instantaneous apprehension either of the true soul or of its primary reflection, which the 'Gnostics' stalle his mother (ii. 9. 12. 10). Estranged from the

source of wisdom, truth and goodness, he is inevitably a rebel in all his works:

For they say again that Sophia did not descend, i.e. did not 'incline' (νεύσαι), but merely shed a light upon the darkness, so that an image arose in matter. Fabricating then an image of an image (εἶδωλον εἰδώλου) . . . they generate their Demiurge, making him a rebel from his mother, and creating the cosmos through him so as to lead it into the most shadowy of shadows (ii. 9. 10. 25–32).

When a downward motion, or νεύσις (ii. 9. 10. 19), is spoken of, the name soul is joined with that of a certain Wisdom or Sophia. The two are certainly distinct, since Plotinus is able to ask whether both descended together or one was the instigator of a shared transgression:

For they say that soul inclined downward, and also a certain Sophia, whether the soul was the instigator or Sophia caused soul to transgress, or whether they reckon the two to be identical. After that, they say, the other souls descended and the members of wisdom, putting on bodies, like those of men (ii. 9. 10. 19–24).

Neither Soul nor Sophia is supposed to be a captive in the material universe, although this dismal lot has fallen to the individual souls and the 'members of wisdom' which entered the bodies of men and other creatures in their train.³ Apart from a vague and incomprehensible hint that she wrought in the hope of honour (ii. 9. 4. 14), the cause of Sophia's rupture with the higher celestial world is not explained. However, among the superfluous hypostases of the 'Gnostics' are certain terms which, whatever their precise denotation here, are introduced as passions of the World-Soul, and afflict it, to the great disgust of Plotinus, in the same manner as they would afflict a human being:

Why bother to enumerate their other hypostases, their transmigrations (παροικήσεις), antitypes (ἀντιτύποι) and repentances (μετανοΐαι). For if they call these passions of the soul, when it is in a state of repentance, and use the word 'antitype' to denote the beholding of the images of existent things, but not the things themselves, then these are the words of men who babble vainly in the hope of constructing a philosophy of their own (ii. 9. 6. 2).

There are, it appears, three orders of soul in the present universe: the members of Wisdom, the souls dispatched by the World-Soul and the mortal compound of elements. The 'Gnostics' who divorce themselves from the World-Soul (ii. 9. 18. 20) and claim an exclusive right to the title 'Sons of God' (ii. 9. 9. 6), unite in an

³ This interpretation of the passage is not certain, but I hope that it is confirmed by my citation of ii. 9. 19. 20 below.

arrogant brotherhood which includes the vilest of men (ii. 9. 13. 10) but not Plotinus, and gathers together the scattered particles of the fallen wisdom. The mortal soul is no doubt common to all, and even bodies like the stars, composed only of fire, are endowed with a malevolent animation. Whether even detractors of the 'Gnostics' are allowed, as human beings, to participate in the World-Soul, we cannot tell, and while we are told that in this world the immortal is subject to the mortal, we are not told that the immortal is the property of all men.

If the theories here expounded are indeed those of the 'Gnostics' they have very little in common with the doctrines of immortality zealously guarded by Plato's heirs. For the latter, all souls are immortal, those of the stars by a more impregnable right than those of men; for the former, the possession of immortality is a rare and uncertain gift which raises a class of men above every being in the created universe.

Worse still, it appears that these men have done nothing to earn a dignity to which others can never attain. The injunction 'look to God' (ii. 9. 15, 33) is not the beginning of any discipline in virtue and self-denial, and the base men who are told that they are better than the gods are already superior in their own eyes to the purblind votaries of the ancient cults. Adopting tenets more puerile than those of Epicurus (ii. 9. 15. 10), they disdain belief in providence and upbraid both the inequalities of birth and the iniquity of man's heart. Yet do these complaints incline them to a more ardent pursuit of virtue, a withdrawal from vain and illusory enjoyments, or even an active benevolence towards men who have felt the weight of these cosmic wrongs? On the contrary (ii. 9. 15. 19 f.), they pursue their own concerns without any thought for the necessities of others; lacking the art, or even the notion, of purifying the soul, they expect to be revered by celestial natures; devoid of all interest in virtue, they believe that God reserves his paternal surveillance for them alone. Whereas Plotinus hopes to crown an arduous pilgrimage with the vision and apprehension of the One, the 'Gnostics' declare that the higher world already lies open to them (ii. 9. 18. 33).

As they adjudge to themselves the trophies of philosophy, so they take credit for powers beyond the reach of any man. Rejecting oracles and prophecy (ii. 9. 9. 42), despising the intelligible gods and indifferent to the wisdom of the virtuous men of old, they affect their own magic (ii. 9. 14. 6), and by means of 'melodies, incantations, breathings and hissings' draw down from heaven the very stars whose influence they regard with such 'tragic fears'. In every sickness they see daemonic possession, which, though uncertain whether daemon and disease are a single entity or rather

two simultaneously present, they none the less profess to exorcise by their incantations (ii. 9. 14. 24 f.).

Insolence and pride are the distinctive characteristics of this sect. However little they recollect or retain of their former state, they think themselves no true denizens of the world, no corruptible natures like the stars, no tarnished images like the demiurge, but fugitives from the intelligible sphere, whose souls contain the form of the very world (ii. 9. 5. 37). It is not clear why their souls were compelled to descend by a transgression which did not carry any such consequence for the guilty, nor why men so immune to the daunting glory of the heavens should prove to be so susceptible to the attractions of young boys (ii. 9. 17. 27). The 'Gnostics' do not, of course, address any such questions to themselves; instead, they have the blasphemous conceit (ii. 9. 13. 1) to demand a reason for the origin of the world, not perceiving that this is to seek a beginning of the eternal. They are even foolish enough to talk of a new world (ii. 9. 5. 25) to which their unfettered souls will escape, though it is curious that, with the means ready to hand, they are so unwilling to expedite their departure (ii. 9. 9. 16).

Plotinus testifies to the encroachment of the sect upon his own circle both by the vehemence of his censure, and by his admission that there are some among his friends whose attachment to this philosophy even his arguments have been unable to shake:

For I am abashed when I contemplate certain of my friends, who, having encountered these notions before the beginning of our intimacy, have continued to espouse them for reasons that I am unable to understand (ii. 9. 10. 2 f.).

The reasons for this adherence are not far to seek: for anyone driven by wretchedness or despair to a forlorn and haughty denial of providence, anyone, more sanguine but less noble, who, as a candidate for philosophical honours, grudged the pains of self-denial, and anyone, for that matter, who desired answers to the questions that Plotinus would not entertain, would gladly have abandoned the hesitant subtleties of the philosopher for the promises and fables of the theosophist. The Gnostics, with their singular contempt for the world of matter, provided an easy solution for those who lacked the Platonist's faith in an unresting divine activity which could make the form of beauty vaguely discernible even in the dark and fugitive matter of the world.

II

Some features of his argument show that Plotinus had divined the Christianity of the 'Gnostics', for he subjects them to the

criticisms regularly employed by pagan enemies of the Church.⁴ Like Lucian (*Peregrinus*, 13) and Celsus (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, i. 27) he calls his opponents ἰδιώται (ii. 9. 9. 56); like Celsus again he professes to know what liberties are disguised beneath the name 'brethren'; in accordance with the practice of all polemicists, from the persecutors in Acts to Alexander of Lycopolis, he makes play with such words as καινὴ and καινοτομίᾳ,⁵ and he borrows from Celsus (*Contra Celsum* vi *passim*) the two-pronged calumny that his adversaries have stolen from the Greeks, whom, for the most part, they have none the less failed to read or understand. 'If you do not like the world', he exclaims, 'there is no need to stay here' (ii. 9. 9. 16). The jibe was already repudiated by Justin (2 *Apol.* 4), yet Lucian (*Peregrinus*, 13) treats the martyrdom of Christians as suicide and Celsus, when he expressed the wish (*Contra Celsum*, viii. 28) that Christians would disappear from the earth, may have implied that the solution was in their own hands. Alexander of Lycopolis provides evidence that the same question had already been put by pagans to the earliest Manichaeans (*Contra Manichaeos*, 4). The charges of immorality, of novelty and of plagiarism are among those that the Fathers had been labouring to turn against certain heretics.⁶ By AD 250 a pagan author had no excuse for treating the deviant brethren as though all their fellow-Christians would support them. According to Origen, this was a fault in Celsus (*Contra Celsum*, vi. 28), but since that time the Fathers had spent the greater part of a century in arguing the contumacious elements out of the Church.

How much of this controversy was familiar to Plotinus we cannot tell, but Porphyry, who was no doubt his chief informant, had allowed the Church to disabuse him of some of the more pernicious misunderstandings. In his work *Against the Christians* he does not tax them with imaginary vices, and he shows a profound acquaintance with both Jewish and Christian Scriptures which enables him to dispense with any fanciful derivations of their doctrines from the Greeks.⁷ His chapter on the Gnostics in the *Life of Plotinus* is therefore of great interest:

⁴ On Plotinus and the Church see Schmidt (1901), p. 82.

⁵ Acts 17: 19; Lucian, *Peregrinus*, 11 and 12; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, i. 4, i. 38, and i. 46; Alexander, *Contra Manichaeos*, 2.

⁶ Immorality: Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* i. xxviii. 2 and Hippolytus, *Refutatio* v. vii. 7. Novelty: Tertullian, *Adv. Val.* 15. 1. Plagiarism: Hippolytus, *Refutatio* v. 2, vii. 2, and vii. 5.

⁷ See Fragments in M. Stern (ed.), *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 454-83. See also A. Meredith, 'Porphyry and Julian Against the Christians' in *ANRW* xxiii, pt. 2 (1979), pp. 1130-6.

γεγόνασι δὲ κατ' αὐτὸν τῶν Χριστιανῶν πολλοὶ μὲν καὶ ἄλλοι, αἵρετικοὶ δὲ τῆς παλαιᾶς φιλοσοφίας ἀνηγγμένοι οἱ περὶ Ἀδελφίων καὶ Ἀκυλίνου, οἱ τὰ Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Λίβυος καὶ Φιλοκώμου καὶ Δημοστράτου καὶ Λυδοῦ συγγράμματα πλείστα κεκτημένοι ἀποκαλύψεις τε προφέροντες Ζωροάστρου καὶ Ζωστριανοῦ καὶ Νικοθέου καὶ Ἀλλογενοῦς καὶ Μέσου καὶ ἄλλων τοιοῦτων πολλοὺς ἐξηπάτων καὶ αὐτοὶ ἠπατημένοι, ὡς δὴ τοῦ Πλάτωνος εἰς τὸ βάθος τῆς νοητῆς οὐσίας οὐ πελάσαντος.

The grammar of the first sentence remained intractable to most scholars before Igal,⁸ who surmised that the intelligible construction πολλοὶ μὲν ἄλλοι . . . αἵρετικοὶ δὲ had been crossed by the idiomatic but irrelevant πολλοὶ καὶ ἄλλοί, thus rendering the syntax rather more intricate than the thought. There is precedent, if not excuse, for such confusion; at least, if what was good enough for Thucydides was good enough for Porphyry, we may cite the opening words of the Plataeans when they defend themselves against Thebes (Thucydides iii. 56): πολλὰ μὲν καὶ ἄλλα ἡμᾶς ἠδίκησαν, τὸ δὲ τελευταῖον αὐτοὶ ξύνιστε. Lucian provides another instance, which is equally pejorative, when he sneers at the numerous marriages of Zeus (*De Sacrificiis*, 5): ἔγημε δὲ πολλὰς μὲν καὶ ἄλλας, ὑστάτην δὲ τὴν ἀδελφὴν. In the passage quoted from Porphyry there is no τελευταῖον (δὲ) or ὑστάτην (δὲ) and it might seem that the 'heretics' and the 'Christians' are presented in strict opposition; yet the English construction 'not only . . . but also especially' is the equivalent of the μὲν . . . δὲ antithesis in some prose of late antiquity—Origen in particular is a mine of instances⁹—and is most likely to be the meaning of it in this context.

It would certainly be difficult to deny that the αἵρετικοί are Christians: it was open to the author to make Χριστιανοὶ μὲν (or even Χριστιανῶν μὲν, with only a venial and common solecism) the syntactic counterpart of αἵρετικοὶ δὲ if he intended to divorce Christians from 'heretics' in his description; and logical considerations support the view that the genitive Χριστιανῶν is to be taken with both halves of the antithesis. The αἵρετικοὶ govern the rest of a very long sentence, and, since the Χριστιανοὶ do not appear anywhere else in the chapter, what can the author have meant by introducing them if they did not define the genus to which the αἵρετικοὶ belonged? The word αἵρετικός is of course the original of the English 'heretic', and had become by this period a technical term in the language of Christian authors. To pagans, who lacked

⁸ J. Igal, 'The Gnostics and the Ancient Philosophy in Plotinus', in H. J. Blumenthal and R. A. Markus (eds.) *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought* (London, 1981), 138–49.

⁹ e.g. *Werke*, vol. II, pp. 150. 31 and 318. 21 (Koetschau).

a corresponding notion of orthodoxy, the word would be apt to retain its original sense of 'able to choose'. As the description of 'an adherent of any philosophical αἵρεσις' it was rare enough in all contexts, and would scarcely have been apposite in this, since even those who belittled the intellectual claims of Christians would not deny them a αἵρεσις, and so could not use αἱρετικοί in this weaker, pagan sense as one of a pair of antithetical terms. The word is used in a sense made current by, and reserved for, Christians—a sign, if one were needed, of Porphyry's close acquaintance with the language and affairs of the contemporary Church.

Porphyry knows a heretic from a Catholic, but the words which describe the nature of the heresy, ἐκ τῆς παλαιᾶς φιλοσοφίας ἀνηγγμένοι, have made new work for translators. Have the 'Gnostics' renounced the 'ancient philosophy' of the Christians, or has some other philosophy enabled them to commence a renunciation of the Church? Philology will support either interpretation, but once it is established that the αἱρετικοί are Christians, we may be confident that the tenor of the whole chapter demands the second. If the 'Gnostics' stand accused of having abandoned the 'ancient philosophy', which philosophy have they abandoned? Not the Platonic, which commentators like Porphyry would deem foreign to every Christian; not the faith of the Catholic Church, which neither the 'Gnostics' nor Porphyry would have admitted to be ancient; not the dispensation of the Jews, from which all Christians alike were held to have seceded, as much by their pagan as by their Jewish detractors. The last argument constitutes no small part of Celsus' case against the Christian Church of the second century, and when Eusebius wrote the *Praeparatio Evangelica* he still felt the obligation to refute it. The orthodox might, of course, have blamed the 'Gnostics' for their abuses of the Old Testament, but Porphyry would hardly have transmitted an imputation which he believed to be as applicable to the accusers as to the accused. The 'Gnostics' have abandoned nothing: ἀνηγγμένοι is the perfect middle participle of ἀνάγω, and bears the sense 'deriving from, or using as a first principle' (cf. Plutarch, *Moralia* 592 f.). They have taken as the ground of their speculations some school or system whose antiquity was generally admitted. The statement was a familiar one, for that heresy is the alliance of true instruction with the errors of pagan learning is the first and last word of Hippolytus on the manifold divisions which have afflicted the body of Christ.

Is the charge true or has Porphyry merely loaded his shot from a common magazine? Plotinus must be our witness, and what he tells us does not suggest that he had any sure means of tracing the

'Gnostic' doctrines to pagan books. He offers to them in one place (ii. 9. 4. 1) the word *περορρησασα*, employed in Plato's *Phaedrus* to account for the fall of the soul. No use is made of the image of wings at any other point in his long rebuttal of 'Gnostic' errors, and he concedes the word to his adversaries only because it enables him to insinuate that a Greek master has been first robbed and then abused.

There follows a rehearsal of other acts of plagiarism, which appear to be more extensive:

The Hellenes . . . spoke without delusive pomposity of ascents from the Cave . . . Generally speaking, some of these people's doctrines have been taken from Plato . . . For the judgments and the rivers in Hades and the reincarnations come from Plato. And the making a plurality in the intelligible world, Being and Intellect and the Maker different from Intellect, and Soul, is taken from the words in the *Timaeus*: for Plato says 'The ruler of the universe thought that it should contain all the forms that intelligence discerns in the Living Being that truly is'. But they did not understand, and took it to mean that there is one mind which contains in repose all realities, and another mind different from it which contemplates them, and another which plans . . . and they think that this is the maker according to Plato' (*Enn.* ii. 9. 6, trans. Armstrong).

Here we must distinguish what the 'Gnostics' are said to have stolen from what they might have stolen had they consulted the best authorities. The image of the Cave they have left where they found it; Plato has furnished them only with lurid colours for the painting of the after-life and a charter for their doctrine of the three primordial Minds. The first of these allegations must be factitious, since pictures of the after-life could be drawn from a multitude of texts and monuments, and Plato himself was indebted to precursors whom the 'Gnostics' would have been equally pleased to despoil. That the *Timaeus* was being cited in this circle as the authority for a cardinal 'Gnostic' doctrine is likely enough, since the interpretation resembles one advanced by Plotinus himself and by at least two later members of his school.¹⁰ We shall see below, however, that the Gnostics cherished a system of three intellects which no man could have deduced from these expressions in the *Timaeus*, unless he wished to invoke a Platonic document to justify a notion already formed. The 'Gnostics' might have appropriated certain texts in Plato for an apologetic purpose; but their use of him would wait upon the development of their cosmogony, and Plotinus is on surer ground when he makes the opposite criticism, that his adversaries for the most part either

¹⁰ I can provide here only a brief Appendix summarizing the evidence, which I hope to treat at length in another article.

eschew or are culpably ignorant of the best thought of the Greeks.

Porphyry's assertion that the 'Gnostics' have 'used the ancient philosophy as a first principle' may have owed more to his reading in the literature of previous controversy than to his observation of a living school. What is remarkable is that, like the churchmen and unlike Celsus, he regards plagiarism from Greek works, not as the fault of all Christianity, but as the peculiar feature of one sect. Thus Porphyry is the first among pagan writers to have judged heresy by an intellectual canon which conformed to that laid down by orthodox writers of the Church.

III

Following a practice dear to both Christians and pagans, Plotinus insults the Gnostics with their own phrases.¹¹ When they speak of the dark Abyss his opponents are truly reasoning εἰς ἐπισκότησιν (ii. 9. 10); their statement that the Demiurge is the εἰδῶλον of Sophia (ii. 9. 10) is itself an εἰδῶλον λόγου (ii. 9. 1); their hope of a καινὴ γῆ (ii. 9. 5. 24) is nothing but a bold καινολογία (ii. 9. 6); and they have no right to prate of Sophia or of an ἔννοια that is older than the whole cosmos when they themselves have neither such σοφία (ii. 9. 8) or such ἔννοια (ii. 9. 17) as is possessed by the common man. One instance of such parody appears in the first of his *Enneads* and provides evidence that the teaching of these dualists was repugnant to him as soon as he began to collect disciples:¹²

εἰ γάρ τις ἐπιδράμοι λαβεῖν βουλόμενος ὡς ἀληθινοῦ, οἷα εἰδῶλου καλοῦ ἐφ' ὕδατος ὄχουμένου, οὐ λαβεῖν βουληθεῖς, ὡς ποῦ τις μῦθος, δοκεῖ μοι, αἰνίττεται, δὺς εἰς τὸ κάτω τοῦ ρεύματος ἀφανῆς ἐγένετο, τὸν αὐτὸν δὴ τρόπον ὃ ἐχόμενος τῶν καλῶν σωμάτων καὶ μὴ ἀφιεῖς οὐ τῷ σώματι, τῇ δὲ ψυχῇ καταδύσεται εἰς σκοτεινὰ καὶ ἀτερπῆ τῷ νῷ βάθη, ἔνθα τυφλὸς [καί] ἐν ἄδου μένων καὶ ἐνταῦθα κάκει σκιαῖς συνέσται. φεύγωμεν δὴ φίλην ἐς πατρίδα, ἀληθέστερον ἢ τις παρακελεύοιτο. τίς οὖν ἡ φυγή; καὶ πῶς ἀναξόμεθα; οἷον ἀπὸ μάγου Κίρκης φησὶν ἢ Καλυψοῦς Ὀδυσσεῖς αἰνιττόμενος, δοκεῖ μοι, μείναι οὐκ ἀρεσθεῖς, καίτοι ἔχων ἡδονὰς δι' ὀμμάτων καὶ κάλλει πολλῶν αἰσθητῶ συνών. (*Enn.* i. 6. 8)

The story of Narcissus may be the ostensible object of the allusion, but the language is that of the Gnostics, and the result of this

¹¹ See Lucian, *Peregrinus*, 6 and 10 and the title of Celsus' *True Logos*; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* i. i. 3 (πλάσμα), Preface 2 (πλάνη) and i. xxxi. 5 (ὑδρα); Hippolytus, *Ref.* v. xi. 1 (πολυκέφαλος, πολυσχιδής, πλάνη, ὑδρα).

¹² Against Dodds and Puech on this point see A. H. Armstrong in his *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Mediaeval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 256-7.

tendentious assimilation is to imply that they themselves have been seduced by the very ignorance that they attribute to Sophia.¹³ It is they, after all, who are vulnerable to the charms of beautiful bodies, and it is they who are likely to lose themselves in a futile search for the βᾶθος of the intellectual world. Hades and the Cave in Plato's *Republic* are brought together as they are in the polemic against the Gnostics.¹⁴ Might we infer that the use of Homeric allegory is another part of the Classical tradition which Plotinus was endeavouring to reclaim from real or putative abuse?

Plotinus affects to feel a certain diffidence in assailing friends who succumbed to the Gnostic delusion before he made their acquaintance. The word αἰδώς intimates that these are friends of some distinction, and we are reminded of the manner in which Aristotle has to take leave of Plato's theory of Forms (*Nic. Eth.* 1096a 16), or of the formula used by Plato himself (*Rep.* 595c) to deprecate the authority of the old poets. Proclus (*Comm. in Rem. Publ.*, vol. II, p. 110. 15 Kroll) evinces similar misgivings when he finds himself at odds with Theodorus of Asine. It might therefore seem impossible that the Aculinus of Porphyry could be the Aculinus of the following passage:

Among [Porphyry's] fellow-pupils were Amelius, Origen and Aculinus, men whose writings are preserved, although they are now held in no esteem, despite the excellence of their doctrines, on account of the obscurity of their style (Eunapius, *Vitae Sophistarum*, p. 457 Boissonade).

As always,¹⁵ however, Eunapius has a short way with the truth. Origen was not a fellow-pupil of Porphyry, but of Plotinus, and one before whom the Master hesitated to open his mouth when he paid a visit to his school in Rome.¹⁶ If we therefore assume that the Aculinus of Eunapius belonged to Origen's generation, we have a figure who is old enough to have been treated as an authority by the 'Gnostics' and at the same time to have commanded the qualified reverence of Plotinus.

Eunapius was a follower of Iamblichus, who had robbed Plotinus' teaching of its simplicity when he made out a philosophical case for 'hissings and incantations' in his answer to Porphyry's

¹³ See W. Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, p. 205 n.

¹⁴ On this passage and Porphyry's *Cave of the Nymphs* see my 'Scenes from the later wanderings of Odysseus' in *CQ* xxxvii, pt. 2 (1988).

¹⁵ See R. Goulet, 'Variations Romanesques sur la Melancolie de Porphyre', in *Hermes* cx (1982), pp. 445-8.

¹⁶ See F. M. Schroeder, 'Ammonius Saccas' in *ANRW* xxxvi, pt. 1 (1987), pp. 494-509.

Letter to Anebo.¹⁷ We need therefore not be surprised that the different principles of Eunapius should have led him to speak highly of one whom the earlier school had spurned. Iamblichus himself alludes to the Gnostics, under that name, as though they were part of a constellation of reputable philosophies:

According to Plotinus, the cause [of the fall of the soul] is original otherness; according to Empedocles a flight from God; according to Heraclitus the repose that consists in change; according to the Gnostics a dementia or deviation (*De Anima apud Stobaeum*, vol. I, p. 375 Wacsmuth).

In the *De Mysteriis* of Iamblichus we are allowed to descry the secrets of Hermetic monotheism. The only other reference to a Greek philosopher named Aculinus makes him the author of a Hermetic allegory:

Maia stands for the procession to visible being. The logos which pervades all things is the ordering principle of all existents, so she is called the mother of Hermes. For this is intelligible matter, the ordering of the procession to visible being and the bringing into being of the existents. For existent things are compounded of matter and form (Lydus, *De Mensibus* p. 128. 12 ff., Wuensch).

'Being is a combination of matter and form.' The doctrine is akin to that which certain Platonists of the second century—Atticus, Plutarch, possibly Numenius¹⁸—had elicited from the *Timaeus*, and which was treated by the later Neoplatonists as a wilful innovation. The assumption that matter and form subsist independently is regarded by Plotinus as the root of the 'Gnostic' philosophy. We may therefore assume that Lydus has preserved the authentic utterance of a leading 'Gnostic', perhaps a little older than Plotinus, and that Hermes had been made to participate in his liberal dealings with the Classical tradition.

IV

The word γνωστικὸς as the distinctive appellation of a school is attested only twice in Greek philosophy. In an article recently published in this *Journal* I have argued that the Fathers regarded this term as a dangerous euphemism, and therefore applied it rarely and with reserve.¹⁹ The Naassenes, as some prefer to style

¹⁷ See A. Smith, *Porphyrus's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition* (The Hague 1974), pp. 80–141.

¹⁸ See J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London 1977), pp. 206–7, 254 and 373 ff.

¹⁹ See my 'Gnostics and Valentinians in the Church Fathers' in *JTS* NS xl (1989), 27–47.

them,²⁰ differ in two important respects from their Valentinian successors: they treat matter as something eternally subsistent, opposed to, and not derived from, the realm of Spirit; and they speak of a Demiurge who is the lord of matter, not the parent of those who live according to the soul. It makes sense in the Naassene system to speak of a *νεῦσις* or fall into matter, as it would not make sense in the system of Valentinus, for whom the sequence of events is rather: (a) Sophia's transgression, which is rather an abortive aspiration than a wandering or fall; (b) the confinement of the pleroma and the consequent exclusion of Sophia or her daughter, entailing the demarcation of an upper and lower region; (c) the emergence of the Demiurge, the Cosmocrator and a nether world of matter from the passions of Sophia.²¹ A more detailed study will show how closely the evidence of Plotinus agrees with that of his Christian predecessors.

The Naassene Demiurge is a θεός πύρινος (Hippolytus, *Ref.* v. vii. 31), and, since he is an intelligence completely devoid of virtue, we should expect to find that equally vicious properties are allotted to the stars. Such notions cannot be found in the Valentinians, for whom, as for the astrologers, only certain stars are evil,²² but Origen's Ophite Diagram represented the ascent of the soul through seven planetary spheres, in each of which the guardian bared his monstrous physiognomy to oppose its further progress (Origen, *Contra Celsum* vi. 24. ff.). The Demiurge of these Ophites is an 'accursed god', and Tartarus and Gehenna are the names for the region which occupies the lower part of the diagram. The Naassenes proclaim (*Ref.* v. x) that the world's first principle was Mind, and, unlike the Valentinians, they appear to have no conception of a Power beyond being and thought. The second principle is an 'outpoured Chaos', the third a demiurgic soul.²³ It is the soul which, in this Naassene hymn as in the teaching of the 'Gnostics' of Plotinus, is said to have descended into this 'labyrinth' of passion, sense and change. Two members of the triad, the first and third, are compatible with the series that the 'Gnostics' are said by Plotinus to have read into the Timaeus, and it is certainly the Naassenes, and not the Valentinians, who would

²⁰ See in particular Hippolytus, *Ref.* v. vi-xi.

²¹ The notion of heaven above and earth below is inherited by the Gnostics from Jewish literature. The Valentinians conceived of the birth of matter as a procession from unity to plurality, basing themselves, in this respect as in others, upon Pythagorean and Middle Platonic sources.

²² *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, 71; at *Excerpta*, 70 the stars are signs, but not causes.

²³ On the authenticity of the hymn see M. Marcovich, 'The Naassene Psalm in Hippolytus' in B. Layton (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* (Leiden, 1980-1) vol. II, pp. 770-8.

be likely to cavil at Plato for his failure to fathom the βᾶθος of the Mind. βᾶθος is indeed a word that the Naassenes made pregnant with new meaning.²⁴ To them belong the treasures of divine wisdom which even the words of Paul had been inadequate to describe. βῦθος, which is the Valentinian term for a profundity not accessible even to intellect, is a word that does not figure in polemic against the Naassenes or the 'Gnostics' of Plotinus, since the vocabulary of these men expressed more limited aspirations.

The text of which Irenaeus gives an abstract in his account of the 'Gnostici Barbelo' survives in Coptic versions under the title of the *Apocryphon of John*.²⁵ The longest rendering indicates that some at least of its contents derive from a Book of Zoroaster. This book was replete with astrological lore, and perhaps the Mithraic Ladder which was brought to light by Celsus as the source of the Ophite Diagram (*Contra Celsum*, vi. 22–3) stands in a closer relation to it than either he or Origen surmised.

Hippolytus' Naassene Sermon mingles the faiths of every nation, extorting the same hidden testimony from the mysteries of Isis and the poetry of Anacreon.²⁶ It is inevitable that it should often recur to the *Odyssey* as a parable of the soul's escape from the world,²⁷ and it is equally inevitable that the babel of human tongues and clashing elements should be stilled by the wand of Hermes, who bridges earth and heaven in his traditional roles as demiurgic principle, guide of souls and light of the human mind:

For they say that Hermes is speech, who, being the interpreter and architect of all things, past, present and to come, is honoured by them and stands in a form like that of the pudendum of a man . . . He is the leader, the escort and the origin of souls (*Ref.* v. vii. 29–30).

What one ancient philosopher says of the morals of another can rarely be of interest to the historian, but sometimes it is the nugatory value of what is said that may move us to ponder the saying of it. Promiscuous fornication was alleged against all Christians, and by the Fathers against all heretics, but unnatural lusts, such as those to which Plotinus alludes, were expressly imputed only to those whom the Fathers agreed to call Gnostics. It is difficult to imagine that the Fathers would have invented the

²⁴ Hippolytus, *Ref.* v. vi. 4. Cf. Romans 11: 33 and 1 Cor. 2: 1.

²⁵ All citations of Nag Hammadi Codices are from J. M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden, 1977).

²⁶ On the integrity of the sermon see P. M. Casey, 'Naassenes and Ophites' in *JTS* xxvii (1926), 374.

²⁷ See Hippolytus, *Ref.* v. viii *passim*, and the somewhat fanciful study by J. Carcopino, *De Pythagore aux Apôtres* (Paris, 1956), pp. 83–212.

singular argument by which this vice is supposed to have been defended:

They say that dissipation (ἀσχημοσύνη) is the first and blessed unformed essence of all things, the cause of form in everything that is endowed with form (*Ref.* v. vii. 18).

In this dissipated essence we may contemplate, no doubt, the Homeric Ocean (v. vii. 38) which supplies the material origin of humanity, the changing apparitions of the polyonymous Hermes, and the 'outpoured Chaos' which holds the middle place between soul and mind. Matter and its Demiurge are evil, but the Redeemer must assume all forms in order to deliver the inhabitants of matter from their bonds.

We may therefore conclude that what the Fathers depose concerning the Gnostics is entirely at one with the testimony of Plotinus, and that, while these accounts are consistent with one another, neither is so consistent with the accounts of the Valentini-ans, although this was the most illustrious of heretical Christian sects.

V

Scholarship can do little to identify the other figures in Porphyry's list of authorities, which we should not augment with the names of philosophers known to us from the Classical tradition.²⁸ Atticus and Numenius were treated in his school as men whose treatises made profitable reading (*VP* 14), and, even if some of their views were not acceptable, there was no thought that their works (or such enthusiasts as Amelius: *VP* 3) ought to be shunned. However, the discovery of texts from Nag Hammadi bearing the titles *Zostrianus* and *Allogenes* has enabled us to compare the reports of Plotinus with the *ipsissima verba* of his 'Gnostic' foes.

The extant manuscript of the *Allogenes* contains little that would have invited the animadversions of Plotinus, but at the end it does us a service by revealing the identity of Messos:

These are the things that were disclosed to me, O my son (Messos) . . . [proclaim them, O my] son Me[ss]os [and make] (the) seal [of] all [the books of] Allo[ge]nes (*Allogenes* 68. 34-69. 20).

The *Zostrianus*, easily proved to be of kindred origin to the *Allogenes*,²⁹ corroborates the allusions of Plotinus to 'transmigrations, antitypes and repentances', of which there appear to be no

²⁸ *Contra* Dodds in *Entretiens Hardt*, v, p. 185.

²⁹ See J. H. Sieber, 'An Introduction to the Tractate *Zostrianus* from Nag Hammadi' in *Novum Testamentum* xv (1975), pp. 233-40.

other instances except in treatises of a later date and uncertain provenance. We find in the *Zostrianus* signs of a mixing of philosophy with magic, and it rehearses the myth of Sophia in a form which scarcely differs from the summary in the ninth book of the second *Ennead*:

But when Sophia looked down . . . she produced the darkness . . . With the reflection of a reflection she worked in the world, and the reflection of the appearance was taken from her. But a place of rest was given to Sophia in exchange for her repentance (*Zostrianus* 9. 16–10. 9).

Sophia looks down, and not, as in the Valentinian myth, towards the Father. The resemblances between this version and that of the Greek philosopher extend even to vocabulary, since the notion of a reflection of a reflection is exactly what is conveyed by the phrase εἰδῶλον εἰδῶλου. Plotinus does not tell us that Sophia was translated to the heaven of the repentant, but his knowledge of some early form of this treatise cannot be denied.

Is the *Zostrianus* a Gnostic tractate? We have only to look at the seal, which bears the names of Zostrianus and Zoroaster. The notion that the *Zoroaster* and *Zostrianus* of Porphyry, separately refuted by the two most luminous minds of their generation, were in fact a single treatise is not one that has attracted many supporters,³⁰ but a reference in Arnobius (*Adv. Nationes* i. 52) makes it probable that Zoroaster stood in the same relation to Zostrianus as did Messos to Allogenes, and that in the original manuscript Zoroaster's was the filial hand that preserved the revelations when they were brought forth for the benefit of posterity by the less illustrious seer.³¹

We cannot now dispute the common origin of the *Zostrianus* and the *Zoroaster*, and the latter, as we have seen, was the original of the *Apocryphon of John*. That this was a Gnostic document is proved by the testimony of Irenaeus, and all doubts as to its provenance must be dispelled by its occasional recollections of the tragedy of Sophia. This aeon conceives a child in imitation of the Father, but under the spell of ignorance (9. 29 f.) and without the consent of her consort. She thrusts her offspring into an outer region (10. 11) which proves (11. 10) to be a dark realm only illuminated by gleams of Sophia's spiritual radiance; and the lightning-eyed abortion (10. 11) then proceeds (10. 25 f.) to create from fire seven planetary rulers and the twelve signs of the zodiac

³⁰ See J. Doresse, 'Les Apocalypses de Zoroastre, Zostrien et Nicothée' in *Studies in Honour of Walter Ewing Crum* (Constantinople, 1950).

³¹ In my 'How Many Zoroasters?', *Vig. Christ.* 42. 3 (1988), pp. 282–9, I argue for the existence at least of a Gnostic version of the supposed Zoroastrian original of Plato's myth.

to be his ministers in the formation of a depraved and benighted world.

Since the Gnostics are made to speak of an 'innominabilis pater' even in the account of Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* I. xxix. 1), it may seem that we were mistaken in inferring from Plotinus and Hippolytus that the Gnostics acknowledged no god 'beyond being and thought'. We must remember, however, that these documents have passed through many hands, and, since there are no clear instances of such wordless adoration of the Unknowable before the second century, we may assume that the presence of the ineffable Father and Barbelo in these treatises is the consequence of the same process that turned the Book of Zoroaster into the *Apocryphon of John*.³²

Arnobius, with his allusion (*Adv. Nationes* i. 52) to an Armenian Zoroaster, who was both 'Zostriani nepos' and 'familiaris Pamphylus Cyri', gives us reason to think that the Book of Zoroaster assailed by Porphyry may have been the one that Proclus was to reject as an ignorant parody of Plato's myth of Er (*Comm. in Rem. Pub.*, vol. II, p. 109 f., Kroll). This began with an address to a certain Cyrus who was the son of one Armenius and a Pamphylian by birth. If these works are indeed identical, the Book of Zoroaster must have been known to Cronius, who speaks (Proclus, *op. cit.* p. 110. 2) of Er as the tutor of Zoroaster. Perhaps it was also known to his contemporaries Numenius (Fr. 35 Des Places) and Celsus, who are the earliest philosophers to quote the Mithraic notion of an ascent of the soul through the seven planetary spheres. The acme of these writers coincides with the discovery of the *Apocryphon of John* by Irenaeus, and we may therefore venture to fix the latter half of the second century as the date at which Gnostic literature became current in the intellectual circles of the west.

At this point one must be careful to draw only the legitimate conclusions. The Gnostics were always set apart from the Classical tradition by their hatred of the universe, their insatiable desire for new revelations and their efforts to pre-empt the goals of philosophy without its attendant pains.

VI

Nicotheus merits a study by himself. His name figures only in

³² Despite A. J. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. IV (Paris, 1953), pp. 1-91 and H. Dörrie in *Entretiens Hardt* V pp. 191-223, there is still no case for explicit recognition of such transcendental principles before Basilides: see the classic *Agnostos Theos* by E. Norden (repr. Leipzig, 1956) pp. 83 ff.

one Coptic text, the untitled treatise of the Bruce Codex, where he is cited as a witness to the perfections of the Father.³³ It would appear that an even more venerable authority is possessed by a certain Marsanes, who receives the adoration of the great aeons on account of the visions vouchsafed to him by the Firstborn of the divine powers. This Marsanes is perhaps identical with the prophet Marsianus, who is said by Epiphanius (*Panarion* XL. vii. 6) to have been honoured by the Archontics. The Archontics made their appearance in the fourth century, and, although they cherished a treatise called the *Allogenes*, this was not the treatise of that name which has been discovered at Nag Hammadi. None the less it is unlikely that the two were unrelated, or that the Archontic Marsianus had nothing to do with a text entitled *Marsanes* which was discovered at Nag Hammadi, and whose contents resemble in many particulars those of the *Allogenes*, *Zostrianus*, and *Apocryphon of John*.

For the most copious information about Nicotheus we are indebted to the *Treatise on the Omega* by Zosimus of Panopolis, an alchemist who appears to have been of Porphyry's generation.³⁴ The text is not the work of an orthodox Christian, since it confesses debts to Hermes and Zoroaster. Neither of these, however, was consulted with such profit as Nicotheus, the 'hidden one' (I. 4), the 'unfathomable' (II. 12), who is the only source of the knowledge that the alchemist proposes to reveal.

One passage has long been recognized as a borrowing from the Naassenes. The Primal Man, a figure who recapitulates the history of mankind as it waits for grace, is Adam to the Medes, the Chaldaeans, the Hebrew and the Parthians, while in his Egyptian aspect he is called Thoth, and is the discoverer of all things and of their names (II. 18 ff.). Scott and Reitzenstein³⁵ divined the resemblance between this sally into comparative mythology and the following extract from the Naassene Sermon:

It is difficult to ascertain whether Alalcomenus, first of all men, rose upon the Boeotians over the lake Cephisis . . . or whether Arcadia brought forth Pelasgus . . . The Chaldaeans say that this Adam is the man whom alone earth brought forth (Hippolytus, *Ref.* v. vi. 4).

The treatise begins with a magical invocation and an allusion to the seventh sphere of Cronus (I. 2 f.). In words that are all but

³³ Bruce Codex, chap. 7; see the *Commentary on Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, by B. A. Pearson (Leiden, 1981), p. 226 ff.

³⁴ Text and Commentary in W. Scott, *Hermetica* (Oxford 1925), vol. IV, pp. 104-53.

³⁵ Scott, *Hermetica*, iv, p. 121 and R. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres* (Leipzig 1904), pp. 103 ff.

identical with those that Hippolytus found in the Naassene Sermon, the author proclaims that Ocean is the genesis of all things (1. 5). The statement (5), on the authority of Hermes and Zoroaster, that the philosopher is the master of Necessity merits particular attention. The Book of Zoroaster known to Proclus contained the dictum that 'Necessity is air' (*Comm. in Rem. Pub.*, vol. II, p. 109. 20); the *Apocryphon of John* replaces that element by the 'spirit which originates in matter' (21. 7), styling this a 'bond of forgetfulness' (21. 12), while Fate is said to constitute the 'last of the terrible bonds' (28. 15). The *Apocryphon of John* therefore corroborates the hypothesis that the 'Gnostic' Zoroaster was the Zoroaster of Proclus, and we find that the only tenet which is cited from the latter is related to the one concern that Zoroaster and Hermes shared with the alchemist of Panopolis.

But more remarkable yet is the presence of a cardinal tenet of Naassene theology in that chapter of the treatise which professes to put the pupil in possession of the whole mystery. The vision of the Son of God, continually transmuting the difficult elements and continually undergoing transmutation, is the reward for which the alchemist is striving:

You will behold the Son of God becoming all things for the sake of the souls of the holy, so that he can rescue the soul from the domain of fate and raise it to the incorporeal. Behold him as he becomes all things—deity, angel and suffering man . . . giving light to every mind . . . Following the Father he reaches out for the blessed place and is led towards the light (*Treatise on the Omega*, 8).

Where, asks Scott,³⁶ was the recipient of these promises to look for their fulfilment? If Zosimus means to declare that there is some process known to him which will render this gracious being visible, then the answer can only be: in the retort. It is mercury that, according to the beliefs of these bold practitioners, is now the base passivity awaiting sublimation, now the one thing needful which raises the base to the sublime. It is mercury that represents both the redeeming power of the deity and the undiscovered deity of the redeemed.³⁷

Mercury is Hermes, who in the Naassene system embraces every level of existence, from the highest to the most fallen. He

³⁶ *Hermetica*, iv, p. 129.

³⁷ See C. G. Jung, *Alchemical Studies* (London, 1967), pp. 225–36. On the stone or Adamas see p. 235. See also pp. 217–20 on the dual nature of Hermes and cf. the Gnostic serpent at *Adv. Haer.* i. xxx. From the evidence of this and *Ref.* v. vi it would seem that, like Sophia, the serpent is both the first transgressor and the ultimate Redeemer, and, like Hermes, takes all forms in order to restore form to the earthly man.

holds a place in the universal economy which is also assigned to Christ (Hippolytus, *Ref.* v. x) and the Son of Man (v. vi. 4). Like the men Adam and Christ he is discernible everywhere under the properties of another alchemical symbol, that of the stone. Christ is the stone that the builders rejected (v. vii. 35), and Adam, as his name implies, is a ridge of rock (v. vii. 34) or rather (v. vii. 37 f.) the inmate of a stony prison which must succumb to the emancipating Spirit. Hermes, the foursquare guardian of the home, is not only the interpreter and demiurgic principle of all things, but 'stand first among them', fashioned into the image of the generative organs of a man (v. vii. 29).

How is it that Hermes is styled the Demiurge by men who abhor the creation? How is it that the illumination of the nether darkness is the means of redemption in Zosimus, while for the Naassenes it was the origin of the fall? We learn in the *Apocryphon of John* that it is the same Sophia whose rays were engulfed in darkness with the Demiurge who is now at work with wisdom, power and guile to bring them home:

And our sister Sophia is she who came down in innocence in order to rectify her deficiency. Therefore was she called Life, which is the mother of all living (23. 21-4).

We have not penetrated the secret of the *Treatise on the Omega* if we speak of Naassene influences. As we might have gathered from the confession of a triple debt to Hermes, Zoroaster, and Nicotheus, we have before us nothing less than a digest of the whole creed.

VII

The 'Gnostics' of Plotinus are the Gnostics of the Fathers. The name had not yet begun to suffer its modern peregrinations, and the sect is fully amenable to the principles of historical criticism. It now appears that our catalogue of authorities was by no means exhaustive: to Origen, Hippolytus, Irenaeus, and Clement we must add at least the notices in Iamblichus and Porphyry, the *Treatise on the Omega*, the tractates *Zostrianus* and *Allogenes*, the *Apocryphon of John*, together with the remains of its original, the *Book of Zoroaster*. Above all, we should add to it the ninth treatise of Plotinus' *Second Ennead*, the crowning exposition in an ample body of literature which it ought now to be possible to study, to interpret, to sift for evidence of dates and authors, and perhaps even—though only by dint of patient scholarship and discriminating judgement—to enlarge.

We might, for example, admit to our canon the earliest of the Hermetica, whose mouthpiece (*Poimandres*, 4) is a mercurial apparition (cf. *AJ* 2. 1 ff.) named Poimandres, the Mind of the Sovereignty. The cosmogony begins with a triad of three primordial intellects (9–12), the third of which is the luminous Anthropos (12). This being is seduced by his own reflection in a deliquescent underworld (14) and brings the present universe into being by his fall. The Redeemer is Poimandres, who appears to the visionary in the same tempest of confusion (1–4) that falls upon the speaker in the *Apocryphon of John* (*AJ* 1. 31 ff.). The gates of heaven are guarded by the planets, to each of which in turn the ascending soul must give back one of its vices (25). As in the *Apocryphon of John* (27. 23 f.), the wicked are left to perdition (23) under the ruthless authority of an avenging daemon. Both the *Poimandres* (18, etc.) and the *Apocryphon of John* allude to the opening chapters of Genesis, adapting the Biblical and Gnostic axiom that water is the origin of all (*Poimandres*, 5; *AJ* 13. 20 f.). The resemblance between the two documents can hardly be explained as the result of a chance diffusion of ideas, and is close enough to suggest a common source.

Except that it purports (16) to disclose the 'mystery that was hidden before all ages', this document shows no tincture of Christianity. The observation need cause us no misgiving, since the traces of Christian teaching in the *Apocryphon of John*, the Naassene Sermon and the *Treatise on the Omega* are as vague as the reminiscences of Plato.³⁸ It would appear that the profession of Christianity or of Platonism supervened belatedly on a diverse amalgam of older faiths. This conclusion accords with the testimony of Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 1. xi. 1) that the Gnostic system antedated even so early a thinker as Valentinus, who adopted it as the foundation of his own.

All the works in our canon evince the minute coincidences of thought and detail that we expect in the tradition of a single, coherent school. Little of what we discovered to be Gnostic in the *Poimandres* can be adduced from the later Hermetica, none of which appears to derive the cosmos from a primordial transgression. Nor should the study of Gnosticism dwell, except for purposes of contrast, upon the 'new men' of Arnobius, who are refuted by the arguments that the Gnostics themselves employed

³⁸ On Christianity in Zosimus see Scott, *Hermetica*, iv, pp. 114, 122, and 131–3. On Platonism see p. 114. On Christianity in the Hermetica, see Festugière, 'Hermetica' in *HTR* xxxi (1938), pp. 1–12. B. A. Pearson, 'Gnosticism as Platonism' in *HTR* lxxvii (1984), pp. 55–72 does not seem to me to have demonstrated more than desultory and superficial resemblances.

against the admirers of the world.³⁹ The definition of Gnosticism is no less clear in the Greeks than in the Fathers, and their witness is confirmed by all the texts to which their own assertions guide us. This definition could only be obscured by adducing other texts and systems which passed under different names, or under none that scholarship can now recover. A historian cannot afford to be less fastidious than his sources.

APPENDIX: THE INTERPRETATION OF *TIMAEUS* 39E

Two triads, propounded at different times in the history of Platonist metaphysics, must be carefully distinguished. The triad Being–Life–Mind describes the cycle by which the contents of the intelligible universe assume their separate identity by procession from Being to Mind while their unity is sustained by constant reversion from Mind to Being. The other and older one, with which we are concerned, is the triad Being–Mind–Life and describes the process by which the objects of the sensible world emerge from the realm of Forms.

Plotinus (*Enneads* iii. 9. 1) explains *Timaeus* 39e by a triad resembling that of his Gnostics, except that he speaks not so much of different minds as of different aspects of the same one. He distinguishes the mind at rest from the contemplative intellect and the discursive process which gives rise to the individual souls. This early passage is commonly thought to owe something to Numenius, who is said (Proclus, *Comm. in Timaeum*, vol. II, p. 274, Diehl) to have been the sponsor of a triad employed in the works of Theodorus of Asine. There seems no reason to distinguish this from a series jointly ascribed to Theodorus and to Porphyry at *Comm. in Tim.*, vol. III, p. 64. The nomenclature in the first case is Being–Mind–Source of Souls, and in the second Being–Mind–Life.

The cardinal assumption in the philosophy of Numenius (*fl.* AD 150–170) is a triad of three Intellects, one (styled 'Being') at rest, one contemplating the contents of the first and one, as the result of an indiscretion, giving rise to the sensible world (Fr. 11 Des Places) and endowing its creatures with life (Fr. 12). It is obvious that this order cannot be disturbed, and when the terms Being, Mind, and Life occur together in Plotinus (*Enn.* vi. 6. 8) the sequence is again required by the argument.

It seems clear enough that this is the triad proclaimed by the Gnostics in their interpretation of *Timaeus* 39e. In the Coptic *Zostrianus* and *Allogenes*, traces of this are found in the ascending series Vitality–Mentality–Existence (*Allogenes* p. 54), though this has been displaced by the

³⁹ For doubts as to whether Arnobius, *Adv. Nationes*, ii, pp. 13–62 describes a single, existing sect see Festugière in *Memorial Lagrange* (Paris, 1949), pp. 97–132 and P. Courcelle, 'Les Sages de Porphyre et les *Viri Novi* d'Arnobé' in *REL* (1953), pp. 257–71.

series Mentality–Vitality–Existence. The presence of such inconsistency suggests that the more erudite Gnostics adapted their texts in obedience to the trends that they observed in the most illustrious of the contemporary Greek schools.



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Pauline Platonism: The Myth of Valentinus

When the Nag Hammadi Codices were first discovered, it seemed to the majority of scholars that the interpretation of Gnosticism as a Christian heresy was dead. For the rest, there was little agreement, as a mere perusal of one text or another was enough to convince each critic that his own theses had been proved. Where Jewish motifs predominated, this was deemed to indicate a Jewish, or at least Jewish Christian provenance¹; the sparsity of allusions to the New Testament gave encouragement to those readers who already believed that Gnostic thought had its origins outside the Christian world, if not before it²; where so much was traceable to Platonic or Pythagorean sources, interspersed now and then with fragments of a commentary on Homer, or with sacred names from Egypt and Iran, the hydra-headed heresy described by the early fathers seemed about to be overrun by an acephalous menagerie of creeds³. Nothing seemed less likely than that the readers of the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Zostrianus* or the *Eugnostus* shared a church with Irenaeus or the roots of their theology with Paul.

None the less, the evidence is not all of a single kind, for there are writings in the corpus that would never have been exposed to the suspicion of heterodoxy had they come to light in any other jar. Scholarship is not perhaps required to account for every one of a heterogeneous mass of items which may owe their contiguity to nothing but the fact of simultaneous ejection from the same library⁴; but we need a coherent thesis for those contents of the first codex, often styled the Jung Codex, which are generally agreed to share the stock of words and images which the early church associates with the name of the Alexandrian Valentinus⁵. The latter had notoriously denied the Incarnation

¹ See e.g. G. Macrae, 'The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth', *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970), 80-101; G. Quispel, 'Judaism, Judaic Christianity and Gnosis', in A.B. Logan and A. Wedderburn (eds), *The New Testament and Gnosis* (Edinburgh 1983), 44-68.

² The most powerful modern defence of the 'History of Religions' approach is K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion* (London 1983).

³ See e.g. F. Wisse, 'The Nag Hammadi Library and the Heresiologists', *Vigiliae Christianae* 25 (1971), 205-23.

⁴ See the survey of theories in the introduction to J.M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden 1996). In recent scholarship, the association of the codices with the Pachomian monastery of Chenoboskion is no longer taken for granted.

⁵ The literature on this in English begins with F.L. Cross, *The Jung Codex: A Newly-Discovered Gnostic Papyrus* (London 1955).

and the salvation of the body; yet the Gospel of Truth (which is often though arbitrarily ascribed to the heresiarch himself) assumes a physical crucifixion of the saviour, while the Epistle to Rheginus gives as fair an exposition of Paul's views on the resurrection of the flesh as we could find in Irenaeus⁶. The longest work in the codex, the so-called Tripartite *Tractate*, is a little more anomalous than the treatises preserved under the apostolic pseudonyms of Barnabas and Hermas; yet it sides with the episcopal orthodoxy in deriving the existence of the present world from a God who is both omnipotent and benign⁷. The Logos who obeys his mandate does so at the cost of his own felicity, but not with the careless motives or the dangerous consequences which accompany Sophia's fall in every patristic summary of Valentinian teaching. These summaries are partly vindicated by the contents of other codices, including the *Zostrianus*, the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Exegesis on the Soul*.

We could of course dissolve these contradictions in the evidence by the free use of historical conjecture. We could argue that the contents of this Codex, which are not attested earlier than the fourth century, were late products of the Valentinian movement, at a time when it was forced to woo the triumphant orthodoxy of the Constantinian Empire⁸. We could argue, on the contrary, that the codices preserve the authentic words of a largely orthodox theologian, who became a Gnostic only in the more notorious works of his disciples⁹. Or, following a vogue for the denigration of the Fathers, we could argue they knowingly attributed to their rival the beliefs of his more perverse contemporaries. None of these hypotheses is improbable — indeed, I incline to think that all are in some measure true — but the historian will not lightly yield these treasures to the fourth century, when there are others in the corpus that can be securely dated to the second. Nor will he impute malice to the contemporary witnesses without antecedent motives, or ignorance in excess of any demonstrable cause.

This much is clear: the documents are not their own interpreters, and do not disclose their authors, though some knowledge of the authors might

⁶ At least in the commentary of M.L. Peel, *Epistle to Rheginus* (London 1969), though not so obviously so in B. Layton, *The Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection from Nag Hammadi* (Missoula, Montana, 1983). The most balanced consideration of the theology of this treatise is probably that of J.É. Ménard, *La Traité sur la Resurrection* (Quebec, 1983). On Gnostic and Irenaean interpretations of Paul see E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (London, 1980), chapter 2.

⁷ *Nag Hammadi Codices* I.5. On the imperfect (but not pernicious) generation of the world through the logos see pp. 74ff.

⁸ See e.g. H. Attridge and E. Pagels, *Nag Hammadi Codices* I (Leiden, 1985), 178.

⁹ See e.g. G.C. Stead, 'In Search of Valentinus', in B. Layton (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol. 1: *Valentinian Gnosticism* (Leiden, 1980), 75-95; C. Marksches, *Valentinus Gnosticus* (Tübingen, 1992). M. Smith, 'History of the term Gnostikos', in B. Layton (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol. 2: *Sethian Gnosticism* (Leiden, 1981), 796-801 contends that the name was deliberately extended to cover a number of diverse heresies in the second century. M.J. Edwards, 'Gnostics and Valentinians in the Church Fathers', *JTS* 40 (1989), 25-40 argues that the error is of more recent date.

conduce to the understanding of the documents. Lacking such evidence, we can only hope that all our witnesses can be brought to some agreement. This, as I shall argue in the following paper, can be done if we set ourselves the task of reconciling, not two intellectual systems, but two complementary vehicles of expression. Materials for this thesis are not far to seek, for nothing so well corroborates the paraphrase of Valentinian doctrine in Irenaeus as his inadvertent testimony to its latent use of Plato. In Platonism of the second century the metaphorical idiom, the *muthos*, was becoming as conventional as the literal mode, or *logos*, and the assignment of a text to one or other of these types could be a matter of philosophical debate. Hippolytus maintained that Valentinus was a Platonist, and the story of Sophia's fall was central to the teaching of those Gnostics whom Plotinus, the second founder of Platonism, was to reckon among his alienated friends (*Enneads* 2.9.10.3).

My aim in the present study — though it may seem paradoxical — is to show that a Platonic exegesis of the Valentinian *muthos* could reduce it to the orthodox Christian *logos* of the treatises in the Jung Codex. The treatises would thus retain their value for historians with no prejudice to either the veracity or the candour of our ecclesiastical witnesses, though we may not admire their acumen as readers. I shall begin by setting out a few of the leading principles that governed the decipherment of allegory among Platonists and churchmen of late antiquity; next, after an abstract of the Valentinian myth from common elements in the codices and the Fathers, I shall try to use these principles to reconcile the myth with a more optimistic theory of creation; finally I shall argue that the tenets of the Valentinian school were strictly Pauline, though presented through a new configuration of Pauline symbols, which makes life a moving image of theology and theology the paradigm of life.

I

Plato's own *Protagoras* (320c) distinguishes myth and *logos* as two modes of philosophical exposition; and notwithstanding Socrates' obvious preference for the latter, there is hardly any important dialogue without a myth. Platonic myths are generally accounts of the future life or the creation of the world, which, while they may appeal to eminent authorities and conduce to the edification of the audience, cannot support themselves by any logical or inductive argument. The use of allegorical criticism to interpret myths in a different sense from that suggested by the surface narrative, is deprecated on more than one occasion in the dialogues (*Phaedrus* 230d; *Republic* 378b), yet some of Plato's followers found it plausible or expedient to argue that his own myths should be treated in this fashion. One aim was to eliminate contradiction: how could the *Timaeus* be speaking literally in attributing a temporal creation to the soul, which in every other place is said to be eternal?¹⁰ If soul is a simple es-

¹⁰ See H. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* (Baltimore, 1944), 388ff.

sence in the *Phaedo*, how could the *Republic* (439ff) and the *Phaedrus* (245ff) make it a composite of three? Allegory will also rescue Plato from his critics: we can cherish the gorgeous texture of his writings, while agreeing with Aristotle on the eternity of the cosmos or the necessary immanence of forms¹¹. If the impatient reader has been deceived by the obliquity of the teaching, he has failed to meet the test of a true disciple; all adepts of the mysteries are aware that what is senseless or abhorrent to the vulgar may first excite, then edify and finally illuminate the initiated mind¹².

Scholars are only beginning to apprehend the part that ritual, the celebration of the Christian mysteries, played in the life of Gnostic sects. We ought to add the caveat, however, that for Valentinian Christians — as for Origen, Clement or any Greek philosopher — the practice of the ritual was the shadow, not the soul, of piety. We must not deceive ourselves into supposing that because the Nag Hammadi texts were hidden they were therefore esoteric; on the other hand, we must not suppose that the texts were ever meant to tell us everything, for in any group whose members are required to become disciples, there are precepts that can be transmitted only by oral teaching, and discoveries that cannot be achieved without experience. Here I am concerned to unlock the propositional content of the doctrines, but I cannot say what happened in the last stages of the mystery, or what intoxications might await an instructed graduate of the Valentinian school.

We can at least say that Platonists in the age of Valentinus spoke increasingly of things remote from knowledge and experience, and were consequently obliged to retain the metaphors from their master's dialogues. Far from harmonizing these, however, they sometimes brought them into flagrant contradiction, as though to remind their readers that there is no such thing as a factual account of the ineffable. Numenius of Apamea sometimes writes as though the present world emerged by some necessity of logic or of nature from the first principle (Frs 21 and 22 Des Places); yet in another, he writes as though it came to be in time and through a failure of attention in the demiurgic intellect (Fr. 11.13ff Des Places). Plotinus speaks in like terms of the superabundant goodness of the One, which flows for ever into all levels of inferior reality; but he too speaks at times as though the initial emanation were an act of *tolma*, i.e. reprehensible audacity (*Enneads* 5.1.1). He adopts the optimistic mode in reflecting on the nature of the One, the pessimistic mode when he reminds us of the necessary distance between the product and its source.

Four tendencies may be mentioned here, which influenced pagan reading of the dialogues of Plato, and can also be discerned in the exegesis of the scriptures by those Christians who were most familiar with Platonism:

¹¹ On the meaning of the word *gen(n)êtos* at *Timaeus* 28b, see the second-century exegete Calvenus Taurus in John Philoponus, *De Aeternitate Mundi* 135 Rabe.

¹² See C. Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon von Alexandrien und Klemens* (Berlin, 1987), together with M.J. Edwards, 'The Naming of the Naassenes', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 112 (1996), 74-80.

1. Facts or states that were temporally simultaneous may be described as though they unfolded over time. Plotinus reads the *Symposium*, with its strange romance of the birth of Love, on the premiss that (to quote Mackenna's rendering) 'myths, if they are to serve their purpose, must necessarily import time-distinctions into their subject and will often present as separate Powers which exist in unity but differ in rank and faculty.... The truth is conveyed in the only manner possible; it is left to our good sense to bring it all together again (*Enneads* 3.5.9).' Augustine makes a famous application of the same rule when he argues that the first six days of Genesis express the timebound character of human understanding, or the logical priority of the potential to the actual, rather than the time required by God for the creation of the world (*De Genesi ad Litteram* 4.49 and 54).

2. At each stage of its linear evolution, the narrative lends itself to a number of interpretations. The fourth-century writer Sallustius enumerates as many as five in his tractate *De Diis et Mundo*, not including the literal one, which was generally agreed by Platonists to be dispensable. Among Christians the more conservative Origen distinguished three senses of scripture, and maintained that in most passages all three could be discerned (*De Principiis* 4.2.4); his famous doctrine was, however, anticipated by the Valentinian Theodotus, who, according to Clement (*Excerpta* 66) declared that scripture has a mystical sense which deals in types, an enigmatic one which speaks in parables, and a plain one which is present in the text without disguise.

3. Cosmogonical narratives may be parables for the history of the soul, and perhaps *vice versa*. The temptations of the human soul in the *Phaedrus* are a model for the fall of the cosmic demiurge in Numenius. Plotinus saw this well enough when he borrowed the very language of Numenius to explain the fate of the souls in the present universe; he was, however, enough of a partisan to ascribe a literal, and therefore erroneous reading of the same myth to the Gnostics¹³. Christian exposition of the scriptures was often guided by polemic, and Augustine had already been anticipated by Ambrose and by Gregory of Nyssa when, expounding Genesis 2 against the Manichees, he conjectured that the watering of the garden is a symbol for the infusion of God's wisdom into created intellects¹⁴.

4. Categories of behaviour and experience may be represented as categories of nature; ethics, in short, becomes ontology. This is by far the most important rule, since we are apt to contrast the ethical and ontological forms of dualism. Ethical dualism draws an absolute distinction between the evil and the good in a single order of creation; ontological dualism postulates two orders, two crea-

¹³ Thus in Numenius (Fr. 2.16 Des Places) the first intellect is a charioteer like the soul in the *Phaedrus*; whereas the demiurgic mind in Numenius undergoes schism by looking up instead of down (Fr. 11.13ff), the same fate befalls the individual soul at Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.9.3. *Enn.* 2.9.10 censures the Gnostics for making the World-Soul subject to human passions.

¹⁴ Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.4-5; the antecedents are Ambrose, *De Paradiso* passim, and Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum Cantorum* V.5 Jaeger.

tors, two eternal substances. Ethical dualism treats the good as God's own doing and the evil as man's rebellion; ontological dualism ascribes the evil to a different hand. Ethical dualism will allow, and may desiderate, the transformation of evil into good; for ontological dualism good and ill are equally inevitable, and logic (at least) implies that, being equally inevitable, they are equally divine.

But how does one discover which of these dualistic attitudes is present in a text? When the Old Testament speaks of certain men as sons of Belial (1Kings 21.10), or the Pharisees are stigmatized as children of the devil in John's Gospel (John 8.41), it is usual to suppose that this is ethical dualism metaphorically expressed as ontological. Such men are as they have chosen to be, and not as they were made. When, however, the Gnostic divides humanity into three classes — the spiritual, the psychic and the material or hylic — we are apt to follow our witnesses in assuming that these natures are immutable, that the spiritual at least are saved for ever while the hylic are irrevocably damned¹⁵. Few commentators find such strong determinism in Paul, although he tells us that the election of the Church is foredetermined and that certain men are vessels created only for destruction (Romans 8.29-30 and 9.14-23); yet Paul, unlike Valentinus, does not affirm explicitly that the psychic man is capable of choice (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.6.2).

Even ethical dualism is foreign to those Platonists for whom evil is not the contrary, but a deficiency, of good. Certain myths of Plato could be read as presupposing an antithesis between intellect and matter; it was better, in the eyes of Neoplatonists, to construe them as depicting higher and lower operations of the soul¹⁶. As for the conceit of a tripartite demarcation of humanity, that was broached as a joke by Aristophanes in the *Symposium* (189e and 191e), and by Socrates himself in the *Republic* (414b) as a necessary lie. Socrates confesses that his idiom here is tragic; the same complaint is made against Valentinus by Hippolytus, by Plotinus against the Gnostics, by Proclus against Numenius, by satirists and philosophers against every form of self-aggrandizement¹⁷. Is it not conceivable that Gnosticism, like tragedy, is more a way of speaking than an outlook on the world?

II

While there are many versions of the history of Sophia, they retain in many points a unanimity that bespeaks a common source. Since its wide distribution

¹⁵ For doubts as to 'Gnostic determinism' see S. Pétremont, *A Separate God* (London 1991), 180-201; W. Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule* (Tübingen, 1996), 186-90.

¹⁶ Compare Plutarch, *De Iside* 370ff (cosmogonic interpretation of Poros and Penia at *Symposium* 203-4) with the application of the same myth to the soul by Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.5.9.

¹⁷ Plato, *Republic* 413b; Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 6.42.2.; Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.9.13.7; Proclus on Numenius, Fr. 21 Des Places; Lucian, *Peregrinus* 15.

is attested both by the Fathers and by the Nag Hammadi Codices, it is impossible to say where it originated; it would appear, however, to have received its greatest polish and completeness in the hands of the Valentinians Ptolemaeus and Heracleon, neither of whom is likely to have bequeathed it to the other. Therefore it is reasonable to surmise that Valentinus either invented it (as Pétrement contends) or was at least the first to bring this Gnostic legend to the knowledge of the church¹⁸.

The myth begins with the Father, the unfathomable mystery who is called the Abyss or Buthos. He has a consort Sige, eternally in some accounts, while in others he propagates her as his first self-manifestation. From these are engendered Nous and Aletheia, a masculine and feminine power united in a syzygy or inseparable pair. From these spring Logos and Zoe and from these again Anthropos and Ecclesia: the four syzygies together constitute the Ogdoad. The family is enlarged by the procreation of new aeons, and the least of these, the female partner in the final syzygy, is Wisdom or Sophia. She, like all her relatives, is luminous, androgynous (though female) and a pure spirit; nevertheless it is she who is the first author of transgression, the first to destroy the harmony of the aeons in their fullness or *pleroma*. This she does without malice, by desiring too immediate a knowledge of the father or by engendering a child without her consort. The result is an abortion or *ektroma*, which she casts from the *pleroma* in disgust¹⁹.

The child itself (or in some accounts a further child of that child) is the Demiurge, an insubstantial and infertile being who tries to reproduce the distant beauty of the spiritual realm. Sophia is distracted by remorse — indeed it is her tears that produce the Demiurge and the matter of his creation — and finds herself temporarily excluded from the *pleroma* by a boundary or Horos. Nevertheless the same cause that excludes her is the cause of her salvation, for it brings forth Christ as the fruit of all the aeons in the *pleroma*, and he redeems Sophia from instability and wandering by endowing her with form. This Horos, brought into being as an antidote to the folly of Sophia, is also Stauros or the Cross²⁰.

The Demiurge has no saviour and proceeds to create a retinue of seven vicious angels. These archons are the planets, in their customary roles as the custodians of necessity, birth and time. The Demiurge, rejoicing in this sevenfold power or hebdomad, forgets that his work depends on a superior reality, and

¹⁸ For comparison of the differing testimonies see F. Sagnard, *La gnose valentinienne et le témoignage de S. Irénéé* (Paris, 1947), 451-61. For seminal reconstructions of the myth see G. Quispel, 'The Original Myth of Valentine', *Vigiliae Christianae* 1 (1947), 43-73 and G.C. Stead, 'The Valentinian Myth of Sophia', *JTS* 20 (1969), 75-104. Pétrement (n. 15) advances the bold hypothesis that the *Apocryphon of John* does not antedate, but depends on Valentinus.

¹⁹ This summary is taken largely from Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.1.1-1.2.1; cf Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.29-30.

²⁰ Taken from Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.2.2 and Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.31.

proclaims that there is no God but himself. Sophia either returns to the *pleroma* or is settled in an intermediate heaven. Though her understanding is replenished by her union with Christ, she is bound by place, affection and responsibility to the world of darkness. Into this she proposes to introduce a seed of light, but this will flourish only if a substrate is provided by the Demiurge or his archons. One version has her achieve her end by a secret impregnation of the Demiurge, who bears a son of a more enlightened nature than his own. This offspring is called Sabaoth, the lord of hosts in the Jewish scriptures, who enters the forsaken realm of glory to the words of a royal psalm²¹.

Sabaoth's retinue consists of men who were created for redemption by Sophia, with the unwitting collaboration of the archons. She forms in heaven an archetype of man or the Anthropos, whose reflection in the lower world excites the emulation of its rulers. They manufacture a being of flesh, but cannot animate him; Sophia breathes her spirit into Adam, and the archons, smitten with anger and desire, avenge themselves by raping her. Being seduced, however, not by their will but by her own, she scornfully adopts the form of a tree, or of the serpent who inhabited it in Eden. Then she provokes a salutary violation of the laws framed by the Demiurge to protect himself from exposure to the light. The Demiurge pursues his ennobled creatures with the punishments recounted in the Old Testament: both the flood and the fire that ruined Sodom and Gomorrah bespeak the anger of a despot who sees no good but his own. As Ptolemaeus explains in his Letter to Flora he is the author of the Jewish Law, an instrument not devoid of truth and wisdom, but a mere shadow of the spiritual teaching. Sophia is always at hand to save the progeny of Seth and Shem, the privileged sons of Abraham and Noah, though not their factious progeny Ham and Cain²².

Whether the whole of this synoptic narrative would have been available to Valentinus we need not try to determine. The stories of the seduction of the archons and their vengeance on humanity are not found in the Jung Codex or in summaries of Valentinian doctrine, and do not appear to echo anything in Platonism. They are, however, important to my theme because they make it clear that a variant — and perhaps the earliest variant — of this myth was based on scripture. My object here is to demonstrate in detail that the matrix of the Valentinian narrative is Biblical, but I do not mean to deny that it was also meant for Platonists. The great heresiarch seems to have adopted that material from the Gnostics which was equally susceptible of Platonic and of Christian

²¹ See *Hypostasis of the Archons, Origin of the World*; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.6.5. For commentary see F.W. Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth* (Leiden, 1978).

²² See sources in preceding notes, with E. Pagels, 'Exegesis and Exposition of the Gnostic Creation Accounts in Selected Texts from Nag Hammadi', in C. Hedrick and R. Hedgson (eds), *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass. 1986), 257-85. See Epiphanius, *Panarion* 33.6 for Ptolemaeus' *Letter to Flora* and extended narratives in *Hypostasis of the Archons*; *Apocryphon of John* and Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.30-31.

exegesis — not in the eclectic style of one who adds a dash of Greek philosophy to a dash of Jewish fantasy, but rather in the manner of a synthesist, who aims to present two isomorphic systems through a single piece of art.

Let it be briefly said here that for Platonists the ontology of the *muthos* becomes psychology in the *logos*. Sophia will be the soul who leaves her supercelestial orbit in the Phaedrus, with the Demiurge and the archons as her bewildered lower faculties. Or else she would be the good demiurgic agent of the *Timaeus* and the *pleroma* would be her archetype or paradigm, while the Valentinian demiurge would play the part of an evil soul in matter, which is made susceptible of form and beauty through its partial intuition of the Good. If I now go on to speak exclusively of scripture, it is firstly because I have written other papers²³, secondly because I am addressing theologians at this conference, and thirdly because I feel that if it were possible to revisit second-century Alexandria, we should not find Valentinus in a seminar for Platonists, but in a Christian church.

In giving this longer version of the Valentinian narrative I have, if anything, made my own task harder; if I can now persuade you that this outline lends itself to a Christian reading, I suppose I may assume that the same is true for any shorter variant of it. I shall mention only one piece of historical reconstruction: in texts from Nag Hammadi that may antedate Valentinus, Barbelo is the first and only female emanation, and the mother of the Demiurge. It is therefore likely, as Stead maintains, that Sophia was originally identical with Barbelo or with Sige, and the first-born bride of God²⁴.

III

How then can this fable be interpreted to fit with either the doctrine of salvation in the New Testament or the story of Creation in the Old? Sophia, the Wisdom of God, has turned delinquent; the Creator is now the demiurge and the tyrant of his creatures; coupled with the familiar term *pleroma* we meet such newcomers as the Ogdoad, Sige, Horos. Since Valentinus was also a philosopher, there will always be residue that cannot be traced directly to the scriptures; but if we read in the ancient manner — fancifully, allegorically, typologically — many things that seemed impenetrable will be found to be only decently obscure.

We may begin by noting that it is only in the Bible, not in any pagan teaching, that an entity called Sophia has a hypostatic character and a demiurgic

²³ M.J. Edwards, 'Gnostics and Valentinians in the Church Fathers', *JTS* 40 (1989), 26-47; 'Neglected Texts in the Study of Gnosticism', *JTS* 41 (1990), 26-50; 'The Gnostic Acuilinus', *Studia Patristica* 24 (1993), 377-81.

²⁴ Stead (n.18), 88ff. For Barbelognostici see Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.30.1, together with *Apocryphon of John* pp. 1ff.

role. In the Wisdom of Solomon she appears also as the friend, the nurse who imbues the newborn child with vigour and resources as he struggles to gain his feet. She helps one man to escape from Sodom, another from the flood; as in the Gnostic story, it is the wisdom that participates in the making of the world that enables some of its inhabitants to escape the wrath of the principal creator²⁵. Of course she is subordinate to the Demiurge in one case and superior in the other, an instrument in one case and an opponent in the other; but where, if not in Solomon's dramatic presentation of sacred history, is there any ground at all for the antithesis between the wisdom of God and God himself?

Some ancient readers tell us what is obvious, that the suffering and redemption of Sophia are also a parable of the fall and emancipation of the soul. In the *Exegesis on the Soul* from Nag Hammadi, the heroine is the soul itself but the language that describes her tribulations is the same²⁶. Plotinus credits his Gnostics with the doctrine that the souls of men fell into the lower world as a result of the temptation of Sophia, and remained after her ascent (*Enneads* 2.9.10). The collusion of Sophia with the archons is perhaps the mythical counterpart of a doctrine that is ascribed by Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 1.25) to one Carpocrates, that the soul before it terminates its pilgrimage must acquaint itself with every form of vice.

Sophia's twofold nature has rightly been construed as a mirror of human understanding, which is capable of seizing God, yet wastes itself in promiscuous flirtation with the world. If, however, we wish to account more thoroughly for Sophia's femininity, her mixture of the virgin and the harlot, and the power of saving others which accrues from her restoration, we must contemplate the vicissitudes of Israel in the rhetoric of her prophets. The *Exegesis on the Soul* declares:

Again, it is written in the prophet Hosea: 'Come, go to law with your mother, for she is not to be wife to me... For she said, I shall prostitute myself to my lovers. It was they who gave me my bread and water and my garments and my wine and oil and everything I needed. Therefore behold I shall shut them up so that she shall not be able to run after her adulterers. And when she seeks them and does not find them, she will say, I shall return to my former husband, for in those days I was better off than now (*Exegesis* 129.23-130.10).

Israel in the prophets is the light of the world, the righteous one who suffers persecution from the world's rulers, the former and the destined bride of God, but one distinguished by a habit of infidelity. The conversion of the people to foreign deities was frequently ascribed to a royal love-match with an alien, and might bring in its train a custom of sacred prostitution. No wonder, then, that

²⁵ Wisdom 7.1ff (helpless child; cf *Hypostasis of the Archons*, p. 88); 10.3-4 (flood; cf *Apocryphon of John*, p. 29); 10.6-8 (cities of the Plain).

²⁶ *Nag Hammadi Codices* II.6. See J.-M. Sévrin, *L'Exégèse de l'Âme* (Quebec, 1983), 39-41 on parallels to the myth of Sophia.

apostasy to the cults of Babylon, Syria and Phoenicia was so often represented as the turning of a wife into a whore²⁷.

In her innocence Israel is at once a wife, a daughter and a virgin. The states of wife and maid are interchangeable, insofar as both are opposed to fornication. A fallen city is likened, now to a widow, now to a girl deflowered. Such poems as the Magnificat show that for early Christian writers the fate of Israel had been bound up with a prophecy that a virgin would conceive; and yet the same nation, many times in travail, was the many times divorced and wedded bride.

As the *Exegesis on the Soul* again makes obvious, virginity for Sophia is not the state of being without a consort; rather it is the union with her true spouse, and no other, which she enjoyed before her fall:

As long as she was alone with the Father she was a virgin and in form androgynous. But when ... she fell into the hands of any robbers ... they defiled her and she [lost] her virginity (*Exegesis* 127.23-32).

In texts from Nag Hammadi the aeon Barbelo is a virgin, yet she is also the consort of the paternal aeon. Sophia, though her privilege and duty is to be virginal, has a spouse by whom she ought to have conceived. Her lower, or second self, Sophia Prunicos, is engendered when she deserts her husband, not for another partner, but to bear a child alone²⁸. She is thus, like Israel, virgin, spouse and harlot; and like Israel again, the sole illuminator of a world estranged from God.

Fornication therefore becomes in Hebrew texts a metaphor for idolatry. As Israel lost her empire, her identity was sustained by her religion, and her prophets spoke as though the cult of images were not so much a sin as sin itself. The invectives aimed in Proverbs against the harlot, for example, were turned in the Wisdom of Solomon against those who tempted Israel to apostasy. The constancy of Wisdom, and of Israel, is contrasted in these writings with the promiscuity of other nations: such light as the world contains is shed abroad by the scattered seed of Abraham. The wisdom of the sinful world is typified by the foolish woman in the book of Proverbs, whose parody of Sophia's call makes prisoners of innocence and youth (Proverbs 9.1ff).

Jews could assume that wisdom is the property of Israel, and Sirach (24.18) equates her openly with the Law. As a Christian, Origen could distinguish three varieties of wisdom — the wisdom of God, the wisdom of the rulers and the wisdom of the world. It was the rulers in their ignorance who condemned the Lord of Glory; for Caiaphas and the Pharisees the Law had become an idol, and their service to it all the more adulterous because it was a copy of the

²⁷ See e.g. Hosea 1-3 (marriage to harlot); Ezekiel 16 (fornication of Israel and Judah); cf Isaiah 47 (fallen virgin of Babylon).

²⁸ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.29.4; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 21.2. In accounts directly ascribed to Valentinus the lower Wisdom is often called Achamoth (= Hebrew Hokmah).

best (*De Principiis* 3.3.1ff). A Christian who bound himself by Jewish ordinances would on this view be repeating the folly of Sophia. It requires little further reasoning to correlate these three wisdoms with the three Valentinian categories of men.

Wisdom, fornication and idolatry are motifs from Jewish scripture; but that is not to say that they have no correlatives in Platonism. Philosophy is the analogue of wisdom, and the education of the young disciple is presented in Plato's *Phaedrus* as a contest between two lovers, one of whom, Socrates, leads him on through dialogue to a better understanding of his own nature, while his rival, the absent Lysias, pursues a more insidious seduction through a written *tour de force*²⁹. The *Symposium* (180d-e) distinguishes the pandemic from the Uranian Aphrodite, the former of whom is merely a stimulus to carnal intercourse, while the latter begets a more sublime desire for the generation of immortal progeny. We must concede that idolatry, in its Biblical sense, is ignored in Plato's strictures on the futility of popular religion; but Valentinus seems to have remembered his animadversions on the painter, whose shallow artifice replicates all things while creating none.

I wish to conclude this section with two further observations, on which I cannot dwell. First, it was remarked above that Sige, who may once have been Sophia, is in one account the offspring of the Father, but in another his consort and coeval. An analogue can be found in the two Greek renderings of Proverbs 8.22, one of which (*ektisen*) makes Sophia the first 'creation', while the other (*ektesen*) makes her the first 'possession' of the Lord (Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* I.299 etc.). Secondly, the phrase Sophia Prunicos appears to denote the practice of stenography in Gregory of Nyssa (*Contra Eunomium* I.50); if this sense was already current in the second century, the adoption of the epithet as a sobriquet for Wisdom in the Valentinian story would be a sneer against the copious but superficial learning of the scribes.

IV

These considerations on the Old Testament, though they show that even Hebrew texts may have a latent meaning, do not of course encourage us to substitute that meaning for the superficial one, as in the case of a Platonic allegory; none the less they show what hidden senses might be visible in such an allegory to those who had learned their alphabet from scripture. Such readers would not look only for the 'psychological' rendering that would satisfy an interpreter of Plato. The notion of an analogy, indeed an inherent sympathy, between the human faculty and the Light that informs the universe is evidently a commonplace in the Wisdom-literature of Judaism; this, however, contra-

²⁹ See further M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge, 1986), 200-34.

dicts the wisdom of Plotinus and Iamblichus in teaching that the real object of God's providence is not the individual but the people. I shall argue that this is true of Valentinian symbolism, with the proviso that he was not a Jewish but a Christian teacher. Just as modern scholarship reads the opening chapter of Genesis as a celebration of God's eternal covenant with Israel, so the Valentinian myth can be seen as a twofold comedy of personal redemption and of corporate salvation in the Church.

The most obvious disparity between Jewish and Gnostic thought is to be found in their conceptions of the Demiurge, who is in one case the father of Sophia and in the other her ill-favoured son. The antithesis appears complete, yet Israel's scriptures also spoke of a demiurge whose works were blind and sterile. For all the prophets the cult of wood and stone is an expression of a universal heresy; the worship of the elements, which turns our love away from the creator to his creature, is at its most absurd yet most alluring in the craftsman who transfigures dead materials into a mockery of God (Letter of Jeremiah; Isaiah 46 etc.). In Paul (Galatians 4.3, 4.9) we see an equation between the worship of the elements and the Jewish veneration of the Law. Both text and elements, after all, were nothing but *stoikheia*, and those who had renounced his light for darkness, veiled his spirit and abused his grace as a national prerogative could be said to have been worshipping another God than the Father of Jesus Christ. The title of the Creator in the literature of Hellenistic Judaism is *ktistes*; the appellation *demiourgos* thus bespeaks a deity who belongs to pagan thought, the God of Plato rather than the scriptures, who exists for Judaism only so long as it persists in its unconscious sacrilege³⁰.

Paul averred that the Law was given by angels (Gal 3.19), while Rabbinic lore maintained that angels even made the world³¹. Such traditions, literally interpreted, enabled one to divorce the world and Israel from the highest God while holding that the author of creation was the author of the Law. Literally interpreted, however, they need not be, if the angelic intermediary is equated, like Sophia, with a certain state of knowledge in human subjects. To call Sophia the mother of the Demiurge would then imply no more than that fallen wisdom begets idolatry; because a false morality engenders a false perception of the world, the Jewish legalist remains in unconscious bondage to the elemental powers. Subjection to the Law, writes Paul, does not release from sin, but merely multiplies the occurrences of sin with its attendant penalties. In Gnostic thought the service of the Demiurge is deprivation, ignorance and jealous persecution: man is not chastised by a righteous Father, but is made the sport of devils — or rather, perhaps, bedevilled by the gods of his own conceit. We hear in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (1.6ff) of two wisdoms, one

³⁰ For the Demiurge in Plato see *Timaeus* 27d etc.; he returns to prominence in *Hermetica* 1.9, Numenius Fr. 11 Des Places etc. See further A.-J. Festugière, *La Revelation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1954), 275-92.

³¹ E.E. Urbach, *The Sages* (Cambridge, Mass. 1975), 135ff.

expressing and one opposing the will of the Creator. The founder of the Church did not of course believe the created universe to be evil in conception; but Valentinus needed to do no more than reify his vivid utterances to generate the myth of Sophia's fall and her captivity in the world.

The importance of the Church appears most clearly from two entries in the Valentinian lexicon which have often seemed intractable to Christian exegesis. Analogues for the terms Ogdoad and Hebdomad have been sought in the *Hermetica* and even in the roll of Egyptian deities at Hermopolis. As Pétrement has shown, however, they are susceptible of a Christian reading³². If the hebdomad contains the seven planets, it will signify the week, and in particular the sabbath that concludes it; Philo in (for example) his *De Specialibus Legibus* 2.56 dilates upon the sacred properties of the number seven. The sabbath was the day on which God rested — better construed, Augustine says, as the day on which he gives rest to his people (*De Gen. ad Litt.* 4.8-17); the destiny of the Church depends in short upon the Sabbath, which expresses both God's character and the purpose of his Law. Israel thought of the Sabbath as her own contract with the deity, but God has sworn, says the author to the Hebrews, that the apostates will not enter into his rest (Heb 4.3; cf Psalm 95.5). The Ogdoad is the next day after the sabbath, which the Christians called the Lord's day, and which some compared to the eighth day on which Jewish children underwent circumcision (Clement, *Strom.* 6.16 and *Exc. Theod.* 63). Thus what was to the Jews a day of subjection was to the Christians a day of grace and restoration. The first Epistle of Peter (1Peter 3.20) says that the Church is represented by the Ogdoad of persons saved with Noah (cf Philo, *Vita Moysis* 2.12); and when Jesus called his flock a Sabbath-rest, he was already promising what he himself would consummate by rising on the Sunday after the Sabbath of the Passover, the rest in God foreshadowed, but not granted by the initial covenant (cf Clement, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 63).

For a more comprehensive understanding of the Ogdoad in the Valentinian scheme, we must remember that it is the heart of the *pleroma*, a term whose range of meanings in the scriptures is notoriously wide. Paul uses it to signify the completion or *pleroma* of the ages, through which God worked out his plan (Galatian 4.4; Ephesians 1.10). It stands for the completeness of salvation in Ephesians (3.19), and in Romans for the spiritual fulfilment of the Law (13.10). At Romans 11.25 it signifies the full complement of the saved. Paul's most famous use of it is to derive a moral imperative from a theological axiom: because in Christ 'dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily' (Colossians 1.23), we cannot find salvation in the culture or affliction of our own bodies. We must seek it in the body of the resurrected Christ (2.19), through whom, as Paul or an imitator tells us in Ephesians, the fullness of the Godhead is transmuted into the fullness of the Church (1.23). The Pauline

³² Pétrement (n. 15), 68-70.

method, therefore, is to argue in a clear sequence from theology to ecclesiology; that of Valentinus is to conflate the different subjects of discourse. The polyvalent status of the myth allows simultaneous expression of what would otherwise be logically consecutive, just as its narrative form entails consecutive presentation of what is temporally simultaneous. The variety of meanings that the New Testament confers on its vocabulary suggests as many as four interpretations of the Valentinian myth:

1. The first is cosmological: the abstraction of God's wisdom from his fullness or *pleroma* generates a defective world. This, as it is the most literal, is the most common interpretation of Valentinus, and makes him an adherent of the Middle Platonic theory that the world springs from an inferior operation of its ruling intellect. On this account, the Horos is the boundary of God's nature, and hence of his knowability, maintaining his ineffable transcendence by the exclusion of common wisdom or Sophia.

2. The second interpretation is historical: the aeons of the *pleroma* are those ages in which God fulfilled his purpose, and the Ogdoad is that day on which his purpose is completed. The Horos is that terminus in history which is marked by Jesus' death upon the Cross. This event, according to the *Gospel of Truth*, made Jesus the first-born fruit of the *pleroma*; but it turns away the Wisdom or Sophia of the nations, since, as Paul himself declared at 1Corinthians 1.23, the Cross is folly to the pagans and a stumbling-block to Jews.

3. The third interpretation is anthropological: having failed to apprehend the Godhead by its own wisdom, humanity has lost not only the knowledge of him, but the fullness of its own being. The Ogdoad, the day on which the Law admitted a child to Israelite society, is now the day of entry to the new Kingdom through the new covenant that was sealed upon the Cross. Thus it is that the state of *hysterema* or deficiency, which is said to afflict Sophia in the cosmic myth, is represented in the *Gospel of Truth* as the present condition of the human soul. Knowledge is the organ for supplying this deficiency, but the prominence of the cross implies that obedience and tribulation are also necessary. No doubt Valentinus would remember how the Apostle craved to fill up the remainder (*hysteremata*) of Christ's suffering (Colossians 1.24); and, for all that the Fathers say of his antipathy to martyrdom, a theology that was merely intellectual would not accord such prominence to the Cross.

4. The fourth interpretation is ecclesiological: the *pleroma* is now the kingdom, the Cross its demarcation, the fallen Sophia its critics, the restored Sophia its membership, the Ogdoad the rest that God prepares for his elect. This use of the term is confirmed by Irenaeus (*Adv Haer* 1.7.1) and by the *Tripartite Tractate* in the Jung Codex, which expressly equates the *pleroma* with the Church (*Nag Hammadi Codices* I.5, pp. 90ff). The rights that Valentinus exercises over scripture here are no greater than those affirmed by the orthodox Gregory of Nyssa, who takes the noun *pleroma* in the Song of Songs to mean the full population of the kingdom. Its antonym *hysterema* he explains in

Ecclesiastes by a reference to the lost sheep, which he reads as an allegory of the soul in exile (*Oration 2*; Jaeger p. 305). A similar construction had been put upon this text by Valentinus, as the *Gospel of Truth* reveals (p. 32), although this blasphemy was ascribed by Irenaeus to Simon Magus (*Adv. Haer.* 1.23).

Perhaps the anthropological and cosmological senses are the only ones that would have been intelligible to a Platonist. That is enough: so long as there is one interpretation that both Christians and Platonists would be willing to entertain, there is no need to prove that every valid interpretation of one would be acceptable or interesting to both. A philosopher would, of course, require the myth to be explained in his own nomenclature; but we have no reason to think that a Valentinian would be any more reluctant to perform such a translation than the Gnostics of Plotinus, who evidently passed as Platonists. Anyone who had studied the term *demiourgos* in Plato's dialogues would know that it is applied with the same pejorative force to two activities, painting and forensic eloquence³³. Just as the Valentinian myth implies that Jewish reverence for the law is another species of idolatry, so Plato warns us that the words of lawyers can beguile the mind as easily as pictures cheat the eye. A charitable Platonist, no less than a candid Christian, would have surmised that the creator of this myth has employed his privilege of representing ethics through ontology, the permanent through the temporal, the history of perception through a mythical cosmogony. Evil is intrinsic to our being as human subjects; myth, determining essence in the form of aetiology, can depict the flawed existence of the subject as an archetypal flaw in the world itself.

Symbols in themselves are not a test of orthodoxy. Why need Valentinus be less orthodox than Methodius of Olympia, the redoubtable opponent of both Origen and Porphyry? Salvation is for him the restitution of a state conferred on Adam at his creation (*Symposium* 3.3-4); the hundred sheep are the spiritual and intellectual beings who are designed for this beatitude (3.6), and the Ogdoad the day when they partake of it together (7.6). The hundredth sheep is fallen man, and the circumcision of Israel on the eighth day is renewal of the inward state, looking back to the creation and prefiguring the obedience of Christ (7.6). The Church, as the community of the saved, he calls our mother (8.11 etc.), like Sophia, and, after Paul, the fullness or *pleroma* of the nations (8.6). Methodius is known to have subscribed to some opinions that were later ruled heretical³⁴, and one cannot but wonder what would have become of his *Symposium* had he not enjoyed the protection of his episcopate and his known antipathy to other bugbears of the Church.

³³ See *Republic* 596d-e on the false skill of the artist; *Gorgias* 454a on the rhetorician as demiurge in words.

³⁴ Subordinationism at *Symposium* 7.1; a possible identification of Christ with Adam at *De Creatis* 2.8.

Valentinus is therefore not so irredeemably heterodox as his adversaries imagined; but in one thing at least he could never join them — their ignorance or fear of the pagan classics. The concept of a demiurge as the patron of heathen error would seem all the more felicitous to one who knew the world-creating figure of that name in the *Timaeus*; that such persons were among the intended audience is clear from an extant saying of Valentinus, where he echoes Plato's strictures on the blindness of the imitative arts³⁵. Valentinus evidently had little faith in the natural intelligence of his species, and did not believe that the mysteries of the Godhead could be known by any means but revelation. Yet he lived in Alexandria, where others before and after him perceived that it was only with the instruments of philosophy that the Church could meet the attacks of carnal wisdom and only with the contents of the Bible that it could reconcile the Jew. When he dressed the latter in the garments of the former, he was guilty of no treachery to the apostolic preaching and no cowardice in the face of persecution; the esoteric style reminds its audience that theology is a discipline which lays as heavy a tax upon the intellect and character as any pagan school.

Why, then did he not compose a work like Clement's *Stromateis* or Origen's *De Principiis*, which would leave no doubt at least of his intention to be a Christian? Perhaps he hoped not only to disarm the erudite critics of the Gospel but to furnish new resources to its proselytes. Writers of our own century, such as Jung and Joseph Campbell, have argued that the true task of religious thought is not to abolish myth but to renew it. Christians too — one might name Nicholas Berdyaev, Jurgen Moltmann and Leonardo Boff — have been persuaded that theology without myth would be a dead, or rather fatal, science, powerless to affect the present state or future choices of the human individual. The Valentinian myth would be sure to win the respect of any mind that was sharp enough to penetrate its many layers of meaning; perhaps it would also change the lives of those who read its fundamental lesson, that we cannot pursue ontology without soteriology, or grasp so much as God's ineffability without some faint perception of his dealings with the world.

³⁵ See n. 33, with Valentinus Fr. 5 and Stead (n. 9), 82-8.



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XII

THE TALE OF CUPID AND PSYCHE

The romance of Cupid and Psyche, while embedded in a fine novel by Apuleius, has been thought too great for its context - not only by translators and imitators, who are enamoured of its beauty,¹ but by scholars, who have inquired here for the origins of the European folktale,² and by poets and philosophers, who detect in it the vestiges of something more profound.³ Exegetes, encomiasts and students of the sources have produced discrete hypotheses, which rarely have much in common; this article attempts to bring to light a number of sources that have hitherto been neglected, but with the aim of showing that philosophy in this period did not disdain the folktale, and that allegorists are often most successful when they are not the sole contrivers of their myths.

I. The Text and Some Interpreters

First we must rehearse the tale again, and note the differing approaches which are exemplified by two distinguished authors of our time. The following abridgement of the tale accords most prominence to those details that will be taken up again in the present study.

Psyche is a princess, so illustrious for her beauty that the people worship her as an earthly Venus (*Metamorphoses* IV.28). The heavenly Venus, here an imperial figure moved to wrath (IV.29), persuades the infant Cupid to ruin Psyche (IV.30-1), and the consequence is that, though she is revered like the simulacrum of a goddess (IV.32), she is never sought in love. In obedience to an oracle, she is exposed upon a mountain, where a monster is expected to devour her (IV.33-5); but instead she is conveyed to a gorgeous palace (V.1), and is served by unseen ministers in the daytime (V.2), while her unseen bridegroom sleeps with her at nights (V.3-4). Against her lover's wishes (V.5), she invites her plainer sisters to the palace (V.6-8); their envy is excited (V.9.11), and, on learning that her husband is resolved to remain invisible, they maintain that he is a serpent, whom she must kill before she is herself devoured (V.12-20).

¹ Readers of English literature will think of William Adlington's translation of the *Metamorphoses* (1566), and that of Cupid and Psyche in Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*. A poetic rendering under the title *Eros and Psyche* was made by Robert Bridges, and William Morris retold the story in his *The Earthly Paradise*. C.S.Lewis's novel "Till we Have Faces" recounts it through the eyes of one of the sisters.

² See F.Liebrecht, *Amor und Psyche* (1879) in G.Binder and R.Merkelbach (eds) *Amor und Psyche* (Darmstadt 1968) pp. 44-55; R.Reitzenstein, *Das Märchen von Amor und Psyche* (Leipzig 1912), of which pp. 1-89 are reproduced as Binder and Merkelbach (1968) pp. 87-158. L.Friedlander, *Das Märchen von Amor und Psyche* (1964), *ibid.* pp. 16-43.

³ See e.g. K.Raine, *Blake and Antiquity* (Princeton 1963) pp. 23-33. See S.Lancel, *Curiositas et préoccupations spirituelles chez Apulée, Revue de l'histoire des religions* 160 (1961) pp. 25-46 = Binder and Merkelbach (1968) pp. 408-32.

Psyche is persuaded (V.21), and that evening, dagger in hand, she lights her lamp, but only to discover that the object of her plot is the most beautiful of deities, the author and delight of every creature, Love himself (V.22). Wakened by a drop of oil from the lamp (V.23), he flies away, though not withdrawing an earlier pledge that she is to bear his child (V.14). Psyche, after fruitless attempts at suicide (V.25) and a more effectual vengeance on her sisters (V.26-7), now falls under the dominion of Venus, who plays the part of a jealous and vindictive mother-in-law, enjoining one impossible labour after another (V.28-9 ff). The first two are accomplished with the aid of other creatures (V.30-VI.15); the third is to descend to the lower world and ask Proserpina for a portion of her beauty (VI.16). Once again the task is achieved with the help of other agents (VI.17-19), but Psyche, on returning with a chest reserved for Venus, is overcome for a second time by a fatal curiosity, and looks into the contents of the chest (VI.20). Forthwith she falls unconscious, but is roused by Love, who rebukes her (VI.21) but introduces her as his bride among the immortals (VI.22). Venus is won over (VI.23), and the birth of the infant "Pleasure" or *Voluptas* seals the bond (VI.24).

The fable recapitulates in miniature the experiences of Lucius, the protagonist of the whole novel, who, in consequence of a foolish curiosity, is transformed into an ass.⁴ He regains his human form by initiation into the mysteries of Isis, undergoing ordeals that resemble Psyche's final task.⁵ A simulated journey to the underworld and the opening of a casket being episodes in the Eleusinian ritual,⁶ it is natural to conjecture that the tale has a sacred origin, and Reinhold Merkelbach has argued cogently that Isis holds the key.⁷ Noting that the goddess has two aspects - one as the personified hand of fortune,⁸ and one as the roving heroine who retrieves the dismembered body of Osiris⁹ he proposes to equate Psyche with the second and her celestial tormentor with the first.

E.J.Kenney has dwelt instead on the hints of philosophical allegory.¹⁰ Reasoning from the fact that Apuleius was a Platonist,¹¹ he finds in the *Symposium* a precedent for the ascription of a dual nature to Venus and her son.¹² He makes no use, however, of the

⁴ See S.Lancel, *Curiositas et préoccupations spirituelles chez Apulée*, *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 160 (1961) pp. 25-46 = Binder and Merkelbach (1968) pp. 408-32.

⁵ See the remarks made later in this essay, above n.45.

⁶ See W.Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (London/Cambridge, Mass. 1987) pp. 89-114.

⁷ R.Merkelbach, *Eros und Psyche*, *Philologus* 102 (1953) pp. 103-116 = Binder and Merkelbach (1968) pp. 392-407.

⁸ See Merkelbach (1953) p. 105 (395), and, for a longer study of the importance of the Isis-cult, the same author's *Roman und Mysterium* (Berlin 1962) pp. esp. 53-72.

⁹ Isis was identified with Io, the abandoned paramour of Zeus; for analogies between her woes and those of Lucius see Merkelbach (1953) p. 105 (394/5).

¹⁰ E.J.Kenney, *Psyche and her Mysterious Husband*, in D.A.Russell (ed.) *Antonine Literature* (Oxford 1990) pp. 175-98.

¹¹ See for a comprehensive recent study B.L.Hijmans, *Apuleius, Philosophus Platonicus*, *ANRW* 36.1 (1987) pp. 395-475.

¹² *Symposium* 180d; cf. Apuleius, *Apologia* 12.

speculations of any later Platonist, not even of those contemporary with the African polymath. It is true that he would not find much support in the *De Platone* of Apuleius,¹³ but there are other works that might have been consulted with advantage, as the following article sets out to prove. At the same time, while Kenney has taken little note of Merkelbach or Merkelbach of Plato, the evidence suggests that a philosopher of the period would not have thought it difficult to reconcile the content of the dialogues with the teaching of the mysteries - indeed, he might have been surprised to hear that they admitted of divorce.

II. The Evolution of Platonic Myth

The myth that most possessed the imaginations of the Platonists is attributed in the *Symposium* to the prophetess Diotima. At the feast for the birthday of Aphrodite, she tells Socrates, the god of Plenty, drunk with nectar, fell asleep in a garden, where Poverty discovered him and prudently resolved to make him the father of her child (*Symposium* 203b-c). Poverty, though the counterpart of Plenty, is no goddess, and the fruit of this stealthy intercourse, the daemon Love, is therefore neither mortal nor immortal, neither beautiful nor ugly, never wealthy but always drawn to riches by desire (203c-204a).¹⁴

All love, as this allegory implies, is the aspiration of the lower for the higher, the thirst of the deficient for its good.¹⁵ The good of every soul is its immortality (207d), which the foolish seek through worldly reputation (208c-d), the common man through fatherhood (208e), the artist through the fashioning of a poem or an image (209d-e). The last-named act, transforming the potential into the actual, unites the quest of being with that of value, but only in an external medium; as we hear in the *Republic*, the artist merely imitates what the wise man will endeavour to become.¹⁶

Aristotle, both in stating his own views and in commentary on Plato, takes the action of the artist as a paradigm for the kinetic laws of nature, opining as he did that every physical change or motion will convert potential being into actual and subjugate some matter to some end.¹⁷ The end of every substance is the transition from the potential to the actual, in other words the attainment of its form, which may be said to work upon it like an artist on his

¹³ *De Platone* II.239 distinguishes three species of love - philosophical, carnal and connubial. On the authenticity of this treatise see Hijmans (1987) p. 408 and n.38.

¹⁴ On the treatments of this passage in later Platonism see L.Robin, *La Théorie Platonicienne de l'Amour* (Paris 1932) pp. 103-108

¹⁵ See G.Santas, *Freud and Plato* (Oxford 1988) p. 32ff on the notion of a "generic Eros" in the *Symposium* of Plato.

¹⁶ See esp. *Republic* 599b, where it is said that the good man would rather be the subject than the author of encomia.

¹⁷ See e.g. *Metaphysics* 1071a-b and *De Generatione et Corruptione* passim; but the theme is universal. The relation of Aristotle to Plato has been the theme of numerous studies, e.g. H.Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticisms of Plato and the Academy* (Baltimore 1944); G.E.L.Owen, *The Platonism of Aristotle*, *Proc. of the British Academy* 50 (1965) pp. 125-50.

matter,¹⁸ though only as final, not as efficient cause. The aspiration is kindled by the very imperfection of the aspirant: in a word, the formless is enamoured of the form.¹⁹ Plutarch surely divines a true community of thought between Aristotle and his master when he writes that in Diotima's myth the aspiring matter is Poverty, while Plenty is the object of desire:²⁰

ὁ γὰρ Πόρος οὐχ ἕτερός ἐστι τοῦ πρώτου ἐρατοῦ² καὶ ἐφετοῦ τελείου καὶ αὐτάρκους· Πενίαν δὲ τὴν ὕλην προσεῖπεν, ἐνδεᾶ μὲν οὖσαν αὐτὴν καθ' ἑαυτὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, πληρουμένην δ' ὑπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ποθοῦσαν ἀει καὶ μεταλαμβάνουσαν.

Plenty is none other than the first object of desire and aspiration, the perfect and self-sufficient ; and by Poverty he meant matter, which in itself is deficient in the good, but is being filled by it, for ever yearning and partaking (De Iside 374d).

The same thesis holds for Plotinus, except that each hypostasis in his system acts as matter as for its immediate superior,²¹ and that at times the upward tendency from the lower plane can be seen as an encroachment and the complicity of the higher as a fall. If Poverty is matter and Plenty is Soul, the myth implies that the latter must be prepared to fight temptation:²²

ὕλη δὲ παρούσα προσαιτεῖ καὶ οἶον καὶ ἐνοχλεῖ καὶ εἰς τὸ εἶσω παρελθεῖν θέλει· πᾶς δὲ ὁ χῶρος ἱερός καὶ οὐδέν ἐστιν ὃ ἄμοιρόν ἐστι ψυχῆς.

Matter appears, importunes, raises disorders, seeks to force its way within; but all the ground is holy, nothing there without part in Soul (Enneads I.8.14 trans. Mackenna).

If, however, Plenty is Mind and Poverty is Soul, a neglected detail in the Platonic myth implies that the mind has broken with its source:

Τὸ δ' ἐκεῖ πληρούμενον¹ τοῦ νέκταρος τί ἂν εἴη ἢ λόγος ἀπὸ κρείττονος ἀρχῆς πεσὼν εἰς ἐλάττονα; Ἐν οὖν τῇ ψυχῇ ἀπὸ νοῦ ὁ λόγος οὗτος, ὅτε ἡ Ἀφροδίτη λέγεται γεγονέναι

"Poros intoxicated" is some power deriving satisfaction outside itself; what then can we understand by this member of the Supreme filled with Nectar but a Reason-Principle falling from a loftier essence to a lower? This means that the Reason-Principle, upon the "birth of Aphrodite", left the Intellectual for the Soul (Enneads III.5.9 trans. Mackenna).

¹⁸ The hints of Physics 199b and Metaphysics 1033b are taken up more explicitly by Themistius on De Anima 430a 12-13, and by Plotinus e.g. at Enneads V.1.8.

¹⁹ See L.Elders, Aristotle's Theology (Assen 1972) pp. 35-44.

²⁰ For commentary on Plutarch and the Isis-cult see J.G.Griffiths, Plutarch: De Iside et Osiride (Cardiff 1970). The thought of Plutarch is compared with that of Apuleius by P.G.Walsh, Apuleius and Plutarch, in H.J.Blumenthal and R.A.Markus (eds) Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought (Aldershot 1981) pp. 20-31.

²¹ Hence there must be an "intelligible matter" even in the realm of Nous, in so far it suffers a privation of the one: Enneads II.4.16. This is the principle of Otherness that is posited by Plato in the Sophist and the Timaeus.

²² On Plotinus and the exegesis of Plato see J.-M.Charrue, Plotin, L'lecteur de Platon (Paris 1978), though less is said of the Symposium here than the frequent use of it in the Enneads would warrant; see n.14 above.

The "birth of Aphrodite" is construed as the procession of the Soul from the superior hypostasis, and the condescension of mind is not a lapse, but the superabundance of its goodness. Other Neoplatonists suggested that the mind had been seduced by lower pleasures;²³ but Plotinus will not allow that anything higher than the Soul can ever fall.²⁴ He is indeed unwilling to admit that even the soul can fall by error or delinquency, notwithstanding the Great Myth of the Phaedrus.²⁵ Here the rational faculty is depicted as the driver of a chariot which is drawn by steeds of spirit and desire (Phaedrus 246a-247c). Circling the upper region in pursuit of a perfect vision of the Good, some chariots succumb to a calamity, the cause of which is not so plain as the outcome, which is to throw the crippled chariot down to earth (247c-248e). There it must remain until it grows the wings that will lift it back to heaven (248e-249d), a return that is begun by the discovery of beauty in human bodies (249d-254a) and completed by the discernment, under the teaching of philosophy, of the Beautiful itself (254b). Like an adept issuing from a mystery, the soul is stirred to memory by the sight of mortal beauty (250e-252a), the wings of its chariot start to grow, but now it is in danger of being overthrown for a second time if the charioteer does not control the reins (254c-e). If, however, it loves without temerity, fashioning and adorning the beloved like the statue of its tutelary god (252d), the soul begins the ascent from concrete instances of beauty to the Beautiful, and hence to its lost abode.

The end of this synopsis rests in part upon a conflation of the Phaedrus with the Symposium; but it is one that would be allowed by the majority of scholars,²⁶ and Plotinus goes much further. As we now see, the notion of a fall has been imported into the myth of the Symposium from the Phaedrus; by contrast, he is interpreting the Phaedrus in the light of the other dialogues when he argues that the true artisan of beauty will be shaping, not the statue of another, but himself.²⁷ A still more striking superimposition of the Phaedrus on the Symposium is performed in the treatise on Love (Enneads III.5), which makes Diotima's myth an allegory of the soul's divorce from its good, and of its subsequent return:

Ἡ δὲ συνάρησις· ψυχῆ νῶ συνοῦσα καὶ παρὰ νοῦ ὑποκτᾶσα καὶ αὐτὴ λόγων πλῆρωθεῖσα

On this principle we have, here, Soul (successively) dwelling with the divine Intelligence, breaking away from it, and yet again being filled to satiety with Reason-Principles (Enneads, III.5.9 trans. Mackenna).

²³ See e.g. Porphyry, *De Antro Nympharum* p. 68 Nauck and Numenius Frs. 33 and 35, where it is suggested that the soul is drawn from heaven by temptation.

²⁴ See J.M.Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge 1967) p. 85.

²⁵ See Enneads IV.8.1 etc. and Charrue (1978) pp. 165-72. On the Great Myth see A.P.Burnett, *The Central Myth of Plato's Phaedrus*, GRBS 13 (1972) pp. 267-90.

²⁶ Though M.Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge 1986) pp. 200-31 thinks the dialogue a "palinode" in which the quest of eternal things is renounced for the more vulnerable love of human agents. In that case the beginning or the Great Myth will be mythical indeed.

²⁷ Enneads I.6.9, alluding to Phaedrus 252d.

The tribulation and rescue of the soul may be compared to the fate of Psyche in Apuleius. Plotinus holds that the Intellect must sever part of itself as a "Reason-Principle" (or Logos) to redeem the truant soul from its destitution; in Apuleius Love will make no visible approaches to his paramour before he has been estranged from her by an inadvertent wound. If Plenty (Πόρος) is the nectareous exudation of the Intellect, he cannot be unrelated to the Cupid of Apuleius, whose blood is said to fleck his skin like delicate beads of dew.²⁸ We must not attempt to substitute the Eros of Plotinus for the Cupid of Apuleius; if there is any allusion in the Enneads to a tale of Eros and Psyche, it is to another version, far more common, in which Love, and not the soul, displays the lamp. The scene is known from amulets and also from the magical papyri:²⁹

γλύφον Ἀφροδίτην ἰπικιστὶ καθημένην ἐπὶ Ψυχῆς τῇ ἀριστερῇ χειρὶ κρατοῦσαν ... ὑποκάτω δὲ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς Ἔρωτα ἐπὶ πόλου ἐστῶτα, λαμπάδα κρατοῦντα καομένην, φλέγοντα τὴν Ψυχὴν.

Engrave Aphrodite seated, as on a horse, astride the soul, holding her with the left hand ... And underneath Aphrodite and the soul Love standing on the vertex, holding a lighted lamp and setting the soul aflame (PGM IV.1725-1733 Preisendanz).

Yet even this brief icon, which can hardly be the creation of philosophers, apprises us that the bondage of the soul to Aphrodite is a commonplace, a parable of its servitude to passion, while her "left hand" makes an equally conventional allusion to the weakness and sterility which the soul incurs by yielding to the machinery of fate.³⁰

The scheme of folly, loss and restitution, which constitutes the history of the soul on earth, is juxtaposed with a reference to Eros and Psyche in Enneads VI.9. Here the initial error is a striving for the Good, the ill success of which results in wandering and captivity:

ὄσῳ δ' ἂν εἰς ἀνείδεον ἡ ψυχὴ ἦ, ἐξαδυνατοῦσα περιλαβεῖν τῷ μὴ ὀρίζεσθαι καὶ οἶον τυποῦσθαι ὑπὸ ποικίλου τοῦ τυποῦντος ἐξολιθάνει καὶ φοβεῖται, μὴ οὐδὲν ἔχη. διὸ κάμνει ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις καὶ ἀκμὴν καταβαίνει πολλάκις ἀποπίπτουσα ἀπὸ πάντων, μέχρις ἂν εἰς αἰσθητὸν ἦκη ἐν στερεῷ ὥσπερ ἀναπαυομένη.

The soul or mind reaching towards the formless finds itself incompetent to grasp where nothing bounds or to take impression where the impinging reality is diffuse; in sheer dread of holding to nothingness it slips away. The state is painful; often it seeks relief by retreating

²⁸ Metamorphoses IV.23: "ut per summam cutem roraverint parvulae sanguinis rosei guttae".

²⁹ See for commentary R.Mouterde, *Le Glaive de Dardanos*, in *Mélanges de l'université de St.-Joseph* 15 (1930) pp. 53-64; R.Reitzenstein, *Noch Einmal Eros und Psyche* (19830) in Binder and Merkelbach (1968) pp. 235-92. In this translation I have thought it too tendentious to treat Psyche as a proper name, though this practice is suggested by the use of capital letters in Preisendanz, and endorsed by H.D.Betz, *The Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago 1986) pp. 69-70.

³⁰ See Irenaeus, *Adv. Haereses* I.5.4 and I.11.1 for this symbol in Christian heresy. On the "bastard generation" of matter see Republic 587b and Timaeus 52b. On the symbolic relation between the left-hand and bastardy, even before the invention of the "bar sinister" in European heraldry, see J.-P.Vernant, *From Oedipus to Periander, Arethusa* 15 (1932) pp. 19-38.

from all this vagueness to the region of sense, there to rest as on solid ground (Enneads VI.9.3 trans. Mackenna).

After this the soul may come into its own again through Eros, bearing out (Plotinus says) the enigmatic doctrine of two myths:

καὶ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐκεῖ Ἀφροδίτη οὐρανία, ἐνταῦθα δὲ γίγνεται πάνδημος οἶον ἑταιρικθειῖα. καὶ ἔστι πᾶσα ψυχὴ Ἀφροδίτη· καὶ τοῦτο αἰνίττεται καὶ τὰ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης γενέθλια καὶ ὁ Ἔρως ὁ μετ' αὐτῆς γενόμενος.

There the soul is Aphrodite of the heavens; here, turned harlot, Aphrodite of the public ways; yet the soul is always an Aphrodite. This is the intention of the myth which tells of Aphrodite's birth and Eros born with her (Enneads VI.9.9 trans. Mackenna).

We shall soon have cause to return to the Symposium, with its distinction between the Uranian and the Pandemic Aphrodite.³¹ For the moment it can be said that, while a tale of Eros and Psyche was familiar to the Greek Platonists, it was not the one that Apuleius tells. We should look instead to the intercourse of Poverty and Plenty, or rather to the Platonic commentators who conflate this allegory with the myth of the fallen soul.

If Diotima's fable can be cited by the Platonists as the vehicle of a doctrine about the soul, it is legitimate to adduce Platonic doctrine about the soul as a gloss on the tale of Cupid and Psyche. The history of the soul in Neoplatonism consists, like that of Psyche in Apuleius of the sequence: union, separation, wandering and return. The first attempt to rise to a superior plane entails the soul's expulsion in the Phaedrus, and in the exegesis of the Symposium could be construed as an assault on a great prerogative. In the same way, Psyche loses Cupid when she seeks to know too much of him and is driven back to the world.

Having noted a propensity to combine the two erotic myths of Plato, we should not fail to observe that in the Phaedrus it is the charioteer's two horses that betray him into a second fall, just as Psyche in Apuleius yields to the importunity of two sisters. The sisters are not so beautiful or so virtuous as Psyche, and reason is the appointed master of both desire and spirit in the Phaedrus; each myth represents the capitulation, in the human soul, of the better to the worse.

III. Isis and the Philosophers

The part assigned to Venus in the fable of Cupid and Psyche is the silhouette of that which Fortune plays throughout the novel, until Isis, who describes herself as Lucius' "better fortune", intervenes.³² Psyche puts herself without delay in the power of Venus, who becomes her persecutor; Lucius comes to Isis as a suppliant after a long estrangement

³¹ Symposium 180d; see n.12 above.

³² On the reading of the novel in the light of the eleventh book see J.J.Winkler, *Auctor and Actor* (California 1988) pp. 8-11 and 209-15. On Apuleius as a witness to the nature of the cult see J.G.Griffiths, *Apuleius: The Isis-Book* (Leiden 1975).

from his human form. Calling upon the goddess by whatever name she elects to bear,³³ he begs to have his previous shape restored to him, and she answers in like terms:

En adsum tuis commota, Luci, precibus, rerum naturae parens, elementorum omnium domina.

Behold, I come hither Lucius, in answer to your prayers, I the parent of the natural order, the sovereign of all the elements (Metamorphoses XI.5).

The Venus of the fable cannot wield the infernal titles, but she exerts the same dominion over nature:

en rerum naturae prisca parens, en elementorum origo initialis, en orbis totius alma Venus

...

Lo I the ancient parent of the natural order, I the primordial origin of the elements, the kind Venus of the whole world ...

Little though she deserves them, this vindictive mistress appropriates the honours that Lucretius had conferred upon a deity of the same name. The poet's "Alma Venus" (*De Rerum Natura* I.2) is the Roman form of a goddess known to Empedocles and the Greek tragedians, who occupies the whole of the natural world as the law of harmony, the pleasure of attraction and the principle of birth;³⁴ no less is she the Isis of philosophers, whom Plutarch would equate with the World-Soul:

ἔχει δὲ σύμφυτον ἔρωτα τοῦ πρώτου καὶ κυριωτάτου πάντων, ὃ ταγαθῶ ταυτόν ἐστι, κακείνο ποθεῖ καὶ διόκει· τὴν δ' ἐκ τοῦ κακοῦ φεύγει καὶ διωθεῖται μοῖραν, ἀμφοῖν μὲν οὐρα χώρα καὶ ὕλη, ῥέπουσα δ' αἰεὶ πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον καὶ παρέχουσα γεννᾶν ἐξ ἑαυτῆς ἐκείνῳ.

... she has a love of the first and most sovereign principle of all, and this she longs for and pursues. The lot which lies with evil she shuns and rejects, she is indeed a sphere of activity and subject-matter for both of them; but she inclines always of herself to what is better, offering herself to it for reproduction (De Iside 3726 trans. Dillon).

The World-Soul, as the intermediary between form and matter, is subordinate to the higher nature, signified in Plutarch by Osiris.³⁵ In Apuleius Lucius learns that, even after becoming an initiate of Isis, he must be inducted into a higher mystery:³⁶

novum mirumque plane comperior: deae quidem tantum me sacris imbutum, at magni dei deumque summi parentis invicti Osiris nedum sacris illustratum ...

³³ *Metamorphoses* XI.2: "Regina caeli - sive tu ... caelestis Venus ... seu nocturnis ullulatibus horrenda Proserpina" etc.

³⁴ Empedocles Fr. 17; Sophocles, Fr. 855 Nauck = 678 Radt; Euripides, *Hippolytus* 447ff.

³⁵ On Love and Osiris cf. R.Reitzenstein, *Eros als Osiris* (1930) in Binder and Merkelbach (1968) pp. 301-12.

³⁶ Lucius' guide is a priest called Mithras (XI.25-6), though syncretism of the Mithraic cult with that of Isis is not demonstrable elsewhere. Perhaps the common equation of Mithras and Hermes had led Apuleius to introduce him here; for this Hermes as a mystagogue see the *Hermetica* passim and especially the *Kore Kosmou* for his friendship with Egyptian deities.

I was plainly informed of a new and marvellous thing: I had only been steeped in the sanctities of the goddess, but was not yet illuminated by the sanctities of the invincible Osiris, a great god and the supreme parent of all the gods (Metamorphoses XI.27).

The distinction between the Greater and the Lesser Mysteries was observed from the earliest times in Greek religion;³⁷ but a Platonist might have recalled the words of Socrates in the Phaedrus, that initiation into the highest teletai was prepared by Love for the retinue of Zeus.³⁸ Poets who sing to Venus or Aphrodite as the monarch of the natural order speak of sexual passion as a malady to be shunned or prayed away.³⁹ Plutarch, who believes that such attraction is unfruitful, calls it Aphrodite, and the higher feeling Love.⁴⁰ He then goes on to give qualified assent to an ancient simile:

εοικέναι μὲν οὖν Ἀφροδίτῃ κελήνην ἥλιον δ' Ἐρωτι τῶν ἄλλων θεῶν μᾶλλον εἰκόσ ἐστιν, οὐ μὴν εἶναι γε παντάπασι τοὺς αὐτοὺς·

It is more reasonable to liken the moon to Aphrodite and the sun to Love than to speak thus of any other gods, though certainly the relation is not one of complete identity (Amatorius 464d).

In making solar and lunar deities of Love and Venus, Plutarch matches the former with Osiris, the latter with Isis, since he also allots these gods, in order of dignity, to the sun and moon.⁴¹ In Apuleius' fable Venus fails because there are creatures who love Psyche enough to execute her tasks for her,⁴² and Love himself supplies the remedy in her last distress. If Isis lacks the darker side of Venus, in the novel as in mythology, a Platonist might conclude that one is the evil, and the other the good World-Soul.⁴³ This duplication of souls we find in Plutarch's captious reading of the Laws:⁴⁴

ὁ γὰρ Πλάτων μητέρα μὲν καὶ τιθήνην καλεῖ τὴν ὕλην αἰτίαν δὲ κακοῦ τὴν κινήτικὴν τῆς ὕλης καὶ περὶ τὰ σώματα γιγνομένην μερικτὴν ἄτακτον καὶ ἄλογον οὐκ ἄψυχον δὲ κίνησιν, ἣν ἐν Νόμοις ὡσπερ εἴρηται ψυχὴν ἐναντίαν καὶ ἀντίπαλον τῇ ἀγαθουργῷ προσεῖπε.

³⁷ See e.g. H.W.Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London 1977) p. 56 f.

³⁸ Phaedrus 250b; cf. Plutarch, *Amatorius* 761f etc.

³⁹ See e.g. Euripides, *Hippolytus* 523-32, 555-64; and cf. the change in the character of Venus in Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* IV.

⁴⁰ At *Amatorius* 764c the association of Aphrodite is denied in favour of the lunar one. In the speech of Aristophanes at *Symposium* 190b, the moon is the planet of the androgynous beings, who after being cut in half by Zeus become the ancestors of that class of human beings who engage in heterosexual (but illicit) intercourse.

⁴¹ See *De Iside* 372a-e. Griffiths (1970) pp. 496-502 finds Plutarch tendentious on the functions of Isis.

⁴² Note the words of Venus at *Metamorphoses* VI.11.2: "non tuum ... sed illius cui tuo immo et ipsius malo placuisti".

⁴³ J.Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London 1977) pp. 283-4 attempts to find this evil World Soul in the *Didascalicus* of Alcinous/Albinus chapter 10.

⁴⁴ The passage under interpretation is *Laws* 896d-897c, which posits the evil World-Soul as a hypothesis to be rejected.

For Plato calls matter a mother and a nurse; but the source of evil he calls the motive principle in matter, which is divisible with respect to the body, disorderly and irrational; yet this is not a motion devoid of soul, and in the Laws he has styled it the soul that is contrary and antagonistic to the benevolent one (De Animae Procreatione in Tamaeo 1015f).

We may appeal to Plutarch with some confidence, not only because Apuleius was himself a Platonist of the second century, but also because, at the outset of the novel, his hero Lucius names the Chaeronean as his kinsman (Metamorphoses I.2),. Plutarch's help enables us to interpret both the affinity and the difference between the two goddesses, each of whom is an aspect of the double face of Fortune. Isis is the sister of Osiris, and Aphrodite shares her birthday with Love in the Symposium; in Plutarch's thought both Isis and Aphrodite are inferior manifestations of the power that sways the world.

IV. Mesopotamian Goddesses and the Magical Papyri

We have noted that the functions of Proserpina are not ascribed to Venus in the fable of Cupid and Psyche; had it been otherwise she would hardly have made an application to Proserpina for a portion of her beauty. As Merkelbach and others have observed, the trials which Psyche undergoes in her embassy to the lower realm are recapitulated in the experience of Lucius when he enters the cult of Isis:

accessi confinium mortis et calcato Proserpinae limine, per omnia vectus elementa remeavi ... does inferos et deos superos accessi coram et adoravi de proxumo.

I came to death's frontier and trod the threshold of Proserpina; I was borne through all the elements and returned I came into the presence of the infernal and supernal gods, and adored them close at hand (Met. XI.23).

Isis is the triple power in heaven, earth and Hades - not only caelestis Venus, but Proserpina, Diana and the moon (Metamorphoses XI.5). In classical mythology the goddess who embraces the last three figures is more commonly known as Hecate,⁴⁵ though when it occurs in the magical papyri her name is often joined with that of deities who belong to the lower world. One of these is Persephone, the Greek Proserpina, who sometimes shares an appellation of still more ancient provenance:

καὶ Κούρη Περσεφόνη Ἐρεσκιγάλ καὶ Ἀδώνιδι (PGM IV.337-8).

This Ereshkigal rules the nether kingdom in Sumerian texts, and then in Babylonian ones; the most famous of her deeds is her confinement of Inanna, a lunar goddess who was also her sister and the queen of love.⁴⁶ Descending to her sister's realm by seven gates, at each of

⁴⁵ On Hecate in philosophy see S.I. Johnston, *Hecate Soteira* (Atlanta 1990).

⁴⁶ See J.B. Pritchard (ed.) *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton 1969) pp. 52-59 for this tale, and pp. 637-44 for other stories of Dimuzi and Inanna. S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford 1989) pp. 154-62 translates the Babylonian version, noting on p. 161 n.9 the theory that both the Sumerian and the Babylonian texts allude to the journey of the goddess' statue at a yearly festival.

which she sheds a piece of clothing, Inanna steps unclad into the presence of Ereshkigal, and, failing to make good whatever challenge she came to issue, is humiliated and taken prisoner. Only the provision of a substitute, her consort Dimuzi, effects her release, and even this condition is granted only after the womb of her oppressor (who is a virgin) has been swollen by the other gods with intolerable pangs.⁴⁷

Some students of the Mesopotamian story have concluded that Ereshkigal is the other self of Inanna;⁴⁸ in the Classical world, where the queens of heaven and of Hades were two aspects of the same deity, it could hardly have been doubted that, if Isis were to descend into the underworld, the shadow that would greet her was her own.

We might even say that the devotees of Hecate enacted the fall of Inanna whenever, as legend told, they drew the moon down from the sky.⁴⁹ *Eidolon*, the Greek word for a shadow, also denotes a reflection or any image of the original; it is rendered almost perfectly into Latin when Apuleius writes of Psyche that "mirantur quidem divinam speciem, sed ut simulacrum fabre politum mirantur omnes" (*Met.* IV.32). Psyche is the simulacrum of Venus, for whom she is here mistaken. That the worship is said to be erroneous would imply that she is unequivocally the lesser being, and so of course it seems to Venus; nevertheless the human fugitive proves herself the moral superior of her persecutor, who acts throughout like a jealous mother fearful that her son will bring a new mistress into the home. As neither is consistently superior or subordinate to the other, we cannot denominate either of them the Pandemic or the Uranian Aphrodite, as these terms are defined in the *Symposia* of Xenophon and Plato⁵⁰ - or rather, we may use both terms of each at different times. We must reckon with both the Uranian and the Pandemic Aphrodite when considering the evidence in the next section of this paper; we should also note that, if Venus and Proserpina can be aspects of the same goddess, the enslavement of the wandering girl to Venus and her descent into the underworld are tales on a common theme.

V. Gnostic and Valentinian Parallels

Myths are the characteristic form of speech for a deviant Platonism that flourished in the second and third centuries A.D.⁵¹ It is seldom that any remains of it can be dated more precisely, but we know that one of its earliest treasures, the *Book of Zoroaster*, was

⁴⁷ The passage of Inanna through seven gates may be compared with the ascent of the soul through the planetary houses in *Hermetica* I.25 and the Ophite Diagram described in Origen, *Contra Celsum* VI.24-33.

⁴⁸ See D.Wolkstein and S.N.Kramer, *Inanna* (New York 1983) pp. 155-63; though it should be said that this interpretation is attributed only to Wolkstein, and is thus not that of an expert in Akkadian literature.

⁴⁹ See e.g. Virgil, *Eclogues* VIII.70; Horace, *Epodes* V.46; Propertius I.19-20; Ovid, *Heroides* VI.85.

⁵⁰ Plato, *Symposium* 180d; Xenophon, *Symposium* VIII.9.

⁵¹ Many of the statements in this paragraph require a long bibliography, which I or other students have supplied in recent articles. I shall therefore confine myself in most cases with a reference to one or two items of secondary literature.

composed before 150 A.D.,⁵² and that in the second century the name "Gnostic" was assumed by a number of related groups.⁵³ Gnostic thought perhaps originated with the Jews of Alexandria,⁵⁴ and, though it was always a blend of the Hebraic and the Greek, was not at first especially redolent of Plato. As I have maintained elsewhere, however,⁵⁵ it entered into relations with the Platonist Numenius of Apamea; and at the same time or earlier a Christian theologian of Alexandria married Plato with some tenets of the Gnostics - though Valentinus took his vocabulary, and professed to take his doctrines, from the Epistles of St Paul.⁵⁶

Closely associated with the system of Valentinus, and of similar date, is a scion of the Book of Zoroaster, the Apocryphon of John.⁵⁷ The lost Zoroaster, together with other documents that survive in late and adulterated versions, was used in the late third century by a group who were known to Porphyry as Gnostics,⁵⁸ though Plotinus treats them rather as the ungrateful heirs of Plato, once his friends. The doctrine of the Gnostics can be reconciled with the contents of the Apocryphon of John, although not quite so well with the creed of Valentinus; which is the earliest and which the latest of the three we cannot say. We need not doubt, however, that all their elements lay to hand in the second century, and two of their common elements have a bearing on the tale of Cupid and Psyche. The fathering of the intelligible kingdom by the luminous Anthropos, and the transgression of Sophia, which engenders the material realm, may be called the heart and veins of Gnostic thought.

1. The Naassenes, says Hippolytus, were the first Gnostics, acknowledging as supreme divinities Man and the Son of Man (Refutatio V.6.4 etc.).⁵⁹ Uniting both the sexes, the Primal Man or Anthropos had an extended genital member for the dispersion of his seed in the domain of physical being (V.7.29); here the scattered particles were rejoined to form the image of another Primal Man (V.7.6). The phallus of this mundane god pointed heavenward, that of the higher Anthropos downward (V.7.27, 29), and both could be

⁵² See M.J.Edwards, How Many Zoroasters?, *Vigiliae Christianae* 42 (1988) pp. 282-9.

⁵³ As often, the best study of the term is one of the oldest: R.P.Casey, *The Study of Gnosticism*, JTS 36 (1935) pp. 45-60.

⁵⁴ As recently argued by M.J.Edwards, Gnostic Eros and Orphic Themes, ZPE 88 (1991) pp. 25-40. See also Fallon in n.60 below.

⁵⁵ M.J.Edwards, Atticizing Moses? Numenius, the Fathers and the Jews, *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990) pp. 64ff.

⁵⁶ On the Platonism of Valentinus see C.Stead, *In Search of Valentinus* in B.Layton (ed.) *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, Vol I (Leiden 1980) pp. 75-95. On this theologian as an interpreter of Paul, see S.Petremont, *A Separate God* (London 1991) pp. 127-213. My "Gnostics and Valentinians in the Church Fathers", JTS 40 (1989), which maintains that Platonism furnished the means of a systematic return to orthodoxy, should have distinguished Valentinus more carefully from his successors, Ptolemaeus, Secundus and Heracleon.

⁵⁷ Irenaeus, Adv. Haereses I.29 and a number of coptic versions: see S.Giversen, *Apocryphon Johannis* (Copenhagen 1963).

⁵⁸ On Vita Plotini 16 see H.M.Jackson, *The Seer Nicotheus and his Lost Apocalypse*, *Novum Testamentum* 32 (1990) pp. 250-77.

⁵⁹ See further J.M.Creed, *The Heavenly Man*, JTS 26 (1924-5); M.Marcovich, *The Naassene Psalm* in Hippolytus, in B.Layton (ed.) *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, Vol II (Leiden 1981) pp. 770-779.

identified with Hermes (V.7.29, 30, 34, 37); but Osiris was among his other titles, while the seven veils of Isis were deemed to symbolize the planetary spheres (V.7.23). These planets must be the offspring of the Anthropos, who is said to be the demiurge of everything in the upper and lower kingdoms (V.7.29). The reason for the creation of the lower world, which is treated as a "Chaos" and a prison (V.7.9, 30; V.10.2), is not explained. Nevertheless, a text from Nag Hammadi, a great repository of eccentric religious literature, confirms what would in any case be suggested by a comparison of the Naassenes with the Orphics - that the Anthropos was the cosmic god of Love.

In this text, *The Origin of the World*, we are told that, just as one lamp kindles many, so Eros, who combines delight and forethought in his androgynous nature, scattered light into every part of Chaos without depletion of his own.⁶⁰ All creatures are enamoured of this luminous progenitor, among them Soul or Psyche, who sheds blood to cement their union:

But the first Psyche (Soul) loved Eros who was with her, and poured her blood upon him and upon the earth ... After this the beautiful fragrant flowers sprouted up in the earth according to their kind from the blood of each of the virgins of the daughters of Pronoia (NHC II.5.111.9-20).

Here - though not without a reminiscence of the *Iliad*⁶¹ - we meet again the Eros and Psyche of the amulets and the magical papyri, where Pronoia is an epithet of the soul.⁶² In this treatise the greater being is once again the lamp by which the weaker, female party is excited; the Apuleian plot remains unparalleled, but this treatise must belong, as Tardieu thinks,⁶³ to the same allegorical domain.

2. As Gnostic thought develops,⁶⁴ Primal Man must take his seat amid a multitude of lights. Above him are the incomprehensible powers who supply the ground of being, below him that exfoliation of properties which makes up the "pleroma" of the intelligible realm. Each of these lesser "aeons" is androgynous, but distance from the Anthropos makes the collusion of the masculine and feminine unstable. The trespass of Sophia, the female moiety in the last and weakest aeon, is a desertion of her consort, and entails the generation of a new but imperfect world. Plotinus knew the story in two versions:

⁶⁰ On this treatise see F.T.Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth* (Leiden 1978); M.Tardieu; *Trois Mythes Gnostiques* (Paris 1974) pp. 140-214. The text has been edited and translated anew by B.Layton (Leyden 1989). The translation here is that of H.-G.Bethge, taken from J.M.Robinson (ed.) *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden 1977) p. 169.

⁶¹ Cf. *Iliad* XIV. 347-9 on the fertility which results from the union of Zeus and Hera.

⁶² See PGM IV.475: Ἰλαθί μοι, Πρόνοια καὶ Ψυχῆ.

⁶³ Tardieu (1974) pp. 146-8.

⁶⁴ Petrement (1990) maintains that Valentinian thought precedes the Gnostic systems, but does not give sufficient attention to the fifth book of Hippolytus' *Refutatio*, where the creeds described are too diverse to be derived from Valentinus, and rely more heavily on Jewish and pagan than on Christian sources. On the evidence for the Valentinians see F.Sagnard, *La Gnose Valentinienne et le témoignage de St.Irenée* (Paris 1947).

Ψυχὴν γὰρ εἰπόντες νεῦσται κάτω καὶ σοφίαν τινά, εἴτε τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρξάκης, εἴτε τῆς τοιαύτης αἰτίας γενομένης σοφίας, εἴτε ἄμφω ταῦτόν θέλουσιν εἶναι, τὰς μὲν ἄλλας ψυχὰς συγκατεληλυθέναι λέγοντες καὶ μέλη τῆς σοφίας ταύτας μὲν ἐνδύουσι λέγουσι σώματα, οἷον τὰ ἀνθρώπων· ἥς δὲ χάριν καὶ αὐταὶ κατῆλθον, ἐκείνην λέγουσι πάλιν αὖ μὴ κατελθεῖν.

They first maintained that the Soul and certain "Wisdom" (Sophia) declined and entered this lower sphere - though they leave us in doubt of whether the movement originated in soul or in this Sophia of theirs, or whether the two are the same to them - then they tell us that the other souls came down in the descent and that these members of Sophia took to themselves bodies, human bodies for example. Yet in the very same breath, that very Soul which was the occasion of descent to the others is declared not to have descended (Enneads II.9.10 trans. Mackenna).

The account in which Sophia avoids a fall can still be read in a descendant of the Gnostic Zostrianus;⁶⁵ but the one describing a fatal inclination had perhaps a better pedigree, at least in Jewish sources, since a variant occurs in the First Hermeticum and in Philo.⁶⁶ It is only in later sources that Sophia is equated with the moon,⁶⁷ but the story of a goddess who falls captive to her own image or eidolon is one for which we have already shown the most ancient precedent. As we have observed, it is also Apuleius' prototype when he tells how Venus abused her simulacrum, the errant Psyche, and dispatched her on an embassy to Proserpina. Sophia too was banished from the pleroma, and in certain narratives turns into a prostitute, or conceives a lower self, Sophia Prunicus, who mates with the cosmic powers.⁶⁸ Behind this figure lies Eve, the "foolish woman" of the Book of Proverbs, and prophetic denunciations of the harlotries of Israel;⁶⁹ but Platonists would not forget the Pandemic Aphrodite, who partakes of male and female, or the custom in Greek of giving the neuter gender to the names of prostitutes.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Zostrianus (Nag Hammadi Codices VIII.1) 9.18-10.12. The same title belongs to one of the texts employed by the Gnostics of Porphyry, Vita Plotini 16.

⁶⁶ Hermetica I.14 on the fall of the Anthropos; Philo, De Opificio Mundi 151-2 (on the fall of Adam), where an allusion to the speech of Aristophanes in the Symposium must also be suspected. On the Jewish provenance of the First Hermetic treatise see C.H.Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (Cambridge 1935).

⁶⁷ Clementine Homilies II.8-9, where the name Helena, given by Simon to his paramour, appears to have been confounded with that of Selene.

⁶⁸ See Irenaeus, Adv. Haereses I.29.4, drawing upon a version of the Apocryphon of John; Origen, Contra Celsum VI.34, where the source is the Ophite diagram. On the relation of the Apocryphon of John to Valentinian theology see G.Quispel, *Gnosis and the Apocryphon of John in Layton, Vol I* (1980) pp. 118-32.

⁶⁹ See G.Macrae, *The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth, Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970) pp. 86-101; Proverbs 9.13-18. Ezekiel 16 is perhaps the most extended of the prophetic denunciations.

⁷⁰ At Plato, Symposium 180d-181d Pausanias slights the Pandemic Aphrodite, which, unlike the Uranian, is drawn to women no less than to boys. The epithet Pandemos, unlike Urania, has only one termination for the masculine and the feminine genders.

But if any myth of this kind is to be aligned with the Apuleian fable, it is that of Valentinus. Platonist as well as Christian, he took for granted the love of the inferior for the superior, which entails a disposition to ascend. Yet this may have excessive manifestations, like the impulse of Sophia to know her Father in his veiled identity:

ἤθελε γάρ, ὡς λέγουσι, τὸ μέγεθος αὐτοῦ καταλαβεῖν. Ἔπειτα μὴ δυναθῆναι διὰ τὸ ἀδυνάτω ἐπιβαλεῖν πράγματι, καὶ ἐν πολλῷ πάνυ † ἀγῶνι γενόμενον διὰ τὸ τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ βάθους καὶ τὸ ἀνεξιχνίαστον τὸν Πατρός καὶ τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸν στοργήν, ἐκτεινόμενον αἰεὶ ἐπὶ τὸ πρόσθεν, ὑπὸ τῆς γλυκύτητος αὐτοῦ τελευταῖον ἂν καταπεπόσθαι, καὶ ἀναλελύσθαι εἰς τὴν ὅλην οὐσίαν, εἰ μὴ τῇ στηριζούσῃ καὶ ἐκτὸς τοῦ ἀρρήτου μεγέθους φυλακκούσῃ τὰ ὅλα συνέτηθε δυνάμει.

This passion, they say, consisted in a desire to search into the nature of the Father; for she wished, according to them, to comprehend his greatness. When she could not attain her end, inasmuch as she aimed at an impossibility and this became involved in an extreme agony, of mind, while both on account of the vast profundity as well as the unsearchable nature of the Father, and on account of the love she bore him, she was ever stretching herself forward, there was danger lest she should at last have been absorbed by his sweetness, and resolved into his absolute essence, unless she had met with that power which supports all things, and preserves them outside of the unspeakable greatness (Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses II.2, trans. Roberts and Donaldson).

The limiting form, or Horos, has the same function in the narrative, though not in the philosophy of the author, as the sensible world that supports the soul in Enneads VI.9.3. Poverty conceives a child by Plenty in the Symposium, and Sophia also has offspring by this wanton overture. Ejected as she wanders, weak and crying, in the void outside the pleroma, this abortion is nothing but a poor image of herself.⁷¹ Sophia, like the chastened soul in the Enneads of Plotinus, is redeemed by the creation of a new boundary; the abortion is not so lucky, but gives birth to a viler son, who becomes the architect and tyrant of the material creation.⁷² This Demiurge and his immediate progenitors are all degraded copies of the Gnostic Primal Man, and hence of Love.⁷³

Sophia's misfortune represents, if nothing else, the poverty of human understanding, which falls short of God, breeds heresy and does penance in the hope of restoration by

⁷¹ See E.A.Fischer-Mueller, Yaldabaoth: The Gnostic Female Principle in its Fallenness, *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1990) pp. 79-95.

⁷² See Sagnard (1947) pp. 148-71 for a review of the testimonies in Irenaeus, and G.C.Stead, *The Valentinian Myth of Sophia*, *JTS* 20 (1969) pp. 75-104.

⁷³ See Edwards ZPE 88 (1991) for this thesis.

God's love.⁷⁴ In the Gospel of Truth, a Valentinian work,⁷⁵ the Error is personified as Plane, and her fruitless exploration of the void has been compared to the quest of Isis for Osiris.⁷⁶ Osiris, as we have noted, was among the appellations of the Gnostic Primal Man, and Sophia retains enough of him to scatter brilliant particles of wisdom in the lower world, then work for their redemption and return.⁷⁷ Though there was no reflection to ensnare her in the Valentinian story, she here submits voluntarily to a world that is a shadow of the higher one, governed by a nature which can be nothing but a base replica of hers.

Like Psyche, then, Sophia, having erred by curiosity, is sentenced to a double expiation: first she is expelled from the place of joy, and secondly some part of her must go down to the lower world. In texts which are not Valentinian, though related, she comes to resemble Psyche in her felicity as a mother, since the instrument of salvation is a child produced through the Demiurge, who is destined to enter heaven, with great rejoicing, as the captain of the redeemed.⁷⁸

VI. Conclusions and Reservations

This article may claim to have contributed a least five points to the study of the Apuleian fable and its sources:

1. An ancient myth related the descent of a female power to the nether world, in which she was taken captive by her shadow. Philosophers, who would call this her eidolon, read the myth as an allegory of the soul's capitulation to inferior desires. The relics of this tradition in Apuleius are that his heroine is named Psyche, that he makes her a simulacrum of the goddess who becomes her persecutor, and that Psyche's final task is to solicit from Proserpina, the Venus of the underworld, a gift which it is envious to covet and (for Psyche) almost fatal to discern.

2. Platonism, even when it exhorted the soul to strive for union with the highest principles, maintained that where the postulant is greedy or importunate a calamity will follow, which cannot be redeemed except by arduous discipline. Sometimes the encroachment of the lower on the higher could be conceived as an assault; Psyche when she exposes the face of Love with the aim of murdering him, is guilty of this temerity, and incurs the due reward.

⁷⁴ F.C.Burkitt, *Church and Gnosis* (Cambridge 1932) maintained that the fall of Sophia was an allegory for the ineptitude of human wisdom, and, in the light of Petrement (1990) one should certainly take notice of 1 Cor 1.17ff and Romans 1.22. In the latter text the futility of Wisdom is revealed in the making of idols, the most lucrative profession of the pagan demiurge.

⁷⁵ See H.Jonas, *The Evangelium Veritatis and Valentinian Speculation*, *Studia Patristica* (1962) pp. 96-111.

⁷⁶ J.Helderman, *Isis as Plane in the Gospel of Truth?*, in M.Krause (ed.) *Gnosis and Gnosticism* (Leiden 1981) pp. 26-46.

⁷⁷ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haereses* I.7; Sagnard (1947) pp. 384-415.

⁷⁸ See Fallon (1978) *passim*.

3. Both in the astrology of Plutarch and in the synthesis performed by Christian heresy, Love can be equated with Osiris, and the wandering soul with Isis; the evidence assembled here sides firmly with those readers of Apuleius who see a parallel between the Love and Venus of his fable and the Egyptian deities of his final book.

4. While he has put the lamp in the hand of Psyche and not of Cupid, Apuleius may have intended the dripping of the oil to take the place of the emission of Psyche's blood in another version of the story. The severance of the Intellect from its Logos in Plotinus might be cited by a pertinacious exegete as a gloss on Cupid's wound.

5. The pangs of Ereshkigal, the birth of Eros in the Symposium and the repeated parturition of Sophia in the Valentinian myth all offer precedents or parallels to the birth of Psyche's child.

We must not leap too rapidly from parallels to sources, from inherited materials to generic affiliation. We might conclude, since the strongest and most numerous affinities are supplied by Valentinus, that Apuleius moved in circles close to Gnostic thought; or, seeing that some features of his tale are prone to allegory, we might suppose the whole to be nothing more than an elegant draping for the common furniture of Platonism. Apuleius, however, was not a Gnostic and only an occasional philosopher. Such rigid schemes deny to Apuleius his facility in invention, combination and the avoidance of expected commonplaces. We should not forget how often he sets out to surprise his readers - by transferring the lamp from Cupid to his spouse, by robbing Venus of her initial majesty, by making Psyche fall a second time.

We have barely taken notice of certain elements in the narrative - the portrayal of Venus as a wicked stepmother, for example, or the rumour that Psyche's lover is a beast - which belong to a common fund of storytelling;⁷⁹ we have not asked whether theories of historical contagion will account for the recurrence of a theme so well as those of Jung or Propp; we have not asked whether Northrop Frye is right to see all romance as a "secular scripture", which turns upon the heroine's descent to and return from a state of peril and distress.⁸⁰ We have not appraised the debt of Apuleius to such celebrated and obvious precursors as the Fourth Georgic,⁸¹ nor observed how often it is that the greatest Latin poems (and the last-named one among them) seem to be pregnant with the germ of an allegory that miscarries in the hands of scholarship.⁸²

Discussion of such topics can be neither brief nor certain, and the object of this essay was more modest. It was to show that we find convergent tendencies in the disparate speculations of the Empire, that the systematic interpreters of Plato could both feed and feed upon the

⁷⁹ Cf. in particular the stories of Cinderella and of "Beauty and the Beast".

⁸⁰ N.Frye, *The Secular Scripture* (London 1976).

⁸¹ See Georgics IV. 316-558 for the descents of Aristaeus and of Orpheus.

⁸² On the Fourth Georgic see e.g. L.P.Wilkinson, *The Georgics of Virgil* (Cambridge 1969) pp. 117-8. Other candidates for an allegorical reading, perhaps based on the mysteries, would be Aeneid VI and Catullus LXIII.

interpretation of the mysteries, that philosophers were not debarred from reading other books, nor other books from citing them. Apuleius - sophist, Platonist, novelist and humorist - has devised an entertainment that does not preclude all serious constructions, an arbitrary fiction that does not shun all affinities with myth.⁸³

⁸³ I am grateful to Isabel Henton for her comments on an early draft of this study.

XIII

PORPHYRY'S 'CAVE OF THE NYMPHS' AND THE Gnostic CONTROVERSY

When Porphyry died (about 305 A.D.), his world was in the hands of a pagan tetrarchy; Christianity was soon to furnish it with a dynasty of autocrats. Porphyry had written against the Church on one occasion¹, but in his other writings there are no signs of pervasive animosity, let alone of deep alarm. He has none the less been suspected of discreet attacks², and quite legitimately, since it was common in antiquity for polemicists to disdain the very names of their opponents. We should not know (for example) that the most acerbic passages in Plotinus had been written against a group of deviant Christians, were it not for the information supplied by Porphyry and studied in this paper³.

Porphyry was born in 232 and the treatise studied here is perhaps among the firstfruits of his maturity⁴. Undoubtedly the first survival in a fecund genre, it takes the 'Cave of the Nymphs' from Homer's Ithaca, with its doors for gods and mortals, and turns it into an image of the solar system, a showpiece of symbolic architecture and a poetic icon comparable with Plato's myth of the soul's escape from the prison of the senses. The thesis that its function may have been as much polemic as protreptic will be supported in this paper by analogies with *Enneads* 2.9, the thirty-third of Plotinus' treatises, which was written against a group of Christian heretics between 263 and 268, while Porphyry was a member of the school. The teaching of these heretics, styled 'Gnostics' in the editorial title, is a parody of that set forth in Porphyry's 'Cave of the Nymphs': they prefer their own apocrypha to the ancients, condemn the specious beauty of the world, affect

¹ On the *Adversus Christianos* see T. D. BARNES, *Porphyry against the Christians: Date and Attribution of the Fragments*, *J. Theol. St.* 24 (1973) 424-442; A. MEREDITH, *Porphyry and Julian against the Christians*, *ANRW II.23.2* (1980) 1119-1149.

² See BOUFFARTIQUE's edition of the *De Abstinencia I* (Paris 1977) 36-7; for anonymous polemics of this period, Arnobius, *Contra Gentes* 2.11-52 (perhaps against Porphyry) and Eunapius, *Vitae Sophistarum* 476 Boissonade, where the unnamed "men in black" are Christian monks. On allusions to Christianity in Plotinus see e.g. A. H. ARMSTRONG, *Plotinus and Christianity with special reference to II.9.[33].26-83 and V.8.[31].4.27-36*, *Studia Patristica* 20 (1987) 83-86.

³ On the identity of the Gnostics see C. SCHMIDT, *Plotins Stellung zum Gnosticismus* (Leiden 1901); H.-C. PUECH, *Plotin et les Gnostiques*, *Entretiens Hardt* 5 (1960) 160-190; M. J. EDWARDS, *Neglected Texts in the Study of Gnosticism*, *J. Theol. St.* (1990) 26-50; H. M. JACKSON, *The Seer Nicotheus and his Lost Apocalypse*, *Novum Testamentum* 32 (1990), 250-277.

⁴ Porphyry wrote a work of this type while studying under Plotinus (*Vita Plotini* 15), and a dating to this time is rendered all the more attractive by the fact that much of his extant writing is demonstrably later (*De Abstinencia*, *Contra Christianos*, *Sententiae*, *Ad Marcellam*, *Vita Plotini* and probably *Ad Anebonem*).

religion only as a substitute for rational theology, and profess to derive from Plato views unknown to any Greek.

Scholars are never likely to agree in finding casual scintillations of polemic in a work that does not profess to be controversial, and I shall not pretend to prove that he wrote the 'Cave of the Nymphs' as an attack upon the Gnostics. I shall, however, argue in the first part of the paper that certain features of his treatise would have found their way there more easily because they had been prominent in his dealings with this sect. In the second part I shall suggest that he meant to write, not only a work of interpretation, but a manual for interpreters, and one that might be construed as a tacit reprimand to teachers who purported, like the Gnostics, to arrive at truth without the aid of other men's endeavours.

I. Porphyry attached two names to Enneads 2.9, as he did to all his master's treatises⁵. The first was 'Against the Gnostics', the second 'Against those who say that the Demiurge and his universe are evil.' The latter is thus supposed to represent the defining tenet of the Gnostics. Ecclesiastical writers of the same period (Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, Origen and Hippolytus) corroborate this usage⁶. A Gnostic is one who holds that the highest deity, the Father, is immutable and entirely unconcerned with the material creation. The author of the present world is a purblind god, the Demiurge, brought forth as an abortion when Sophia, an emanation of the Father, tries in vain to usurp his powers. 'Demiurge' is one name of the creator in the 'Timaeus' of Plato, and also of the craftsman who, in chapter after chapter of the Septuagint, provides the chief temptation to idolatry⁷. Born together with matter, he creates the seven planets, whose rulers strive (without success) to imprison the reflection of divinity in the sphere of chance and time⁸.

What is true in the doctrine of the Gnostics, says Plotinus, has been stated by the ancients "without pomposity" when they represented the soul's escape from matter as the egress of a prisoner from his cave (Enn. 2.9.6.6–10). It is, of course,

⁵ See Vita Plotini 4–6. R. HARDER, *Eine Neue Schrift Plotins*, *Hermes* 64 (1936), 1–10 substantiates the chronology, if not the editorial division of treatises.

⁶ For a detailed review of the evidence, see M. J. EDWARDS, *Gnostics and Valentinians in the Church Fathers*, *J. Theol. St.* 40 (1990) 27–45. This reveals that "Gnostic", a complimentary term desired by every Christian group in Alexandria, was adopted as the proper name of a group of sects, to the indignation of the orthodox party.

⁷ See Plato, *Timaeus* 28b and, for the first recorded Gnosticizing use Valentinus, apud Irenaeum, *Adv. Haer.* 1.5.1–2. Though the term demiurge appears only at 2Macc. 4.1 in the Septuagint (and then figuratively), denunciations of the idolatrous craftsman are legion: Isaiah 46, Letter of Jeremiah, Daniel 3, Genesis 4.17–22. For the term applied to God see Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 171.

⁸ See the Nag Hammadi Codex, *The Hypostasis of the Archons* (Codex II.4.87), discovered c. 1945, and translated by R. A. BULLARD and B. LAYTON in J. M. ROBINSON (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden 1988, San Francisco 1990) 163.

the allegory from Plato's 'Republic' 7 that Plotinus has in mind⁹, but he was always happy to see a philosophic truth derived from Homer (Enn. I.6.8, Vita Plotini 15 etc.). The 'Cave of the Nymphs' is Porphyry's illustration of the metaphor commended by his master, taking into account not only Homer's cave, but others which are more obviously symbolic. Without the clue from Plato, it would perhaps have been impossible to detect an arcane significance in Homer; on the other hand, were it not for Homer, Plato would lack the mandate of antiquity, which exemplified its insights both in sculpture and in words (De Antro p. 58.13–18 NAUCK): "The same questions remain for inquiry whether one is searching for the intention of those who established [the cave] or the poet who sets it forth; for it was not the way of ancients to establish sacred precincts without mystical symbols, nor of Homer to describe the without a reason."

Here Porphyry, who maintained elsewhere¹⁰ the presence of divine energies in statues, pays his compliment to the human demiurge. Not only the explicit use of Homer, but the implicit use of all antiquity is the philosopher's prerogative; and in fact the choice of authorities in this work is so unusual as to indicate uncommon circumstances of composition. Widespread as they were, the cult of Mithras and the following of Numenius were among the dubious legacies of eastern Hellenism; it fell to Porphyry, the son of Tyre and child of Athens, to reclaim them for the Platonists, despite the fact that one was called a demiurge, and the other could be charged with an extravagant denigration of the world.

1. It was in the second century that Platonists had begun to take an interest in Mithraica¹¹, among them (according to Celsus in his attack on Christianity) a diagram which described the ascent of souls through the seven planetary spheres (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.22–23). His aim in citing this was to expose the plagiarism of a Christian group, the Ophites, who appear to have been Gnostics¹², and undoubtedly held the thesis that the author of the present world is evil. Nevertheless, his assumption that the Ophites stole from the Mithraists is questionable. The order of the planets in his allegedly Mithraic diagram follows the days of the week, and forms a ladder to lead the adept out of time into eternity. Among the many depictions of the planets in Mithraic architecture, there is none that shows this plan, and the contempt for time is more at home in Gnostic than in Mithraic speculation¹³. It may be, then, that the Gnostics, who were always prone

⁹ See Republic 514ff, and for a review of studies J. MALCOM, *The Cave Revisited*, Cl. Qu. 31 (1981) 60–68.

¹⁰ See J. BIDEZ, *Vie de Porphyre* (Ghent 1913) Appendix 1, 3*–23* for edition and commentary of the *De Statuis*.

¹¹ See R. TURCAN, *Mithras Platonicus* (Leiden 1975).

¹² See R. CASEY, *Naassenes and Ophites*, J. Theol. St. 36 (1935) 45–60.

¹³ See M. J. VERMASEREN, *A Magical Time-God*, in J. R. HINNELLS (ed.), *Mithraic Studies* (Manchester 1975) Vol II 246–256.

to reinforce their preaching with allusions to the mysteries¹⁴, had in this case simply fathered their beliefs upon an obscure but growing cult.

Porphyry would have reckoned this a characteristic forgery, together with the Book of Zoroaster which is attested in Gnostic literature, the numerical exposition of the name Mithras by the Gnostic Basilides, and the lion-headed Demiurge who shares his physiognomy with figures in Mithraic iconography¹⁵. Zoroaster is commended in the 'Cave of the Nymphs', but in the Life of Plotinus his true remains must be distinguished from the forgeries which the Gnostics had made current in that age (*Vita Plotini* 16)¹⁶. "In his time there were many Christians of other kinds, but especially some heretics, who began from the ancient philosophy ... bringing forward apocalypses of Zoroaster [etc.] ... But I Porphyry have written many refutations of the Zoroaster, showing that the book is spurious and new, fabricated (*πεπλασμενον*) by the authors of the heresy to make it seem that the doctrines which they wished to prevail were those of the ancient Zoroaster."

If the word *πεπλασμενον* is pejorative here for Porphyry, its cognates might seem equally so on a cursory perusal of his 'Cave of the Nymphs'. He deprecates the notion that the cave is entirely a plasma of the poet (58.11); admitting that its images or icons are conveyed "as in a mythical fabrication (*ἐν μυθοῦ πλάσ-ματι*)", he adds that the underlying theme, the hypothesis, would not have been fabricated if the plasma were not informed by certain truths. Only if we grant this can we comprehend the "ancient wisdom" present in the Odyssean verses; here, as in his chapter on the Gnostics, fabrication is deceptive, while antiquity is the guarantee of truth.

But as we have seen, antiquity could produce an edifying fabrication. Mithras in the 'Cave of the Nymphs' is a Persian deity, spoken of in the works of Zoroaster, whose mysteries release the soul from a world of his own creation. This world is not so much evil as defective, its tenants not so much prisoners as athletes, and its contents rather parables than lies (*De Antro* 60.4–11)¹⁷:

"Thus also Persians perfect the initiate by mystically illustrating the descent and subsequent egress of the soul, calling space a cave. First, as Eubulus says, Zoroaster hallowed a natural cave ... in honour of Mithras, the maker and father of all. The cave bore for him an icon of the cosmos, which Mithras created (*ἔδημιούργησεν*). The contents carried symbols, at proportioned intervals, of the cosmic elements and climes."

In this passage (adduced by H. CHADWICK to corroborate the evidence of Celsus on the Ophites¹⁸), Mithras shares the appellation "maker and father of all" with Plato's Demiurge at *Tim.* 28c. Platonists agreed that it was the the goodness

¹⁴ See M. MARCOVICH, *Hippolytus: Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* (Berlin 1986) 36–38.

¹⁵ See further M. J. EDWARDS, *Gnostic Eros and Orphic Themes*, *Z.P.E.* 88 (1991) 25–40.

¹⁶ For the translation see EDWARDS (1990) and JACKSON (1990), cited in n. 3 *supra*.

¹⁷ See TURCAN (n. 11 above) 23–43 on Porphyry's sources.

¹⁸ H. CHADWICK, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge 1953) 334 n. 2, somewhat inaccurately rendered.

of the latter that induced him to shape an image of eternity in space and time, since nothing could be better than that everything should attain the highest excellence that is proper to its kind. Plotinus, however, testifies that aversion to the Demiurge made the Gnostics both contemptuous and fearful of his most beautiful creation (Enn. 2.9.131–6): “The critic of the nature of the cosmos does not know what he does, nor where this rashness of his is leading. But this [must be said], that they do not know the order of first, second and third things in their sequence down to the last, and that one ought not to revile what is worse than the first, but peaceably excuse the nature of all things, looking at the first things and putting a stop to the tragedy of the terrors which they locate in the cosmic spheres”.

Both this complaint and the currency of a Book of Zoroaster in Gnostic circles are confirmed by the Apocryphon of John, which, being extant in three Coptic versions and a Latin paraphrase, was perhaps the most well-known of Gnostic texts¹⁹. According to this, the spirit of man is heavenly, but his flesh, his hylic body, is a creation of seven archons, who are evidently the rulers of the planets and of the week. Their acolytes, equal in number to the days of the year, complete the anatomy and instil the passions, but the tale is not yet done (Nag Hammadi Codex 2.1.19.1–10): “This is the number of angels: together they are 365. They all worked on it until, limb for limb, the natural and material body was completed by them. Now there are other ones in charge over the remaining passions, whom I did not mention to you. But if you wish to know them, it is written in the book of Zoroaster.”

The Demiurge of the Platonists worked from knowledge of the paradigm, but the Demiurge of the Gnostics tries to ape the indestructible ones who dwell beyond his vision. (NHC 2.1.13.2-5). Thus he neither makes nor merits an icon, being a shadow or eidolon, and indeed the merest “shadow of a shadow” (Enn. 2.9.10). He is engendered by the reflection of the intellect when it falls into a subjacent realm of matter, which, if transiently illuminated, is not thereby redeemed (Enn. 2.9.10.19–31): “For they say that soul inclined below and a certain wisdom (Sophia), whether the soul began it or Sophia was that cause, or they wish both to be the same; saying that the other souls and members of wisdom came down with them, they say that these put on bodies, such as those of men. But she on whose account they came down, they say again, did not come down, but merely illuminated the darkness, then from that an eidolon came into being from matter, Then, fabricating (πλασάοντες) an eidolon of an eidolon here somehow out of matter or materiality or whatever they choose to call it, saying now this, now that, and using many other names to darken what they mean, they generate their so-called demiurge.”

Plotinus will go some way with the Gnostics, but no further; for the rest, they are responsible for the shadowy fabrication that they purport to be describing. Matter in the Enneads is the effect of an eternal, not a temporal or capricious

¹⁹ See ROBINSON (n. 8 above) 124–125.

generation, perpetually illumined by the procreative soul. Source of evil it may be through its lack of formal properties, but evil has no origin or being independent of the good. As for beauty, that distracts the ascending soul and makes it fall in love with its own reflection²⁰; but that is not to deny that it is right to project this image on to matter, and it is only the Gnostic pessimist who thinks the reflection culpable, a false light on the surface of an uncomprehending world.

Versions of the Gnostic myth occur in which Sophia is first enticed by the reflection of her divinity in matter, then enveloped in the darkness²¹. Plotinus may allude to this conceit in his earliest treatise²², and Porphyry speaks, in the 'Cave of the Nymphs', of a danger that the eye will be seduced in its contemplation of the cave (De Antro 59.21–5): "On this account the cave may thus be properly called delightful when one first approaches it, because of its partaking in the forms; but it is misty to one who looks at what is beneath it and enters into that with his mind."

Porphyry's observer, who sees first beauty then obscurity, might seem about to repeat the Gnostic fall. The difference is that in Porphyry the detection of the shadow is the beginning of enlightenment, for matter has no captivating power. Matter in Neoplatonism is neither mere negation nor an independent principle of evil, but an attenuated shadow of the Good. In the 'Cave of the Nymphs' it is a necessary element in a blend of light and shadow, never seen but through the mediated presence of the forms (De Antro 59.18–21): "Because of matter, then, the cave is misty and dark, but through the cosmetic activity of the interwoven form (whence indeed it is called the cosmos) it is beautiful and lovely."

Thus Mithras and his worshippers are vindicated; craftsmanship, divine or human, need not be idolatry, so long as we perceive the enlightening form within the work.

2. For Porphyry's account of the descent and return of souls within the cosmos, the proof-texts are the *Odyssey* and Plato's Myth of Er in 'Republic' 10. The earliest philosopher to combine these ancient touchstones with the name of Zoroaster was Numenius of Apamea, who lived in the second century A.D.²³. For anyone embattled with the Gnostics, it was expedient to show that one could quote this great precursor without embarrassment, for while he enjoyed the qualified respect of the Neoplatonists, he seems, to have maintained, like any Gnostic, that the world had been projected into pre-existent matter by a schism in the divine

²⁰ See *Enneads* 5.5.12; M. J. EDWARDS, *Middle Platonism on the Beautiful and the Good*, *Mnemosyne* 44 (1991) 161–167.

²¹ See *Hermetica* 1 (Poimandres) 14, with H. JONAS, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston 1958) 146–173. the text states that the Anthropos who had charge of the mortal world inspired the world with love for him for casting his reflection; then "seeing his own likeness in it, in the water, he fell in love and desired to dwell there; and with the desire came the act."

²² See *Enneads* 1.6.8, which is sometimes thought to refer to Narcissus, sometimes to the Gnostics. For the latter view see W. BOUSSET, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (Göttingen 1907) 207.

²³ On his conjunction of the Myth of Er with Homer see J. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists* (London 1977) 375–6 and Numenius, *Frs* 30–35 *DES PLACES*.

(Fr. 11 DES PLACES): “The first and second god, however, make one; but, being drawn towards matter, which is a dyad, it unites it but is torn apart by it because of its concupiscent and fluid nature”.

The cause of the world is therefore, like Sophia, an emanation of divinity, which falls through its attraction to a pre-existent matter, and is constantly essaying to restore the broken harmony. We need not review the affinities which scholars have observed between the teaching of Numenius and those of Gnostic groups²⁴, except for the one that is most germane to Porphyry’s allegorical speculation in this treatise. He is the one Greek author who informs us that Numenius took Odysseus as a symbol of the imprisoned soul in quest of its deliverance (De Anthro 79.19-20 = Numenius, Fr. 33); he reproduces also his citation of the Odyssean verses which refer to a people of dreams (Od. ω 12 at De Anthro 75.11ff). Numenius takes this phrase to mean, not the dead, but the blind majority of the living; it can hardly be an accident that the same phrase is adopted, with a like interpretation, by the Naassenes, a curious Gnostic group of the second century²⁵, who pre-empt the Neoplatonists by giving an allegorical veneer to sordid myths. Although it cannot be shown that either party was so early or so eminent as to be a likely model for the other, it is fair to conclude that the Gnostics and Numenius drew from a common intellectual reservoir.

So great was the indebtedness of Plotinus to Numenius that it was said to amount to plagiarism (Vita Plotini 17.1ff), and Porphyry was, if anything, more beholden than his master. Apart from his three citations of Numenius in the ‘Cave of the Nymphs’, he may have relied upon him for his knowledge of the old mythographers²⁶. His distinction between the doors of gods and mortals in the ‘Cave of the Nymphs’ is based expressly on Numenius’ teaching that the soul, after passing through the seven planets, comes to earth by way of Cancer and returns through Capricorn (Fr. 31 DES PLACES = De Anthro 70.25–72.19). The Gnostics traced a similar path, ascribing a new malignity to the planets²⁷. If Porphyry was to build with these ancestral stones, it had to be in such a way as to leave no room for error; the doctrines of Numenius must stand square with a Plotinian cosmogony, in which matter is eternally instinct with the marks of beauty, and the place of the soul’s detention is the means of its ascent.

²⁴ See DILLON (op. cit., n. 23) 376; M. J. EDWARDS, *Atticizing Moses? Numenius and the Jews*, *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990) 64–75.

²⁵ See Hippolytus, *Refutatio* V.7.37 for the quotation; EDWARDS (n. 24 supra) for discussion of its relation to Numenius; CASEY (n. 12 supra) on the Naassenes. For the citation in Numenius see also R. LAMBERTON, *Homer the Theologian* (Berkeley 1986) 54–77.

²⁶ See M. J. EDWARDS, *Numenius, Pherecydes and the ‘Cave of the Nymphs’*, *Cl. Qu.* 40 (1990) 258–62. His citations of Numenius in the *De Abstinencia* are at 63.10ff (Fr. 30 DES PLACES), 70.26 (Fr. 31) and 79.19ff (Fr. 33); the edition of E. DES PLACES (Paris 1973) adds the reference to Pythagoras at 75.11 as Fr. 32.

²⁷ See Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.22, quoted above. At *Hermetica* 1.25 the ascending soul returns its vices to the seven planets.

II. The 'Cave of the Nymphs' is itself a proof that theological arguments in the third century rested equally on logic and authority. Allegory was a versatile expedient by which anyone could procure an ancient witness, and if an author wanted proof that he had a better claim to use this instrument, he would naturally look for it in the words of his chosen text. Most frequently the proof would be a symbol that the commentator identified and glossed on his own behalf: the text itself, he would argue, held the key to a more profound interpretation of its contents. For a Platonist, the similes of enlightenment in the dialogues – of "turning the eye of the soul" or seeing the sun – may express the desired experience of the student as he reads them²⁸; taken in due sequence, the dialogues will illustrate our progress from the lowest to the highest grades of virtue²⁹; much is hidden, but even while his logic is ambiguous, Parmenides' return upon his argument attests his faith in the ultimate reversion of the many to the One³⁰.

Plotinus was as ready as the Christians to accuse his Gnostic rivals of perverting ancient sources. Plat. Tim. 39e was the support for their distinction between the mind at rest, the mind in contemplation and the mind as demiurge³¹. Plotinus hints that other ancient symbols were abused to express and vindicate their hatred of the world (Enn. 2.9.6): "For they manufacture these doctrines as though they were not in contact with the ancient thought of the Greeks; for the Greeks knew, and spoke clearly without pomposity, of ascents from the cave, coming closer and closer by gradual stages to a truer vision."

The aim is thus to approach "by gradual stages", not to grasp the truth at once; nothing is revealed at once for Neoplatonism, either in life or in a text. Plotinus seems to insinuate here that the Gnostics stole from Plato, whose well-known (if perplexing) use of allegory would justify their own resort to symbols. Porphyry's task was harder, since, in making the cave of Ithaca the subject of his treatise, he was required to demonstrate first that it contained an allegory, and secondly that he knew best how to read it.

As we have seen, one key to a hidden meaning is the antiquity of Homer, which is equally significant if he did not invent, but reproduced his model: "it was not the way of Homer to describe without a reason" (58.18; see above). Novelty (*καινοτομία*) is the matrix of vain teaching in the Gnostics, says Plotinus (Enn. 2.9.6.11 etc.); his student affirms the converse, that the ancients never did anything in vain. Anything in Homer that does not explain itself will not be otiose, but a

²⁸ See the anonymous Prolegomena to Plato in C. F. HERMANN's edition of Plato Vol VI (Leipzig 1874) 206.20ff.

²⁹ See the Isagoge of Albinus in HERMANN (n. 28 supra) Vol VI

³⁰ See Proclus, *Theologica Platonica* 2.12.

³¹ See *Enneads* 2.9.6.17-19, and, for interpretations of the Platonic passage, A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *La revelation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, Vol II (Paris 1954) 275-296.

crux for the enlightened commentator. If the cave is a sacred precinct³², then the reader is an initiate and the expositor a priest.

Such claims, although they justify the commentator, require him to absolve the text from a charge of being needlessly obscure. This was Plato's verdict on the allegories which the sophists found in ancient myths³³, and also the sentence passed by other critics on his own³⁴. In the 'Cave of the Nymphs', the hermeneutic crux is the quotation from the 'Republic' of that parable in which a man progresses from the observation of shadows cast by eikones to the direct observation of the sun. Porphyry quotes the response of Glaucon – "what a prodigious eikon!" (Rep. 514a, De Antro 62.4) – and takes this as accrediting his own view that the wisdom of the ancients could be iconically embedded in a cave.

The difficulty of interpreting the classics arises, not from the perversity of authors, but from the distance between all literature and truth. In the 'Phaedrus' writing, like a picture, is the mute and defective likeness of a superior concept³⁵. This gulf between words and things is an impediment to knowledge, since Plato makes it an axiom that each degree of knowledge has its correlated object³⁶. In the 'Cratylus', he toys with, but does not endorse, the theory of a natural affinity between the words of Greek and their correlatives; even the most ingenious etymologies of his followers did not conceal the presence of an arbitrary component in all the languages of man³⁷. The recurrence of the same metaphors in the 'Phaedrus' and the 'Timaeus' may imply that speech and matter are analogous: just as the finished text may be an icon of reality, so the one created world is an εἰκὼν of its paradigm; and the intelligence that disseminates the seeds of truth in writing is itself a seed of deity, implanted in the world by lesser gods³⁸.

Words and matter are therefore both receptacles, both necessary and insufficient vehicles of knowledge. But if language is to convey a truth, it must be understood. The speech of the gods is inaccessible to us³⁹, but we have at least the noble and dignified utterances of past philosophers. The Gnostics would appear to

³² For the analogy see De Abinentia 60.15 etc. For poems as temples cf. Pindar, Ol. 6.1–40; for poet as priest cf. Callimachus, Hymn 2.1 and Horace, Odes 3.1.1–4.

³³ See e.g. Phaedrus 229c–230a, where the word ἀτυφοῦ may have suggested Plotinus' ἀτύφως at Enn. 2.9.6.8.

³⁴ See Proclus, In Rem Publicam Vol II 96.2–109.3 KROLL (for Epicurean attacks on the Myth of Er); Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Ad Pompeium 2 (for the obscurities of Plato).

³⁵ Phaedrus 275. See further H. WILMS, EIKON: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Platonismus, Vol I (Münster 1935) 1–34.

³⁶ As is clear from the discussion of the orders of knowledge and being at Rep. 477a–480a. See further J. ANNAS, An Introduction to Plato's *Republic* (Cambridge 1981) 190–216.

³⁷ See M. HIRSCHLE, Sprachphilosophie und Namenmagie im Neuplatonismus, Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie 96 (Meisenheim 1979) 4–35.

³⁸ See Phaedrus 276 and Timaeus 41; J. DERRIDA, Disseminations (Eng. trans. Chicago 1981) 160–163.

³⁹ For allusions to this recurrent term in Homer see Cratylus 391e–392a.

reject both principles: argument is waived in favour of “hissings and incantations” (Enn. 2.9.14.5-6), and the works of Plato and Homer are superseded by unknowns. Porphyry (Vita Plotini 16) supplies their names: Allogenes, Messos, Nicotheus, Zostrianus and the spurious Zoroaster⁴⁰. The superficial justice of these charges is confirmed by Coptic texts, the Zostrianus and Allogenes, which are wholly revelatory in character and abound in strings of lettering⁴¹, as senseless and haphazard as those which punctuate the magical papyri, with the same intent of proving that the visionary, unlike the mere philosopher, has already acquired the language of the gods.

Just as matter does not support a natural theology for the Gnostics, so the classics cannot point to truth. Porphyry, as we have seen, allows that wisdom may be embodied either in books or in the artefacts that the books describe: the ancients wrote in stone as well as paper and in artefacts as easily as in words. It is therefore not surprising that perception within the cave should be dependent on the skill of the perceiver (De Antro 65.6–8): “But to souls who are being perfected in nature and to natal demons the cosmos is holy and lovely, though dark and misty.”

The Gnostics would have scoffed at Porphyry’s sharing his interpretative privilege with the demons. For Neoplatonism the natal demon is the minister to whom the soul must pay its debts for the wrongs of previous lives⁴². According to Plotinus he is the ruler of a star and the custodian of a person’s higher self (Enn. 3.4). The Gnostics, we are told, malign the stars with “a tragedy of terrors” (Enn. 2.9.13.7), and no doubt they would have ranked the natal demon with those planetary archons whom their “hissings and incantations” put to flight (Enn. 2.9.14.5–6 above). For seekers who desired an immediate audience with the Godhead, there was no work for the lesser deities, just as there was no authority in the human word.

Vision is the favoured metaphor in Platonism for the intellection of form behind phenomena⁴³. Homer, in a parenthesis that Porphyry does not mention, says that the cave is *θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι*, a marvel to behold⁴⁴. There was indeed no need to quote a phrase that was the keynote of his treatise, which interprets the cave primarily as an object before the mind. Our previous discussion shows it to

⁴⁰ On the identification of these, see now M. J. EDWARDS (1990) and H. M. JACKSON (1990), cited in n. 3 supra.

⁴¹ See Zostrianus (Nag Hammadi Codex 8.1) 52.17, 118.20 and 127.1–5 and the list of names at Allogenes (NHC 11.3) 54.17–22. These appear as ROBINSON (n. 8 supra) 417, 427, 429, 495. On the magical import of Hebrew names see Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.45; on the power of meaningless names see [Iamblichus], *De Mysteriis* 7.4–5.

⁴² See Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 9, and M. J. EDWARDS, *Two Images of Pythagoras*, in H. J. BLUMENTHAL and E. G. CLARK (eds). *The Divine Iamblichus*, 164–165.

⁴³ See Rep. 507c–509b; E. KEULS, *Plato and Greek Painting* (Leiden 1978) 33–35.

⁴⁴ Though Od. 14.108 is cited at De Antro 55.9.

be, not only a landmark, but a means of patient access to a higher plane of vision; it is the mind and not the body that is said to penetrate its dark foundations, and the paradox for the senses, that the cave is at the same time dark and pleasant, is resolved for the intellect by its apprehension that the beauty of phenomena is always a simultaneous revelation and concealment of the forms.

The cave, according to Porphyry, is both fluid and hard (62.16–17: ἀντίτυπον καὶ ῥευστόν) . To the adjective ἀντίτυπος corresponds the noun ἀντιτυπία, which according to Plotinus is a catchword of the Gnostics (Enn. 2.9.6.1–2). Denoting both reflectiveness and solidity, the term is used by Platonists of things in the world, to imply that the forms are mirrored by the objects which they fail to penetrate⁴⁵. If we judge, however, by the terms that Plotinus cites as its congeners, this word in Gnostic speech has no application to the physical, but only to an ephemeral condition of the soul⁴⁶. For Porphyry the “antitypical” nature is in matter, and the soul is the recipient of eidola, which if rightly used will lead it back to knowledge (64.20); in Gnostic thought, the demiurge, the εἰδωλον of an εἰδωλον, is the child of an erring soul (Enn. 2.9.10.27, as above).

The cave, as the seat of mundane ἀντιτυπία, is a subject of cognition, transcended in the very act by which it is understood. The symbol of the desired illumination is the olive above the cave, which is for Porphyry the immediate goal of Odysseus’ approach (De Antro 80.8–9): “Therefore the seat beneath the olive is proper to him as the suppliant of the god”.

This god is Athena, patroness of wisdom, whose aid is as necessary to the reader as to the hero. On its first appearance, it is a symbol to the reader that an allegory is needed to elucidate the text (De Antro 57. 17–21): “The discussion of these obscurities is sufficient; the passage is not a fabrication (πλάσμα) to charm the soul, nor does it contain the description of a locality, but the poet is using it as the instrument of some allegory, mystically putting near it the olive plant.”

The clause about the olive is attached to the foregoing proposition in such a way as to suggest that it is intended as the proof of it; it is thus a sign to the reader about the nature of the text. Within the text, it is equally a sign that the cave is not the work of chance (De Antro 78.8–13): “It did not flourish there, as one might think, through some chance, but contains in itself the riddle of the cave. Since, then, the cosmos did not come into being at random or for no reason, but is the perfect work of divine forethought and intellectual nature, by the icon of the cosmos, the cave, has been planted the symbol of divine forethought – the olive.”

Since Homer did not write at hazard, he depicts a cave which was itself a work of providence and the image of a providential world. The olive functions therefore

⁴⁵ See M. J. EDWARDS, *The Gnostic Acuilinus: A Study in Platonism*, in *Studia Patristica* 24 (1993) 380, citing Damascius, *Vita Isidori* 154.11 WESTERMANN and [Iamblichus], *De Mysteriis* 217.14 PARTHEY.

⁴⁶ At Enn. 2.9.6.1 we find *metanoia* (repentance) and *paroikesis* (exile), the first of which must refer to the soul’s activity in salvation, the second to its present earthbound state.

as the lodestar of philosophy in two respects: in the quest for truth in nature, and in the derivation of meaning from a text. Perusal of a text can raise the mind from earth to heaven; but, since the text itself is among the earthly things, a parable of the mind's ascent from matter will also function as a metaphor for its sublimation of the written word.

Odysseus and the reader are both suppliants at the olive, but the latter at least must supplicate, not only Athena but his natal demon. To appease this god is not a work of hermeneutic subtlety, but of spiritual endeavour; or rather, there can be no separation of the two (De Antro 80.8–21): "The seat beneath the olive is also appropriate to him both as a suppliant to Athena and as one whose supplication appeases his natal demon. For one cannot be rid of this sensory life forthwith by blinding it [sc. as Odysseus blinded the Cyclops, son of Poseidon], and striving to be free at once. The one who attempts this is followed by the wrath of marine and material deities, who should first be appeased by sacrifices and beggars' toils and endurances, sometimes fighting the passions, sometimes charming and deceiving and adopting all changes towards them, in order that, stripped of one's rags, one may destroy them all; and not even thus be free from toils, but only when one is absolutely remote from the sea and ignorant of the works of sea and matter."

It may be observed that suicide, the means of emancipation which is rejected by this passage⁴⁷, was the course denied to Porphyry by his master, yet commended by the same man to the Gnostics: "If you are killed, you have what you wish, and if you complain, you are not compelled to go on being a citizen" (Enn. 2.9.9.16–17). The true escape is a training in philosophy, since to be a man of knowledge is to be a man of virtue; as Socrates declared, we cannot liberate the soul until we have turned its eye (Rep. 533d). Porphyry implies that moral progress is required to achieve the insight represented by the olive, for the suppliant must make his peace with the gods of the sea before he wins the favour of Athena. At the same time, he intimates, by putting the olive both at the beginning and at the end of his discussion, that knowledge must continue to increase as the condition for the pursuit and apprehension of the Good.

The Gnostics of Plotinus are wholly ignorant of this truth, and are caricatured as saying (Enn. 2.9.9.56–9): "You are a son of God, but the others, whom you admire, are not sons, nor have received from fathers what they honour, but you, without labour, are superior to the heavens."

Porphyry's method differs absolutely from the arrogant logomachy of the Gnostics, who believe, not in appeasing nature, but only in escaping it. They are so far from acknowledging the role of moral effort that the fact of initiation is enough, in their eyes, to make them already superior to the gods. The cave shows

⁴⁷ See Vita Plotini 11. with Enn. 1.9; F. CUMONT, *Comment Plotin detourna Porphyre de suicide*, R.E.G. 32 (1919) 113–120; R. GOULET, *Variations Romanesques sur la Melancolie de Porphyre*, *Hermes* 110 (1982) 443–457.

us that matter is eternally redeemable, that wisdom is a process of laborious discovery in which ancient hands direct the modern eye.

Porphry concludes with a comparison foreshadowed at the beginning of his study. The poet is like an artisan who causes amorphous matter to partake of truth as the cave partakes of form (De Antro 81.6–8): “For Homer could not have fabricated the whole theme without transforming the fabrication in the light of certain truths.” This sentence follows hard on his exhortation to ascend from the realm of matter to that of intellect. In the final sentence the cave itself is spoken of in terms that pertain to matter (81.9–10):

“As to the underlying (ὑποκειμένου) cave the work of interpretation finishes here.” The participle ὑποκειμένου signifies three things to a philosopher: the material substratum of existents, the subject of a treatise and the subject of a logical proposition. As Aristotle noted, this is not an accidental homonymy, for the subject of a treatise is its “matter”, by the converse of that metaphor which treats matter as the “subject” of a form (Eth. Nich. 1094b12, 1098a28). For Porphyry the meaning on the surface of a text is always open to discerning transformation, since it is, like any icon, both symbolic of and other than the truth that it mediates. If he did not compose it for the Gnostics, he composed this work for anyone who did not yet know that reading is an essay in the improvement of the self⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ The research for this paper was funded by a British Academy Post-Doctoral Fellowship, held at New College Oxford from 1992 to 1993.



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Socrates and the early Church

Nothing, 'with one exception', said the Reverend Benjamin Jowett, sometime Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, resembles the death of Socrates in Plato.¹ This judgment, we may say, speaks once for his cloth and once for his gown; but no such prejudice can have induced the cosmopolitan George Steiner to observe that our 'moral and intellectual history' is characterized by two deaths, each of which is preceded by a famous supper.² Nor did it seem whimsical to C.K. Barrett, the soberest of all commentators on the Gospel of John, to compare the saying of Christ, 'I will not leave you as orphans', with *Phaedo* 116a: 'we were now to spend the rest of our lives as orphans'.³ It is of course unlikely that the Evangelist was acquainted with the *Phaedo* at first-hand; later Christians were, and they lost no time in deriving the obvious lesson from this martyrdom of which the pagan world had long repented. As we shall see, however, these admirers found in Socrates no doctrine to be baptized, no character to be imitated: his aporetic manner was of necessity less serviceable to Christian apologetic than the apodictic style of the interlocutors in Plato's later writings. If there were Christian Platonists but no Christian Socratics prior to Kierkegaard, the reason is that Plato shed the precious dew of antiquity on the Gospel, whereas his master seemed to have opened up a luminous void behind the clouds of faith.

The early Christian estimate of Socrates

This neglect of the living Socrates would be more remarkable had Christianity been initially, as certain scholars now contend, a Cynic movement born of the intercourse between Greeks and Jews in Roman Galilee.⁴ The theory presupposes, against the archaeological evidence, that

¹ Jowett 1892, 194.

² Steiner 1996, 391–2 and 399.

³ Barrett 1955, 387.

⁴ See e.g. Downing 1992.

such towns as Nazareth, Cana and Capernaum had been penetrated as deeply by Greek culture as the cities of the Mediterranean seaboard; it decrees that the cultic elements in Christian thought – the Lordship of Christ, the resurrection, the Second Coming – are increments to a primitive deposit of ethical teaching which has curiously failed to survive without these cultic elements; it requires us to believe that an obscure convict, who had never claimed divinity, was deified by stages against all precedent, until (in contrast to Caesar or Alexander) he came to be regarded by his votaries as the sole God. And even then, the Christians of this fantasy are not Cynics: the Cynic is a solitary, not a sectarian, austere to himself and formidable to others, cultivating a self-sufficient kingship rather than praying for membership in the kingdom of God. Lucian, the pagan satirist, hints at a parallel between the two philosophies only to demonstrate that one is a corruption of the other; in his *Runaways* he belittles the suicide of Peregrinus, a Cynic turned Christian, as a meretricious parody of Socratic fortitude. Malice prompted second-century clerics to liken the celibate and vegetarian Tatian (fl. 170) to the Cynics, one of whom, Crescens, had denounced his master Justin (d. 165) to the Romans;⁵ it was only in the fourth century, when asceticism became an institution of the Church, that a less invidious model came to Jerome's mind. Writing against the libertine Jovinian, he preserves an otherwise forgotten anecdote that Antisthenes, the father of Cynicism, had exclaimed on coming into the school of Socrates that here at last was the man whom he had sought (*Against Jovinian* 2.14.34).

Apologists of the second century tolerated philosophy only when it seemed to confirm a Christian doctrine. Justin, for example, commended Socrates as a champion of reason or 'true *logos*' (*1Apology* 5.4), yet did not credit him with knowledge of *the* Logos, as though he had apprehended the truth contained in Christ the Word of God. His service to humanity was to unmask the demons (5.4), not to reveal the Gospel.⁶ One good saying can be attributed to him – that we ought not to honour a man above the truth⁷ – but if, with Heraclitus and the sages of barbarous nations, he can be reckoned as a Christian before Christ (*1Apology* 46.3), it is because, like other Greeks, he employed his reason upon the teaching of the prophets (*1Apology* 44–45). Christians, who have incurred a similar charge of atheism (*2Apology* 10) are more worthy of an audience, for they excel all these in knowledge of God.

⁵ Tatian, *Oration to the Greeks* 19.1 imputes to Crescens the pederasty and dissimulated avarice for which Socrates had been ridiculed; but his own reference to the false accusation of Socrates at 3.3 is little more than an echo of Justin.

⁶ For Justin, as for other Christians, demons are fallen angels whose design is to corrupt mankind by claiming the worship due to god alone; if their cults occasionally resemble that of Christ, this is because, before their fall, they received an adumbration of the Gospel.

⁷ *2Apology* 3.6, a vague citation of *Republic* 595c. Justin himself purports to have been taught by a 'Socratic' at *Dialogue with Trypho* 1.2.

The example of pagan martyrdom was none the less too valuable to be cast aside for a quibble. Athenagoras (fl. 170) mentions Socrates, in Aristotelian fashion, as a token man, foredoomed to death like others,⁸ but later in his apology the same death is adduced as a palmary instance of the malice which the pagan world has shown to its own physicians. Tertullian (c. 160–c.240) is willing to admire the retort of Socrates when his friends bemoaned the injustice of his sentence: ‘would you rather that it was just?’ At the same time, he insists that there is no merit in a studied equanimity which is acquired under the tutelage of a daemon, and no ground for confidence in immortality without the guidance of the Holy Spirit (*On the Soul* 1.3–6). Tertullian returns to the death of Socrates in his bellicose *Apology*, at one point mocking the Greeks who put to death their benefactor and at another casting in their teeth his reputation as a corrupter of the young (*Apology* 46). He cites the philosopher’s curious oaths to show that he was guilty of the other charge – the introduction to Athens of ‘new deities’⁹ – and declines to enrol his daemon among the gods because the man himself professed no knowledge of them.¹⁰ If he none the less vowed a cock to Aesculapius on his deathbed, that is evidence only of his inconsistency: how fatuous of Apollo to praise this sceptic as the wisest of mankind!¹¹

Hippolytus of Rome (d. ?235), a heresiologist who fathered on Greek philosophy every Christian speculation that offended him, knows nothing of Socrates but that he was a pupil of Archelaus the Pythagorean, and departed from his master by putting ethics at the centre of his teaching (*Refutation* 1.5, 1.10, 1.17). A rubric to his brief notice of Hermogenes, which asserts that ‘Socratic’ reasonings led this heretic to maintain the coeternity of matter and God,¹² may come from a different hand. In Alexandria Socrates reaped some benefit from the high reputation of Plato. Clement (fl. 200) pays a tacit compliment to his fellow-Athenian by omitting him from the *Protrepticus*, where philosophers are arraigned for their hypocritical collusion with the errors of the herd. In the *Stromateis*, where Clement sets out to reconcile philosophy with faith, he appears more often – as the mentor of Antisthenes and Plato, as the tutor of all the Greeks, and as a paragon of virtuous

⁸ *Embassy* 8.2; cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 981a and 983b, with Hippolytus, *Refutation* 7.18. The name of Socrates is replaced by that of the biblical characters Peter, James and John in the logical discourses of the Cappadocian Fathers: Basil, *Letter 38*; Gregory of Nyssa, *That there are not Three Gods*; Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 31.19.

⁹ *Apology* 14; cf. *Against the Nations* 1.10.42. In Gregory of Nyssa’s paraphrase of Acts 17.18, the charge against Paul is that he introduced new daemons to Athens (*Against Eunomius* 3.163).

¹⁰ On his ignorance of the gods cf. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 13 and 19.

¹¹ *Apology* 46; cf. *Against the Nations* 2.12. At *Apology* 11 he opines that, if fame speaks true, Socrates was wiser than the gods.

¹² *Refutation*, proem to Book 8.

frugality.¹³ A number of aphorisms from the dialogues are attributed to him simply as Plato's mouthpiece,¹⁴ but a personal estimate seems to be implied in the quotation of the sayings which imply that death is the goal, though not the end, of our present life.¹⁵ Lengthy quotations are drawn from *Phaedo* 69c–d on the distinction between true bacchantes and those who merely bear the wand, and from *Alcibiades* 109e, on our duty to seek the good.¹⁶ The *Crito* too is cited with approval for its testimony to life after death, and when Socrates is made to declare that the law is not for the righteous or that God created the world, we see that Clement is out to make him an apostle. Prophet he cannot be, because the last of these discoveries is said to have been filched from the book of Genesis.¹⁷ Among his other tutors Clement numbers Archelaus and Aspasia, and he clearly shared the opinion of contemporary Platonists, that Pythagoras was at once the deeper mind and the teacher of a nobler way.¹⁸ The higher praise however, belongs to Christ, because he did not transmit his philosophy through an esoteric catena of disciples but proclaimed it to the world.

Clement speaks both knowledgeably and tolerantly of Socrates' *daimon*, almost characterizing him as a guardian angel;¹⁹ on the other hand the Christian who gives his name to the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix (fl. ?180) ridicules the 'buffoon who had to confess that he knew nothing, though he pretended to be familiar with a demon' (*Octavius* 38; cf. 26). Thus Octavius rebuts the sophistry of his friend Caecilian, who keeps up the religion of his fathers because he sees no grounds for a natural theology, and regards the fate of such a man as Socrates as a proof that heaven is blind to our affairs.²⁰ 'Xenophon the Socratic' is also cited as a witness to human ignorance of the

¹³ *Stromateis* 1.14.63.2 on Antisthenes; 6.2.5 on the debt of the Greeks to him; 2.20.120.5 on his abstinence.

¹⁴ E.g. *Stromateis* 5.14.95.3 cites *Phaedrus* 255b (good attracts good); 5.14.97.2 cites *Theaetetus* 188e and *Phaedrus* 279b on the comeliness of the inner man. He does not pause to censure the polytheism of the last quotation, and he finds a presentiment of the incarnation at *Sophist* 216a–b where the man who discerns the truth about god is said to be himself a visible divinity. One Socratic dictum – that the just man is always the happy man – is taken from Cleanthes: *Stromateis* 2.21.131.3.

¹⁵ *Stromateis* 5.10.67.2, citing *Phaedo* 65e on philosophy as a preparation for death; 3.3.21.1, citing *Gorgias* 492 for the maxim that death is a kind of sleep.

¹⁶ *Stromateis* 3.16–17.

¹⁷ *Stromateis* 5.1.14.1, citing *Crito* 48b; 4.3.10.1, fusing *Republic* 443c with 1 Timothy 1.9; 5.14.99.3 on creation.

¹⁸ See *Stromateis* 4.19.122 on Aspasia (cf. Plutarch, *Pericles* 24); 1.14.63.2 on Archelaus (cf. Diog. Laert. 2.16).

¹⁹ *Stromateis* 5.14.91.4. Quoting the *Theages* at *Stromateis* 1.21.133.3, he also remarks at *Stromateis* 1.17.83.4 that the daemon seldom spoke except to countermand an erroneous resolution. At 1.4.53.3 he notes that the daemon was also known to Isidorus, a disciple of the heresiarch Basilides.

²⁰ *Octavius* 5; cf. Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis* 1.8–9 on the invincibility of the stars.

gods (19); Octavius replies by quoting Socrates' dictum in the *Memorabilia* that we know God through his effects though not by direct observation, just as we see by light although our eyes are too weak to contemplate the sun.²¹

Origen (c.185–c.254), in answering the real polemic of Celsus, has little use for Socrates except now and then as an *argumentum ad hominem*. Thus it can be no crime to change religion when Socrates not only taught himself to pursue the good but rescued Phaedo from a brothel.²² The discords of the Church are not an argument against Christ, for Socrates too inspired a number of warring schools (*Against Celsus* 3.13). His fame too makes him useful in a *reductio ad absurdum*: having once amused himself at the expense of the Stoics with the speculation that Socrates in another world will philosophize again, be married again to Xanthippe and come to trial again before the same accusers, Origen later improves on the jest by adding in the philosopher's genealogy and a more circumstantial account of the process against him.²³ To Celsus, however, Socrates was the antitype to the pusillanimous Christians of his day, who preached in secret, and to Christ himself, who could not foresee his own death. Against the first charge Origen retorts that Socrates' followers did not suffer persecution (1.13); the second rebounds, as Socrates' case proves only that a man who foresees his death may still elect not to evade it (2.17). As Celsus is (or at least appears at times to be) a Platonist, the argument of Caecilian in Minucius is inverted: since the death of Socrates does not tell against the providential government of the universe, neither does that of Christ (2.41). Socrates himself perceived that the intellect is more precious than the body, so that what befalls the latter is truly neither good nor evil.²⁴ For all that, Origen does not join Celsus in his high estimate of Socrates, maintaining that a man who was truly wise would not have praised the tragic poets and that it was probably not his wisdom but his offerings that commended him to 'Apollo and other daemons'.²⁵ This calumny is no doubt intended to strike at the daemon of Socrates, just as an innuendo against the doctrine of transmigration is conveyed in Origen's argument that if God did not make the world for human beings, then even Socrates, Plato, Pherecydes and Pythagoras are of less account than brutes (*Against Celsus* 4.97).

Christians of the fourth century, who had witnessed persecution under the tetrarchs, showed a pardonable hostility towards many Greek

²¹ *Octavius* 13 and 32, the latter drawing on to Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 4.7.7.

²² *Against Celsus* 3.57, 1.64 (cf. Diog. Laert. 2.31).

²³ *Against Celsus* 4.67, 4.68, 5.20.

²⁴ *Against Celsus* 4.62, adducing *Theaetetus* 176a as a source for Celsus; 4.59 on the insignificance of the corpse after Socrates' death; 3.25 contrasting the intellectual virtue of Socrates with the prowess of a boxer.

²⁵ *Against Celsus* 7.6; contrast Celsus himself at 6.12. At 1.9 Origen scoffs that the lofty reasoning of the *Phaedo* is debased by the trivial sacrifice of a cock.

philosophers. The scepticism of Socrates was easily turned into a logical pillory. Constantine belittles him as a charlatan who trifled with contradictions and ‘made the worse argument the better’.²⁶ Arnobius (d. 327) is pleased to observe that Socrates was no admirer of Homer, and derives the usual profit from the fact that the Athenians repented of his death; he derives even more from Socrates’ confession in the *Phaedrus* that he is ignorant of his own nature.²⁷ Lactantius (c. 250–c.325) pursues the case against scepticism, caricaturing Socrates as one who knew nothing except that he knew nothing (*Epitome of Divine Institutes* 32).²⁸ Jerome (c. 340–420) when he helped to make this taunt a Christian commonplace, was no doubt aware that it was derived from Plato’s *Apology* (*Letter* 53.3). Elsewhere he admires the frugality of Socrates and his deft reply when his wife Xanthippe doused him from a chamber-pot: ‘I knew that such a shower would bring on rain’ (*Against Jovinian* 2.14, 1.48). Yet here his aim is to illustrate the turpitude of women, and, while he can tax the Greeks with having put to death their own teacher, he can also reproach them for making an idol of Socrates and other mortal sages.²⁹ Augustine’s friend Orosius (fl. 410) enrols the death of Socrates in a catalogue of pagan misdemeanours designed to prove that the world was full of evils long before there were Christians to blame (*History* 2.17.16).

Greek authors give more proof of having read the works of Socrates’ disciples. Eusebius (c. 260–339) extols him as the ‘wisest’ and ‘most reverend of the Greeks’.³⁰ On his own account he says little else, but enjoys the excerptor’s privilege of angling in all waters. He applauds when Xenophon’s Socrates upbraids those who neglect the study of man in pursuit of more abstruse discoveries, but commends the Indian visitor who warns Socrates that without a knowledge of things divine we are ignorant of things human.³¹ He suspects, with Clement, that Socrates’ daemon was a guardian angel; and is willing to repeat, through Alexander of Aphrodisias, the anecdote in which Socrates allows Zopyrus to decipher the marks of a lustful disposition in his face.³² If Socrates was a monotheist, Eusebius thinks this not so meritorious when, like his master Pythagoras, he received this truth from Moses.³³

²⁶ Oration to the Saints 9; cf. *Apology* 18b and the allusion to Aristophanes’ *Clouds* at Diog. Laert. 2.20.

²⁷ *Against the Nations* 5.38 on Homer; 1.40 on the execution; 2.7.1 citing *Phaedrus* 230.

²⁸ Cf. Milton, *Paradise Regained* 4.294.

²⁹ *Letters* 57.12; *Against the Pelagians* 3.1. *Letter* 49.13 contrasts the doubting Socratics unfavourably with the Christian apologists.

³⁰ *Gospel Preparation* 15.61.12; 1.8.19, following quotation of *Phaedo* 96b-c.

³¹ *Preparation* 15.62.1-6, quoting Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.11–16; 11.3.8, quoting Aristoxenus by way of Aristocles.

³² *Preparation* 13.13.6, quoting Clement (above); 6.9.22, quoting Alexander, *On Fate* 6.

³³ See especially preparation 13.12.4, citing the Jewish apologist Aristobulus.

Eusebius' younger contemporary, Athanasius (c. 298–373), denounced Socrates as an idolater, sneering that he had gone down to the Piraeus to worship a human figure of Artemis in the company of Plato (*Against the Nations* 1.10). Perhaps he meant that Plato became an accomplice in the act by writing of it; perhaps he meant to imply that the Thracian Bendis was the Artemis of Taurica; above all, as we have said, he meant to sneer.³⁴

The tract by Augustine (354–430) *Against the Academics*, the fruit of his youthful dalliance with Platonism, attempts to catch the sceptic in his own meshes. Of Socrates, however, he can speak generously in *The City of God*, applauding his conversion of philosophy to moral ends and crediting him with the 'elegant and polished' style that distinguishes his most illustrious pupil.³⁵ Neither the works of Plato nor the hypothetical writings of his master have been laid under contribution in the subsequent assault on the demonology of Augustine's fellow-African Apuleius. Augustine wields a fork with which he hopes to spear either Apuleius or Plato – the former, if he is confesses that the benign companion of Socrates was after all no daemon, the latter if he is found to have shown superstitious reverence to a being who lacked the properties of God. Thus Christian logic sets one Platonist against another: in the sixth century Cassiodorus hit upon a shorter way, declaring that the sage who had almost passed for a god with Plato had been proved to be all too human in Porphyry's *History of Philosophy (Tripartite History* 7.2). Another compiler, Claudius Mamertius, is not ashamed to summon Plato's Socrates as a witness to the incorporeality of the soul (*On the Soul* 2.7); but this confirms the general rule that for early Christians Socrates was either a broken reed in the enemy's hands or a sword in theirs.

The Socratic antidote to scepticism

Whence did the early Christians derive their knowledge of Socrates? Those who were content to rehearse stock anecdotes will scarcely have known themselves where they overheard them. Even when the name of a Socratic dialogue is correctly cited – even when the author is able to reproduce an exchange of several lines, as Clement once does³⁶ – it is possible that the source is a florilegium. As Daniélou noticed, Christian authors are so prone to adduce the same passages from Plato that they cannot all have lighted upon them independently.³⁷ At the same time, we must not be too incredulous, for every scholar can witness that it is possible to read a text

³⁴ Michael Trapp suggests to me that Plato has been confused with his brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus.

³⁵ See *City of God* 8.3 on Socrates, 8.13 on Apuleius. Jerome, *Against Rufinus* 3.40 also attributes elegance and wit to Socrates, though as a speaker in Plato's dialogues.

³⁶ *Stromateis* 3.17, citing *Alcibiades* 109c.

³⁷ Daniélou 1973, 108–7–28.

entire and yet remember little of it but what everyone else remembers. The best proof of acquaintance with a classic, in antiquity at least, was not the word-for-word repetition of its contents but the imitation of its style and spirit in one's own writings.³⁸ In the later Roman world the Socratic dialogue was less favoured than the speech or exchange of speeches as an instrument of persuasion; nevertheless it served in Lucian's hands as a caustic solvent to the pretensions of all philosophy,³⁹ and its value for this end was recognized in the first five centuries by the most erudite defenders of the church.

Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* is for the most part not Socratic but an example of the later Platonic mode, in which the principal speaker expounds his own opinions with only occasional prompting or objection from other parties. Even at his most refractory, Trypho is more disposed to ask a question than to take up an opposing role, and Justin therefore never has occasion to perform a full elenchus. Socratic interrogation is, however, the means of his own conversion as he describes it in chapters 3–7. First his interlocutor establishes that science (*epistēmē*) is the source of knowledge, next that there is knowledge that comes by discipline and knowledge by observation, then that God is an object visible only to the intellect. 'What power in the intellect enables it to perceive him?', he asks, and Justin replies with a paraphrase of Plato on the affinity between the soul and the Good for which it yearns. The other proves, with a touch of *epagôgê*, that the possession of a soul does not distinguish us from animals to whom God remains invisible, and that, since they commit no sins, their souls cannot be translated into other bodies. As to the immortality of the soul, that is incompatible with the mortality of the cosmos: is the cosmos, then, contingent or eternal? It is contingent (*gennētos*) Justin answers, and so his questioner triumphs easily. Justin tries to resurrect the argument from the *Phaedo* that the soul, being life, is incapable of death, but now his opponent demonstrates by Aristotelian arguments that the soul is not so much life as a partaker in life, and therefore may be separated from it as easily as any substance from an inessential property. The duel has proved, if nothing else, that a Platonist is no match for a Socratic when the Platonist has no weapon but his book.

The outcome is, however, a Pyrrhic victory for the dialectical method. Justin's discomfiture forces him to agree with his assailant that philosophy can impart no certain knowledge of divine things, and that consequently it is vain to seek such truth in another source than God's own revelation. No book but the Scripture even pretends to offer this, the old man declares, and

³⁸ Thus Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 3.4.38, avows the Socratic aim of winning the man, not merely the debate.

³⁹ See e.g. *Hermotimus*. Basil, *Letter* 135. 1 admires the agility with which Plato explodes the pretensions of Thrasymachus, Hippias and Protagoras.

forthwith Justin is a convert. We may contrast the tenor of Plato's *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates exploits the versatility of living speech to illustrate the helplessness of writing when it leaves the hand of its author; Justin, on the other and, wrote his dialogue to expose the insufficiency of reason, and concluded that when our disputations fail we must seek the answer in the unchanging word of God.

Yet, as Trypho proves by his intermittent stubbornness, the Scriptures do not say the same thing to all readers. In the third century it was common practice to bring a heterodox interpreter before an assembly of bishops, who would co-opt a learned champion – most often, it seems, a presbyter – to vanquish him in open controversy. Origen was the most celebrated deputy of the Church on these occasions – not unnaturally, as his panegyrist Gregory Thaumaturgus (fl. 310)⁴⁰ says that he used to teach his own disciples in the Socratic manner (Gregory Thaumaturgus, *In Praise of Origen* 97). In the one remaining specimen of his prowess, the *Dialogue with Heraclides*, he generally proves his case by fluent paraphrase of scripture, but can now and then devise a chain of questions to force the truth from a reluctant adversary.⁴¹ God and the soul are here the principal topics, and one might say that with such themes it requires some effort not to imitate Socrates. It is, however, a question of physics – germane to, but not raised in the *Timaeus* – which affords the pretext for another dialogue ascribed to Origen in the *Philokalia*, a posthumous anthology of extracts from his writings. Other versions of it are ascribed to Bishop Methodius of Olympia and to a certain Adamantius, unknown elsewhere unless his name is a sobriquet for Origen;⁴² whoever the author may have been, no pagan or Christian essay in this vein would have been more worthy of Plato's master. Maximus, the defendant, holds that matter coexisted independently with God before creation. The orthodox speaker first requires a definition of matter, and once it is discovered to be a bare substrate, potentially a receptacle of all qualities but intrinsically the bearer of none, it is easy enough to elicit the admission that a subject to which no predicates appertain is not a thing and hence is nothing, an empty postulate that circumscribes the omnipotence of God.

An argument of this kind was undoubtedly familiar to Origen, though since he does not profess to have invented it, his testimony does not prove him to be the author of this dialogue.⁴³ That Methodius (fl. 300), a later and less philosophical writer, should have been the Bishop Berkeley of his times may seem unlikely, but he was certainly the Plato of his times, to judge by

⁴⁰ Rizzi 2002, 105–7 suggests that the disclaimer of eloquence in the opening paragraph is modelled on Plato, *Apology* 17a. As Rizzi's title indicates, the authorship of the eulogy is not beyond dispute.

⁴¹ See Daly 1992.

⁴² See *Philokalia* 24, with Robinson 1893, xl–xlix.

⁴³ See Origen, *First Principles* 4.7.7.

the skilful imitation of the latter's style in his own *Symposium*. The topic of this work is love, though not, as in its Platonic namesake, the love of one human being for another or even the love of the soul for beauty, but the consecration of all our mortal appetites to God. The purpose of Methodius is to show that only virgins can accomplish this, and he clearly means the palm to be awarded to the eighth of his ten speeches, in which Thecla, the heroine of an early legend, unites the eloquence of Socrates with the insight of the celibate Diotima. Christian sobriety of course permits no homoerotic bonds between the diners, no carousing after midnight, no latecoming Alcibiades to turn comedy into burlesque. As speech follows speech with hieratic stateliness, there is no opportunity even for the occasional thrust and parry which enlivens Plato's feast.

By contrast, in the era of Christian humanism which dawned with Constantine, even the ludic elements in Plato could be emulated. Where Socrates in the *Symposium* asked the prophetess Diotima 'what is love?', so Gregory of Nyssa (fl. 370), in his dialogue *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, inquires of his sister Macrina 'what is soul'?⁴⁴ He receives the reply that soul is a living essence, which is capable of imparting life and motion to the body; Gregory, like Plato,⁴⁵ gives his teaching on the soul in apodictic fashion, no doubt because neither felt that he could afford to surrender this hypothesis. Yet up Augustine's time it was permissible for a Christian to maintain that soul is a body or at least that it is transmitted in the seed. To justify his own belief in its incorporeality, he resorts, like Socrates in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*, to geometry in the dialectic mode:

Augustine: You also see this, if I am not mistaken – that breadth can be divided everywhere, whereas a line cannot be divided along its length.

Ennodius: That is evident.

Augustine: And which then do you rate more highly, that which can be divided or that which cannot be divided?

Ennodius: Certainly that which cannot be divided.

Augustine: In that case you prefer the line to its breadth. For if that which cannot be divided is preferable, that which admits of least division is also to be preferred. Now whereas breadth can be divided everywhere, length cannot be divided except transversely, for it admits of no division along its length. Therefore it is superior to the breadth. Or do you think otherwise?

Ennodius: Reason compels me to accept what you say without hesitation

(*On the Magnitude of the Soul* 11.17).

And now it is easily shown that any magnitude or dimension would detract from the nobility of the soul (13.22). Nevertheless, though Augustine's early

⁴⁴ See Moore 1892, 433. Macrina derives her insight partly from native wit, and partly from an illness which has attenuated the bonds between soul and body.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Phaedrus* 245c, and for Diotima's teaching on love *Symposium* 202d.

writings abound in passages of this kind, each proves as surely as the last that his precursor in this genre was not Plato, whom he barely knew, but Cicero, a Socratic at one remove. Where Cicero has two speakers, as in the *Tusculan Disputations*, one is consciously the master and the other a willing foil. Only in the 'symposiastic' dialogues does the number of interlocutors rise to three, and, as their polished speeches are seldom interrupted, there is never a clear admission of defeat. Augustine favours the elenctic dialogue, yet, like Cicero, is least aporetic when he is most Socratic: as orator or as preacher, his aim was not to sustain an argument but to produce conviction. In the same spirit Jerome assumes the magisterial role when he disputes with the Luciferians and Pelagians. Infallibility is guaranteed to Dame Philosophy, the dominant interlocutor in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*:⁴⁶ even when a Christian is not writing as a Christian he retains the dogmatic mentality, and sees no profit in arguing on both sides of a case.

Two versions of *erôs*

As we have seen, the Christian could affect the gait of a sceptic in the lands that had been farmed already by heresy and philosophy; for the arduous and hitherto pathless hinterland of faith he had been furnished with winged sandals by the scriptures. The doubting Socrates lay even further in his wake than the doctrinaire Platonism which he had learned to see as an insolent plagiarism from the scriptures. One trait of Plato's Socrates, however, Christians may have been better equipped to understand than many Platonists of their own day, for the gospels showed them that the only true relationship between teacher and disciple is one of love. God himself is love (1 John 4.8), and it is the paradigmatic love between Father and Son, enabling each to discern the other in his fullness, which makes it possible for the mystery of godliness to be imparted or revealed on earth (John 5.20 etc.). The bridal imagery of the Song of Songs was preserved from blasphemy by being made to prefigure the mutual yearning of the soul and her Redeemer; *erôs* was considered the least misleading term for this because although it connotes intensity of desire it also hints that this desire is a mortal passion, sanctified only by the condescension of the omnipotent God. Friendship, on the other hand – the reciprocation of intimacy which only the original apostles can be said to have enjoyed with Christ – appears to be *agapê* or charity under a different name.⁴⁷ So it is in the Gospel ascribed to John; so too perhaps in the letters of Ignatius, an early martyr, who said of Christ 'my

⁴⁶ Boethius likens his own captivity to that of Socrates at *Consolation* 1.3.6 and 9 and at 4.19, but, in contrast to the Socrates of the *Phaedo*, he never has occasion to cross-examine his interlocutor.

⁴⁷ A point that receives less notice than it deserves in the classic work of Nygren 1932–8. For criticism of Nygren and bibliography see Osborn 1994.

erôs is crucified', while he praised the bishops and deacons of the Church as 'types' or earthly representatives of this sacrificial love.⁴⁸

The aim of the Christian minister was to work upon the souls of those who heard him in such a way as to augment and purify their love of God. In the same way Plato's Socrates woos his audience with the wiles of an enamoured sophist, knowing that the elevated passion that he inspires in *Lysis* and *Phaedrus* is not for him, even when his conquest in the dialogue is acknowledged by a blush (*Lysis* 222a–b). We may say that this is only an analogy, that teachers who had Christ for a living parable had no reason to borrow Socrates as a model at a time when even his countrymen were ashamed of his flirtations. That is true, but to say that Christian pedagogy is rooted in the example of the apostles and Christ is not to deny that Plato may have been the one who taught them to press the examples into service. Even when Greek philosophy does not contain the elements of a Christian doctrine, it may provide the catalyst without which it would not have been drawn out from the old deposit. So it was with Augustine, who had first to be convinced by Platonism of the incorporeality of God before he found it in the scriptures (*Confessions* 7.9); to adapt the simile of the *Theaetetus* (149a–151c), Plato acted as a midwife to the knowledge which emerged from the womb of scripture. It need not be an accident that those Christians who were celebrated as teachers, or who thought it worth their while to pen a treatise on education, were also the ones who demonstrate the greatest familiarity with Plato. We have already seen that Origen's performances corroborate the praise of his 'Socratic' manner in Gregory Thaumaturgus; the same encomiast tells us that he drew his pupils to him through the affections, not forgetting to present his warrant from scripture. The friendship of David and Jonathan, he argued, is an allegory of the love that knits the soul of the disciple to his master, and the archetype of this in turn is the incandescent love that joined the soul of Jesus to the eternal Word.⁴⁹

Platonists of this era were not amused by Alcibiades' fruitless courtship of Socrates in the *Symposium*,⁵⁰ but in the *First Alcibiades* they found a reversed and sublimated form of the same transaction. Here it is Socrates who makes the approach, and his discourse on love is calculated to wean the soul from the pleasures of the body. The ancients did not doubt the authenticity of this work, which came to serve as an introduction to a syllabus of Platonic dialogues. Our one surviving commentary, that of Proclus (412–85), is from the middle of the fifth century, but its premises can be traced by way of

⁴⁸ John 15.15 and 21.15–17; Ignatius, *Romans* 7, *Trallians* 3 etc.

⁴⁹ Gregory Thaumaturgus, *In Praise of Origen* 85, citing 1Samuel 18.1. Cf. Origen, *First Principles* 2.4.3–6; *Against Celsus* 2.9.

⁵⁰ Note e.g. the indignation of Plotinus when the *Symposium* was construed as an apology for homosexual love: Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 15.

Iamblichus (b. 245) to the founders of Neoplatonism, Porphyry (232–c. 305) and Plotinus (204/5–270). Socrates, in this commentary, is not only an exponent of sublime love in this dialogue, but a being of the same order as love himself. That is, he is a daemon, a guardian to the youth as in the *Timaeus*,⁵¹ but also a lover like the *erôs* of the *Symposium*; not, however, the vulgar or pandemic lover, vanquished by the beauty of his beloved, but the *theios* or divine one, himself a source of awe who turns the eye of the beloved upon himself until by self-examination he acquires the self-knowledge to rise from the life of the body to that of soul, then that of intellect, until finally he ascends to the supernal beauty from which the entire ‘erotic chain’ depends.⁵²

Proclus, unless Iamblichus pre-empted him, was the first Platonist to argue that the *erôs* of the *Symposium*, the yearning of the needy for the full, is not only mirrored but inspired by the affectionate condescension of plenty to poverty, the better to the worse. Socrates is a parable of this cosmic love, or rather an intermediary in the sequence of devolved powers by which the good compels all things in the present universe. Each of us has his daemon, who vouchsafes to us invisibly the assistance that is openly extended to Alcibiades by his mortal interlocutor; for us, however, this divine custodian must be sought within, as Plato hints when he says in the *Timaeus* that the gods have planted reason as a god in every soul. Socrates is appealing to this faculty in his pupil when he styles him, half-facetiously, a daemon, thus reminding Alcibiades that to know ourselves we must first know whence we come.⁵³

Augustine could not have read Proclus, but he breathed the air that nurtured him. His *Confessions*, like the *First Alcibiades* in the commentary of Proclus, is a comedy of two lovers, of whom one embodies plenitude, the other a misdirected love that is conscious of its poverty. If Augustine is saved and Alcibiades is not, the reason is – as the Indian said to Socrates in the anecdote reported by Eusebius – that we must know the divine to understand the human. The maxim ‘know thyself’ will not suffice, because our reason since the fall has been too weak to redeem the wisdom that was forfeited by Adam. This wisdom was God himself, and leaves its traces even now in his tainted image: everyone who completes an act of thought, be he pagan or Christian, is guided not by a daemon but by the unseen Word of God who abides within him.⁵⁴ Only this Word can restore the light of Eden to the benighted soul, and only by assuming a visible form so that the progeny of Adam ‘having forsaken God within them in their pride may find

⁵¹ *Timaeus* 90a, combined already with *Republic* 619 in Plotinus, *Ennead* 3.4.

⁵² See Segonds 1985–6, 21, 29 etc.

⁵³ Segonds 1985–6, 20–1.

⁵⁴ See especially *On the Teacher*.

him once again outside them in humility' (*On Free Will* 3.10.30). Where Socrates used words as an instrument of benign seduction, Christ himself is the embodied Word of God. And just as a word of human speech repeats itself in any concrete utterance, so Christ the Word is present in every word that the Spirit speaks of him;⁵⁵ the Gospel is to Christians now what the incarnation was to the first apostles. Its goal is love, its subject love, and love the test of a true interpretation.⁵⁶ When Christ displaces Socrates in the pedagogy of faith, we are delivered from that overweening confidence in ourselves which Socrates learned from the Delphic oracle; when we read the scriptures, we are not, as Socrates argues in the *Phaedrus*, letting a feeble substitute take the place of dialogue (*Phaedrus* 275d–276a), but imbibing the love that enables us to receive the God who made us in his image, and thus refining our self-love through that self-knowledge which the Socrates of the *Phaedrus* disavows.

Augustine and his Neoplatonic tutors ensured that the questing, diffident Socrates of the Sceptics would pass out of the Christian memory for a millennium. The Cynics were occasionally admired,⁵⁷ but the man from whom they claimed descent disappeared behind Plato, or, more often, behind the periphrasts of Plato. If it was not the pagan commentators but Ficino who rediscovered the portrait of Socrates in the Eros of the *Symposium*,⁵⁸ we need not doubt that Proclus had conspired with Augustine to quicken his understanding. By contrast, the humanists of the sixteenth century made a clear choice for the Bible over Plato, and in Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* the strategy of the *Symposium* is reversed. Now it is Folly, the allegorical mouthpiece, who invokes the historical Jesus as her prototype, thus implying that the satirist, not the monk, is his true disciple.⁵⁹ It is no surprise that Erasmus, as a connoisseur of both Jerome and Augustine, should have grasped the latent analogy between the Christ of the Gospels and the Socrates of the aporetic dialogues; it may be that an enduring sense of likeness between the two explains the tenacity with which the quest for the Socrates behind Plato has been pursued in modern times.

⁵⁵ See especially *On Christian Doctrine* 1.13.

⁵⁶ See *On Christian Doctrine*, esp. book 1.

⁵⁷ Boas 1948, 86–128.

⁵⁸ Ficino 1985, Speech VII, chapter 2.

⁵⁹ See Screech 1988.

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Origen's Platonism. Questions and Caveats

That Origen was a Platonist is still the first information that a student receives in a typical lecture on him¹. If the student knows as little as most theologians do about Plato and his progeny, this epithet becomes a Procrustean bed for all that is subsequently learned about Origen's doctrine or career – that he was born in Alexandria, for example, or held the oneness of God as an axiom, hard though it is to find any pagan Platonist of whom both these are true. The representation of early Christian thinkers as philosophers enables the discipline known as patristics to pass itself off as a branch of Classics, a far more respectable subject than theology; Classicists also gain by this transaction, as their claim to be the custodians of two languages that have shaped the mind of Europe is barely credible unless they can bring the Church within the orbit of their studies. In one respect, however, these parties differ. Classicists are apt to commend the Platonism of Origen and to lament his divagations from the original, which they generally assume to proceed from ignorance; theologians, who are conscious that Origen bears the stigma of heresy, blame his Platonism not only for those opinions which the Church condemned in 553, but also for any traits in him which they themselves condemn, including some that are common to all early Christian writers. And in fact it has been repeatedly urged by Protestant and liberal theologians that the orthodoxy of the ancient Church, no less than its heresies, is the fruit of a coy liaison with the Greek schools, whose pronouncements were always inimical to the Gospel of Christ, have never been intellectually coherent and are now regarded as anachronisms in the secular academy. While therefore the catholic, orthodox or oecumenical scholar treats Platonism as the peculiar

¹ Thus J.A. McGuckin (ed.), *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, *The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology*, Louisville (Kentucky) 2004, 5 note 32 asserts that he is “technically a Christian Middle Platonist”, though the sentence which this annotates asserts that he is “technically an eclectic in his own philosophic tradition”. Contrast P. Tzamalikos, *Origen. Philosophy of History and Eschatology*, *SVigChr* 85, Leiden 2007, 17: “the claim of Platonism in Origen appears so baffling that argument would be needed to establish not its incoherence, but its coherence”. I have defended a similar view in M.J. Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, *Ashgate studies in philosophy and theology in late antiquity*, Aldershot 2002, to which I refer at a number of points below to avoid duplication and prolixity.

vice of Origen and his retinue, the modernist replies that Origen's a priori reasoning and his fanciful permutations of the scriptures are peculiarly virulent symptoms of a general plague.

These theories have been maintained by some in spite of two developments that should have rendered them untenable. One is a more critical and dispassionate understanding of Platonism in late antiquity, a sort of unbaptizing which has rescued men like Plotinus and Proclus from their Christian dragomans and has shown that they not merely failed to embrace but conscientiously abhorred the Christian doctrines of creation, redemption, providence and the transcendent unity of a personal God. The other is a more liberal estimate of early Christian hermeneutics, which is now perceived to be not so much an arbitrary dethronement of the original sense in favour of their own doctrines as a disciplined effort to vindicate the canon by deriving an equal measure of edification from every verse. These trends, where they have been noticed, have not so much laid the old fallacies to rest as laid to rest scholarly discussion of the philosophy of Origen. The many works devoted to his exegesis seldom represent this as a philosophical enterprise, though they may parenthetically credit him with the importation of a few thoughts from Plato. Meanwhile those works which credit him with an ontology, a cosmology or a psychology that are not simply biblical or ecclesiastical have refined but not abandoned the traditional view that every thought that he entertained on such matters had been pre-empted by a Greek, most commonly Plato. This bifurcation in scholarship can be overcome if we acknowledge that exegesis and philosophy need not be at war, that Origen conceived his systematic and harmonious exposition of the scriptures as the substrate for a Christian philosophy which would match the pagan schools in scope and rigour without subscribing to the chimerical pretence of self-sufficiency.

In the following paper I hope to show first that borrowing and dependence are inadequate terms to characterize the relation between philosophy and theology in Origen, and then that his reflection on Christian axioms in the light of philosophical disputes concerning the provenance of the soul did not (as is often thought) confirm his adherence to Plato, but on the contrary led him at least far from any Greek norm as from the prevailing canons of orthodoxy in the Church.

Seven experiments with Greek philosophy

To begin, then: what relations, other than borrowing and dependence, could obtain between Christian literature and the philosophical schools of late antiquity? I propose to distinguish seven, though conflation and additions might be imagined and the taxonomy has no precedent in Origen or any Christian writer of antiquity. I begin with those that seem to me least characteristic of Origen, while the last two, the catalytic and dialectic,

receive the most detailed illustration because they were of most service to him in the construction of an autonomous philosophy.

1. Formal. Origen does not imitate any literary form from Plato, unless the compilers of the *Philocalia* were right to attribute to him a dialogue in the elenctic or Socratic mode, which purports to show that the notion of a material substrate, destitute of all qualities yet hospitable to all, gives rise to insoluble contradictions. The ascription of the same work to Bishop Methodius of Olympia flatters his talents, but in its favour it can at least be said that Methodius, who managed a fair pastiche of Plato's style in his dull *Symposium*, was the harbinger of a Christian humanism which prized the ancient not only as repertoires of knowledge but as models for imitation. Origen, by contrast, cultivates literary forms unknown to the classical tradition, fearing perhaps that to ape these self-reliant thinkers in externals would be to put abroad the notion that there are other means of seeking God than those disclosed to his prophets and apostles.

2. Obsequious. The use of philosophy may be deemed obsequious when a tenet is accepted, without inquiry or reflection one one's own account, because it enjoys the patronage of a great name. There is something of this in the mediaeval deference to Aristotle, a great deal more in the writings of those moderns who assume that those who live after Freud and Wittgenstein must think like Freud and Wittgenstein, whatever the Gospel might say to the contrary. There is little of it in early Christian writers, least of all in Origen: his references to Plato in the *Contra Celsum* are frequent enough to indicate some esteem for his philosophy, but the praise is always tempered and the criticisms invariably presuppose the superior authority of the scriptures. For all that, there are passages in which he seems, without naming him, to take Plato's side on a question that continued to divide the pagan schools. Platonists, Aristotelians and Stoics had come to no consensus in the identification of cardinal virtues, but the same four whose priority is assumed to be axiomatic in the *Respublica* of Plato – wisdom, courage, temperance and justice – furnish the scaffolding for the early chapters of Origen's *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*. Wisdom, according to Plato, is the virtue of the reasoning faculty, courage of spirit or θυμός, temperance of the desiderative or epithumetic element, and justice of the entire soul in which spirit and desire are duly subordinate to reason². While Origen does not embrace this scheme in its entirety, he subscribes to this threefold anatomy of the inner man. Yet it is one thing to be a Platonist in psychology – a topic on which, as Origen himself avers, the apostles left few teachings³ – and another to read the articles of faith through an alien lens. When Origen plots the stages of deliverance from the mortal sphere, or finds in the human composite a

² Pl., R. 449e; Pl., Phdr. 246a-b.

³ Or., princ. I praefatio 5.

model for his polyphonic interpretation of scripture⁴, he does not appeal to Plato's anthropology but to the Pauline triad of body, soul and spirit, which has no true antecedent in the Greek schools.

The equation of God with mind, in the *De Principiis* and elsewhere, is an innovation of Christian usage but a commonplace in the pagan thought of late antiquity. One might think of the second-century Platonist (or Pythagorean) Numenius, if there were more than inferential proof of Origen's acquaintance with his cosmogony⁵. At the same time, the tenet is one that an Aristotelian might have claimed as the shibboleth of his own school, whereas the characteristic name for the highest principle among Platonists (he might argue) is the Good, or perhaps the One. Again, it may be no more than a verbal preference that separates the Stoic identification of Zeus with Logos from the deification of *νοῦς* in the older systems. Were it not for the Epicureans, who were polytheists and held that the gods were accurately portrayed in dreams and sculptures, it could be said that the philosophers were at one in regarding intellect as the essence of divinity. For those who could entertain the notion of incorporeal being, its familiar if unfathomable paradigm was intellect; for those who could not, the analogy held so long as God was credited with a hegemonic and providential function in the universe. That Origen did not surrender his judgment to any one school is evident from his occasional hints that *νοῦς* falls short of God – a tenet which, if we insist upon the name of God, is anticipated only in Philo, another Biblical philosopher. But even when he embraced the more quotidian theology, he embraced it as a Christian. With the majority of his co-religionists, he opined that there can be no resurrection on the last day unless an incorporeal soul survives to guarantee the identity of the self between embodiments; that God is mind – or something akin to mind, or something greater than mind – was then entailed by the putative demonstration of his incorporeality from the scriptures. Only a hidebound Christian would have resisted this deduction because some unbaptized philosopher had arrived at it before him.

Certain tenets, now outmoded and consequently chaperoned in academic literature by the names of those who first enunciated them or defended them most eloquently, had become quotidian maxims in Origen's time. Those who held that all material bodies were compounded from the four elements did not consider themselves Empedocleans or Aristotelians, any more than we consider ourselves Copernicans because we hold that the earth goes round the sun. Today one must be a "Platonist" (or a "Cartesian") to postulate the soul as a thinking subject in apposition to the body; in the ancient world, however, even those who held that the elements or particles of bodies also constitute the soul conceived the latter as some-

⁴ Or., princ. II 11,6; IV 2,4.

⁵ Or., princ. I 1; Numen., fragm. 11 (CUFr, 53 des Places).

thing more than a congeries of somatic functions, and believed that this substantial entity either survives the body or is dispersed immediately in its hour of death. It would not have entered a Christian's head to question these assumptions merely because they were not peculiarly Christian. This is not to say that Christianity was incapable of autonomous speculation: it was indeed the merit of its apologists, and of Origen in particular, to show that certain platitudes, which had functioned as subliminal assumptions in all disputes between philosophical sects, were in fact contestable. One such presupposition was the plurality of gods (which remained compatible for all Greeks with the asseveration of one transcendent fountainhead of being). Another was the necessity of matter as a substrate for the corporeal, which Origen (whether or not he wrote the dialogue assigned to him at *Philocalia* 24)⁶ certainly contests in the *De Principiis*⁷. He presses his objections tentatively, and hints that others before him had urged that this empty concept is in fact a concept of nothing; nevertheless, he is the first known author to say so much in a systematic treatise, and this observation suffices to show that his debt to the philosophers was that of a critic rather than a disciple.

3. Metaphrastic. Most common, in Origen as in other early Christian authors, is the metaphrastic substitution of Greek philosophical terms for the more homely or poetic idiom of the sacred text. Without such expedients it would have been impossible to preach the Word with vigour to the Gentiles. Even the plebeian style of Paul and the evangelists is not, like that of the Septuagint, a calque on the Hebrew and Aramaic of the elder scriptures, but a living tongue, informed by the practice (if not the formal teaching) of Greek rhetoric and employing terms that had no counterpart in the languages of Palestine. The apologists of the first three Christian centuries aimed not only to express the Gospel in their own vernacular, but to endow it with the clarity of an intellectual system. While some modern academics hold the strange view that subtlety, urbanity and roundness of vision represent a cheapening of the Gospel, it was inevitable that thinkers of the early Church would adopt the philosopher's lexicon. To do otherwise was to confess themselves mere malcontents, for it was only the philosopher in the Roman world whose trade entitled him to harangue a multitude, abstain from marriage and mock the puerility of the civic cults. Philosophy gave a man the right to differ in antiquity, and the assumption of the cloak was thus at once a provocative and a protective measure, calculated to excite derision rather than persecution, except in cases where the populace was estranged or its governors openly defied.

⁶ On the authorship see *The Philocalia of Origen*, the text revised with a critical introduction and indices by J.A. Robinson, Cambridge 1893, xl-xlix; T.D. Barnes, *Methodius, Maximus and Valentinus*, *JThS* 30, 1979, 47-55; Origène, *Philocalie 1-20 sur les Écritures*, introduction, texte, traduction et notes par M. Harl, *La lettre à Africanus sur l'histoire de Suzanne*, introduction, texte, traduction et notes par N. de Lange, SC 302, Paris 1983.

Some technical locutions pass into general parlance; others retain indelible traces of their origin. Only a fraction of those who speak of “natural law” or “the common good” are acquainted with the history of these terms; few, on the other hand, would fail to associate Freud with the “Oedipus complex”, Marx with the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. Our knowledge of Greek conventions is for the most part insufficient to tell us when the coinage of a particular school passed into the intellectual vulgate. We may be certain that in Origen’s day the expression τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῶν (that which lies within our power) was common tender and could be used without reference to the deliberations of Aristotle or the Stoics⁸. No doubt it would have been harder to detach the word *monas* from the Pythagoreans, but when Origen applied it to the Godhead he may have been conscious of a Christian precedent in Athenagoras⁹. It is an index of his sympathies that he also co-opts the noun ἐνώς, which was not in use outside the Pythagorean and Platonic schools; but the truth that it adumbrates, the ineffable oneness of the Godhead, was in Origen’s view concealed from the Platonists by their own presumption¹⁰. Perhaps, then, the suitability of the term lies not so much in its pedigree as in its rarity, which excludes a mundane interpretation, hinting that the unity of material particulars is a poor approximation to that of God. The privatives which are freely bestowed on God in Origen’s writings, as in those of his predecessors, are drawn predominantly from the philosophic schools, but never without some warrant in the sacred text. Even if God were not said at 1Tim 6,16 to dwell in “invisible light”, we should deduce his invisibility from the prohibition of images in the Decalogue. His timelessness is the necessary precondition of his infallibility in prediction, while his incorporeality is to be inferred from his indestructibility, as well as from his power of being everywhere and nowhere as he pleases. His impassibility is the guarantee that he cannot be coerced, seduced or baffled by another agent. If the Bible avers that God is faithful and steadfast in defence of his elect, philosophy underwrites these promises by showing that it is the characteristic of one who is truly divine to be free of change and trepidation. No more than his predecessors or contemporaries could Origen see that any harm accrued from a mode of speech which reinforced prophecy with proof and made it possible to say openly what God had communicated to a younger world in riddles.

4. Supplementary. The supplementary use of the pagan classics is the one that Origen himself commends in a letter to Gregory Thaumaturgus – the same disciple who informs us that Origen’s syllabus in Caesarea

⁷ Or., princ. IV 4,7, though the existence of (created) matter seems to be assumed at Or., princ. II 1,4.

⁸ See especially Or., princ. III 1,1.

⁹ Or., princ. I 1,6; Athenag., leg. 6,2 (reporting Pythagoras with approval).

¹⁰ Or., princ. I 1,6; Or., Cels. VII 42.

commenced with an introduction to the chief philosophic schools¹¹. The letter twins philology with philosophy – the first because the Spirit has elected to speak in a human tongue, the second because a peculiarly subtle understanding of the natural creation has been vouchsafed by this same Spirit to the Greeks. It is, of course, a principle of all modern exegesis that the obscurities of biblical Greek are amenable to the same tools that are deployed in the elucidation of pagan literature. On the other hand, the progress of the intellectual disciplines has superannuated every claim to infallibility - that of scripture no less than that of Aristotle – and professional commentators on the New Testament no longer assume that its authors were omniscient or subject the results of science and history to their arbitration. In Origen's time no Christian exegete could doubt that whatever can be known was already known, to the Spirit at least, at the time of composition; to his mind, the perfect commentator will be at once a philologist, who defines the semiological function of each term in the scriptures, and a philosopher, who identifies that real thing which the term signifies in the order of creation.

We have seen above that Origen does not lightly reject the consensus of the schools, though at the same time he does not think even such a common postulate as matter wholly immune to dubitation and refinement. When philosophers disagree, the Christian's choice between them will be determined by the evidence of the scriptures. Thus, when Origen has to construe the term ἐπιούσιος in the Lord's Prayer (which is generally agreed to mean "supersubstantial" in Greek sources, rather than "daily" or "for tomorrow", as in the west), he inquires for other specimens of it in Greek literature, and having ascertained that there are none, decides for himself that the radical element οὐσία connotes existence rather than locomotion¹². He proceeds to ask which of the current significations of this noun has the stronger warrant in the Bible, and appears to aim for a middle course between those who affirm that nothing truly exists but the intelligible, in opposition to those who hold that all existence requires a material substrate¹³. These parties correspond to the gods and giants of Plato's *Sophist*, though the materialists have sometimes been identified as Stoics¹⁴. If Origen shows some bias towards the contrary view, this is not

¹¹ Or., philoc. 13. Gregroy's *Panegyrica* attests the propaedeutic use of Greek philosophy in the school of Origen.

¹² Or., or. 3,7.

¹³ C. Marksches, Was bedeutet οὐσία? Zwei Antworten bei Origenes und Ambrosius und deren Bedeutung für ihre Bibelklärung und Theologie, in: idem, Origenes und sein Erbe. Gesammelte Studien, TU 160, Berlin 2007, (173-193) 183-187. On Origen's refusal to wear a borrowed livery see J.M. Rist, Beyond Stoic and Platonist. A Sample of Origen's Treatment of Philosophy, in: H.-D. Blume / F. Mann (eds.), Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie, JAC.E 10, Münster 1983, 228-238.

¹⁴ On the possibility that Origen used the lexicon of Herophilus see R. Cadiou, Dictionnaires antiques dans l'œuvre d'Origène, REG 45, 1932, 271-285, with the animadversions of Marksches, Was bedeutet οὐσία? (see note 13), 175-183.

because he is a Platonist, but because this view is sanctioned by one Tutor from whom no Christian can appeal.

5. Strategic. A strategic use of precedents and analogues enables the Christian to say *tu quoque* to anyone who brings a charge of folly, turpitude or equivocation against his faith. Thus the shrewd apologist for the doctrine of the Trinity can say "you too believe in a δεῦτερος θεός", though this phrase does not appear in works intended only for Christians, and it seems to intimate not that Christ is inferior to the Father, but only that he is second in the order of revelation and ecclesiastical prayer¹⁵. Another trope, which the Church learned from Josephus, was to scoff at the dissensions of the schools and urge that only the certitude of inspiration can bring peace to this cacophony. Or one can maintain that the philosophers themselves are unwitting heralds of the Gospel: Clement's *Stromateis* is a compendious exercise in the demonstration of homologies between Greek and Christian thought. Origen's *Contra Celsum*, the earliest text to speak of Christ as δεῦτερος θεός¹⁶, acknowledges that a Christian will find much of his creed in Plato; characteristic of the same work, however, is a new strategy, the reprobation of pagan usages which other Christians might have assimilated to their own practice. The collection of Platonic affidavits to the truth of Christianity is only half of Origen's case; the other half consists in the demonstration that even such a man could err for want of the intellectual sureties which can be furnished only by a revelation from above.

Allegory was the palliative applied by generations of philosophers before Origen to the enormities of Greek myth, and in particular to the faults that Plato himself condemned in Homer. Similar arts had been employed to preserve the reader of the Old Testament from scandal and temptation, and the symbolic interpretation of the gnomic sayings attributed to Pythagoras was expressly adduced by Clement of Alexandria as a charter for his expulsion of anthropomorphisms from texts which speak of God¹⁷. Even where the plain meaning of the Septuagint was innocent, however, the mere fact that this was a book in which every syllable was held to be inspired supplied both matter and motive for readings which were neither literal nor prophylactic. Philo looked for a deeper sense in narratives that would otherwise have been veridical but not edifying; for Paul and the evangelists the Torah is a mine of elusive testimonies to the mission and reign of Christ. What we now call typology is in the main coterminous with the spiritual or mystical interpretation of scripture in Origen's writings

¹⁵ See M.J. Edwards, *Nicene Theology and the Second God*, in: *StPatr* 40, 2006, 191-195. Justin quotes the pagan accusation that Christians grant a man second place to God at Just., 1 apol 13 and 22 he likens the Word to Hermes, son of Zeus.

¹⁶ Or., *Cels.* IV 39; VI 61, where Origen seems to take up a locution from his adversary; cf. ἕτερος θεός at Or., dial. 1,25-33.

¹⁷ See e.g., Clem., *str.* V 11,67.

for other Christians; this reading is withheld from pagan critics in the *Contra Celsum*, as though to intimate that neither the few anomalies in the sacred text nor the remedies for them are of a piece with those that exercise the apologist for Homer¹⁸. For the most part, he argues, even the veneration of scripture is evidently less dangerous to the soul than that of a Homer, a Hesiod or a Pherecydes; to sponge every fault from texts like these would be too long an endeavour, even if Platonists were not forced to admit the presence in their master's work of irredeemable blemishes, such as the paradoxical rape of Plenty by Poverty in the *Symposium*¹⁹. The Bible does not require cosmetics; the vices of the Greek canon will not bear them. It need hardly be said that anyone who styled himself a Platonist in Origen's day would have credited Plato's dialogues with an authority not far short of that which Origen accords to the impeccable and infallible word of God.

6. Catalytic. Catalysis occurs when a philosopher's resolution of his own difficulties is of no use to the Christian, in whose eyes the problem requires no answer or a different one, but makes it possible for the Christian to arrive at an analogous resolution of some problem which has arisen within his own system. A familiar example is the distinction which the Platonist Calvisius Taurus drew between two senses of the adjective $\gamma\epsilon\nu(\nu)\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ in the *Timaeus*: the sense to which he awarded the double consonant implied a beginning in time, while he reserved the spelling $\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ for that state of mere contingency or dependence which can hold between an eternal object and its eternal cause²⁰. To Christians, who believed that Plato and scripture concurred in assigning a temporal origin to the universe, this antithesis was redundant and sophistical; those, however, who found it necessary to differentiate the eternal Sonship of Christ from the creation of the world by fiat performed the same orthographic trick in a mirror by allotting the epithet $\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ to the Son, or second person of the Trinity, reserving $\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ for his mortal handiwork²¹. Thus $\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ signifies eternity to the Christian, temporality to the Platonist, and each attaches the opposite meaning to the term $\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$. The catalytic action of cosmology on Trinitarian doctrine is equally visible in the Arian tenet that both the Son and the world are "out of nothing", though in this case it was not the new doctrine but the negation of it that became dogma.

¹⁸ See Or., Cels. IV 45 on the rape of Lot by his daughters; on pagan antecedents see G. Bendinelli, *Il Commento a Giovanni e la Tradizione Scolastica dell' Antichità*, in: E. Prinzivalli (ed.), *Il Commento a Giovanni di Origene. Il testo e suoi contesti*, Atti dell' VIII convegno del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina (Roma, 28-30 settembre 2004), Biblioteca di Adamantius 3, Rome 2005, 133-156.

¹⁹ Or., Cels. IV 39, alluding to Pl., *Smp.* 203b-d.

²⁰ J.M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists. A study of Platonism: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, London 1977, 242-244.

²¹ See further G.C. Stead, *The Platonism of Arius*, *JThS* 15, 1964, 16-31; also idem, *The Word 'from Nothing'*, *JThS* 49, 1998, 671-684.

Such influence being by nature latent, unavowed and frequently unconscious, we cannot hope to discover incontestable signs of its presence in Origen. No doubt the most likely evidence – and our own judgment must be the measure of this likelihood – will be found in his exhibition of superfluous ingenuity when interpreting familiar texts from scripture. Few readers of Hebr 1,3, where the Son is styled the radiance of the Father's power or δύναμις, would reify this δύναμις to produce a triad in which it sits between the first and second hypostases of the Trinity. Origen concludes, however, that Christ is a ray “not of God but of his glory [...] not of the Father, but of his power, an unsullied emanation of his almighty glory”²². In his times the closest analogue is not Christian: paternal intellect, δύναμις and filial intellect form a ubiquitous triad in Porphyry's exposition of the *Chaldaean Oracles*. Augustine later attempted to baptize it by equating δύναμις with the Holy Spirit²³, but it is clear that Origen's aim is not to supplement a lacuna in the apostolic teaching, not to produce a strategic vindication Christian doctrine from its pagan antecedents, and still less to augment the teaching of the apostles with an obsequious borrowing from profane philosophy. Had he not been required to gloss this one text from the New Testament, he would not have devised the triad; on the other hand, this gloss would perhaps have seemed as stilted to him as it does to us were he not aware of a precedent in Greek philosophy.

Origen's designation of the Father as αὐτοθεός (God in himself), in contradistinction to the Son who is θεός only by derivation from the Father²⁴, is perhaps another example of catalysis. This neologism (as it appears to be) is evidently modelled on such compounds as αὐτοάνθρωπος and αὐτοίππος, which in the usage of some Platonists denote the species or transcendent paradigms by virtue of which all entities of one kind possess the same essence²⁵. Origen is not of their school, however, as he will not admit a plurality of referents for the term θεός any more than for αὐτοθεός; the relation between the first god, the αὐτοαγαθός, in Numenius and his second god, who is ἀγαθός by participation in the αὐτοαγαθός, affords a closer parallel, though the substitution of adjective for noun may be no light matter. It is often held that Origen's nomenclature implies the subordination of the Son to the Father, making him a “second god” according to the parlance of such Platonists as Numenius²⁶. But if he means no more than the attributes of the Son belong primordially to the Father – that the Son is what the Father is only because the Father is already what the Son

²² Or., Jo. XIII 25,153.

²³ Aug., ciu. X 23-26, though this seems to me a disingenuous reading.

²⁴ Or., Jo. II 3,20, the Son being designated αὐτολόγος in the same chapter.

²⁵ This way at Arist., *Metaph.* Z 16 (*Aristotelis Opera* 2, 1040b33f. Bekker); cf. Arist., *Metaph.* A 9 (991a29 B.).

²⁶ Numen., fragm. 16,8f. (57 d.P.).

is – he is merely the first to say what was afterwards strongly affirmed by all proponents of the Nicene Creed, including some who expressly denounced the subordination of any member of the Trinity. Eusebius of Caesarea, who inherited the term *αὐτοθεός* from Origen, put his name – with deliberation, but with no avowed reluctance – to the Nicene proclamation of Christ as “true God from true God”²⁷. A letter ascribed to Basil of Caesarea (and to the equally orthodox Gregory of Nyssa) explains that the Son is God, in the only sense that this term bears, because he owes his being and attributes entirely to the Father²⁸. In Latin we find equivalents for the compound *αὐτοθεός* both in Arnobius, a writer of uncertain orthodoxy, and in Augustine, who is generally considered unimpeachable.

The former protests that “he himself was not the one who died on the Cross, since what is divine cannot succumb to death”; the latter upbraids the Manichees for their worship of a God who permitted himself to be taken captive and dismembered²⁹. Both passages imply that what can be predicated of God incarnate cannot be predicated of God himself; Origen treats the locution “God himself” as a synonym for God the Father because (as I hope to have shown elsewhere³⁰) his concept of the Son, even as a person of the Trinity, is seldom divorced from that of the human form that the Son was destined to assume.

7. Dialectical. We may speak of a dialectical engagement with philosophy when the Christian accepts that the defence of his faith requires him to acknowledge the validity of the questions in dispute between the schools, to frame his answers in terms already received among philosophers, to vindicate them according to recognized principles of argument and to meet without evasion whatever may be pertinently urged against them. This does not preclude an appeal to scriptural authority, provided that it is reinforced by arguments cogent enough to disarm proponents of any other revelation and the sceptics who deny the need of any. Nor does it preclude either the creation of new terms or the usurpation of old terms in some other sense than the one conferred on it by his interlocutors: it is a common fallacy in modern scholarship to assume that whenever a Christian fails to mean by Plato’s words what Plato meant by them, he betrays some defect of memory or intelligence. In speculation as in life, the philosopher was the servant of his own conscience. His profession obliged him to be at odds not only with lay members of society, not only

²⁷ Addendum to Ath., *decr.* For *αὐτοθεός* see Eus., *e.th.* II 14,6 (GCS Eusebius IV, 115,16 Klostermann), and on his use of the prefix *αὐτο-* see H. Strutwolf, *Die Trinitätstheologie und Christologie des Euseb von Caesarea. Eine dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung seiner Platonismusrezeption und Wirkungsgeschichte*, FKDG 72, Göttingen 1999, 162.

²⁸ Bas., *ep.* 38,6. On the authorship see J. Zachhuber, *Nochmals: Der 38. Brief des Basilus von Caesarea als Werk des Gregor von Nyssa*, *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 7, 2003, 73-90.

²⁹ Arnob., *nat.* I 62; Aug., *c.Faust.* V 4.

³⁰ Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (see note 1), 70f.

with the patrons of other schools, but with the apologists and patriarchs of his own where he could not reconcile his eye to their perceptions. Of course there was some expectation of fidelity to a master, and if the master was Moses or Paul, the claim was absolute. The object of the Christian philosophers was to show that, even if it had not been absolute, the truths conveyed through Moses and Paul would be irresistible to any mind that was not corrupted by a previous allegiance.

Such an adaptation of dogma to the canons of philosophy is evident in Origen's account of the tenuous body which preserves the saint's identity after death. In *Contra Celsum* V 18-21 he affirms the Pauline doctrine of a spiritual body, but his own thesis, as he expressed it in a more esoteric work *On the Resurrection*, is that the bodily form, or εἶδος, is translated to the soul. This appears to mean that the soul will acquire an envelope of subtler texture than the palpable body that we now wear, and more docile to the promptings of the illuminated spirit. This is not a logical or organic deduction from any biblical teaching, but we can point to its counterpart in the Platonism of late antiquity. Alcinoüs speaks for many when he states that it is the indefeasible function of soul to animate a body; since it was an axiom for the Platonists that "all soul is immortal", this tenet entailed that the soul must possess a vehicle which it continues to inhabit during periods of enfranchisement from the lower world. It could be argued that this vehicle is represented by the chariot of the soul in Plato's *Phaedrus*, or that this is the organic body of which the soul is said to be the εἶδος in Aristotle. Plutarch holds that soul in Hades carries a simulacrum of its discarded husk, while Porphyry, in his essay *On the Styx*, asserts that the liberated soul will bear a congelation of memories into the next life, thus ensuring that it remains conscious of its past and recognizable to others until the next embodiment. While Origen could not agree that the body which accompanies the soul in its ascent to God will be such a morbid accretion, it is unlikely that he was ignorant of all Platonic thought on the retention of the soul's domicile after death, and if he admits these teachings into his system through a Christian filter, it cannot be said that their influence on him is merely catalytic.

It is in his speculations on the causes of the soul's union with the body that Origen is most Platonic, though at the same time he is demonstrably innocent of the copybook Platonism that is foisted on him by ancient and modern critics. The topic is one on which Platonists and Christians were inevitably at cross-purposes, since the latter maintained that God grants only a single probation on earth to every soul. To reconcile the eternal consequences of this pilgrimage with the justice of an omnipotent Creator was no easier in antiquity than today, and it was only with the assistance of the Platonists that a Christian could elicit a theodicy from his own scriptures or arrive at a view on the culpability of the embodied soul. Desultory and abstruse as Origen's conjectures are, they won him global influence and enduring notoriety; for this reason alone they merit

examination in some detail. The inquiry will also lead us from analysis to synthesis, since Origen himself offers no anatomy of his principles, but allows the dialectical relation to coalesce with the supplementary and the catalytic, deeming one shift as useful as another so long as it helps to redeem the silence of the text.

The vicissitudes of a young soul

Whether the soul exists before its sojourn in the present world was to Origen's contemporaries a difficult question, not foreclosed by any scriptural text. There is one verse – John 9,2 – which might be thought to attest a previous existence, for what could prompt the conjecture that the man born blind is expiating his own sin but the belief that we enter the present world with a private cargo of merits and demerits? Basilides, one of the more intrepid of Christian thinkers in Alexandria before Origen, is said to have maintained this doctrine on two grounds³¹: it reveals some other cause for inequalities in the condition of souls at birth than the will of an arbitrary creator, and it accounts for the conjunction of a mature soul with an embryonic body in the womb. The first argument is Platonic, and Basilides goes so far with this school as to posit the transmigration of souls not only from body to body but from one species to another. The Platonists, on the other hand, were not of one mind regarding the ensoulment of the foetus, and Porphyry, who professes to represent the most authoritative tradition, holds that any appetitive motions which it exhibits are the product of φαντασία or of energies inherited from the parent³². In the Roman world it was Christians alone who held abortion to be a sin tantamount to murder³³, and who were therefore obliged, when

³¹ On the questionable evidence for his teachings see W.A. Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule. Eine Studie zur Theologie- und Kirchengeschichte des zweiten Jahrhunderts*, WUNT 83, Tübingen 1996, 121-145.

³² In Porph., *Gaur.* (APAW.PH 1895, 37-46 *Kalbfleisch*), Porphyry argues (a) that the functions manifested by the embryo are only those of the nutritive soul, which is the only principle of life in plants; (b) that it may appear that the foetus is capable of responding to “phantastic” stimuli, but in fact these motions are communicated by the mother; (c) that φαντασία cannot shape the constitution of the agent who experiences it, but it can enable that agent to shape the constitution of another being. At pp. 46-52, he adds (d) that before the act of procreation, the sperm is governed by the vegetative power of the father and by his higher soul and (e) that if a particular soul has an affinity with one body rather than another, this will be either a consequence of the “former life itself” or a corollary of the universal revolution that draws like to like. At pp. 52-58 he concludes (f) that if the sperm has a soul, it need not be rational, as the fecundity is the product of our irrational powers; and (g) that even if the sperm is the joint issue of the imaginative (phantastic) and vegetative powers, it does not follow that these powers are communicated by the foetus.

³³ Tert., *anim.* 25,2f.; 26; Diogn. 5,6; Did. 2,2; 5,2; Barn. 19,5; D.A. Jones, *The Soul of the Human Embryo. An enquiry into the status of the human embryo in the Christian tradition*, London 2004.

the question came before them, to maintain that the soul in the womb is already mature. This point deserves attention because it shows that an apologist who was not a disciple of Basilides might have cause to defend the rationality of the embryo even when he was not advancing any doctrine of a life before the present one. I have argued elsewhere that Origen regards the exultation of John the Baptist in the womb as proof that the soul is endowed with reason at conception, not as evidence for a previous life³⁴. John could not have served as a paradigm for discussion of the latter topic³⁵, as the theories that he was Elijah or an angel were not wholly devoid of scriptural warrant, as Origen concedes³⁶.

In his *Commentary on John* he denies that a soul can pass from one human tenement to another³⁷. Commenting on Romans 7,9 he observes that if the sin which "revived" in Paul had been committed, as Basilides argued, in a previous life, this cannot have been the life of a brute, as creatures devoid of rational discernment are incapable of sin³⁸. This principle that only a reasoning agent can be deemed guilty, when applied to the law commanding the execution of an ass that has lain with a woman, might indeed afford an argument for the perambulation of souls between different species, were it not that the church expressly prohibits this inference. Thus he rejects the teaching of the Platonists Plutarch, Porphyry and Celsus, partly because the attribution of rationality to beasts belies experience, and partly because this doctrine is countermanded by an infal-

³⁴ Or., princ. I 7,4 (GCS Origenes V, 90,3-20 Koetschau): *Si hominis anima, quae utique inferior est, dum hominis est anima, non cum corporibus ficta, sed proprie et extrinsecus probatur inserta, multo magis eorum animantium, quae caelestia designantur. Nam, quantum ad homines spectat, quomodo cum corpore simul ficta anima videbitur eius, qui 'in ventre' fratrem suam subplantavit, 'id est Jacob' [Gen 25,22.26]? Aut quomodo simul cum corpore ficta est anima vel plasmata eius, qui adhuc 'in ventre matris suae positus, repletus est spiritu sancto' [Luke 1,41]? Iohannem dico 'tripudiantem in matris utero', et magna se exultatione iactantem pro eo quod salutationis vox Mariae ad aures Elisabeth suae matris advenerat [...]. Et quomodo effugiemus illam vocem, qua ait: "Numquid iniustitia est apud deum? Absit!", vel illud: "Numquid personarum acceptio est apud deum?" [Rom 9,14].*

³⁵ At least not in Origen. But cf. Theodotus, as reported by Clem., exc. Thdot. 50: The elder said that that which is in the belly is a living thing. For the soul enters into the womb, having been prepared through cleansing for conception, and set apart by one of the angels who presides over generation, who knows beforehand the time appointed for conception and prompts the mother to intercourse. And when the seed is deposited, the spirit in the seed is, as it were, assimilated and taken up into the process of formation ... And in the Gospel [Luke 1,41] "the child leapt", as being ensouled.

³⁶ Or., Jo. VI 11. On his repudiation of the view that the Baptist was an angel see Or., Jo. I 31(34); I 31(25).

³⁷ Or., Jo. I 11; VI 14. On Origen's rejection of transmigration see M. Kruger, *Ichgeburt. Origenes und die Entstehung der christlichen Idee der Widerverkörperung in der Denkbewegung von Pythagoras bis Lessing*, *Philosophische Texte und Studien* 42, Hildesheim 1996, 117-126.

³⁸ Or., comm. in Rom. VI 8,1,21, though he does not name his enemy here.

lible authority. A Platonist might have answered that the first argument is false, the second unconscionable, and that Origen is consistent only in his determination to reason independently of the pagan schools.

Nevertheless, both ancient and modern authors have repeatedly imputed to Origen the Platonic doctrine that the soul was created to be incorporeal, and that it fell into its material envelope, and that it wears its material corset as a punishment for satiety, loss of ardour or willful insurrection³⁹. As I hope to have shown elsewhere, the evidence for his having held these views is almost wholly derived from his enemies: if we excise from Koetschau's edition of the *De Principiis* all the avowedly loose, calumnious and periphrastic accounts of Origen's teaching that are offered as Greek correctives to the Latin of Rufinus, we shall find that Origen does indeed cite inward refrigeration and satiety as causes of sin, but only in the present life⁴⁰; that he does indeed believe that angels fall and that the saints will be the heirs to their lost estate, but does not expressly say that human beings in this world are fallen angels⁴¹; that he does indeed regard the world as a nursery in which punishments are laid up for sins foreseen as well as for those already committed, but not necessarily as a place of retribution for trespasses in heaven⁴². In an infamous passage Origen informs us that the soul of Christ, in contrast to every other, burnt with undiminished ardour for the Logos *ab initio creaturae*; yet whether this means "the beginning of all creation" or "the beginning of its creation" I at least cannot determine from the Latin⁴³. A descent of souls from earth to the hand of God is clearly asserted, both in the *De Principiis* and in the *Commentary on Ephesians*⁴⁴; this descent, however, is clearly not a fall, and nothing is said that the soul exists without a body for more than the instant which precedes its insufflation. The body that we now possess is said in other works to be grosser than that of Adam in his state of innocence⁴⁵, but this does not entail that he was created without a body, and

³⁹ On the obscurity of his teaching see M. Harl, *La préexistence des âmes dans l'œuvre d'Origen*, in: L. Lies (ed.), *Origeniana Quarta. Die Referate des 4. Internationalen Origeneskongresses*, JThS 19, Innsbruck, 238-258; J. Laporte, *Théologie liturgique de Philon d'Alexandrie et Origène*, Liturgie 6, Paris 1995, 159-161.

⁴⁰ As is clear from the conclusion of Or., princ. I 41, that if our backsliding is arrested at an early stage, it is possible to return to our original state of knowledge and alertness.

⁴¹ Or., princ. I 8,1-4 and Or., hom. in Cant. 20,8.

⁴² See Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (see note 1), 105 on Or., princ. II 9,6.

⁴³ Or., princ. II 6,3. Cf. Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (see note 1), 94.

⁴⁴ Or., princ. III 5,4; Origen's commentary on Eph 5,29 is handed down to us only in Latin by Jerome (Hier., in Eph. III 5 [PL 26, 567c-568a Migne] and Hier., adv. Rufin. I 28 [CChr.SL 79, 27,16-32 Lardet]); cf. also R. Heine, *Recovering Origen's Commentary on Ephesians from Jerome*, JThS 51, 2000, 478-514.

⁴⁵ Or., Jo. XX 182 appears to say that the body is the penalty of the fall, but perhaps emans only that the peccability of our present body is inherited from Adam. E. Prinzivalli, *L'uomo e il suo destino nel Commento a Giovanni*, in: eadem (ed.), *Il Commento a Giovanni*

we have Origen's own admission at *De Principiis* I 6,4 that he does not know how the identity of any being other than the persons of the Trinity can be sustained without a material substrate⁴⁶. We cannot even be certain that the flesh which now envelopes us is a punitive afterthought rather than a proleptic remedy for the foreseen effects of sin as it is in the work of Gregory of Nyssa *On the Creation of Humanity*⁴⁷.

What is eminently clear is that, while Origen takes the word κόρος or satiety from the Platonists, while he accepts their derivation of the term ψυχή from the adjective ψυχρός ("cool"), and while he accepts some correlation between the gravity of an agent's sin and the crassitude of his body, his presuppositions are those of the church, and his difficulties arise from the attempt to harmonize scripture with scripture or scripture with experience. Even when he vacillates he will find a text to corroborate each position, and among his presuppositions are the descent of all humanity from one man and its universal redemption by another, neither of which a Platonist can entertain. How far he believed that any of his conclusions could be reconciled with those of the Platonists we can only guess, for his representation of their philosophy is schematic, seldom conscious of its varieties and often anachronistic. The view that the soul descends but does not fall – that its fall results from its becoming too enamoured of its new medium and betraying the mind to the senses – may sit poorly with the myth in Plato's *Phaedrus*, but is a fair approximation to the teaching of both Porphyry and Plotinus⁴⁸. If a question forced on Origen by the scriptures had already been engaging the fertile intellects of the Platonic school for more than half a millennium, he was no more likely to find an answer that they had not considered than to stumble upon a fifth point of the compass.

The most cogent of all the passages adduced to show that Origen posits a previous embodiment of the soul is his justification of God's preference for Jacob over Esau, his elder brother. His choice cannot be determined (Origen argues) by a capricious partiality, and we must therefore presume that the

(see note 18), 374-379, observes that both the fashioning of the body from the earth at Gen 2,7 and the pristine creation of Gen 1,26f. precede the remedial stitching of the coats of skins at Gen 3,21. The making or ποίησις of the first man is supervenes on the fall of Satan, which in turn presupposes the κρισις or creation of the intelligibles in the Word: e.g., Or., princ. II 1,5.

⁴⁶ Cf. Tzamalikos, Origen (see note 1), 59-63. On the vehicle that preserves the soul's identity after death see H. Schibli, Origen, Didymus and the Vehicle of the Soul, in: R.J. Daly (ed.), Origeniana Quinta. Historica, text and method, biblica, philosophica, theologica, Origenism and later developments, papers of the 5th International Origen Congress (Boston College, 14-18 August 1989), Leuven 1992, 381-391.

⁴⁷ See especially Gr. Nyss., hom. opif. 15-18.

⁴⁸ Cf. Aug., ciu. X 30 (satirically); J.M. Rist, Plotinus. The Road to Reality, Cambridge 1967, 121-145.

dispossession of Esau was a penalty for his sin in a “former life”⁴⁹. This is pure Platonism, if we join the majority of commentators in taking “former life” to mean life in a different body, rather than a past episode of the same life, as when Paul speaks of his “former conversation”. But if that is the sense, it fails to explain why God did not award the birthright to Jacob simply by making him the first to leave Rachel’s womb. Rabbinic casuists urged that the wrong for which Esau suffers must have been committed between conception and birth: he was said to have been an idolater by instinct, who was always propelling his mother into foreign shrines, or else (in a story patently designed to annul his claim to primogeniture) to have threatened to cause her death if he were not the firstborn of the twins⁵⁰. We cannot prove that Origen knew or would have endorsed such fables, but we have seen above that he felt obliged, as a spokesman for the Church, to maintain the presence of a rational soul in the embryo. If it is uterine sin⁵¹ that he attributes to Esau, Origen is reasoning not only independently of the Platonists, but against their view that the foetus is irrational, and hence not capable of a personal sin. If his meaning is that Esau was expiating a trespass committed in some previous body, he has turned to Platonism for the amelioration of difficulties that would not have troubled him but for his belief in the infallibility of a barbarous text.

⁴⁹ Or., princ. II 9,7 (171,3-8 K.): *Igitur sicut de Esau et Iacob diligentius perscrutatis scripturas invenitur quia non est ‘iniustitia apud deum’* [Rom 9,14], *ut ‘antequam nascerentur vel agerent aliquid’* [Rom 9,11], *in hac scilicet vita, diceretur quia ‘maior serviet minori’* [Rom 9,12], *et ut invenitur non esse ‘iniustitia’ quod et ‘in ventre fratrem suum supplantavit Iacob’, si ex praecedentis videlicet vitae meritis digne eum ‘dilectum esse’ sentiamus a deo* [proceeds to argue that celestial creatures are assigned to offices commensurate with their merit or demerit].

⁵⁰ L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 1, Philadelphia 1909, 313: “They strove to kill each other. If Rebekah walked in the vicinity of a temple erected to idols, Esau moved in her body, and if she passed a synagogue, Jacob essayed to break forth from her womb. The quarrels of the children turned upon such differences as these. Esau would insist that there was no life except the earthly life of material pleasures, and Jacob would reply ‘my brother, there are two worlds before us [...]. If it please thee, do thou take this world, and I will take the other.’ [...] Even the quarrel between the two brothers regarding the birthright had its beginning before they emerged from the womb of their mother. Each desired to be the first to come into the world. It was only when Esau threatened to carry his point at the expense of his mother’s life that Jacob gave way.”

⁵¹ See further L. Urbach, *The Sages*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 1979, 220, citing *Genesis Rabba* 34,10. “Antoninus asked Rabbi, ‘At which stage is the evil inclination instilled in man?’ He replied ‘from the moment that he is formed’. Thereupon (Antoninus) said to him, ‘If so, it (the embryo) would dig its way from the mother’s womb and go forth. The answer must therefore be when the soul had gone forth’. Rabbi admitted to him that his view was in accord with that of the Bible [...]. He further inquired, ‘At which stage is the soul instilled in man?’ Said Rabbi to him, ‘As soon as it leaves its mother’s womb’. He replied, ‘Leave meat without salt for three days: will it not become putrid? The answer must be: from the moment that he (the child) is commanded (to come into existence)’. And Rabbi admitted to him that scripture also supports him.” Cf. Urbach, *The Sages* (see note 51), 243.

There is, then, nothing obsequious, nothing that would justify our labeling a Platonist, in Origen's speculations on the soul's history before the present life. They may be called supplementary, insofar as they illuminate such texts as "Jacob I loved, but Esau have I hated": but even if he does not conceive the soul's pre-existence merely as a sentient life in the womb, he differs from the Platonists⁵² in assuming that it entails such a life; he differs again from them, and from his Christian precursors, in denying any previous embodiment of the soul in the present world. The doctrine that he holds is designed to explain the inequalities of our one embodied life without recourse to any notion of transmigration, and thus stands in a dialectical relation to the philosophies of the schools, which, as a spokesman for the Church and God, he undertakes to conquer by a new philosophy.

Concluding remarks

Whom should we call a Platonist? In antiquity he was one who, in contradistinction to the Stoics and Epicureans, maintained the reality of the incorporeal and the providential government of the cosmos; who, in contradistinction to Aristotle, held that the soul cannot die and that the Form exists or subsists eternally, transcending the material particular; who, in contradistinction to the Pythagoreans, believed the Forms to be more primordial than number. In contradistinction to Christians (when he had heard of them), he denied that God can will or perpend an object that is not eternally necessitated, or that a book can be a source of infallible knowledge that could not have been attained by independent reasoning. He might agree with a Christian that the One is God (though not that God is one), and that the soul lives for ever (though Christians would not say that it is naturally immortal). But a Christian, even if he was aware that the Platonists held them, held these tenets on other authority than Plato's.

There is a moribund controversy regarding Origen's Greek tutors, which I do not propose to revive here⁵³. That he was not the same Origen who studied with Plotinus under Ammonius Saccas has always been agreed among Classical scholars, if only because the Christian Origen was 47 years old in 232 when Plotinus became a disciple of Ammonius. That there were two scholarchs of eminence named Ammonius is certain, and I do not know how to ascertain which, if either, was Origen's mentor in philosophy. For our purpose the question is of no great consequence, for Platonists and Aristotelians often held the same views and held that those

⁵² Alcin., intr. 25,6 assumes what Porphyry sets out to demonstrate, viz. that the body receives a rational soul after parturition.

⁵³ For bibliography see M.J. Edwards, Ammonius, Teacher of Origen, JEH 44, 1993, 1-13.

of their founders were, for the most part, reconcilable. Unless he was a Christian (as Eusebius contends) the creed of Ammonius was not that of his pupil; the description of the latter as a Platonist is tenable only if we add the rider that he never appeals to Plato as an oracle, that (like Justin) he preferred the way of the book to the way of introspective ratiocination, and that where his opinions coincide with those of a contemporary Platonist, this may be an occasion when it is impossible to differ from one without cleaving to another. It would be as unjust to suppose that when he made use of philosophical ideas he stole them raw and added nothing. The true philosopher demonstrates his autonomy neither by robbing his predecessors nor by shunning them: he waters what they have planted in the hope of nurturing seed for other soils.

Ammonius, Teacher of Origen

Porphyry and Eusebius, antagonistic witnesses, agree that one of Origen's early tutors was called Ammonius. This was also the name of the tutor of Origen's younger contemporary Plotinus, and it has long been the fashion to argue or assume that they were pupils of the same man.¹ Heinrich Dörrie perhaps remains alone in his view that the two men called Ammonius were distinct, a view for which I shall argue in this article, though not entirely on Dörrie's grounds.² In the first part I shall present the available evidence, and in the second use it to defend Dörrie's position against its detractors; in the third part I shall argue that the confusion of the two began in the early Christian centuries, through a mixture of knowledge and pardonable ignorance, and finally I shall advance another candidate, whose credentials for the position of Origen's tutor have not been adequately examined in modern discussion.

I

In bringing together the evidence of the primary sources, Porphyry and Eusebius, I shall use the name Ammonius P wherever an author is speaking of the teacher of Plotinus, and where the teacher of Origen is intended, I shall call him Ammonius O.

In Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* our introduction to Ammonius P is abrupt:

I am grateful to Professor S. G. Hall for corrections to the first draft of this article. Unless otherwise stated translations in the text are my own.

¹ The view of P. Nautin, *Origène*, Paris 1977, 200-1; R. Goulet, 'Porphyre, Ammonius, les deux Origenes et les autres', *Revue de l'Histoire de Philosophie et Religion* lviii (1977), 471-96; F. M. Schroeder, 'Ammonios Saccas', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II xxxvi (1987), 495-506 and most of the authors, other than Dörrie, cited there.

² H. Dörrie, 'Ammonios, der Lehrer Plotins', *Hermes* lxxxiii (1955), 439-77, esp. pp. 471-2. Dörrie argues largely from the unlikelihood of this one Ammonius having kept a school from c. 205 to 243. As, however, the evidence of Theodoret, cited below, suggests a date of about 170 for the birth of this Ammonius and a conversion to philosophy not later than 192, this objection has little force; cf. G. Fowden, 'The Platonic philosopher and his circle in Late Antiquity', *Philosophia* vii (1977), 364.

[Plotinus told us] that in his twenty-eighth year he embarked on the study of philosophy, and, having visited the schools of the most distinguished Alexandrians, returned from hearing them dejected and full of chagrin. He communicated his troubles to a friend, who, knowing the desire of his heart, led him to Ammonius, of whom he had hitherto made no trial. When he entered and heard Ammonius he exclaimed to his friend, 'This is the man I was seeking' (*Vita Plotini* 3. 6–12).

Plotinus will have entered the school of Ammonius P in 232. We hear no more of his instruction until it was complete in 243.³

He remained a student of Ammonius for eleven whole years.... A pact was made between Herennius, Origen and Plotinus that they would not divulge the teaching of Ammonius, which had been expounded clearly to them in his lectures. Plotinus for a time maintained discussions with visitors, but took care to conceal the teachings of Ammonius. Erennius having been the first to break the pact, Origen followed his lead, although he wrote nothing except his treatise *On Demons* and a work addressed to Gallienus, *That the King is the Sole Creator*. Plotinus for a long interval continued to write nothing, though his lessons with Ammonius furnished the material for his seminars.... The seminar, since he urged his students to seek the truth for themselves, was full of nonsense (*ibid.* 3. 20–38).

Two points should be noted in this paragraph: that breach of the pact consisted in the formal exposition of Ammonius' philosophy, even within the privacy of a seminar; and that this Origen who had written only two treatises by the reign of Gallienus is too reticent to have been the Christian teacher, even if the latter had survived to so late a time.⁴

Ammonius P, though he passes so discreetly from Porphyry's narrative, is the subject of a retrospective encomium by the critic and philosopher Longinus:

Of the second kind [i.e. philosophers who did not write] were the Platonists Ammonius and Origen, to whom I resorted most frequently. These were men who greatly enhanced the understanding of their contemporaries. Others who were not writers were the successors of the Athenian school, Theodotus and Eubulus. Origen wrote a work *On Daemons*, and Eubulus [a number of treatises]...but this does not entitle us to count them among those who elaborated a written system (*ibid.* 20. 36–45).

This exhausts such knowledge of Ammonius P as is found in the contemporary sources. Of Ammonius O Porphyry writes more briefly and paradoxically:

Origen was a hearer of Ammonius, the man of our time who displayed the

³ Assuming that Plotinus was born in 205/6 (*VP* 2. 37) and was thirty-eight years old when he left the Alexandrian school. The chronology of the *Life of Plotinus* has given rise to much controversy, but the dates given in this paper may be assumed to be accurate to within a year.

⁴ For the fullest defence of this view, see Schroeder, 'Ammonios Saccas', 496–502. Citations of 'Origen' in neoplatonic authors never allude to any work which cannot be one of the two whose titles occur in the *Life of Plotinus*; those titles never occur in any notice of the Christian Origen.

AMMONIUS, TEACHER OF ORIGEN

greatest attainments (ἐπίδοσιν ἐσχηκότος) in philosophy; and, so far as concerned intellectual culture, he benefited greatly from his schooling, though so far as concerned rectitude of life, he followed an entirely opposite course. For Ammonius, having been brought up by Christian parents, was a Christian (Χριστιανός ἐν Χριστιανοῖς ἀνατραφεὶς), but when he applied himself to wisdom and philosophy, changed to a way of life that was more conformable to the laws. Origen, by contrast, having been educated in Greek doctrines, was a Greek ("Ἕλληνα ἐν Ἑλληνιστῶν παιδευθεὶς λόγοις), but apostatised to an audacious and barbarous creed (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* vi. 19. 6–7).

Of the 'attainments' of this Ammonius, his ἐπίδοσις,⁵ Porphyry says nothing expressly, but indicates the results in the formation of Origen's intellect:

He was always in the company of Plato, and read the works of Numenius, of Cronius, of Apollonphanes, of Longinus, of Moderatus, of Nicomachus and of the wisest men among the Pythagoreans. He also used the books of Chaeremon the Stoic and of Cornutus (*ibid.* vii. 19. 8).

Thus the proof of Origen's schooling is a library, and we may guess that the 'attainments' of his master will have lain chiefly in his prodigious erudition. Porphyry is praising Ammonius O as the most learned of his contemporaries, not as the most profound or the most distinguished: these epithets he reserved for his own master Plotinus.

Eusebius, still professing to speak of Ammonius O, attempts to correct his adversary with regard to both teacher and pupil:

Origen cherished the articles of Christian belief which he had received from his parents, as I have demonstrated earlier in this history, while Ammonius to the end of his life preserved the articles of the divine philosophy uncorrupted and secure, as the man's works suffice to indicate even now... as for example, his treatise *On the Harmony of Jesus and Moses* and such others as are known to the literati (*ibid.* vi. 19. 13).

Corroborative testimony is adduced from a letter by Origen himself:

I found [the Alexandrian Bishop Heraclas] with the master of philosophical studies (μαθημάτων), who had already been maturing in his company for five years before I began to hear these lessons. The consequence was that Heraclas laid aside his common dress and took up the cloak of a philosopher, which he retains to this day, and is constantly engaged in the criticism of philosophical books, so far as his duties allow (*ibid.* vi. 19. 14).

We have no reason to doubt that the unnamed master was Ammonius O;⁶ Origen confirms the report of Porphyry concerning Ammonius O insofar as he alludes to a single teacher, and suggests, by styling him simply 'the master of studies', that he was known to his correspondent, and so a man of some renown.

⁵ The phrase ἐπίδοσιν ἔχειν at *Theaetetus* 146b, *Symposium* 176e and *Categories* 10b28 signifies only the possession of a capacity for addition or improvement; but clearly it must here connote the achievement, not merely the promise.

⁶ Thus G. Bardy, *Eusèbe: histoire ecclésiastique* (Sources Chrétiennes lxxiii), Paris 1955.

II

Can Ammonius O be reconciled with Ammonius P? It should be observed that Porphyry, whose words have given rise to the belief that both the Origenes had one tutor, does not expressly state what he is taken to imply. Knowing that both the Christian and the pagan were taught by a scholar named Ammonius, he takes no pains, when speaking of the pagan neoplatonist as a pupil of Ammonius P, to distinguish him from the Origen of the Church. This would be a most confusing omission if Ammonius P were the teacher of both Origenes. If, however, Porphyry knew and expected his readers to know that the Christian Origen was taught by another Ammonius, the identity of the neoplatonist Origen would be adequately specified by the statement that he was a colleague of Plotinus.

In the light of a recent study, it is necessary to deal at length with a possible objection to this reasoning.⁷ Richard Goulet has recently denied, not only that Origen was taught by Ammonius P, but that he was taught by any scholar of that name. He suggests, that is, that Porphyry made an error which renders irrelevant the search for a second Ammonius, though the error persisted only for a time. The mistake that Porphyry made, according to Goulet, in his work *Against the Christians* (c. 270) was the confusion of the two Origenes; he did not recant this error in his *Life of Plotinus* (c. 300) because it had been peculiar to himself at a certain period, and his readers were thus not likely to be misled.

The evidence for this immature confusion is as follows. Porphyry calls Origen 'a Greek who had received a Greek education', and then defected to the Church; whereas Eusebius' account of his infancy is too circumstantial to leave any doubt that this Origen was born into the faith to which he continued to adhere. Goulet has therefore argued that at the time of writing his work *Against the Christians* Porphyry believed the Christian Origen to be identical with the pagan neoplatonist, and hence ascribed to the Christian (whose works he knew) the pagan education of the other. The Ammonius of *HE* vi. 19. 5ff would thus be Ammonius P, translated erroneously into another connexion; the Ammonius of Eusebius was another man, whom Eusebius identified at a venture with the phantasmal Ammonius O who had been engendered by Porphyry's error.

This theory makes a peremptory assumption and ignores an attested fact. The assumption is that Porphyry's locution "Ἑλληνα ἐν Ἑλληνισμῷ παιδευθεὶς λόγοις means that Origen was born to a pagan household. As many authors have noted, the word παιδευθεὶς refers to his education alone,⁸ and, since the form is that of an aorist participle, his Hellenism is

⁷ Goulet, 'Porphyre, Ammonius', 485.

⁸ R. Cadiou, *La Jeunesse d'Origène*, Paris 1935, 233: 'Il ne considère que les idées d'Origène et les sources de l'exégèse allégorique... d'une conversion proprement dite qui l'aurait mené de l'hellénisme à la religion chrétienne, il n'est point question.'

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merely the result of this process, not the inherited privilege of birth. Porphyry is saying, in other words, that his instruction in Greek philosophy was so perfect that he deserved to be called a Greek; hence his adherence in his maturity to the Christian faith could be deemed by rhetorical licence an apostasy. Porphyry ignores the Christian infancy of Origen, but he is not so disingenuous as to imply that Origen came of pagan parents, and his desire for antithesis thus requires him (somewhat illogically) to contrast the Christian *parentage* of Ammonius with the pagan *education* of his pupil.

The fact that Goulet ignores is the dedication to Plotinus and Amelius of a treatise *On the End* by Porphyry's former master Longinus, whose assiduous polemics were always read and promptly answered (*VP* 20. 85ff.). Porphyry certainly had the opportunity to read this treatise before his departure for Sicily, for it was written while Amelius was still in Rome,⁹ before the pagan Origen had dedicated a treatise to Gallienus, who died in 268, and not long after Porphyry's studies under Plotinus had commenced in 263.¹⁰ In this work Longinus alludes to the neoplatonist Origen and the sparsity of his writings (*ibid.* 20. 40–7). By this time the Christian Origen was dead, leaving behind him more than any man could read. Thus Porphyry knew before 268 that the neoplatonist Origen was not a prolific author, a fact which he later reiterates in the *Life of Plotinus* itself. In his work against the Christians, the inception of which can be dated at the earliest to his residence in Sicily after 268,¹¹ he remarks that the Christian Origen's work was distinguished by its volume (*HE* vi. 19. 5ff.). It is therefore inconceivable that he identified the two in the passage quoted by Eusebius from that work.

⁹ See A. H. Armstrong's translation, Loeb Classical Library, i, New York 1964. The work in question was addressed to both Plotinus and Longinus (*VP* 20. 15) and the tenor of 20. 75ff. implies that he was then still a frequenter of the school. Amelius retired to Apamea in the first year of Claudius (268/9: *ibid.* 3. 40), there to present Longinus with the text of Plotinus' lessons (17. 16ff.); Porphyry had embarked for Sicily only months before (6. 2: the fifteenth, i.e. last year of Gallienus, also 268/9).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 21. 13. The proem would be the latest part of the work: J. Igal, *La Cronologia de la Vida de Plotino de Porfirio*, Madrid 1972, 109 argues that the phrase ἐμοῦ... ἔτι ἀρχῶς ἔχοντος means not that Porphyry was a novice in the school at the time when the proem was composed, but merely that the work to which Longinus refers at *VP* 20. 93 was an early one. As the unanimity of other translators shows, this reading is not a natural one, and leaves one asking why Longinus did not address himself to any later composition if he wrote in or after 268/9. Igal bases his argument upon 21. 18ff., which states that Longinus wrote 'before ascertaining the doctrines of Plotinus with greater accuracy'. Since, however, he never secured the collaboration of Porphyry, which he solicited after the latter's arrival in Sicily, and continued to write against Plotinus even 'up to the present' (ἄχρι νῦν at 21. 19), Longinus might have written these polemics at any time before his death.

¹¹ Goulet, 'Porphyre, Ammonius', 491 assumes the early dating for the composition of the work *Against the Christians*. His thesis is untenable if we accept the conclusions of T. D. Barnes, 'Porphyry against the Christians: date and attribution of the fragments', *Journal of Theological Studies* liii (1973), 424–42; Porphyry must have known that there were two Origenes by about AD 300.

Porphry's testimony that the Christian Origen studied with an Ammonius is therefore not an inference from his supposed identity with the pagan Origen, but a claim for which he must have had an independent source. He therefore affords early evidence for both an Ammonius O and an Ammonius P, and his failure, when naming 'Origen' as a colleague of Plotinus, to specify whether the pagan or the Christian is intended, suggests that he believed only the pagan Origen to have been taught by Ammonius P.

III

A second consideration against supposing that Ammonius P is the same man as Ammonius O arises from the comparison of their literary careers. Both Porphyry and Longinus strongly imply that Ammonius P wrote nothing. The former speaks of a pact made by his pupils to refrain from publication of his teachings, a pact which would have been futile and perverse if he had already been willing to publish them himself. Longinus, when he includes Ammonius P in a list of eminent philosophers who set little value on writing, qualifies his statement to take account of a single work by the neoplatonist Origen, but gives no sign that Ammonius had elected to communicate even as little as this to the world. Eusebius, on the other hand, states that Ammonius O had composed a work *On the Harmony of Jesus and Moses*, a work which was still available for the perusal of any interested reader.

Origen the Christian, we must remember, wrote profusely, Heraclius whenever his occupation permitted it. The latter, at least, since Ammonius O was the only inspiration of his philological labours, could hardly have avoided the reproduction of his teachings. Yet Heraclius became a bishop after quitting the school in 210;¹² what then can Plotinus and his friends have been conspiring to conceal in 243?

The testimony of Eusebius has often been set aside as the result of a confusion, though it is not said where we find independent evidence of the Ammonius for whom he is supposed to have mistaken Ammonius P. The fashionable contempt for his testimony appears to be based upon the very fact that constitutes my argument: the incompatibility of his Ammonius O with Ammonius P. In view of the early date of this historian and his knowledge of sources lost to us, it would seem that his detractors ought to demonstrate its inaccuracy. They must show, that is, that Porphyry's Ammonius O is identical with Ammonius P, or else that he is incompatible with the Ammonius O of Eusebius. As it ought to be easier to prove the negative thesis than the positive, and as the positive thesis would in any case presuppose the truth of the negative one, I shall ask whether the evidence of Eusebius and Porphyry concerning Ammonius O can be reconciled.

¹² Bardy, *Eusèbe*.

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It seems to me that Eusebius, who was acquainted with many particulars of Origen's early life, cannot have identified this Ammonius as his master without some reason, and that, while his Ammonius O cannot be Ammonius P, he can be the Ammonius O of Porphyry. This claim may appear surprising when we recollect that he roundly contradicts Porphyry by affirming that, far from having been converted to paganism, Ammonius remained a Christian all his life; but this is merely an inference from jejune information, and need not have been supported by any data incompatible with Porphyry's account of Ammonius O.

We need only assume that Eusebius was mistaken in taking the *Harmony of Jesus and Moses* as proof of this author's fidelity to his juvenile beliefs. Perhaps there were other writings of this Ammonius which were unknown to him; or Ammonius, like many of his contemporaries, was not a prolific author in his maturity, and Eusebius judged from his extant works in ignorance of his subsequent career. It may even be that Ammonius O was indeed a renegade from Christianity, but one who retained such an interest in the traditions of the Church that he continued, like his contemporary Numenius, to discuss them with a sympathy that did not imply belief.¹³

A valuable hypothesis is that of F. M. Schroeder, who suggests that this Ammonius neither renounced the Christian faith nor adhered to its orthodoxies, but joined a sect which was unacceptable to the 'rule of faith'.¹⁴ Schroeder concurs with the argument of this paper, that the Ammonius O of Porphyry may be the Ammonius O of Eusebius: corroborative evidence for his view will be advanced in the final section of this paper. The only points germane to the present argument are that the evidence of Eusebius cannot be ignored without vicious circularity, and that if it is given due weight it will require us to attribute to his Ammonius O a writing which can be credited without implausibility to the Ammonius O of Porphyry, but not to Ammonius P.

The argument that Heraclas and Origen must, in the course of publication, have given a wider audience to their Alexandrian tutor could be met if it were possible to distinguish between those teachings which were delivered to the 'hearers' of Ammonius, the ἀκροῦται, and those that he reserved for his ζῆλωται, the inner circle. Such a distinction has been advanced by Schwyzer, with a 'diffidence' that Schroeder, who endorses it as a plausible and luminous solution, thinks extreme.¹⁵ In fact Schwyzer's diffidence is no greater than it ought to be, for Porphyry's own nomenclature is demonstrably against him. He can hardly have meant that Plotinus was an intimate of all the men whose ἀκροάσεις he endured

¹³ On Numenius see Mark Edwards, 'Atticizing Moses? Numenius, the Fathers and the Jews', *Vigiliae Christianae* xlv (1990), 64-75, though there it is argued that Numenius' interest in the traditions of Judaism extended only to praising, not to reading, its sacred books.

¹⁴ Schroeder, 'Ammonios Saccas', 504-5.

¹⁵ H. R. Schwyzer, *Ammonios Saccas, der Lehrer Plotins*, Rheinische-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaft, Opladen 1983, 36; Schroeder, 'Ammonios Saccas', 506-7.

without edification (*VP* 3. 9); and yet it was in the ἀκροάσειν of Ammonius P that he heard the formal delivery of his opinions (*ibid.* 3. 26).¹⁶ A man who frequents an ἀκρόασις cannot be other than an ἀκροατής, and yet the same Porphyry calls the Christian Origen an ἀκροατής of Ammonius O. Origen the Christian and Plotinus were both ἀκροαταί of their respective masters; since this Origen and his contemporaries were under no vow of silence, the protracted taciturnity of Plotinus would have been futile if those masters had been the same.

I have attempted to show in this part of my argument that the Ammonius O of Eusebius is compatible with the Ammonius O of Porphyry, but not with Ammonius P. I have also shown that the master whom the Christian Origen speaks of in his letter can be reconciled with Ammonius O but not with Ammonius P. So far as any witness from the third century is concerned, the case for supposing Porphyry and the Christian Origen to have had the same tutor is not strong.

IV

We must now ascertain what knowledge can be derived from sources later than Eusebius. Our only pagan witness to Ammonius P is Ammianus Marcellinus, who informs us that 'Saccas Ammonius, the tutor of Plotinus' was born in Bruchion, a district of Alexandria (xxii. 16. 16). Ammianus is evidently relying upon some source now lost to us, and he is the first to employ the by-name Saccas, which Dorrie gives poor reasons for excising from his text.¹⁷

It is unnecessary to quote the notice in Jerome's *De Viris Illustribus* 55, which is nothing more than a paraphrase of Eusebius on Ammonius O, repeating that historian's imputations on the veracity of Porphyry. Perhaps the only detail worthy of note is that Jerome, unlike Eusebius, does not aver that the writings of Ammonius O have survived, but rather that 'constet eum usque ad extremam vitam Christianum pervenisse'. This, apart from *constet*, merely transcribes the opinion of Eusebius, without his appeal to documentary evidence, and one must therefore suspect that no such evidence lay to hand. Ammonius P, on the other hand, appears to have been no stranger to Nemesius of Emesa, who credits him with two important opinions on the nature of the soul. The first is the doctrine, Peripatetic in origin,¹⁸ and here jointly ascribed to Ammonius and Numenius of Apamea, that the soul is the immaterial bond which

¹⁶ ἀπεκεκαθάρτο at *VP* 3. 26 means 'enunciated clearly'; the lectures of Ammonius are contrasted for their lucidity with the confusion that resulted when Plotinus asked his pupils to debate their way to truth (3. 35). The distinction between ἀκροαταί and ζηλωταί at 7. 1 concerns the zeal of certain pupils, not their admission to a higher grade of teaching. As we learn from 13. 10ff. the most esoteric discussions are open to all.

¹⁷ Dörrie, 'Ammonios, der Lehrer Plotins', 466–7. The position of the name Saccas is irrelevant, and there is no other sign that the passage requires emendation.

¹⁸ See W. Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, London 1955, 262 n. 2.

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checks the perilous flux and motion of the material body (*De Natura Hominis* ii. 12); the second, attributed only to 'Ammonius, the tutor of Plotinus', is the father of a peculiarly Neoplatonic dogma:

Ammonius, the master of Plotinus, solved the question thus [*viz.* 'How is the living creature a unity?']. He said that it is the nature of intelligibles both to be capable of union with things adapted to receive them, just as much as if they were things that would perish with them, and to remain, nonetheless, unconfused with them while in union, and imperishable, just as though they were merely juxtaposed. For the union of bodies always involves some alteration in them as they enter into union... In the case of intelligibles, on the other hand, union takes place and yet no change in them results (*De Natura Hominis* iii. 20 trans. Telfer).

We must take this to be a paraphrase of Ammonius, not a literal quotation.¹⁹ That this is Nemesius' practice when adducing him is evident from the earlier citation at ii. 12, for there the names of Ammonius and Numenius are inextricable, and, while it would be possible to paraphrase both together, they could not be simultaneously quoted in their own words. Dorrie has suggested that the source of this testimony is a work of Porphyry's, lost to us but available to Nemesius.²⁰ The fact that bodily union with the soul is not so explained by Porphyry elsewhere or by the later neoplatonists matters little. Porphyry's more technical works have perished, he was not favoured by commentators after Iamblichus, and in any case we do not know how much of the application here is due to Nemesius rather than to Porphyry or Ammonius P himself.

These provisions granted, we have no reason to follow John Rist in disparaging the veracity of the ascription to Ammonius P:²¹ Rist makes the unwarranted assumption that a written work is in question, but Porphyry could have derived his information from Plotinus or another oral source. It is difficult in any case to endorse Rist's thesis that treatises which bore the name of Ammonius were fabricated in order to confute the claims of Porphyry: how could such passages further the aim of magnifying Origen through his tutor, when Christian authors, the putative beneficiaries of the imposture, either show no acquaintance with the teachings of any Ammonius, or attribute them exclusively to the tutor of Plotinus?

We may therefore suppose with Dörrie that there were no works ascribed to Ammonius, but only a doxographic report in Porphyry. Dörrie's hypothesis also saves the credit of the fifth-century pagan commentator Hierocles, who, once again rather paraphrasing than quoting, says that Ammonius was the first to effect a reconciliation of the

¹⁹ There is certainly no evidence that Ammonius was speaking of soul and body rather than of mind and matter. Telfer remarks (*ibid.* 296) that the final sentence, which applies Ammonius' tenet to the union of soul and body, is 'in a different style'.

²⁰ Dörrie, 'Ammonios, der Lehrer Plotins', 445-59; J. M. Rist, 'Ps.-Ammonius and the soul-body problem', *American Journal of Philology* cix (1988), 403-5. Dörrie suggests that the source was the *Summikta Zetemata* (cf. Telfer, *Nemesius*, 262 n. 2 after Domanski), but, in view of the report of Hierocles, I should rather favour Porphyry's *Harmony of Aristotle and Plato*.

²¹ Rist, 'Ps.-Ammonius', 403.

teaching of Aristotle with that of Plato (Photius, *Bibliotheca* 214, 251). Ammonius is distinguished as the tutor of Plotinus and the Neoplatonist Origen; Photius, the Christian epitomator of Hierocles, did not see fit to add that he taught a presbyter of the Church.

That Plotinus and his followers were the heirs of such a reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle no-one will deny; the notion of an 'unconfused commingling' of the intelligibles can be found in Plotinus' treatise *On the Origin of Evils*:

That Mind, however, is not of such a nature, but contains everything and is everything, being present to all while present to itself, containing all without containing any; it is not that they are one thing and it another, nor is each thing within it a separate entity for the whole is each thing, and everywhere everything, and yet is not confused but distinct (*Enneads* i. 8. 2).

After Eusebius, therefore, there survived reports of the tenets of Ammonius P which are congruent with the philosophy of his most celebrated pupil; there also survived at least one source, represented by Ammianus Marcellinus, which related to his life. Since Porphyry was pre-eminent as historian and as philosopher, a single passage might have been the source of all these records. Even among the Christians of this scholarly age, however, nothing was known, except Eusebius' history, pertaining to an Ammonius who was known to have taught the Christian Origen. Nothing, that is, except for the following notice in Theodoret: 'In the reign of Commodus, Ammonius, surnamed Saccas, gave up the sacks in which he used to carry wheat, and took to philosophy. They say that both our own Origen and Plotinus resorted to him' (*Curatio Graecarum Affectionum* vi. 61).

It has been established above that: (1) Saccas was the surname of Ammonius P; (2) independent notices of Ammonius P survived; (3) these notices style him the tutor of the neoplatonist Origen and of Plotinus; (4) no other notice survives of an Ammonius who is styled the tutor of the Christian Origen. Theodoret is likely to have been aware of the statement in Eusebius that an Ammonius was the tutor of the Christian Origen. The rest of his information he could have drawn from a document which made no mention of the Christian Origen, a document whose existence we have already seen good reason to surmise. If he compared the latter with Eusebius, knowing neither Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* nor the remains of the pagan Origen, he could hardly have failed to conclude that the Christian Origen and Plotinus had been students with the same master.²² If that is so, he has merely anticipated the conclusions of modern scholars, while knowing somewhat less, and so the only witness to the identity of Ammonius O and Ammonius P must be quietly discharged.

The *Suda* (*s.v.* Ammonius) is brief and inaccurate: 'Ammonius the philosopher, surnamed Saccas, became a Greek from being a Christian, as

²² Reference to the indices of Raeder's edition of the *Curatio* corroborates all the hypotheses of this paragraph concerning the extent and the defects of Theodoret's knowledge.

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Porphyry declares'. Porphyry says this of Ammonius O, but he is not the source of the name Ammonius Saccas. If corroboration for the surname has been sought where there is none, it is because the compiler did not know where to find it. He has simply assumed, without warrant, that the most eminent Ammonius was the Ammonius of Porphyry, the extract from whom in Eusebius was possibly his only written source.

V

I have thus maintained that Ammonius Saccas, the tutor of Plotinus, is not the tutor of Origen; that both Porphyry and Eusebius possessed correct information about the career of Origen's tutor; and that Nemesius of Emesa has correctly represented the beliefs of Ammonius Saccas at a time when he had eclipsed the other Ammonius in fame. I have not been required to make a false witness of either Porphyry or Eusebius. I have not had to argue, with Rist, that all the references to 'Ammonius' in Eusebius, Nemesius and Hierocles are the fruits of successful imposture by an unknown. I have merely denied the authority of Theodoret and the *Suda*. Dörrie is equally cool toward Ammianus Marcellinus, whom I have defended, and the *Suda* is in any case caught out in a palpable error when it ascribes a statement to Porphyry which that author never made.

Is it not still reasonable to urge the improbability of there having been an Ammonius contemporary with Origen who was not Ammonius P, but yet enjoyed the reputation of being singularly devoted to philosophy? The cogency of this reasoning disappears when it meets the facts; for there was such another Ammonius, and it is Porphyry who has preserved his name from oblivion. One cannot lightly ignore the commendation of Longinus:

The Peripatetics Ammonius and Ptolemy were the most erudite men (φιλολογώτατοι) of their epoch, Ammonius in particular, whose learning (πολυμαθείαν) was unequalled. They did not write a single technical treatise, but only poems and epideictic discourses, which have been handed down to us, perhaps in the authors' despite. Having neglected to give their doctrines permanence in more serious compositions, they would not have wished to be remembered by these (*VP* 20. 49-57).

As a contemporary of the Peripatetic Ptolemaeus, Ammonius will have flourished in the last decades of the second century.²³ Philostratus bears witness to his renown when he calls him 'the most erudite of all the philosophers that I have known' (*Vitae Sophistarum* p. 618 Boissonade). Of this Ammonius, therefore, three things are known which could also be predicated of Ammonius O: that he was an older contemporary of Origen, that he wrote, and that he was unusually diligent in his

²³ Ptolemaeus, treated as a contemporary of Ammonius, is mentioned by Sextus Empiricus at *Adv. Math.* 1. 60, 72. This means that his writings were known in the last two decades of the second century: on the date of Sextus see Pauly-Wissowa, *Realencyclopaedia*, IIA (1933), 1057.

philosophical studies. The first and second of these could not, however, be said of Ammonius P.

We are not told that Ammonius the Peripatetic taught in Alexandria, but most men called Ammonius appear to have retained an association with the land where the name originated.²⁴ Some other considerations, which may be thought to speak for my hypothesis that Ammonius O was the Peripatetic Ammonius, can be drawn from the pagan and Christian witnesses who were cited above.

Origen praises his tutor as a master of μαθήματα and his pupil Heraclius as one who shines in the exegesis of texts (φιλολογῶν). Porphyry says that the teaching of Ammonius O made Origen a polymath. Longinus calls the Peripatetic Ammonius φιλολογώτατος and admires his πολυμαθεία. The pupil of Ammonius P, on the other hand, evinces his contempt for such distinctions in his estimate of Longinus: φιλόλογος μὲν ὁ Λογγίνος, φιλόσοφος δ' οὐδαμῶς (*VP* 14. 19–20). How could such a summary judgment proceed from the most intimate disciple of Ammonius P, if this was the Ammonius whose learning was ubiquitously regarded as his chief title to esteem?

We have noted above the suggestion that Ammonius O had embraced a deviant form of Christianity. One sect which is known to have arisen in Origen's youth is stated by Eusebius (or his informant) to have dissembled its idolatry of the Stagirite under the philological criticism of the sacred texts (*HE* v. 28. 10–11). It would therefore not be remarkable if such a Peripatetic were to style himself a Christian, or a Christian of this type were to be styled a Peripatetic by others. If his works included such an exercise as the *Harmony of Jesus and Moses*, it would not be strange that such a pagan admirer as Longinus thought their survival a matter for regret. For those more ignorant, and if Ammonius O was a Peripatetic while Ammonius P had vindicated the harmony of Aristotle and Plato, confusion of the two would be still more difficult to avoid.

It might be said that, even if Origen courted his tutor initially for his learning, it is obvious from his own letter in Eusebius that he imbibed from him, not only information, but certain principles of thought. If, then, his tutor was one who not merely read Aristotle but professed to follow him, we might expect that Origen's work would evince conspicuous traces of his teaching. Such a trace we do indeed discern where we might most naturally expect it to appear – in the cardinal position which is assigned by this scourge of heresy to the freedom of the will.

So Hans Langerbeck has already argued, noting that it was Origen's chief task in the *De Principiis* to confute the determinism of the Marcionite and Valentinian heresies. Langerbeck traces to Aristotle Origen's notion that God as a cause is neither bound nor matter nor unconditioned by the

²⁴ This can be easily verified by reference to *Der Kleine Pauly*, i, Munich 1979, 305–6. The practice of Longinus throughout the piece is to couple men who belong to the same locality; and Ammonius is coupled with a man who bears another Egyptian appellative, Ptolemaeus.

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Good,²⁵ and, while he assumes without argument that Ammonius Saccas was the tutor of Origen and Plotinus, he is also obliged to conjecture that in his treatment of this subject one or other has departed from his master. It seems at least as probable that they were taught in different schools.

That Origen held firmly to the Peripatetic teaching on the autonomy of man will be apparent from two passages in his treatise *On First Principles*. The first concerns the fall of the soul, the second its redemption. While he adheres like the Platonists to a belief in the pre-existence of the soul, Origen gives none of the many reasons which the Platonists had offered for its fall. These, it appears, were either deterministic or assumed that the soul had already travelled long enough to contract a liability to sin. Instead he propounds the analogy of an artisan whose knowledge begins to fail him by neglect (*De Principiis* i. 4. 1). Where Plato, who believed in the identity of knowledge and virtue, could offer only metaphor and conjecture as to the cause of the supercelestial error, Origen follows Aristotle in making discipline the means of acquiring and retaining a disposition, and in distinguishing the knowledge possessed by the agent from the knowledge that he chooses to employ (Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1146b 31-5).

At *De Principiis* iii. 1. 1-4, Origen maintains against the heretics, as his older contemporary Alexander of Aphrodisias had maintained against the Stoics:²⁶ (1) that to treat our actions as determined is to annihilate praise and blame; (2) that ὁρμή or impulse, as the automatic outcome of perception, is the object, not the consequence, of judgment; (3) that rational judgment may incline, but does not constrain, us to practise virtue; and (4) that virtue is cultivated in our character by the assiduous performance of virtuous acts. He does not hold, with Chrysippus, that everything that belongs to a man's disposition is in his power, nor, with Plato, that knowledge alone suffices to conquer whatever in man's disposition is bad.

I therefore commend the Peripatetic Ammonius to the attention of scholars who work upon history of thought in Late Antiquity; for it seems to me to be no cause for astonishment if a man of such contemporary distinction and later obscurity should have been confused with the tutor of Plotinus. This confusion I take to have been avoided by Eusebius, by Porphyry, by Longinus and by Nemesius of Emesa, to have commenced with the doxography of Theodoret, and to have been perpetuated by modern scholars, with the exception of Heinrich Dörrie, who did not, however, marshal all the evidence in his case.

²⁵ H. Langerbeck, 'On the philosophy of Ammonius Saccas and the union of Christian and Aristotelian elements therein', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* lxxvii (1957), 77-84.

²⁶ See *De Fato*, p. 187 (on praise and blame), 184 (on the authority of reason over impulse), 185 (on the limited power of deliberation), 197 (on the development of character). On the difference between the Chrysippean and Peripatetic definitions of 'what is in our power' see R. W. Sharples, *Alexander of Aphrodisias On Fate*, London 1983, 9-11.

Birth, Death, and Divinity in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*

Open any book about Plotinus, and it is almost sure to be prefaced by a chapter on his life. The method is that of Porphyry, his most successful pupil, and the content of the chapter in most cases will be drawn entirely from his introduction to the *Enneads*, although perhaps with an occasional animadversion on his dates.¹ The collaborative project recently edited in Paris by Luc Brisson has reminded us that the *Life* has all the usual opacities of a literary artifact; we may add to this a handful of articles, most of them by the same scholars, on the *Oracle of Apollo*, and some incidental remarks in F. M. Schroeder's magisterial essay on Ammonius Saccas.² Nevertheless, Patricia Cox is still, so far as I know, the only author who has tried to grasp the pattern and the spirit of the whole, and it is her *Biography in Late Antiquity* that provides the starting point of the present chapter.³

Among the debated features of Cox's book is her distinction between biographies that present the main figure as "the son of a god" and those that confer on him only a "godlike status."⁴ I do not think that this distinction, any more than the book itself, is asking to be read as either technical or exhaustive. We are all aware that Greek

1. See, e.g., Rist, *Plotinus*, 2–20. Igal, *Cronología de la Vida de Plotino de Porfirio*, remains an outstanding contribution to the study of the chronology, on which Barnes, "Chronology," may also be consulted. All these works are interested in the *Life of Plotinus* as a historical text, not a literary one.

2. Brisson, ed., *Porphyre: Vie de Plotin*, vols. 1 and 2; Schroeder, "Ammonios Saccas."

3. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*. The final chapter deals with the *Life of Plotinus*.

4. *Ibid.*, 20: "One paradigm, followed by Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius*), Porphyry (*Life of Pythagoras*) and Iamblichus (*Pythagorean life*) characterizes the divine philosopher as the son of a god. The other, followed by Porphyry (*Life of Plotinus*) and Eusebius (*Life of Origen*) attributes only a godlike status to the divine philosopher."

has more than two such terms, and that each of the expressions θεός, δαίμων, υἱὸς θεοῦ, and θεῖος ἀνὴρ is employed with even less discrimination by the ancients than in modern studies of them.⁵ I take it that the author's aim was therefore, not to foist a new precision on ancient writers who were neither lexicographers nor philosophers, but to make the important point that the biographies of different pagan saints are so constructed as to yield very different hints of their relation to the gods. In the following analysis of Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, I use his own vocabulary because, as a philosopher, he may be supposed to have chosen his words advisedly; we have the right to assume that if he verbally contradicts his own beliefs, it is because he is speaking through, or on behalf of, other men.

I argue here that one of the cardinal aims of the *Life*, at least when read in conjunction with the *Enneads*, is to make the reader privy to a mystery hidden from all the pupils and antagonists of Plotinus during his lifetime and not even discovered by the biographer until a short time before he prepared this work in commemoration of his master. First, I argue that, while Porphyry attributed supernatural capacities to his hero, he does not wish us to think that these were extraneously imparted or inherited at his birth. Second, the narrative of Plotinus's death estranges the master even from his pupils when the destiny that he promises to others in the *Enneads* is treated as peculiarly his own. Third, although the truth about Plotinus is unwittingly detected by a priest of his native Egypt, it can be comprehended only by a reader who already knows the *Enneads*. Fourth, the author's commentary on the *Oracle of Apollo* shows philosophy to be wiser than the gods.

This chapter will thus, I hope, fulfill the main purpose of this collection, the study of the uses of biographical literature in late antiquity. Such a collection of studies will inevitably lead us to ask whether late antiquity recognized a genre of biography; if we answer in the affirmative, we shall also wish to know whether Christianity appropriated the genre, and indeed whether Christian writings may have contributed to its evolution. Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* is a prime example in any account of late antique biography; I also hope to show

5. A discussion of, and antidote to, much loose modern writing on the subject of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ can be found in Francis, *Subversive Virtue*, 54–129.

here that it affords a proper subject for comparison with at least one eminent work in the Christian canon. My final argument, therefore, is that Porphyry's protagonist is intended to be, not merely a pagan saint, but a pagan Christ.

THE BIRTH OF PLOTINUS AND THE BIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION

I begin with the birth of Plotinus, if only because we have so much to learn from the fact that Porphyry does not. Plotinus is described in the opening sentence as ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς γεγονώς φιλόσοφος, which could be rendered as "the philosopher who came to be among us." This use of γίγνομαι is not unparalleled in *Life of Plotinus*, which says of the Gnostics γεγόνασι κατ' αὐτόν when it means that they were active in his time (VP 16). It is, however, strange to style Plotinus a contemporary of younger men without first saying something of his time of birth, which Porphyry himself had calculated at his death.⁶

Porphyry cannot have been unacquainted with the miraculous nativities attributed in his own century to men like Apollonius of Tyana. Philostratus, an older contemporary of Plotinus's, wrote, for example: "The people of that region [about Tyana] say that Apollonius was the son of Zeus, though he styled himself the son of Apollonius" (*Vita Apollonii* 1.6). Porphyry knew something of Apollonius's travels in India, which are mentioned in his treatise *On the Styx* and may have prompted him to assign the unlikely motive of visiting India to Plotinus when the latter joined the army of Gordian III.⁷

Miracles, clairvoyance, vegetarianism, and readiness to die are traits that both Plotinus and Apollonius share with the prototype of all philosophical biographies, Pythagoras. Tales of miraculous origin abound for this figure, although Porphyry may have borrowed both the legend and his detachment in rehearsing it from a celebrated work by Apollonius himself: "Apollonius in what he writes about Pythagoras gives his mother's name as Pythais, a descendant of Ancaeus the founder of Samos. Some say that he was the offspring of Apollo and

6. *Life of Plotinus* (=VP) 2.29–31, ed. Henry and Schwyzer, *Plotini Opera*, 1: 1–38; Igal, *Cronologia*, 55–75.

7. VP 3.13–17. For discussion and bibliography, see Edwards, "Plotinus and the Emperors."

Pythais, though according to Apollonius, Mnesarchus was alleged to be his father" (Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae* p. 18.10 Nauck).⁸

Scholars have pointed out that the biographers who preserved these anecdotes did not endorse them,⁹ and in any case divine paternity would not suffice of itself to make a man a god. Apollonius and Pythagoras, whatever their parentage, both lived and died as human beings, as is evident from the catalogues of their previous incarnations; Plotinus, the only one of the three who has no history before his life, is the only one whom the gods themselves acknowledge as divine.

If Porphyry had thought it anachronistic to attach the gods to the birth of a contemporary figure, he could have availed himself of the superstitions that surrounded those of Socrates and Plato. A life of Plato reminds us that the verb γίγνομαι denotes, not the reality or essence of a thing but its contingent occupation of time and space: "All that comes into being does so at a certain time and place. Now let us learn each of these, and also the manner and circumstances of his coming into being" (*Vita Platonis* p. 6.12–15 Westermann). The biographer has already said that Plato was born on the seventh day of Thargelion and Socrates on the sixth; from this he concludes that Plato had the better of his master, since the first was the day of Apollo and the second that of Artemis. Porphyry, by contrast, withholds the information that the verb γίγνομαι seems to promise, alleging that Plotinus "seemed ashamed to be in the body" and "could not bear to speak of his race, nor of his parents, nor of the land of his birth" (*VP* 1.1–3). The second chapter says that, while Plotinus honored the natal days of Socrates and Plato, "he did not think it proper for anyone to honor the day of his birth by feasts or sacrifice" and so would not divulge it. There was, however, at least one source, attested by Eunapius and the *Suda*, which professed to know the birthplace of Plotinus; Porphyry himself concedes that an Alexandrian sorcerer knew his birthday well enough to do him mischief through the influence of the stars.¹⁰ Porphyry's ignorance surprised Eunapius, and we are entitled to suspect that it is feigned.

8. On Apollonius as a source for Pythagorean biography, see Rohde, "Quellen des Iamblichus in seiner Biographie des Pythagoras."

9. See, e.g., Francis, *Subversive Virtue*, 120–21. On the philosophical background to the passage, see O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 39 and n. 60.

10. See Eunapius, *Vitae philosophorum*, ed. Boissonade (= *VS*), p. 455.33–35; Porphyry, *VP* 2.37–42 (on the birthdays of philosophers); 15.21–26 (on the rejection of astrology); 10.4–5 (on the assault by Olympius).

Even if Plotinus, like other prominent figures of his epoch, thought it dangerous to make his birthday public,¹¹ Porphyry would have needed other reasons for conniving at the reticence of his teacher once the latter had been delivered from his body. Marinus clearly thought that his *Life of Proclus* would enhance the reputation of its subject if it ended with a horoscope.¹² When Porphyry draws attention to Plotinus's refutation of astrology, this is partly a defense of his own omissions in the *Life*: "He studied the principles of astrology, though not like a practitioner, paying special attention to the methods which enable men to cast horoscopes; having ascertained that their conclusions were unreliable, he was not afraid to expose many things in their writings" (*VP* 15.21–26). Neither Plotinus nor his pupil wholly denied that stars possess some power to affect the body; but neither would allow that they were capable of determining the mind.¹³ Any Neoplatonist would agree that the philosopher can lay no claim to virtue if he loses his autonomy; inherited divinity would compromise this no less than stellar influence, and perhaps it is because Porphyry sees more clearly than Philostratus or Marinus that he exempts his master's birth from every favorable accident and all suspicion of honorable parentage, whether human or divine.

DEATH AND REPUTATION

Astrologers of Porphyry's time may not have claimed to know Plotinus's horoscope, but they knew what he had suffered, and Firmicus Maternus cites his death as a refutation of his claim to freedom. Plotinus, he informs us, mocked the stars and built himself a residence in Campania, where he hoped to be secure from fate but found instead that virtue was no shield against the indignant constellations:

Not at all did he turn his mind or his eyes upon the end of Socrates or Plato. . . . Behold, as he was safe in this elated confidence the whole power of the fates threw itself upon him. First his limbs grew rigid with a cold torpor of the blood, and little by little his sight was

11. On the measures taken against astrology by emperors, see MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 235 ff.

12. See Marinus, *Vita Procli* 35–36. The importance of fixing the time of a person's *genesis* is emphasized at [Anonymi] *Vita Platonis* p. 6.12–15 Westermann.

13. See, e.g., *Enneads* 2.2–3 (on whether stars are causes) and 4.4.40 (on physical magic).

dimmed, so that his eyes lost their sharpness and splendour. After this a pest erupted through the whole of his skin, and the consequent putrefaction of his body was accompanied by the wasting of his limbs and the corruption of his blood. Every day and hour, minute parts of his entrails were dissolved by the illness that was creeping through them. Where the observer had seen a healthy organ, it was suddenly deformed by the ulceration of his expiring body. (F. Maternus, *Mathesis* 1.20–21)

This syndrome of conventional diseases is as likely to originate in poetry as in the records of Plotinus's own physician. Paul Henry is no doubt right to maintain, against Hans Oppermann, that Maternus has merely embellished the account that he found in Porphyry, incidentally confusing the project for constructing Platonopolis with the retirement of Plotinus to his deathbed in Campania.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the long narrative that Porphyry devotes to this cruel episode suggests that it was sufficiently notorious already to be the subject of polemic. He preempts the exultation of the astrologers by telling us at the outset that Plotinus did not care for either his body or his birthday, and he vindicates his freedom by asserting that he left Rome voluntarily to spare his friends the affliction of his presence (2.20f.). By making this the first date in his biography, he reminds us that the founder of his philosophy had defined it as a preparation for death;¹⁵ and he puts into the mouth of the expiring sage two sentences suggesting that his long struggle with the body is more conducive than a quiet or sudden departure would have been to the elevation of the soul.

In the *Life*, Plotinus is superior to his illness, choosing when and how to end it. Eustochius arrives in time to hear his patient say, "I am waiting for you," but at once it becomes apparent that he is waiting not for medicine but for death:

When he was about to die, so Eustochius informed us, the latter, who was living in Puetoli, came to his bed with little haste. Plotinus said, "I am still waiting for you," and then "I am trying to lift up the divine within me [τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον] to the divine in the All [τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον]." (VP 2.23–27)

14. On the Platonopolis project, see Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 12, and Edwards, "Plotinus and the Emperors." Oppermann, *Plotins Leben*, argues that Eustochius was Firmicus's source, but is rebutted by Henry, *Plotin et l'Occident*, 25–43.

15. Plato, *Phaedo* 64a. Further analogies with this Platonic dialogue will become apparent from the following discussion.

Plotinus greets Eustochius with a sentence of the same type as the one with which he is said to have commenced his philosophical career: he exclaimed of Ammonius Saccas, τοῦτον ἐζήτουν, and here he says to his last disciple, σε ἔτι περιμένω.¹⁶ The most eminent philosopher to have watched his master's deathbed was Pythagoras, who attended Pherecydes during equally painful and protracted symptoms.¹⁷ It is not, however, given to Plotinus's doctor to maintain so long a vigil, or do anything but catch the valediction of his liberated soul. The content of this utterance, which ought to have been the most pregnant of his life, is partly concealed from us by the textual tradition. Henry's celebrated article lists the following variants:¹⁸

I am trying to reconcile the divine in myself [or, in us] to the divine in the All.

Try to reconcile the god in yourselves [τόν ἐν ὑμῖν θεόν] to the divine in the All.

Try to reconcile the divine in yourselves [τό ἐν ὑμῖν θεῖον] to the divine in the All.

There is external evidence, if we know how to use it rightly, in a letter by Synesius of Cyrene, where he tells his correspondent to "lead back the divinity in yourself to the ancestral divinity" (τό ἐν σαυτῷ θεῖον ἀναγε ἐπὶ τὸ πρόγονον θεῖον), adding that "they say that this was the dictum of Plotinus."¹⁹ But σαυτῷ is not a variant in the manuscripts of Porphyry's *Life*, and Synesius's object is not to reproduce the words exactly but to apply them. His statement affords no evidence that Plotinus used the second-person pronoun, and indeed it suggests the opposite; for if, as he implies, the words were passing into a proverb, the identity of the speaker would be lost and they

16. See *Vita Plotini* 3.13 for Plotinus's verdict on Ammonius Saccas, which recalls Antisthenes' compliment to Socrates, recorded by Jerome, *Adv. Iovinianum* 2.14.344: "Go and seek another master, for I have found mine."

17. See esp. Apuleius, *Florida* 15; Diogenes Laertius 1.117–8; Aelian, *Varia Historia* 4.28. On the life of Pherecydes, which includes a number of miracles foreshadowing those of his supposed pupil Pythagoras, see Schibli, *Pherekydes of Syros*, 140–75. On the literary epidemic called phthiriasis, which carried off Plato, Speusippus, and Alcman as well as Pherecydes, see Keaveney and Madden, "Phthiriasis and Its Victims."

18. See Henry, "Dernière parole de Plotin."

19. Synesius, *Ep.* 138, cited by Henry, "Dernière parole de Plotin," 127. On Synesius's knowledge of the Neoplatonists, see Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene*, 145–54.

would be bound to take the form of an exhortation. We can understand how a copyist would substitute the proverb for a statement; it is harder to surmise how, if Plotinus had employed the second person, it could have been superseded by the first.

The true variant, then, is the one in which Plotinus makes a statement about himself. The word θεόν is not attested here any more than in the allusion by Synesius; its presence in one rejected reading may be best explained as the result of assimilation to the *Enneads*, where Plotinus does indeed speak of the "god within each of us" (τὸν ἐν ἐκάστῳ ἡμῶν θεόν), referring to the *nous* or intellect that dwells in every rational being and implying no distinction between his pupils and himself.²⁰ The words ascribed to him here imply a consciousness of something that must be spoken of more reticently, something therefore higher than a god and not to be shared with his deciduous admirers. Porphyry was the only one to be absent by command and not by choice,²¹ and so it falls to him to expound in chapters 10 and 23 of his biography what he intimates discreetly in chapter 2.

Eustochius left one other observation that found its way into Porphyry's redaction of the scene: "A snake crawled out of the bed in which he lay and slipped out through an aperture in the wall, and at that moment he breathed out his spirit, being, as Eustochius said, a man of sixty-six years" (*VP* 2.27–30).

The snake can hardly be, as some have thought, the "allotted daemon of Plotinus," for, as we shall see, the *Enneads* do not suggest that this could take a shape outside the body, while Porphyry maintains that it did, but in a different form.²² Emile Bréhier refers to Hermes Trismegistus, who is likened to Plotinus by the historian Ammianus Marcellinus;²³ but since Ammianus lived a century later, and the Egyptian Hermes finds no place in the works of either Porphyry or Plotinus, this conjecture can be supported only by an appeal to the

20. Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.5.1.

21. See *Vita Plotini* 11.11ff. for Porphyry's journey to Sicily; Eunapius's account suggests, on the contrary, that he returned before Plotinus died (*Vitae Philosophorum* p. 453.2 Boissonade). See further Goulet, "Variations romanesques sur la mélancolie de Porphyre." On the importance of being present (or excusing one's absence) at the death of one's master, cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 59b, and Owen, "Philosophical Invective," esp. 11ff.

22. See below on *Enneads* 2.4; also Edwards, "Two Episodes from Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*."

23. Plotin: *Les Ennéades*, ed. Bréhier, 1.2 n. 1; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Historiae* 22.16.15–16.

"superstition of the Alexandrian Eustochius." We have no reason to think that an Alexandrian would have been especially prone to superstition, and in any case we have to explain, not why the thing was stated by Eustochius, but why it was transcribed in this biography.

One answer (which I think both new and true, but not sufficient) would be that Porphyry intended to draw a contrast with the unsuccessful fraud essayed by Heraclides Ponticus, an early and irresponsibly biographer of Pythagoras,²⁴ who is said to have been a charlatan in death as well as life:

He had a grown snake, which he had reared from its infancy. When his death was approaching, he requested one of his confidants to conceal his body and place the snake in his bed, so that he would seem to have gone to the gods. And as the citizens were carrying out the bier and blessing the name of Heraclides, the snake, disturbed by the noise, crept out of the robes to general consternation. Subsequently, however, the fraud was detected and Heraclides was known, not as he made himself appear, but as he was. (Diogenes Laertius 5.6.89)

Plotinus, too, is seen in death "not as he would appear, but as he was"; but since he had no confidants and little expectation of an audience, he cannot be suspected of deceit. Nor can Porphyry mean us to interpret the departing snake as his master's soul, for he himself did not believe that human souls migrated after death into animal bodies,²⁵ and such a change on any view would be, not release, but the penalty of wrongdoing. Heraclides Ponticus was a man to be outdone, like Pherecydes, but only one philosopher had died in a way that was always agreed to merit emulation. Firmicus Maternus sneered that his great contemporary forgot the end of Socrates; it would not escape a disciple that the comparison could be given a far more favorable turn.

The death of Socrates, like that of Plotinus, began in the lower regions of the body, and it would have been a source of shame to his disciples had not he himself construed it as a blessing when he gave instructions for a final sacrifice: "Critias," he said, "we owe a cock to Asclepius; let him have it and don't forget" (*Phaedo* 118a7–8). Satirists and Christians were amused by this belated vow; Damascius's reply

24. See Gottschalk, *Heraclides of Pontus*, 110ff.

25. At least according to Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.30; although Stobaeus, *Eclogae* 1.41.60, implies a literal understanding of transmigration.

is that Asclepius, the divine physician, is here receiving paradoxical honors as the deity who effects the separation of soul and body.²⁶ Death is the remedy of the true philosopher, who perceives that the disease is life itself. Asclepius, as a chthonic god, was often represented by a serpent, and appeared thus in the dreams of those who came to his temples seeking only bodily salvation.²⁷ Plotinus is in no temple, and the lateness of Eustochius might have led us to suppose that he died for want of a physician; but the presence of Eustochius coincides with the departure of the snake to make it obvious that their roles are complementary. Each is a doctor, each with his task, and only the human doctor need remain to gather up the mortal wrappings. Porphyry has composed a novel scene in which a man receives the visit of Asclepius and decides upon his own remedy; but how could it be otherwise when the living man had told his bewildered pupils that "the gods should come to me, not I to them?"²⁸

KNOWING THE GOD WITHIN

This saying is reported in the tenth chapter as an epilogue to two frustrated intrigues by exponents of a false power over nature. The first of these, mentioned earlier as a possible explanation for the concealment of his birthday, is an attack upon the body of Plotinus through the heavens:

One of those with pretensions to philosophy was Olympius, an Alexandrian . . . who endeavoured to work against him through the magic of the stars. But when he found that the attempt had turned against himself he said to his cronies, "Great is the force of Plotinus' soul, for it can reciprocate the attacks of those who try to do him harm." Plotinus, for his part, resisted the machinations of Olympius, saying that his body at that time was being drawn together "like the contracted purses" as his members were compressed. But Olympius, once he was in danger of suffering more himself than he did to Plotinus, desisted; for Plotinus had something more by birth than others. (VP 10.1–15)

26. See *Phaedo* 118a; Damascius/Olympiodorus, *In Phaedonem* pp. 205 and 241 Norvin. For satiric comments, see Lucian, *Bis Accusatus* 5 and Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 3.20.16–17.

27. See testimonia collected in Edelstein, *Asclepius*.

28. VP 10.35. The superiority of philosophers to gods is acknowledged even by Porphyry, *Sententiae* p. 31.8 Lamberz, so that his claim to be ignorant of Plotinus's meaning here would seem to be intended to set a puzzle for the reader.

Porphyry, with the same candor that he displays in his account of the mortal illness of Plotinus, does not conceal the pains that he incurred from these assaults. Instead, he subordinates them to philosophy by making Plotinus use a flippant metaphor that Plato had applied to the creation of the sexes;²⁹ the sage who “seemed ashamed to be in the body” thus reminds himself and us that our afflictions are not the consequence of any discrete event, but of our mere corporeal presence in the world.

Olympius himself imputes his failure to the force of Plotinus’s soul, and Porphyry adds that he had something more by birth than other mortals. Porphyry does not gloss this by repeating what was said about Pythagoras, that “he let men know that he was of greater seed than that according to mortal nature.”³⁰ For one thing, his Plotinus is too humble to reveal his powers except on irresistible provocation; for another he has the commentary to hand in Plotinus’s treatise *On Our Allotted Personal Daemon*, which he represents as the sequel to another inadvertent demonstration of these powers:

Plotinus has something more by birth than others. For a certain Egyptian priest arrived in Rome and became known to him through a friend. Wishing to make a display of his wisdom he invited Plotinus to come and see an exhibition of his so-called proper daemon that dwelt within him. Plotinus agreeing readily, the conjuration took place in the Temple of Isis, this being, as he said, the only pure spot that he could find in Rome. The daemon was summoned, but proved on becoming visible to be not one of the race of daemons but a god. The Egyptian cried “O blessed art thou, whose companion daemon is not one of the lesser race but a god.” . . . There is indeed a book written by him as a result of this occasion, entitled “On our Allotted Daemon,” in which he explores the reasons for the distinction between the companions. (*VP* 10.15–32)

This treatise is *Enneads* 3.4, and was written before Plotinus made the acquaintance of his biographer. Porphyry has described the contents better than the occasion, for the daemon of which Plotinus speaks could hardly have been evoked by any rite. It is the fate allotted to the soul at the beginning of each embodiment, or rather the future state that it should strive to attain in the course of that embodiment. It is

29. *Symposium* 190e on the σύσπαστα βαλλάντια. Plotinus himself put a serious construction on the myth, citing 192e at *Enneads* 6.5.1.16.

30. Cf. Aelian, *Varia Historia* 4.17.

not the driving force within the body that the astrologers (and Porphyry) would have called the natal daemon; rather, it is the star that the aspiring mind has adopted as its pilot (3.4.6), and this pilotage is assumed to be both benevolent and compatible with freedom. It is left to the biographer to insinuate that Plotinus was unique in being the master, not the victim, of his birth.³¹

The priest betrays his ignorance by assuming that a daemon, which is merely the state of soul above the present one, must be always something other than a god. Porphyry is satisfied that the rivals of Plotinus should confess his superiority; that superiority is all the more apparent, and the confession more sincere, when it is framed in the crude vocabulary of the defeated party. Literature offered precedents for such contests, where Pythagoras gets the better of Apollo's priest Abaris, or Apollonius prophesies misfortune to a celebrant of the Eleusinian mysteries;³² but Porphyry's innovation is to link the tale to a treatise that, if the link were sound, would put a wholly new construction on it. Plotinus says that one who lives entirely in his intellect is the equal of those gods who would otherwise have been his guardians; such a man he knew himself to be, and we must thus conclude, with Armstrong, that his tutelary daemon is the One.³³

CORRECTING THE GODS

These early chapters of the *Vita Plotini* have been a riddle to those not already acquainted with the teaching of Plotinus. Porphyry says that his master was of rarer birth than others, yet conspires with him to conceal the time and place of it; the dying sage is conscious of a divinity within him, and, in chapter 10, we appear to see the undeniable signs of both its presence and its nature, yet the book that is recommended as an interpretant subverts the origin of the sign itself. So long as we are hampered by the defective understanding of a Eustochius, an Olympius, or an Isiac priest, it is only by an inference (if at all) that we can name the divine companion of Plotinus. The *Life* does not so

31. Thus Plotinus is a philosopher, not a magician. See Armstrong, "Was Plotinus a Magician?" against Merlan, "Plotinus and Magic." On the natal daemon and related figures, see Edwards, "Two Images," 163–65.

32. Iamblichus, *De vita Pythagorica* 92; Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 4.18.2. In each case the man who professes a peculiar wisdom or talent discovers that he has encountered his superior.

33. See *Enneads* 3.4.6 and the introduction to Armstrong, *Plotinus*, 3: 141.

much endorse the witnesses to his greatness as supply us with the materials to correct them, and Porphyry concludes that the authoritative verdict must be delivered by the gods: "But what is all this talk of mine about a tree and a rock, as Hesiod says? For if one ought to use the testimonies that come from the wisest, who could be wiser than a god?" (VP 22.1–4). Porphyry belonged to a generation of philosophers who no longer thought it childish to believe that the gods expressed themselves in verse. In this time, the Sibyls revived, the Orphic fragments multiplied, and Empedocles acquired a new reputation as a poet; Porphyry compiled at least one digest of the *Philosophy to be Imbibed from Oracles* and perhaps another work entitled *On the Regression of the Soul*.³⁴ The supposed *Chaldaean Oracles*, on which this was based, were manufactured by and for philosophers,³⁵ and so, we may suspect, is the one recorded in the *Life* as having been spoken to Amelius; for it comes from one of Apollo's shrines, which were never so verbose and were alleged in the previous century to have lapsed either into prose or into silence.³⁶ The precedents that Porphyry himself cites are archaic—two verses from Herodotus and the famous testimonial to Socrates;³⁷ archaic, too, is the diction, which conceals at least as much as it discloses and can only be construed by a second act of divination, Porphyry's commentary in chapter 23.

The apophthegm that justifies the quotation of the *Oracle of Apollo* is from Hesiod's *Theogony*; his *Works and Days* supplies the leading image, with its story that the first generation of mortals, the most virtuous and the happiest, were a race of gold who when they perished took the form of tutelary daemons.³⁸ Plotinus is saluted in the *Oracle* as a man who now enjoys, along with Minos, Rhadamanthus, and the rest of the "golden race," the "more divine estate of daemons"; five times the word is used of his new condition, but his soul in life already possessed this quality, and what he now receives from Zeus, he has

34. See O'Meara, *Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine*, on the *De regressu animae* in *De civitate Dei* 10.

35. See, e.g., Saffrey, "Neoplatoniciens et les oracles chaldaïques."

36. See Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum* and *De Pythiae oraculis*. Many scholars are, however, willing to believe that the oracle emanated from a shrine: see, e.g., Brisson, "Oracle d'Apollon dans la *Vie de Plotin* par Porphyre," where he favors a shrine in Asia Minor; on these see Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 177–85.

37. See Herodotus 1.47; Plato, *Apology* 21a.

38. See Hesiod, *Opera* 115 ff.; Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre*, 126 n. 1; Goulet. "Oracle d'Apollon dans la *Vie de Plotin*."

earned by his dauntless ardor in pursuing the goal illumined by the "radiance" from above.³⁹ This notion of return to a primordial felicity, is not, however, derived from Hesiod but from Empedocles, who represents himself as a fallen daemon but exults in his redemption by proclaiming himself to be "no longer a mortal, but a god."⁴⁰

The *Oracle's* phrase is δαῖμον, ἄνερ τὸ πάροιθεν, but Plotinus himself preferred the Empedoclean θεὸς ἄμβροτος, οὐκέτι θνητός.⁴¹ Porphyry must have seen that this discrepancy between Apollo's language and his master's is the symptom of a fundamental difference in the thought. The seer includes himself among the gods who have the power to bestow felicity on such beings as Plotinus, who can aspire to no higher state than that of daemons. A Platonist would have answered that Apollo himself in his mantic role is not so much a deity as a daemon,⁴² and Plotinus, as we have seen, maintained that the gods should come to him. Porphyry pretends not to understand him, but this is merely an indication that his *Life* is of a propaedeutic character; for in the *Sententiae*, he himself distinguishes between those who have obtained the rank of θεοί by their philosophic virtues, and those who have risen higher to deserve the appellation, "father of gods."⁴³ This phrase is elucidated in the writing that his own edition treats as the summit of his master's thought: "For activity [*energeia*] also generates gods in silence by contact with [the One], and it generates beauty, righteousness and virtue" (*Enneads* 6.9.9). In an earlier paragraph (6.9.7), the story that Minos was the son of Zeus is understood as a prefigurement of the intimacy with the One to which the human soul aspires. The Eros and Aphrodite of the *Symposium* are now not so much the causes as the progeny of this ascent, and this alone the philosopher will acknowledge as his goal. Discoverable only by the *logos* of philosophy, the One, in Porphyry's commentary on the *Oracle*, is the key that unlocks the *muthos* of a less enlightened seer:

39. For daemons or the daemoniac in the *Oracle*, see *VP* 22, 23, 46, 47, 57, 59. For the radiance from above, see *VP* 22.29ff.

40. On Empedocles in Neoplatonism, see Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.7.10, 4.8.12, etc., with Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae* p. 33 Nauck, and Edwards. "Late Use of Empedocles."

41. Empedocles, Fr. 112.4 DK, cited by Plotinus at *Enneads* 4.7.10.38.

42. See, e.g., Apuleius, *De Deo Socratis*, provoking a Christian rejoinder in Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.

43. See n. 28 above. On the uses of the term θεός in the *Enneads*, see Rist, "Theos and the One."

And as he kept on drawing himself by this daemonic light towards the first and transcendent God, through meditation and according to the methods described by Plato in the *Symposium*, there appeared to him that God who has neither form nor any concept, but is seated above the mind and all intelligible. To this I Porphyry testify that I also once approached and was united in my sixty-eighth year. So then the "nearby goal" appeared to Plotinus. (*VP* 23.7–14)

Without at least one experience of divine illumination, Porphyry could not, in a single passage, have offered such tendentious readings of the *Oracle of Apollo*, Plato's *Symposium*, and Plotinus's own allusions to the "god who sits within us."⁴⁴ In the *Life*, the acolytes of other gods bestow their ignorant praises on the sage, who has disarmed them by his miracles, and after his death, the failure of understanding will be even more acute. At the same time, it is easier to correct, for it is now contending, not with the spontaneous defenses of his body, but with the thoughts of his imperishable mind.

BIOGRAPHY AND GOSPEL

It should be observed at this point that the work I have called the *Life* of Plotinus in this chapter received a slightly different title from its author: he named it *On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of His Works*. In the usage of the period, such prepositional phrases denote a work of a partisan character, nearer to panegyric than to what we now call biography, and intended to support the cause or polity that its subject introduced into the world. Just as Porphyry's memoir is a preface to fifty-four treatises, so Philostratus's *Concerning Apollonius of Tyana* was succeeded by the *Letters* of that philosopher; Iamblichus's *On the Pythagorean Life* is the first of ten books in a projected encyclopedia; and the fifth book of Eusebius's *On the Life of Constantine* is an *Oration to the Saints*.⁴⁵

One English word for a narrative with such a patent tendency is *gospel*, and it would not be surprising if the exponent of a new Platonism conceived his own memorial of his master as a pagan contribution to this genre. He produced it perhaps a little after 300 A.D., and

44. The illumination comes to Porphyry when he is the same age as that of Plotinus at death; he will not allow himself to be the equal of his master.

45. For further consideration of this point, see my "Epilogue: Biography and the Biographic."

his own *Contra Christianos* may have been written about the same time, with the intention of enhancing or excusing the severity of Diocletian's measures against the Christians.⁴⁶ The Gospels were already being compared with the Philostratean account of Apollonius, and one at least had been perused with sympathetic attention by a Platonist, who exclaimed that the opening verses of the Fourth Gospel should be inscribed in permanent characters of gold.⁴⁷

Desire to outshine Amelius, to overreach Philostratus, or to belittle Christianity would all have been strong motives for the writing of a Neoplatonic gospel. Polemic may, however, be compatible with respectful imitation, especially when an author has so much in common with Porphyry as the fourth evangelist. Each professed to write from personal knowledge; each ascribed the wisdom of his master to a deity and contrasted it with the superficial piety of his rivals; each presented himself as the interpreter of a text in which those rivals would have sought a different meaning; each maintained, against less perceptive disciples, that the world had more to learn from the master's death than from his birth. To take three points:

1. In both accounts the rivals look for truth in the wrong locality. Plotinus shows that he, not the temple of Isis, is the true seat of divinity; Jesus in the Fourth Gospel treats the temple as a symbol of his body, and denies that God prescribes any place of worship.⁴⁸ The "Jews" who frequent the temple are revealed to be ignorant of their own religion; and, just as the astrologer and the priest maintain their errors even when they commend Plotinus, so when Caiaphas speaks of Jesus "dying for the people," we are told that he did not perceive the import of his words.⁴⁹

46. See Barnes, "Porphyry against the Christians," for a late dating of the *Contra Christianos*. Porphyry may be one of the philosophers said by Lactantius at *Div. inst.* 5.2 to have trampled on the prostrate Christians during the persecution by Galerius. I am inclined to accept the argument of Simmons, *Arnobius of Sicca*, that Arnobius is responding to Porphyry's treatise, but I would assign a later date to the Latin apologist.

47. See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.29. Augustine himself was wiser than Amelius: see his famous contrast between Neoplatonism and the incarnational theology of the Christians at *Confessions* 7.9.

48. John 2.21 (Jesus' body as temple); 4.21–24 (worship in Spirit, not in Jerusalem).

49. John 11.49–50. Caiaphas unwittingly parodies Jesus' own allegations of ignorance at 3.8–11, 4.23, etc.

2. The sacred *text* that vindicates Plotinus is an oracle; in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus tells the Jews to “search the scriptures.” The latter text explains itself no better than the former, for the evangelist is asking us to believe in a Messiah who was neither born in Bethlehem nor preceded by Elijah.⁵⁰ Both testimonies call for an interpreter, not in spite of, but because of their assumed infallibility. The hermeneutical instruments for Porphyry are the *Enneads* and the dialogues of Plato; the Christ of the evangelist needs no instrument, because he is the embodied Word of God. Porphyry assimilates events to books; the evangelist is guided by the continuing revelation of the Logos through the Paraclete, and his book is the event.⁵¹
3. For the fourth evangelist, the Cross is both a signal, drawing everyone to Jesus, and a means of grace, restoring him to the glory that he possessed before the world as the only-begotten of the Father. Yet no account is given of this begetting, because, as Logos, he was always with the Father, and as Son he was born, “not of blood or the will of the flesh, but of the will of God.”⁵² All that can be said of his nativity is ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, “the Word became flesh”; when Cyril of Alexandria spoke of Christ as one who “came to be man among us” (καθ’ ἡμᾶς γενέσθαι ἄνθρωπον), he chose the verb of generation carefully, to remind us that the Word experienced no change in himself.⁵³ Plotinus, the “philosopher who came to be among us,” dies at peace with his guiding deity; the Christ of the fourth evangelist proves his unity with the Father when he gives his life without complaint and takes it back at will.⁵⁴

I do not suggest that Porphyry would have called his work a gospel; the Church of his day acknowledged only four, and when they were

50. John 5.39 (on searching the Scriptures, either indicative or imperative); 8.42 (Messiah alleged to be born at Bethlehem); 1.21 (John the Baptist, not Elijah, in contrast to Mark 9.13).

51. See esp. John 14–16, and the assimilation of Jesus to the Torah at 10.35.

52. John 12.31–32 (the Cross draws all men); 1.13 (born of the will of God). Whether the true reading of the latter be singular or plural, it includes Jesus; but any allusion to the Virgin Birth is secondary to the implication that *any* physical circumstances of birth are beside the point.

53. Cyril of Alexandria, *Ad Nestorium* 3.8.

54. John 10.17; 19.28–30. At John 19.30, Jesus gives up his spirit; at *VP* 2, Plotinus lets his spirit go.

more numerous, the term defined the intention of a writing, not its form.⁵⁵ Here—and I would say, not only here—it is better to speak of common themes and elements, of influences or models, than of genre. There are certainly common elements, I have argued that there could have been an influence, and I think that there is a demonstrable unity of aim. Porphyry's *Life* begins with a criticism of the trick by which Amelius perpetuated the body of Plotinus in a portrait;⁵⁶ the fourth evangelist's proem is ostentatiously indifferent to the human birth of Jesus, which had been immortalized in other gospels. In both the *Life* and the Gospel, the protagonist has the right to be called a god, but in neither book is this perceived by others before his death. The *logos*-proem points, like Apollo's *Oracle*, to a life too long for history, so that neither *Life* nor Gospel can pretend to be an adequate memorial. One is an introduction to the *Enneads*, the other an earthly sampler of that multitude of volumes, yet unwritten, which "the world could not contain."⁵⁷

55. Others now extant include the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Nicodemus, and the Gospel of the Egyptians. The diversity of form and content is remarkable.

56. See Edwards, "Portrait of Plotinus."

57. John 21.25.

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XVIII

PORPHYRY AND THE INTELLIGIBLE TRIAD

PASSAGES from Plato often inspired in late antiquity a speculative profusion of ingenuities that can scarcely have been intended by the author. Even in the *Timaeus*, however, few passages could be found which were to undergo so much elaboration as the sparse and incidental remarks in the *Sophist* concerning Being, Life and Mind. These terms are given some prominence in the *Enneads* of Plotinus, where it remains nonetheless very difficult to reconstruct a hierarchical order either of dignity or of procession, or to give the triad that cardinal place in his system which is certainly accorded to the triad One–Mind–Soul.¹ If the term Life is to take a place between Being and Mind it must be sharply distinguished from Soul, which is always inferior to the intellect in the ontology of the true Platonist. Plotinus is one of the most exact of philosophers, and if he fails to make the discriminations which would be necessary to anyone wishing to understand this nomenclature, it is because he is not expounding such a triad even as a subordinate part of his system: at most it might be thought to be implied or presupposed.

There can be no doubt, however, that the triad is of fundamental importance to the successors of Plotinus, and Proclus is at pains to make his exposition both logical and clear:²

‘Among these principles Being will stand foremost; for it is present to all things that have life and mind . . . but the converse is not true . . . Life has the second place; for whatever shares in mind shares in life, but not conversely, since many things are alive but remain devoid of knowledge. The third principle is Mind; for whatever is in any measure capable of knowledge both lives and exists’ (*Elements of theology* 101, trans. E. R. Dodds with adaptation).

Where do we find this triad during the centuries which intervene between Plotinus and Proclus? Certainly in the voluminous works of Marius Victorinus, a Christian theologian of the fourth century; but what of the Syrian Porphyry, the most celebrated pupil of Plotinus, upon whom Victorinus can be shown to have drawn so freely?³ Certainly again we find that Porphyry anticipates the theology of the triad, as did Plato and Plotinus; but can we prove that this author had already developed the system in its completed form by the middle of the third century?⁴ Can we then go on to demonstrate that Porphyry was the author of a *Commentary on the Parmenides* whose fragments it was once usual to quote without name or date?⁵

Both positions, that Porphyry gave systematic form to the triad ‘Être-Vie-Pensée’ and that he wrote the *Commentary on the Parmenides*, have been maintained with formidable eloquence and learning by the French scholar Pierre Hadot.⁶ Both positions, however, were taken up in defiance of Wilhelm Kroll, who attributed both the triad and the *Commentary* to the Platonists of the fourth century.⁷ Kroll’s arguments were more cursory than those of Hadot, who has almost entirely effaced the views of his predecessor. Nonetheless, there is still a need for a careful review of the evidence, and I hope to show in this study that, while the arguments of Hadot are not absolutely

¹ See in particular *Enneads* i 6.7; v 4.2; v 6.6.

² See E. R. Dodds, *Proclus: the elements of theology* (Oxford 1963) for observations upon this passage and its antecedents.

³ See P. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus* (Paris 1968) *i passim*.

⁴ On the Coptic *Allogenes* and *Zostrianus* see Appendix and the remarks on the Gnostics of Plotinus below.

⁵ P. Hadot, *REG* 74 (1961) 410–38.

⁶ The relevant articles are cited below. Hadot’s attribution of the *Commentary* is assumed to be correct by A. C. Lloyd in *The Cambridge history of later Greek and early medieval philosophy* 291–2. Qualified assent is expressed by R. T. Wallis in his *Neoplatonism* (London 1972) 97 and 114–18.

⁷ See Kroll (1892) cited below, n. 41.

disprovable, he embellishes the data with a subtlety that disguises important differences and lacunae, and ought not to command uncritical belief.

I

Speculation on the intelligible triad (as the later philosophers call it) has its origin in the following remarks in Plato's *Sophist*:

'Are we to be so easily persuaded that motion, life, soul and mind have no real place in that which fully is—no, neither life itself nor intellection—and that Being stands unmoved in high and holy isolation, devoid of Mind?' (*Sophist* 248e–249a).

Any thoughtful Platonist must therefore admit the necessity of some process which results in the creation of determinate Existence out of undetermined Existence, a process by which Being becomes intelligible in Act. Hadot has gathered together and interpreted those passages in the *Enneads* which speak of Life as the principle of motion in the 'procession' of Existence into Mind and again in the 'conversion' of the Mind back to its source.⁸ He rightly observes, however, that Being, Life and Mind do not constitute separate categories or hypostases, that the triad belongs to the superstructure, not to the foundations, of this philosophy.⁹ Peripatetics, Stoics and other Platonists, even the pedagogical conventions of antiquity, are laid under contribution in Hadot's search for anticipations of the triad;¹⁰ nevertheless, it does not appear that any work before the *Chaldaean oracles* would have invoked it as a necessary element in a metaphysical system or accorded it the dignity of a precise and philosophical exposition.¹¹ Even the *Oracles* do not seem to provide us with the nomenclature that later became conventional, or with more than hints of a system; for the refinement and establishment of both, we must look to Porphyry, or rather to his lost works as they are restored and illuminated by Hadot.

It is unfortunate that the appeal of Hadot's theory must be to fragments and conjectures, and that the triad is lacking even in works which might have been expected to reveal the heart of Porphyry's philosophy. We should not expect to find anything either profound or comprehensive in the *Letter to Marcella*, the *Life of Pythagoras* or the treatises on abstinence and the interpretation of Homer; but the reader who peruses the *Life of Plotinus*, the *Isagoge* or the *Sententiae*, even the student who has sifted whatever scholarship can recover of the *de regressu animae* or the *Philosophy from the oracles* will perhaps be surprised to find himself as ignorant as ever of the mysteries of Being, Life and Mind. Some germs of the system ascribed to him by Hadot there must of course have been in Porphyry, as in anyone who had the right to call himself a Platonist; but if we are to establish Hadot's position, and thus have grounds for supposing that the use of 'Life' as a name for the median principle in the fourth century is a direct legacy of this one author, we must insist upon being shown, not only the scattered limbs of such a system, but the system itself expressed in certain words.

One passage, and one passage only, in the commentaries of a later source, can be said to bear immediately on this question:¹²

'Among these Platonists are Porphyry and Theodorus . . . According to them the mind of these stars advances towards being, sometimes through intermediaries and sometimes

⁸ 'Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin' in *Entretiens Hardt v: Les Sources de Plotin* (Geneva 1960) 108–57.

⁹ Hadot (n. 8) 122 and 139.

¹⁰ Hadot (n. 8) 122–30.

¹¹ See P. Hadot, 'La métaphysique de Porphyre'

in *Entretiens Hardt xii: Porphyre* (Geneva 1965) 127–63.

¹² Cited in Zeller's *Die Philosophie der Griechen* III ii 705 n. 1. This is fr. 17 in W. Deuse *Theodoros von Asine: Sammlung der Testimonien und Kommentar* (Wiesbaden 1974).

without intermediaries . . . Thus the sun, which is Being, approaches the Mind by way of Life; Aphrodite is Mind and Hermes Life, but the former approaches Mind by way of Life, the latter by way of Being. Even if Mind is their common goal, it can be reached at times existentially, at times intellectually, at times vitally . . . The goal of the First Triad is Being, that of the Second Mind, that of the Third Life . . . they speak everywhere of all three, Being, Mind and Life, maintaining that each of the gods participates in the three Fathers, but that different properties (*idiómata*) dominate in each, each possessing a different activity (*energeia*) and approaching its goal through different intermediaries' (Proclus, *Comm. in Timaeum* iii 64 Diehl).

Those like Zeller, Dodds and Hadot,¹³ who use this passage as evidence that Porphyry himself devised the intelligible triad and its nomenclature have not been disturbed that the three terms Being, Mind and Life appear persistently in this sequence, and not in the later sequence Being, Life and Mind. They might argue that, the true sequence being sufficiently familiar, the terms might be transposed for the sake of rhythm or variation; nevertheless the consistency with which the series occurs deserves more attention. Here it will be argued that the sequence Being-Mind-Life is of an independent and earlier origin than the one ascribed to Porphyry by Hadot, and that this is in fact the sequence which is delineated in the passage above.

We must consider, for example, the following passage from Plotinus, which is adduced by Dodds as evidence that the triad Being-Life-Mind would have been adopted in that form by his disciple:¹⁴

'First, then, we take Being as first in order; then Mind, then that which has Life, considered as containing all things. Mind, as the energisation of Being, is second. Thus it is clear that numbers cannot depend upon that which has Life, since unity and duality existed before that . . . ' (*Enneads* vi 6.8 trans. McKenna, with adaptations).

It is obvious that the argument would vanish if the order of terms were disturbed. The terms appear elsewhere, sometimes ordered in this way, sometimes in the sequence Being-Life-Mind, but there appears to be no other passage where Plotinus has invested it with so clear a philosophical significance.¹⁵ That attention is not always paid to the order is evident from the haphazard medley in *Enneads* i 8.2 of 'Mind, Being, Soul, Life and the *energeia* with regard to Mind'; this passage, however, though not, perhaps, directly related to our present study, affords proof that there are occasions when the order cannot be ignored.

Similar terms appear to have been employed by the 'Gnostic' adversaries of Plotinus in their threefold division of the nature of Intellect, though this is regarded by him as only one specimen of a tendency to a gratuitous superfetation of hypostases:¹⁶

'And making a plurality of the intelligible world—Being, Mind, the Maker different from Mind, and Soul—is taken from the *Timaeus* [citation of 39c 7–9], failing to understand which, they take it to mean that there is one mind which contains in repose all realities, and another mind different from it which contemplates them, and another which plans—but often they have soul as the maker instead of the planning mind' (*Enneads* ii 9.6, trans. Armstrong with some adaptation of punctuation and wording).

Here again it is impossible to order the terms anew without making nonsense. The faculty of discursive reason must always wait upon the contemplative faculty, and soul is always subordinate to the universal mind. The final sentence appears to mean that the

¹³ See nn. 4, 6, 12 and 17; also Rist (n. 52).

¹⁴ Dodds (n. 2) 253 against Kroll.

¹⁵ For relevant citations see Hadot (n. 8).

¹⁶ See *Enneads* ii 9.2 etc. *Enneads* ii 9.6 and ii 9.10 present close parallels to the extant *Zostrianus*,

which is discussed in the Appendix. For an explanation of the Gnostic position as expounded in that tractate see J. Sieber in *Novum Testamentum* xv (1973) 233–40.

third term in the triad was sometimes entitled Mind, and at others Soul. That Soul should stand in place of Life is consistent with the assumptions of Greek philosophy, and especially of Plato:¹⁷ here then we have an instance of the triad Being-Mind-Life.

Plotinus' grounds for quarrelling with the 'Gnostics' are that they treat these mental powers as distinct hypostases, that they assign the title demiurge exclusively to the third power, and, worst of all, that they cannot allow the third power to act creatively without falling into sin.¹⁸ Yet the notion of a fallen mind, the last of three, which brings the world into being by its transgression, would not be foreign to every Platonic thinker of late antiquity. A similar procession of three Intellects is the fundamental postulate of Numenius, who made his First Mind both an *argos theos* and the form of Being (*to on*),¹⁹ the Second Mind the contemplating Intellect, the Third the fallen principle which unites the contents of Intellect with matter.²⁰

Numenius (fl. A.D. 170) is a figure rarely accorded his full due in the histories of Neoplatonism, despite the fact that Plotinus used his writings as a pedagogical instrument, and one of his pupils, Amelius, had almost the whole by heart (Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 3). He has never been adduced as the source of the teaching quoted above from Theodorus in Proclus *Commentary on the Timaeus*. Theodorus himself has been credited by Kroll with inventing the theory and reading it back into the works of his former master,²¹ and the very citation of him might be thought to give some force to this suspicion. As a pupil of both Porphyry and Iamblichus,²² Theodorus matched them neither in influence nor repute, and even a modern article which has argued most persuasively for his importance has also shown that Proclus treated him only with a qualified esteem.²³ It might therefore be assumed that if he is quoted in this passage, he must have amplified the doctrine of his illustrious predecessor, whose authority he would do little to enhance. What we hear of his debts to Numenius, however, suggests that, whatever he added to the wording, he did not spin the basic system from his own thoughts.

That Theodorus had turned to Numenius at least for some triadic ordering of Being, Life and Mind, we learn from another citation in Proclus *Commentary on the Timaeus*:

'Theodorus, the philosopher of Asine, inflated with the tenets of Numenius, has introduced a novel doctrine concerning the progression of the soul. . . . Let us recapitulate these doctrines point by point. Rightly, then, he celebrates the first principle as the unspeakable, ineffable source of all and the cause of that which is good. After this, raised as it is above all other things, is the triad which determines the extension of the intelligible. . . . [Two other triads are then distinguished] The former is the Being anterior to Being, the Mind anterior to Mind, the Life anterior to Life. The demiurgic triad which follows possesses first Being, then Mind, then the source of souls.' (ii 274 Diehl).

The reference to Numenius is no idle insinuation. Theodorus was the author of a work designed to prove the Numenian tenet that the soul was identical with the world of Forms,²⁴ and he was ranked by commentators with Amelius, a great devotee of

¹⁷ *Republic* 353; see also Proclus, *Elements of theology* 188-9 and 197. The later position appears to be that Soul is the communicator of life, but not Life itself; this distinction appears to be unknown in the early school, and even if we distinguish 'source of souls' from 'soul' in Theodorus, we have not proved that Life itself could stand between Intellect and Being.

¹⁸ See especially *Enneads* ii 9.10 for the myth of Sophia.

¹⁹ fr. 12.13 ff.

²⁰ fr. 11.13 ff.

²¹ See Dodds (n. 2) 253 against Kroll. A. J. Festugière in his translation of the *Commentary on*

the Timaeus, Vol iv (1964) 88-9 finds it impossible to distinguish the contribution of Theodorus from that of Porphyry.

²² See Pauly-Wissowa, *RE* v A2 (1934) 1833 ff.

²³ H. D. Saffrey, 'Le 'Philosophe de Rhodes' est-il Théodore d'Asine?' in E. Lucchesi and H. D. Saffrey (eds) *Mémorial A. J. Festugière* (Geneva 1984) 65-76.

²⁴ fr. 37 Deuse. Numenius seems bound to support the position that 'the soul is all the intelligibles' in fr. 41; moreover, he makes the soul identical with its first causes (fr. 42). Perhaps this belief was confined to the rational soul (see fr. 44).

Numenius as one who conceived of a triad of three demiurgic principles.²⁵ In fragment 12 of Numenius (Des Places) we find Life proceeding from Intellect, and Intellect from Being:²⁶

'The First God is the King, not occupying himself with any works. The Demiurgic God, however, is the leader, who does his rounds through the heavens. Through him we make our journey, when Mind is sent below, through the different levels, to all those who are destined to be partakers. So when God looks and turns towards each one of us, the consequence is that bodies live and enjoy animation.'

The Second Intellect proceeds from the First, which is Being, and 'looks towards each of us' to produce life. In fragment 13 it is the soul that is distributed 'to each of us' by the Second Mind. In fragment 11 the Second Mind acts upon us by the Third, which is the result of a rupture caused by looking down. We may thus conclude that this Third Mind is the medium through which soul and life are communicated, hence the 'source of souls'.

Later Neoplatonic exegeses might induce us to interpret 'Source of Souls' as a title of Hecate, who personifies a mediating principle in the *Chaldaean oracles*;²⁷ but Theodorus' acquaintance with the *Oracles* is not so securely attested as his fidelity to Numenius, and we have seen that we need not invoke such sources to discover here, as Hadot does, all the elements of the intelligible triad, though not, as he observes, the triad itself:²⁸ 'On remarque de l'ordre différent: être, vie, pensée chez Victorinus; être, pensée et vie chez Théodore.'

Hadot hopes to demonstrate conclusively by this argument that it was Porphyry, not Theodorus, who was the precursor of Victorinus. The inference is warranted if we assume: (1) that Proclus represents Theodorus correctly in one passage, but conflates his teaching with Porphyry's in another; and (2) that the sequence 'Being-Mind-Life', adopted in Proclus' recapitulation of the first passage, is either irrelevant or represents the position of the less eminent of the two authorities named. At the same time assumption (2) involves the premiss that this excerpt is in other respects an accurate description of an intelligible triad which only Porphyry espoused. If the order is irrelevant in the second passage also, Hadot's attempt to banish it from the argument comes to nothing; if it is as fixed as Hadot supposes, it is reasonable to apply an equally rigorous exegesis to the first passage, and his theories are deprived of their chief support.

In fact the formula 'source of souls' is easily justified from the works of the earlier Neoplatonists. Plotinus, commenting on *Timaeus* 39c (*Enneads* iii 9.1) gave a similar account: to that of the 'Gnostics', discovering: (a) a contemplated intellect, the *noêton*; (b) the contemplating *nous*; (c) the *dianooumenon*, which is mind in one sense, not mind in another, and performs the functions of *psuchê* to engender individual souls in the world. We need only add this third term from Plotinus to the Being and Intellect which the 'Gnostics' discovered in the same text to produce the triad of Theodorus.

Porphyry was upbraided by the later commentators—though he was clearly true to Plotinus—because he designated the Demiurge a 'hypercosmic soul' (See Proclus *in*

²⁵ fr. 12 Deuse. Note that the third term is again 'Source of Souls'.

²⁶ The passage contains many difficulties: for the most part I have followed the translation of Des Places in his edition of 1973. I do not suggest that Theodorus has been faithful to the meaning of Numenius, only that such a passage as this could easily have been subjected to a tendentious exegesis which would produce the system ascribed to him by Proclus at *In Tim.* ii 274.

²⁷ On Hecate in the *Chaldaean oracles* see H.

Lewy, *The Chaldaean oracles and theurgy* (Paris 1956) 142. As will appear below a student of the *Oracles* (such as Porphyry) could equate Hecate with *dunamis* without introducing the term Life. What Theodorus made of this figure we cannot tell.

²⁸ *Porphyre et Victorinus*, i 102 n. 3. Hadot maintains in the same note that the passages are different in context, which, if true, deprives the present one of any evidential value in his argument.

Tim. i 306 ff. Diehl). To other Platonists—even perhaps to a Platonist so early and so faithful to Numenius as Amelius—the proper interpretation of *Timaeus* 39e was a closed system of three intellects; Porphyry therefore differed from his successors on this point of exegesis to produce a result analogous to the difference between the intelligible triad and the triad Being-Mind-Life.²⁹

What Porphyry or Theodorus intended to say of the planets remains obscure. Deuse's edition of Theodorus (pp. 112–16, on Proclus, *In Tim.* iii pp. 64–5 Diehl) demonstrates that the different intermediaries are determined by the different *idiomata* of the planets, and does nothing to warrant the inference that the order of terms is indifferent or that Life holds a privileged place between Intellect and Being.

We need no longer surmise that the intelligible triad was the invention of Theodorus rather than Porphyry; we may rather assume that the triad which bore that name in the later school superseded an earlier one, in which Life was simply the principle through which the contents of Mind acquired a sensible existence, and strict order both of dignity and procession required that Mind should always hold the second place and Life the third.

II

Hadot has assembled other evidence, both copious and persuasive, to prove that the intelligible triad was foreshadowed in writings of Porphyry's which are now lost. His chief exhibit is Porphyry's treatment of the *Chaldaean oracles* as we are able to reconstruct it from its disparate and fragmentary remains.

Porphyry's contribution to the philosophy of the *Oracles* is the subject of an article in which one suspects that the scholar has improved what he professes to restore.³⁰ Every stage of his argument must be granted except the last. Porphyry conceived the whole scheme of the *Oracles* as an *Ennead* (Lydus, *de mensibus* iv 122); this *Ennead* was divided into triads, and the deity of the Jews assigned to the second (Lydus, *de mensibus* iv 53); the Jewish God was allotted the place of Intellect in a triad whose other terms appear to have been Existence and Power. Hadot constructs a system of three triads, ordered as Being, Power and Intellect, and a subordinate division of each triad into the same succession of terms.³¹ The validity of this scheme is corroborated by ancient writers upon the *Oracles*: what is not confirmed, however, is the assertion that the middle term for Porphyry could not be 'autre que la vie'.³²

Psellus, who wrote voluminously on the *Oracles* before their dissolution, found not 'être, vie, pensée' but the series 'Being-*Dunamis*- Mind', a series which he never proposes to modify by explaining that the word *dunamis* could be exchanged indifferently for the word *zoè*.³³ Both terms are derivable from the same passage in the *Sophist*, and Proclus treats them as synonyms;³⁴ yet if we compare the frequency of the word *dunamis* in the *Oracles* with that of the expressions which signify 'life' we shall see that the substitution of 'Life' for 'Power' in such a triad would not have been either natural or legitimate at all times.³⁵

This is not to say that Porphyry could not have been the author of the nomenclature

²⁹ On the interpretation of *Timaeus* 39e, and on the 'hypercosmic soul' of Porphyry, see J. Dillon, *TAPA* c (1969) 63–70, and K. Corrigan, *ANRW* xxxvi 2 (1987) 978–84.

³⁰ Hadot (n. 11). The value of this article cannot be exaggerated, but I think that Hadot attempts to prove too much.

³¹ Hadot (n. 11) 139–40.

³² Hadot (n. 11) 140.

³³ See E. Des Places (ed.) *Les oracles chaldaïques* (Paris 1971) 189–201.

³⁴ See *Sophist* 248b and c. and Proclus, *Comm.* in *Timaeum*, Vol i p. 17 17.23 etc. Also Dodds (n. 2) 253.

³⁵ *Zoè* relevant only at 96.2; *dunamis* probably relevant at 3.2, 4, 5.5, 56.2, 96.1, 136.2 and 137.

expounded in the later Neoplatonists, and he could easily have been induced to devise it by a desire to reconcile the thought of the *Oracles* with the doctrine of the *Enneads* and the *Sophist*. But if Porphyry reserved Hadot's three terms for the purposes to which they were applied by Plotinus before him, and by Theodorus even in the fourth century, we have all the more reason for doubting that he was the man to take the Chaldaean triad and substitute Life for Power. The result would be two triads of identical but differently-ordered terms, creating an equivocation that any careful writer would wish to avoid.

We cannot demonstrate the extent of Porphyry's contribution by an immediate resort to Victorinus, whose borrowings from him, though evidently legion, ought not to be assumed before they are proved.³⁶ Nor can we elicit a satisfactory conclusion from Augustine, who is adduced by Hadot as a witness, but falters in his testimony in a way that would be impossible if Porphyry had spoken so consistently and so plainly as the French scholar:³⁷

'Dicit enim Deum Patrem et Deum Filium, quem Graece appellat paternum intellectum vel paternum mentem . . . quamvis quem alium dicat horum medium non intellego. Si enim animae naturam etiam iste vellet intellegi, non utique diceret horum medium?' (*de civitate Dei* 23).

The hypothesis that Soul is the median principle in the triad is aired but to be discounted, and might have little relevance in the time of Victorinus to a discussion of the term 'Life'. Nevertheless the saint remains an embarrassing sponsor for the theories of Hadot, who has shown that Victorinus espouses the triad 'Being-Life-Mind' when he adopts a certain titlature for the persons of the Trinity, designating the Father as Existence, the Spirit as Mind and the Son as Life.³⁸ There are other places in Victorinus where the Son is given the predicates of Mind, sometimes in conjunction with those of Life;³⁹ but here he is given only those of Mind. Augustine speculates that the middle term is the Spirit, but the Spirit in Victorinus is not styled Life, and is never the middle person of the Trinity. Augustine, by insisting upon the likeness between this 'medium' and the Spirit (x 23.3, where it is expressly said to proceed from Father and Son) guides us to the correct interpretation, which Proclus received through Theodorus from Porphyry himself, and which, notwithstanding the strictures of the later commentator, has been traced to Chaldaean teaching by at least one modern authority:⁴⁰

'But others . . . speak of two intellects prior to soul, one containing the forms of general principles, the other those of particulars; and soul, he says, is the middle term, in that it proceeds from both' (Proclus, *In Tim.* ii 154.4).

This passage would clearly unravel all the perplexities which were not solved for Augustine by his study of Victorinus (*Confessions* viii 3). It gives the soul the characteristics of the Holy Spirit and explains how it might be described as an intermediary; it does not, however, accord it that ontological priority over the Intellect which Proclus accords to Life.

³⁶ Rist (cited below, n. 52) gives only qualified assent to this 'working hypothesis' adopted by Hadot and Theiler.

³⁷ *Porphyre et Victorinus*, i 266 and especially 475. For an edition with commentary of the *de regressu animae* see J. Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre* (Ghent 1913) 27*-44*.

³⁸ *Porphyre et Victorinus*, i 46-74.

³⁹ *Porphyre et Victorinus*, i 50-7. We might speculate that only the relation of Son to Father is in question here, perhaps with an appeal to some

distinction such as that between *vita* and *vivere*; but the language of Augustine appears to make this position untenable, and even if we cannot hope to interpret him, we ought to respect his confusions.

⁴⁰ See J. Dillon, *Phronesis* xviii (1973) 180-5. The statement that Porphyry called the doctrine 'Persian' on the authority of a certain Antoninus does not, of course, prove that it was not Chaldaean. The fact that Proclus declines to recognise it as such is a mark of his animosity to the fanciful Theodorus.

III

No-one could belittle the service rendered to scholarship by Hadot's edition and translation of a commentary on the *Parmenides*, which was disengaged from a palimpsest of the sixth century in 1873;⁴¹ nor can one deny that the *Commentary* yields the terms Being, Life and Intellect according to the sequence in which he wishes to dispose them. In the last of these damaged fragments the author describes the process whereby the objects of the Intellect issue from and revert to the source of Being:⁴²

'And the Intellect and its object have one essence, but mind is Life when it emerges from Being and inclines towards the Intellect with the result that it arrives at the Intelligible and contemplates itself. . . All three are acts: considered as Being the act is at rest, considered as Intellect it is turned upon itself, considered as Life the act is emerging from the Intellect'.

Since, however, Hadot's dating of this *Commentary* differs from that of previous editors by a matter of a century,⁴³ it would be no fitting compliment to his industry if we merely sustained his judgment without examining his reasons. These are most fairly stated in his own words. The fragments, he informs us, should be assigned to Porphyry because:⁴⁴

'Leurs méthodes et leurs doctrines sont identiques a celles de Porphyre: fidélité à Numénius, traits plotiniens, utilisation de la physique stoïcien dans la métaphysique néoplatonicienne, reticence a l'égard des *Oracles Chaldaïques*.

Des expressions comme *ho epi pasi theos . . . dia smikrotètos diapheugousês* suffiraient a révéler que Porphyre est l'auteur de ces fragments. D'autres termes, et d'autres tours, familiers à Porphyre, et par notre anonyme, confirment cette conclusion.'

If we were to grant to Hadot all the premisses of his first paragraph they would not enforce the conclusion: even in the twilight of pagan antiquity, Numenius did not lack admirers, while Plotinus was half a god;⁴⁵ the parts of Stoic, Pythagorean and Platonist were easily combined by any successor of Plotinus; and, as for the *Chaldaean oracles*, it was never so easy to read them as to doubt them. A work from Porphyry's hand and one from the hand of any intelligent student of his writings might be expected to exhibit similar methods: scholars who address themselves to the dating of ancient manuscripts are apt to forget that any trait of a writer (except his genius) may be reproduced in his school.

What is meant by 'fidelity to Numenius'? Chiefly it seems, the notion that 'l'être pur est l'idée de l'étant'.⁴⁶ The *Commentary* thus postulates two varieties of being, one the being of individual substances, the other a purer category, denoting the mere existence which we must predicate of anything that is.⁴⁷ For Numenius, argues Hadot, the First Mind contains the ideas of the goodness and the being which are present in the Second, and this thinker may thus be responsible for the distinction between the participated existence and the essence which participates. If this claim is to be supported, it must be with evidence from some other source than the fragments of Numenius, since these afford no instance of the phrase *idea tou ontos*, and indeed the phrase would seem to be scarcely compatible with the locutions that he habitually employs.

Numenius speaks of the First Mind as *idea agathou*, rendered by Hadot as 'l'Idée du Bien'.⁴⁸ The Second Mind is good by participation in the First: it is to the latter, and that

⁴¹ For text see *Porphyre et Victorinus*, ii 64 ff. The text was first produced with commentary by W. Kroll in *RhM* 47 (1892) 599-627.

⁴² xiv 16-26; see *Porphyre et Victorinus* ii 110-2.

⁴³ See Hadot (n. 5) 114 f.

⁴⁴ Hadot (n. 5) 438.

⁴⁵ See Eunapius, *Vitae philosophorum* 455 Bois-

sonade. Among admirers of Numenius we must count Amelius and Theodorus (pp. 17, 22).

⁴⁶ Hadot (n. 5) 418 and n. 36.

⁴⁷ xii 32-3; see *Porphyre et Victorinus*, ii 106 and Hadot (n. 5) 418 f.

⁴⁸ See Numenius fr. 20 Des Places.

alone, that such a phrase as *idea agathou* or *autoagathon* belongs.⁴⁹ The same is true of the simple expression *to agathon* when used as the appellation of some particular entity. The Second Mind falls under the description of 'that which is good', which might in certain contexts be represented by *to agathon*; but Numenius avoids the locution *idea tou agathou* (Hadot's 'idéé du Bien') at the cost of some eccentricity in expression. We read only *idea agathou*,⁵⁰ so we cannot postulate any linguistic distinction between 'The Good' and its Idea. Hadot's further assumption that the usage of *agathon* will furnish some analogy to the usage of *on* is misguided and unfortunate: what separates *to on* from the *idea tou ontos* it would have taken a different philosopher to determine, since *to on* is the name repeatedly and exclusively used in the fragments of Numenius to designate the First Mind.⁵¹

We may thus conclude that this document evinces no uncommon degree of fidelity to Numenius, and we may also add that Hadot's case for ascribing it to Porphyry would be no stronger if it did. Porphyry labours jealously in his *Life of Plotinus* (*VP* 20-1) to prove that his master is no mere imitator of Numenius, and it is obvious that he regarded the way of Plotinus, and his intellectual virtues, as his own. He is emboldened by the suffrage of Longinus to suggest that his contemporary Amelius, who had the works of Numenius by heart, was unphilosophical and diffuse. Porphyry would therefore cleave to the teachings of Plotinus against Numenius,⁵² and, since Plotinus spoke of ideas only as constituents of the second hypostasis, Intellect (*Enneads* v 5 etc.), it is difficult to see how such adherence would be compatible with the statement that the First Principle is an idea.

So far is the disciple of Plotinus from confounding the highest principle with essence or form that he states in the *Sententiae* that this principle is the 'Non-being transcending Being'⁵³. This is, of course, a work which adheres dogmatically to the tenets of Plotinus: it is widely admitted that Porphyry's philosophy underwent continual change, and his adoption of the term *huparxis* as a title for the One has been thought to suggest that his allegiance was not sustained.⁵⁴ John Rist has proposed that a study of the Chaldaean system at some late stage in his life would enable Porphyry to admit not only this term for the first principle, but also the expression *to einai monon*, which would place the One unequivocally in some category of Being, and would anticipate the *exsistentia* of Victorinus.⁵⁵ Whether this hypothesis can be upheld we may judge from a comparison of Porphyry's misgivings with regard to the *Chaldaean oracles* with those found in the *Commentary* by Hadot.

With regard to the *Oracles*, what Porphyry doubted, if anything, was not their authenticity, but their efficacy in preserving the most valuable element in man:

'Sufficit quod purgatione theurgica neque intellectualem animam, hoc est mentem nostram, dicis posse purgari, et ipsam spiritualem . . . immortalem tamen aeternamque non posse hac arte fieri confiteris' (Augustine, *de civ. Dei* x 27).

The arts of Chaldaea may be divinely-ordained, but there is something diviner in man. The soul may be rendered pure by incantations, but only the arduous vigils of philosophy will prepare the mind for everlasting repose.⁵⁶

Such discriminations do not compromise the authority of the *Oracles*, as the author

⁴⁹ Numenius, fr. 20.5 and 20.11.

⁵⁰ Fr. 16.9 and 14; 20.12. For *to agathon* see fr. 16.4 and 5; 19.12.

⁵¹ Fr. 5.5 and 14; 6.7 and 8; 7.2; 8.2, etc.

⁵² J. M. Rist, 'Mysticism and transcendence in later Neoplatonism', *Hermes* xcii (1964) 213-25 discusses this question, admitting the *prima facie* case against such a deviation on Porphyry's part.

⁵³ *Sententiae* xxvi; see Rist (n. 52) 220.

⁵⁴ See Rist (n. 52) 223-4.

⁵⁵ See Rist (n. 52) 220-2.

⁵⁶ For edition of the *de regressu animae* see Bidez, cited above (n. 37). For analysis see H. Lewy, *The Chaldaean oracles and theurgy* (Paris 1956) ch. 1 and Excursus on Porphyry and the Oracles.

of our *Commentary* is said to do by Hadot. The hesitant 'if indeed the gods have spoken' is his sole allusion to the possibility of any divine unveiling, hardly the tone which Porphyry must have adopted in his treatise *On the regression of the soul*.⁵⁷ If we are to make use of Rist's hypothesis we must suppose that after the composition of this treatise Porphyry came to doubt the divine inspiration of the *Oracles*, but at the same time conceived so high an estimate of their value that he adopted from them a nomenclature which is foreign to that of Plotinus, and indeed strikes at the roots of his master's thought.

It might be urged, on the other hand, that the formula 'if indeed the gods have spoken' is a mere elegance, and does not convey any genuine reservations. In that case, Rist's hypothesis is tenable, though unproven, but the argument that treats the phrase as a circumlocution peculiar to Porphyry is impossible to sustain.

All these objections are nugatory if it is true that the quotation in Hadot's next paragraph 'suffiraient a révéler' that Porphyry is the author of this work. No-one, says Hadot, could entertain the hypothesis that the One escapes our perception by its smallness unless he were that Porphyry who maintains in his *Sententiae* that the true being of any object is diminished by augmentation in corporal volume.⁵⁸ May we not even be pardoned for wondering how Hadot can dispose so easily of all readers and imitators of the *Sententiae*? May we not ask why the Porphyry of this *Commentary* employs the words so diffidently, and introduces them only as the result of an unsatisfactory conjecture by Speusippus? This at least appears to be the tenor of certain corrupt lines in an earlier part of the *Commentary*, where the noun *smikrotêta* is joined with the title *ho epi pasi theos*, and the citation of Speusippus is not disputed by Hadot.⁵⁹

Hadot ekes out the lacunae to imply that those who follow the conjecture of Speusippus are mistaken, and he is supported by a quotation from Damascius, already adduced by Kroll. When the word *smikrotêta* recurs at ii 3, however, he treats it as the peculiar nomenclature of Porphyry himself. The truth is rather, as Kroll points out, that the Speusippean vocabulary is rejected in the first folio to be endorsed with a somewhat different connotation in the next: 'Doch kan der Satz auch ironisch gemeint sein'.⁶⁰

The passage produced by Hadot as the closest in wording to *dia smikrotêta is in harm. Ptolem. 17.20*, where the preposition is *hupo* in two cases, and the phrase is employed with no sense that it is compromised by its previous use in Speusippus. We are obliged to be pedantic, since the words in question are scarcely recondite, and comparisons will prove nothing unless the coincidences are shown to be minute.

Citations of the title *ho epi pasi theos* in Christian authors might be discounted, since pagans were unlikely to imitate them. We cannot, however, afford to make so light of their presence in Origen, who studied, like Porphyry's master, under the Alexandrian Platonist Ammonius, surnamed Saccas.⁶¹ It is more than remotely possible that writers other than Origen and Porphyry should be indebted to the same source for a similar turn of phrase.

Likeness in vocabulary is again an argument only for imitation, not for authorship; the probative force of dissimilarity is, of course, much stronger, and Hadot does not pretend to have discovered any Porphyrian antecedents for such important substantives as *henas* and *plêrôma*, which occur in this *Commentary* and in many specimens of later

⁵⁷ On the dating, which Rist (n. 52) 223 is inclined to follow, see Bidez. Even those who believe with J. J. O'Meara, *Porphyry's philosophy from oracles in Augustine* (Paris 1959) that this work was identical with the *Philosophy of the oracles* will be inclined to think that it represents his mature thought.

⁵⁸ *Commentary* i 18-20 = *Porphyre et Victorinus*,

ii 66. See Kroll (n. 41) 619.

⁵⁹ See notes to *Porphyre et Victorinus* ii 66.

⁶⁰ Kroll (n. 41) 620; Damascius admits that the One is elusive, but denies its smallness, attributing the inaccurate opinion to Speusippus. See Kroll 619.

⁶¹ See Origen, *Werke*, i 261.26 Koetschau.

Platonic writing, but do not appear in pagan works before the time of Iamblichus with a precise metaphysical meaning. Hadot does little to strengthen his case for these and nine other difficult items by claiming that they are words which the philosopher of the third century 'might have employed'.⁶²

Henas and *plêrôma*, if none of the others, might have been expected to find their way into the *Sententiae*: that they did not would be for Hadot a sign that Porphyry was unwilling in this instance to depart from the vocabulary of Plotinus or else that he began to favour these words in an undocumented late phase of his thought. The same proposal would also explain the lack of reserve in the use of other expressions which Porphyry would once have declined to employ without some prefatory formula. Yet would it not be equally satisfactory to conjecture that we see here, not a late phase of his philosophy, but his philosophy in the hands of a successor? This position becomes the more attractive the more arbitrary Hadot's attempts to verify his own are shown to be.

To bring into the argument such quotidian words as *echesthai*, *katalambanein*, *mênuein*, *idiôtês*, *holos*, *poieisthai* and *hupostasis* is surely to beat the air.⁶³ To protest that certain common words are particularly frequent in Porphyry's writings is to add nothing unless it is also shown that the *Commentary* exhibits, not only a predictable acquaintance with these expressions, but a similar predilection for their use. Hadot must therefore refrain from adducing *mênuein*, *exêgêtikos* and *parastasis*, all of which, according to Hadot's index, appear in the *Commentary* only once.

Following the plan of Hadot's argument, we have discovered:

1. Faithfulness to the teaching of Numenius in one particular, the use of a term denoting rational being as a predicate of the One; that is to say, a faithfulness which was treason to Porphyry's master.

2. Misgivings with regard to the *Chaldaean oracles* of a different kind from any which are exhibited by Porphyry in his treatise *On the regression of the soul*.

3. Many words which Porphyry had in common with other thinkers; others which he either does not employ in his extant writings or employs only with reticence.

4. The diffident ascription to Speusippus of a phrase which Porphyry would have been willing once to use without reserve.

Hadot has parried all objections without completely overthrowing any, and without producing arguments that match the strength of his claims. The *Commentary* cannot be adduced as evidence that Porphyry had already conceived the intelligible triad of later Platonism, which is anticipated in thought by the Chaldaean Oracles, in language by Numenius, and by Porphyry no less, but little more.

⁶² Hadot (n. 5) 431-4.

⁶³ The words discussed in this paragraph are

listed in Hadot (n. 5) 434-8.

APPENDIX:
THE *ZOSTRIANUS* AND *ALLOGENES**

Although the Greek originals of the Coptic *Zostrianus* and *Allogenes* were certainly known to Plotinus (*VP* 16), the present manuscripts cannot be assigned to any date earlier than the fourth century. There is ample evidence of corruption: the figure of Zoroaster has disappeared from the text of the *Zostrianus*, though his name remains on the seal,⁶⁴ and the present length of this tractate is scarcely such as to have merited the refutation in forty books by Amelius.⁶⁵ A scrutiny of the chief passages which are supposed to contain intimations of the Neoplatonic triad reveals that they have suffered great alterations, though no greater than those discernible in other Gnostic texts.⁶⁶

These passages are as follows:

(a) Existence, Life and Blessedness at *Zostrianus* 66, a corrupt passage which it is impossible to elucidate.

(b) At *Allogenes* 48–9, three triads, each containing the three principles That Which Is, Vitality and Mentality. The triads appear in that order, but the principles are also named in the sequence Vitality, Mentality and That Which Is.

(c) At *Allogenes* 54 praise is accorded, first to Vitality, then to the 'second power' Mentality, which is also the source of blessedness, and finally to the Entire One, under the title That Which Is. Here it appears that the order (which matches *Enneads* ii 9.6) should be significant, and it conforms to the Numenian triad, rather than to that of the later Platonists.

(d) An injunction to ascend from blessedness through Vitality to Existence at *Allogenes* 59. At *Allogenes* 60 this ascent is accomplished. The same principles appear in this order, followed by Non-Existence, at *Allogenes* 61. Again it seems that the order should be impossible to disturb.

Blessedness in (d) is apprehended under stillness and silence; the same properties are the concomitants of Vitality in (c). It appears, then, that one series has been imposed upon the other, and it is natural to infer that it is the system of Victorinus which has supervened upon the Numenian triad. Both formulations appear to be indebted to the vocabulary of fourth-century Christian authors, since pagans were not accustomed to substitute Blessedness for Mind.⁶⁷ Unless we postulate two independent borrowings from the Gnostics, one by Porphyry and one by Victorinus, we shall conclude that the confusion in these documents results from the attempt to keep pace with a century of Platonic innovation.

Both (c) and (d) exhibit the extreme and rigid division of the three terms which was upbraided by Plotinus. Neither would have inspired the refined flexibility of the intelligible triad, and it would seem that we have here the ossified form of a system devised by others—or rather of two, the Numenian system and that of the fourth century, successively appropriated, successively misused.

* Vocabulary and pagination as in the translations of these texts edited by J. M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi library in English* (Leiden 1977).

⁶⁴ Zoroaster may have been the descendant of Zostrianus and recipient of the revelation, just as Messos is in the *Allogenes*. All four names appear as the titles of separate treatises in *VP* 16.

⁶⁵ Sieber (n. 16) finds it 'long enough to merit the lengthy attention of Amelius' and must therefore consider it authentic. On p. 238 he remarks that the use of terms is 'cosmological rather than

logical', which may support my contention that they have re-applied the terms of some earlier Platonist.

⁶⁶ On the four versions of the *Apocryphon of John* and their discrepancies see S. Giversen's edition (Copenhagen 1963).

⁶⁷ See Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, ii 62 and 276.



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THE FIGURE OF LOVE IN AUGUSTINE
AND IN PROCLUS THE NEOPLATONIST

THOSE who have merely heard of Augustine know him as the scourge of heretics, the despiser of women, the executioner of their unchristened children; those who have read him know that love—the love of God for man and of man for God—is the foundation and the cement of his entire theology. To fail in love for the object of inquiry is, in his view, to fail in knowledge; the Trinity fails in neither and is thus the archetype for the perfect congruence of knowledge and love in the unfallen intellect. The cooling of man's love for his Creator left him ignorant of the Trinity within him and of the Trinity above him, and it was therefore to reveal both God and man to man that the Second Person of the Trinity became incarnate. The love of Christ is infused into the soul as soon as the benefits of his sacrifice are imparted to us at the font, but there is no true love outside the school of charity, the one Church which is the body of the risen Christ. It is thus an act of pride, resembling Adam's, to be a Donatist, and an exercise of charity to force schismatics back into the Church.

This, as all agree, is a remarkable synthesis, adumbrated rather than anticipated in earlier Christian thinkers such as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. Protestant critics, however, have been wont to accuse the Fathers of confusing the peculiar species of love that is exemplified and commended in the New Testament with the carnal passion known to philosophers, poets and all the tribes of 'natural man'. The most notorious statement of this thesis is Anders Nygren's masterly *Agape and Eros*,¹ which argues that the *agape* or charity of the New Testament—the *caritas* of Augustine—is a disposition native to God but imparted to his creatures

only by grace; it differs from desire or *eros*—*amor* or *dilectio* in Augustine—in that it never aims at pleasure or advantage for itself and serves its object without desiring to possess it. The palmary example of this love, and the means of wakening it in us, is the gratuitous self-offering of God in Jesus Christ; love of God is not the mystical craving for beatitude and heavenly communion, not even the philosophical pursuit of godlike virtue, but an attitude of perpetual obedience unto death. It entails not the sublimation but the extinction of every countervailing appetite and interest, and is not sustained by any expectation of reward in earth or heaven. Augustine, on this view, is a seductive advocate of the false conflation of *eros* with *agape*, as he conceives the love of God as an ascent through virtue and wisdom to the presence of the Almighty, and enjoins love of neighbour so far as it conduces to the perfection of the soul.

All readers of the New Testament see that Nygren is proposing a religion more austere than that of Christ, who does not hesitate to fortify the consciences of his followers with scenes of future punishment and reward. Those who believe, with Martin D'Arcy² and other Catholic writers, that theology can profit from the study of human nature as it is, maintain that our goal should be the integration, not the simplification, of our capacities: we must reconcile the passions with the rational will, the aspiring anima with the controlling animus, the subjective with the objective character of the moral law. Criticism of Nygren as an historian comes chiefly (in the English-speaking world at least) from students of Neoplatonism.³ One reason is, no doubt, that this is the only group of Classicists that is not habitually inimical to Christianity; the more important reason is that in Nygren's masterpiece it is Plato and his interpreters who persuade the Hellenized Church of late antiquity that sacrificial *agape* is compatible with an ambitious love of self that masquerades as love of God. Once Christians came to imagine that all men possessed by nature the image of God which in our fallen world is granted only to few and by adoption, reason was inevitably preferred to revelation, celibacy and fasting to obedience, mind to spirit and the deliverance of the soul to the consecration of the body. Once again Augustine is held to typify this quest for man-made righteousness by man-made schemes, though perhaps he was not

such an *ignis fatuus* to posterity as the nameless Greek who styled himself Dionysius the Areopagite in the late fifth century. Between the two, in date if not in influence, stands Proclus, the most voluminous writer among the Neoplatonists. He is the second subject of this paper, as his works bear some resemblance to Augustine's in their systematic and scholastic character, the interlacing of eloquence and pedantry, and their cautious inclination to mysticism. A Christian theology, of the *eros*-type condemned by Nygren—a theology which is not that of Augustine—might be educed from Proclus by the substitution of God for the One, the Bible for Plato, and Christ (as I shall show) for Socrates.

I shall argue here, however, that this theology would not be that of Augustine, who was sanguine enough to think that he could discover the eternal Word in Plato, but not (as he admits in his *Confessions*) the Word made flesh. Indeed, I believe that at its heart Augustine's thought is closer to that of Nygren than to that of Nygren's adversaries: he too would have said that the philosophers can make nothing of love so long as they make nothing of Jesus Christ. My paper is thus at most an annotation to Nygren, not a refutation of his main thesis. Whatever is said against him, it is clear enough that *agape* ousts *eros* in the New Testament, and that, here as in other early Christian writings, it denotes not mere affection, but an ardent and peaceable disposition to seek the good of others, at the cost of one's own interests and ambitions. There is nothing to compare with *agape* in pagan literature, unless it be the voluntary submission of the lover to adversity in Greek lyric, Roman elegy and, most memorably of all, in the *Symposium* of Plato. Nygren is in the right again, however, when he rebukes the Christian Fathers who imagined that *eros* and *agape* differ only in intensity.⁴ *Agape* is a virtue, *eros* a passion; *agape* is the service of a multitude, *eros* the quest of a single object; *agape* yields the body to Christ, while *eros*, even in philosophical literature, is seldom wholly disengaged from sexual desire. In fact, the great defect in Nygren's account of pagan *eros* is that he, like most of his critics, overlooks the omnipresent association of the term with sexuality, and therefore fails to see the obvious reason for the choice of *agape* in both Greek testaments to signify the benign inclination of God towards those mortals whom he acknowledges as his sons. It is not so much that *eros* is acquisitive and *agape* sacrificial; it is

rather that one is errant and transitory, one prescriptive and destined to endure. *Eros* turns two unrelated mortals into man and wife, as in the Song of Songs which so embarrassed the Christian Fathers; *agape*, a term first used in the Septuagint, implies esteem and judgement, even an obligation to love, as in a marriage indissoluble by law.⁵ How perishable the covenant between a man and a woman is we learn from the law of Moses, from the history of Israel, from the invectives of the prophets; because the bonds of kinship are less easily dissolved than those of marriage, *agape* can stand, as *eros* cannot, for the abiding love of God in his covenant with the fickle world.

What divides the Christians from the Platonists in their understanding of love is not a difference in the meaning of the terms employed, but a difference in their concepts of the first principle. Simply, tritely but truly enough, we may say that this consists in the fact that the attributes of personality—loving, grieving, willing, speaking, judging—are essential to one and alien to the other. It is an exercise of sovereignty in the biblical God to make laws, and the privilege of freedom to suspend them; he dispenses reward and punishment on his own principles because he is not by nature or necessity the father of the world or of humankind. Creation is an act of will at a time determined only by his unfathomable judgement; salvation—which means victory in the Old Testament, immortality in the New—is not procured by human merit or without it, but by entering with goodwill and sincerity into a bond that he elects to make with a portion of his undeserving creatures. Personhood, in the words of Vladimir Lossky,⁶ is the irreducibility of a being to his essence; the critic Cyril Connolly observes that a fictional agent seems most personal when he is capable of acting out of character.⁷ That God had done this once by becoming man, Augustine readily believed once he had ceased to be a Manichee; that miracles might still be worked in his own day, he accepted only after he had given up the forum, the academy and the monastery for the bishopric of Hippo. Yet faith in miracles—faith in the plasticity of God's own legislation—is inseparable from the Christian understanding of his *agape*, just as the Christian concept of his fatherhood entails that he extends his grace, at the cost of justice, even to the traitor, the prodigal and the erring sheep.

God—and God, of course, is the proper name of the highest being in Christian thought—is always personal because the Church's knowledge of him is a datum of revelation, not the fruit of metaphysical or empirical inquiry. To Platonists, on the other hand, the Good, as the source of all essences and necessary principles, was first a metaphysical postulate, then a distant goal of the philosophic life, and finally the sole content of reflection and experience. Belief in the civic deities is fiduciary, but they rank below the Good and even below the true philosopher. The being whom Plato is most inclined to call '*the god*' (*ho theos*) is the demiurge, or creator of the present world; and while his own account in the *Timaeus* may imply that this is an act in time, it became the orthodoxy of Platonists in the Christian era that if a perfect being had reason to do anything, he had reason to do it always, and that consequently the world could have had no temporal beginning. A God has his nature like any other being, and since all the acts and properties of this nature are discoverable by ratiocination, he will do nothing arbitrary or unpredictable: he will certainly not impair his own design by working miracles, and his universal benevolence takes the form of natural law, not the jealous patronage of mortals who are unworthy of his love.

Even will and love cannot be ascribed to him in any sense that makes him liable to perturbation or subject to the lapse of time. The One, who takes the place of the Good in Plato's oral teaching, in the *Parmenides* and in Neoplatonism, neither thinks, loves nor remembers; its will is its aseity, its capacity to bring itself into being, not an agency of providential government;⁸ it is unaware of those who aspire to union with it, although such union, when achieved, is experienced as beatitude. Such a deity wants no sacrifice from his devotees, though prayer and offerings are legitimately addressed to lower entities, who are personal in so far as they exhibit passion and weakness, and bear some resemblance to the ordinary mortal who has not perceived that his true religious duty is to aspire, as the *Theaetetus* tells us, to 'the likeness of god' (176c). The premisses of Plato and his followers are reversed by Christianity, which forbids the veneration of inferior powers, and teaches that God is more personal than his angels since it was he and not they who stooped to our condition. God became man because it was he who made man in his image,

and the likeness of God is not a seed that germinates within us, but a gift bestowed by divine omnipotence, forfeited by sin and restored by love.

Because of the Incarnation, there are no intermediate figures in Christian worship. Had Platonism, however, become a popular religion, the writings of Apuleius and Plutarch show that fewer libations would have been offered to the gods than to their servitors, who lived closer to the earth and were more prolific in their favours. Iamblichus in the third century appears to have taught that only the true philosopher can dispense with archaic sacrifices, babbling prayers and evocations of infernal spirits. While there is no authority for such practices in Plato, he was perhaps the earliest writer to posit a race of daemons who were neither gods nor souls of the ancient dead. His object—or more properly the object of Diotima in the *Symposium*—is to furnish love with a pedigree that explains the ambiguity of his nature:

On the birthday of Aphrodite, there was a feast of the gods, at which the god Poros or Plenty, who is the son of Metis or Discretion, was one of the guests. When the feast was over, Penia or Poverty, as is the custom on such occasions, came about the doors to beg. Now Plenty, who was the worse for nectar (there was no wine in those days), went into the garden of Zeus and fell into a heavy sleep; and Poverty, considering her own straitened circumstances, plotted to have a child by him, and accordingly she lay down at his side and conceived love (*Symposium* 203b-c, translated by Benjamin Jowett).

Here, in a diaphanous robe of allegory, is the thesis at which Socrates arrives by interrogation in other dialogues. On the one hand, he argues in the *Lysis*, logic forbids us to desire what we have already; on the other we are not so constituted as to crave what is alien to us; love is therefore rich and poor at the same time, as he lacks only what it is given to him by nature to possess. Love, not the lover, remains the formal subject of Diotima's myth, but almost at once she breaks into a eulogy which anticipates the vignettes of human character in Aristotle and Theophrastus, and must have inspired the flippant stereotypes of the Roman elegists:

And, as his parentage is, so also are his fortunes. In the first place, he is always poor, and anything but tender and fair, as the many imagine him; and he is rough and squalid, and has no shoes, nor a house to dwell in...like his father too, whom he partly resembles, he is always

plotting against the fair and good; he is bold, enterprising, strong, a mighty hunter, always weaving some intrigue or other, keen in the pursuit of wisdom, fertile in resources; a philosopher at all times terrible as an enchanter, sorcerer, sophist (*Symposium* 203d, trans. Jowett).

Plato is often blamed for his indifference to the logical distinction between a predicate and the subject of the predicate; in his teaching on the Forms he fails to recognize that holiness cannot be holy, justice just or beauty beautiful unless these Forms are able to participate in themselves. Vlastos acquits him of fallacy by crediting him with a disposition to 'Pauline predication',⁹ so called because the inventory of the works of *agape* at 1 Corinthians 13 is a panegyric on the true Christian, who 'suffereth long and is kind' and 'seeketh not his own', but 'beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things' in the expectation of perfect knowledge and everlasting life. It is strange that Vlastos does not cite Diotima's sketch of *eros* as an instance of this Pauline trait in Plato, for the *eros* of one and the *agape* of the other are as similar in their formal characteristics as two portraits of the same model by different artists. Nygren would reply—as would Augustine, and both with reason—that behind the formal character of *agape* in Paul's letter is a figure unknown to Platonism, Jesus Christ, the incarnation of love.

Yet Plato too can offer us, if not a Saviour, at least a human paradigm of love, as Ficino saw.¹⁰ The echo of Diotima's speech is drowned abruptly by that of Alcibiades in praise of Socrates, the living Silenus who is ugly without and fair within, has no abode and roves barefoot from door to door in the hope of allaying his boundless thirst for wisdom. We hear of Socrates's daemon in the *Apology*, where once again he stands halfway between poverty and plenty, wise enough only to perceive his lack of wisdom. Socrates the lover is familiar to us from the *Charmides*, the *Phaedrus* and the *Lysis*; if he resists the overtures of the handsome Alcibiades, it is only because the true lover is enamoured of the soul and of the beauty that inhabits it. It is not for Alcibiades to seduce him, for the beloved ought to excel the lover in comeliness; at the same time, the lover will excel the beloved in wisdom, for he has an inkling of supernal beauty, while the beloved is content to flaunt his superficial charms. In a true exchange of love, each party is

superior in one respect, inferior in another; each seeks in his friend the satisfaction of his own need.

This reciprocal character of *eros* is dramatically revealed in the *First Alcibiades*, a dialogue which only a handful of commentators now regard as Plato's. To Proclus it is an indispensable foreword to the great works in the corpus, as its teaching on the soul discloses the object of philosophy, while its principal speaker, Socrates, puts his cunning at the service of this object in his virtuous courtship of Alcibiades. The wary libertine, now in the flower of youth and notoriety, is astonished to find that Socrates, the ugliest and poorest of his suitors, has no designs upon his body; instead he deems it the lover's task to cherish the inward beauty of his idol, and in order that Alcibiades may become conscious of this beauty, he commends to him the maxim of Apollo, 'Know thyself'. To a philosopher this means: know that man is not identical with his carcass, but is properly the itinerant soul which makes use of the body as its temporary domicile and organ. To know this is to feel oneself immortal and thus superior to all the laurels that we reap in time. For a while at least, Alcibiades is converted, and frames a lofty resolution, which—as Socrates foretells—has little hope, in such a pupil, of withstanding the guile and battery of the world.

Here, as in the *Phaedrus* and in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, the adept of the high, Uranian Love is not ashamed to use the stratagems of the vulgar or pandemic Aphrodite. No wonder that in this dialogue John Dillon has found the rudiments of an early seducer's manual, the forerunner of the Latin *Ars Amatoria*.¹¹ To Proclus, however, Socrates is not only an exponent of sublime love, but a being of the same order as love himself, a guardian daemon to the youth who hears his suit.¹² Marrying the *Symposium* to the *Phaedrus*, he discriminates between two kinds of lover: the 'pandemic', who is overawed by the beauty of his beloved, and the *theios* or divine one, who is himself a source of awe, and turns the eye of the beloved upon himself, until by self-examination the beloved acquires the self-knowledge to rise from the life of the body to the life of the soul, and thence to that of intellect, until finally he ascends to the supernal beauty from which the entire 'erotic chain' depends (pp. 21, 29 Segonds etc.).

These chains, which span the interval between extreme defect and total plenitude, are the indispensable filigree of the universe in Proclus, and those who occupy the daemonic median are able to impart to those beneath them—heroes, souls and ‘choirs of angels’—a faint impression of the power which they receive from the founts of being. Love here is no longer the needy adventurer of Diotima’s myth, no longer the benevolent self-seeker who exchanges wisdom for beauty in the *Phaedrus*, but a figure who spontaneously bestows his goods in the manner of Plato’s demiurge, of whom the *Timaeus* tells us that he fashioned the world because he was divine and the divine contains no particle of envy (29c). Each of us has his daemon, who vouchsafes to us invisibly the assistance that is openly extended to Alcibiades by his human interlocutor; for us, however, this divine custodian must be sought within, as Plato hints when he says in the *Timaeus* that the gods have planted reason as a daemon in every soul (90a). Socrates is appealing to this faculty in his pupil when he styles him, half-facetiously, a daemon, just as he is stirring up the spirit of self-inquiry when he uses the patronymic ‘Son of Cleinias’, thus reminding Alcibiades that to know ourselves we must first know whence we come (pp. 20-21 Segonds).

Alcibiades asks Socrates why he, alone of lovers, has kept lifelong faith with the objects of his passion. This transfer of interests indicates to Proclus that the novice has now advanced from introspection, which acquaints him with his own ignorance, to the next stage of inquiry, the pursuit of truth through beauty (pp. 34-39 Segonds). This beauty stands at the head of the ‘erotic chain’ that has been let down to him through Socrates; the latter, however, also represents another chain, named after Hermes son of Maia, the god of eloquence (pp. 248, 255 Segonds), and the art by which he induces Alcibiades to confess his need of knowledge is an example of the maieutic rather than the erotic method in philosophy.¹³ In fact the two are seldom found apart, since one derives its name from midwifery and the other from the son of Aphrodite; both aim at the conversion of the hearer and, lacking weapons to restrain his body, have no recourse but to trap his soul with words. Plato himself portrays love as a dangerous practitioner of *goeteia* or sorcery, though he warns us in the *Phaedrus* not to confound the incantations of the true lover with the avaricious

witchcraft of the sophist (242d-245a). Proclus, who both learned and taught in the company of orators, speaks more charitably, presenting the *First Alcibiades* as a treatise on the proper use of rhetoric and assuring us, with a casual quotation from Plotinus, that even 'craftiness' (*panourgia*) is an emanation of *nous* or intellect (p. 28 Segonds, citing *Enneads* 2.3.11.8-9). As for Plato's mockery of the book as a silent artefact, defenceless in the absence of its author (*Phaedrus* 275d-276a), he could not afford to remember it in an age when it was common to publish undelivered speeches and uncommon to philosophize except by way of commentary on the great texts of antiquity. Or perhaps he would have argued that every dialogue is an exercise in seduction, and that the *First Alcibiades* therefore does not merely describe but exemplifies the character of Socrates; if the reader consents to be Alcibiades, allowing the text to work on him as Socrates worked upon his interlocutors, his own tutelary daemon will assume the role of the absent pedagogue (cf. pp. 34, 38 Segonds etc.).

Within a generation of Proclus's death, his teaching on the condescension of *eros* was baptized by a forger of genius, who imposed upon the Church for the next millennium as the apostolic convert Dionysius the Areopagite. The detection of his pseudonym acquits him of gratuitous innovation, for Eros had already found a place in Christian talk of God before the late fifth century, and especially in that talk of God from which Platonists were excluded by their hostility to the doctrines of creation and redemption. 'My *eros* is crucified', exclaimed the martyr-bishop Ignatius, and the false Dionysius follows Christian precedent in understanding *eros* here as a sobriquet of Christ. In a Gnostic text, *The Creation of the World*, the teeming land owes its fecundity to the apparition of Eros, a figure evidently modelled on the ithyphallic demiurge of the Orphics. Orpheus in some Jewish writings is a prophet whose son Musaeus can be identified with Moses; he was also a name of increasing authority among the Platonists, and Proclus rehearses the contents of a number of cosmogonies that would otherwise have remained unknown to us. The adoption of his vocabulary by the Areopagite therefore betokens not so much a supine receptivity to pagan thought as the shrewd appropriation of a new philosophic idiom, more hospitable to myth and demotic theism than that of the ancient masters. While Christians of this

period continued to spoil the Egyptians as Origen taught them, it was not as slaves escaping their oppressors or as robbers in the strong man's house, but as litigants contending at a public bar for the right to impound the treasures of the past.

Augustine was by temper and occupation a controversialist, disputing with the Platonists on equal terms because he was not ashamed to have been one of them. It was they, by his own account, who first convinced him of the incorporeality of the Godhead, thus exploding the false determinism entailed by the materialistic tenets of the Manichees and awakening him to the peril of his soul. His friends included Synesius, the half-converted Bishop of Cyrene, and his earliest Christian treatises—the *Soliloquies*, the *De Ordine*, the Cassiciacum dialogues and the *Contra Academicos*—seem often to be taking up a position within the school of Plato rather than against it. Nevertheless, he came to think that the Platonists, while they might possess some knowledge of the cosmic Word, were strangers to the Word incarnate, deaf to the artless eloquence of scripture, too enamoured of their own conceits to admit that the omnipotent Creator could pour his fullness into a particle of matter. In his view these are not three errors but one, for, as he argues in his essay *On Christian Doctrine*, a propaedeutic to the reading of the Bible, one can apprehend the truth in scripture only by submitting to him who is the truth in scripture, Christ the living Word.

Like Karl Barth,¹⁴ he introduces his doctrine of the word with a confession of the Trinity. To grasp the sense of the sacred text is to penetrate the mind of God its author, and we receive the requisite knowledge of God's character from the Church, as we receive the list of writings in the canon. There is, however, this difference, that while reason cannot prove that God is a Trinity any more than it can verify the authorship of the Solomonic writings, it can at least determine that there is one God, who excels all things conceivable, and is therefore the source of truth, the bourne of virtue and the citadel of everlasting joy. Why do not all perceive him? Because our native wisdom has been corrupted by the fall, and the wisdom of God must stoop to reach us through the foolishness of preaching. And foolishness it seems indeed, that the infinite and ineffable Creator should become a mortal, patient to the blows of other mortals, and betraying his

superiority only by his fortitude in bearing the ignominy of the Cross. Wisdom thus reclaims the intellect by becoming an object of the senses. Lest we should suppose that this entails any diminution of omnipotence, Augustine draws a provocative analogy between the word of God and the speech of man:

When we speak, so that that which we bear in our minds may flow through the ears into the mind of the one who listens, the word that we bear about in the heart becomes a sound and is called speech; nonetheless, our thought is not converted into that sound, but remaining intact by itself, it assumes the form of a vocable in order to insinuate itself into the ears, but with no defect through change in itself; in just the same way, the Word of God, although he suffers no change, is none the less made flesh, that he may dwell within us (*On Christian Doctrine* 1.13; cf John 1.14, Luke 17.21).

The Latin *in nobis* might be rendered ‘among us’ or ‘within us’. The first is suitable to the Incarnation (‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’), the second to the experience of the Christian who can say with the Apostle, ‘Christ in me and I in Christ’. Origen had already maintained that Christ is the universal Word within the written word, and that the reader, by the consecutive apprehension of his body, soul and spirit in the text, becomes one spirit with him, and thus attains perfection both in life and in understanding. Christ ‘as it were, becomes flesh’ in his condescension to our limited faculties, speaking ‘with a literal voice’ which lures us to higher levels of discipleship; the discovery of his true character in the Gospels and the refashioning of his likeness in the reader are a single process, consummated, for most believers, only after death. Augustine derives his hermeneutic not from the threefold division of human nature (which is anomalous in Paul) but from the commoner antithesis between the outer and the inner man. The characteristic virtue of the regenerate man is charity, because anyone who loves himself—as all do—will perceive that his felicity lies in loving God and hence in the love of neighbour which he enjoins in so many passages of scripture. Christ in his dual nature is simultaneously the exemplar of divine charity and of the helplessness in man which calls it forth; even when he is not the ostensible subject of the scriptures, we can judge the exegesis of any passage by its tendency to illustrate the love of God and to foster imitation. Since we cannot love

sincerely without this love of God, and since we cannot love God without knowing him or know him if we stand outside his own body, we must conclude that the school of charity is the Church catholic, as she witnesses to Christ and to the books that speak of Christ. In a word, the omnipresent truth in scripture is charity, Christ as scripture portrays him is the embodiment of charity, and therefore when we approach the text in charity to make it speak of Christ, we are uniting the object of interpretation with the means of interpretation, as Christ did when he said in the Gospel of John, *I am the way* (14.6).

Do we see here, as Nygren avers, the triumph of pagan *eros* over Christian *agape*? It would be tendentious to say so, if a Christian is one who rests his hope in Christ, for it is no less true of Augustine than of Nygren that he puts Christ at the centre of his theology, as the paradigm of love. Augustine's Christ is not, however, primarily a figure on the Cross, but the epiphany in these latter days of that divine similitude which Adam received in the hour of his creation. Since the image has only been obscured and not extinguished by the fall, we may attribute to humans, even before conversion, an inchoate notion of God and a legitimate desire to seek his presence. In *Confessions* X he broaches the argument that nothing can be sought if it is wholly unknown to the seeker and that therefore when men seek happiness, they must have some recollection of that state, and hence of the One from whom all happiness proceeds. Plato had maintained on similar premisses that whatever we love belongs to us already, and that the palpitations of the fallen soul in the presence of beauty are an aftershock of the awe with which it gazed on the Form of Beauty in the supercelestial heaven. Augustine, however, warns us not to fix our desire on anything but God, even while he hesitates to conclude that our feeble memories can accommodate the infinite; the germ of a solution seems to be offered in his little dissertation *De Magistro*, which concludes that we are capable of understanding signs and reasoning from them because within us we have a teacher, who is personally identical with the truth to which all reasoning aspires. This teacher is Christ the Word, but he is present, to borrow Kant's terms, as a regulative, not a constitutive, principle of reason. That is to say, we see *by* him, but *him* we do not see until the inner eye is opened by the Gospel. Preaching is

the sole medium of this illumination, for as a member of the Trinity Christ is no more visible to the fallen conscience than the Father or the Spirit; we are able to see him only because he became a man and bequeathed to us the New Testament as a record of his ministry. We may credit the human race with a collective reminiscence of Eden, not with the power to turn that reminiscence into knowledge until, as Augustine tells the Manichees, we consent to 'find without us in humility the one whom we abandoned in our pride when he dwelt within' (*On Free Will* 3.30).

There is no trace here of the pagan optimism which asserts that man is naturally akin to God and able to find him out by introspection. Even the magnum opus *On the Trinity* does not maintain, as is often thought, that man in his current state is a microcosm of the Trinity, but rather that God is love, that he made man to love and know him, and that without this love the coadunation of memory, understanding and will in the intellect is at best an imperfect simile for the communion of the three persons in the Godhead. The inner and the outer man are both creatures, both defective adumbrations of an archetype which, even when we have learned of it through verbal revelation, is intelligible only to a faith engendered and informed by love. And love, we may say again, is no abstraction, not a perquisite of human nature considered 'in itself', but Jesus Christ, the reconciler of God and man. If there is a counterpart to Augustine in the modern world, it is neither Barth nor Tillich but Karl Rahner, who contends that we have, as humans, a ubiquitous capacity for self-transcendence – not as an indigenous characteristic of the species, nor as a blessing supernaturally added, but as a permanent corollary of Christ's miraculous union of the two natures, which is timelessly efficacious because eternally foreseen.

Memory, the subject of the tenth book of the *Confessions*, holds the pen in the previous nine, and its function is not, as in the *Phaedrus*, to renew the contemplation of a realm above time and sense, but to recount the trials and aberrations of the embodied soul. The narrative holds in counterpoint the futile quest of man for truth and the ineluctable quest of God for man. Platonists held up the *Odyssey* as a parable of the soul's return to 'its own dear country' (Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.8); Augustine mocks his

childhood tears for Dido, as the Cynic Diogenes sneered at those who embroil themselves in the troubles of Odysseus while they fail to perceive their own. Nevertheless he falls in with the plot of the *Aeneid*, breaking his journey to Italy at Carthage, where he allows his soul to be overwhelmed by the 'surging din of lusts' (*Confessions* 3.1). More dangerous to his salvation than his concubine are the theatrical illusions of the Manichees – theatrical in Plato's sense, for a man who cannot distinguish spirit from body will be the plaything of his appetites, and his creed will teach him to blame his pusillanimity on fate. Platonism liberates the conscience, but it cannot arm the spirit, and if we try to attain the Good in Plato's way by a sublimation of our love for others, we shall find that friendship itself can be a distraction to one who is merely in love with love. The antidote to this misplaced desire is the Word, whose incarnation Platonists cannot recognize: not only does he exhort us to love our neighbour, but he lends himself as a neighbour in the flesh while by his Spirit he gives us power to love without sin.

The *Confessions* is thus what the *First Alcibiades* was to a Neoplatonist – a comedy of two lovers, of whom one embodies plenitude, the other a misdirected love that at first is not even conscious of its poverty. The fact that Augustine is saved and Alcibiades is not reveals the difference. Socrates is love personified, Christ is love in person; Socrates is a tutelary daemon, whereas Christ is the Second Person of the Trinity, in whom predicate is identical with essence. Their likeness is the measure of their unlikeness, for both exemplify what only one is able to impart. As literary productions too, the *Confessions* and the dialogue are dissimilar, in that Socrates is the hero of one and Christ the unseen companion in the other. He is none the less omnipresent in the *Confessions* through quotation from the scriptures – another exercise of memory which is ridiculed by Plato in the *Phaedrus*. St Antony's conversion was effected by a single command from the sermon on the Mount; Augustine's was completed by a verse turned up at hazard in the Epistle to the Romans. The prompting was a child's song, and while such omens are attested in the *Aeneid* and in other pagan writings, there seems to have been a further miracle here, for Augustine himself could not recall a chant containing the words 'take up and read'.

Before this time three notable philosophers—Antisthenes, Polemon and Plotinus—were said to have acquired their first convictions in the lecture hall; Augustine, by repairing to the study, follows the precedent of Justin in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (3-8). Should Plato object that the mute page cannot answer the reader's questions or entice his soul like the living pedagogue, Augustine's answer is that Christ transcends the text not only, as Socrates does, by his influence on the reader, but by his bodily resurrection, which for us is perpetuated in the Church.

Hearing is the most informative sense for the early Christian, as vision is for the Platonist. Since hearing is the less voluntary—we cannot turn away our ears as we avert our eyes—it is even now the sense associated with commanding and obeying. Sight is not only exercised at will, but creates new objects of desire – or, we might say, it reveals the quarry to the hunter and equips him for the pursuit. In the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus the end is vision, and the mind is prepared by silence for its ascent to the contemplation of the Good:

Let there be stillness for us, not only of opinion and fancy, not only of the passions that impede us in our movement towards the one as it draws us upwards, but let the air be still, let this All be still; and let all things with unshaken power elevate us to fellowship with the ineffable. And as we stand there, having transcended even the intelligible, if such a thing there be in us, and having adored it with sealed eyes like the sun in its rising (for it is not right for us to look directly upon it, nor for any other being)...let us, as it were worship it, not on the pretext that it created earth and heaven, or souls and the generations of other living things – these indeed it created but in the last stages – but that before all this it brought to light the whole intelligible race of the gods and all that is intellectual...and when after this we come back down from our intellectual hymnody and putting aside the irrefutable science of dialectic, let us consider in the wake of this vision of the first causes how far the first god is raised above the sum of things (*Platonic Theology* 2.11, p. 65 in the edition of H.-D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, Paris 1974).

The silence remains unbroken, there is only a metaphorical act of worship, and no-one's life is changed, as the visionary must already be an adept. The stilling of the elements is a commonplace, with antecedents in poetry, Gnostic preaching and the Eleusinian mysteries, as well as in Plotinus. By contrast,

Augustine's meditation in Ostia begins as a dialogue with his mother Monica, and terminates in another voice, like the one that was heard by Paul or his informant when he was rapt into the third heaven:

We were saying therefore: if the tumult of the flesh subsides for someone, if the fantasies of earth and the waters and the air, are silent, silent too the poles and the soul is silent in itself, and passes out of itself by thinking not of itself, if dreams are silent too and imaginary revelations, every tongue and every thing else that must be surpassed if one is to experience total silence...if they fall still because they have strained their ear toward him who made them, and he alone should speak not through them but through himself, and we should hear his word not through the tongue of flesh or through the voice of an angel, nor through thunder in a cloud nor through an enigmatic likeness, but his very self whom we love in these, himself we should hear without them...Is this not to *enter into the joy of thy Lord?* (*Confessions* 10.9).

In Proclus the daemonic mediator disappears before the climax; the climax for Augustine is the speech of the mediator, still too high for the understanding, but audible at last to the ear within. Platonism promises, but only to the elect among its neophytes, the uninterrupted vision of the deity who sits beyond the range of sense and soul at the highest tier of intellect. Augustine holds that there can be no discerning quest for God, or for the Good, unless it is quickened by the eleemosynary love of God, which, as we were too vain to discern it in the stars and the constitution of the soul, has forced itself on the purblind intellect through the lowly incarnation of the Word. So far he agrees with Nygren, but he does not believe that a faithful acquiescence in the divine compassion is possible, let alone enough to save us, unless charity is rooted in the soul and manifested in a constant course of life. This charity is not, like the philosopher's love, a fostering of pride, for it is pastured by the Word who speaks in scripture, shepherded by the Word who holds together the oecumenical community of the ransomed. Warfield wrote that Protestantism represents the triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over his doctrine of the Church; to Augustine, however, the two were indissoluble, not because he imagines that our salvation is in our own power, but because, as he tells the Donatists (*Against Cresconius* 2.13), we can have a Church without bishops, but not a Church without Christ.

NOTES

This paper was delivered at a Patristics Conference at Stanbrook Abbey, Worcester, held in July 2002 to honour the memory of Dame Edith Barnecut OSB, who devoted over twenty-five years to providing a lectionary of patristic readings for the liturgical year: *Christ Our Light* (2 vols) and *A Word in Season* (8 vols).

¹ A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros. A Study of the Christian Idea of Love*, trans. A.G. Herbert and P.S. Watson (London, 1932-8).

² M. D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love* (London, 1945).

³ See e.g. J.M. Rist, *Eros and Psyche* (Toronto, 1964); C. Osborne, *Eros Unveiled* (Oxford, 1994).

⁴ See Origen, *Proem to Song of Songs Commentary*; in his *De Anima*, Gregory of Nyssa blends the vocabulary of Plato's erotic dialogues with the Pauline eulogy of *agape*.

⁵ See R.C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (London, 1880), 39ff.

⁶ V. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (New York, 1974), 113.

⁷ C. Connolly, *Enemies of Promise* (Harmondsworth, 1961), 65.

⁸ See especially *Enneads* 6.8.

⁹ G. Vlastos, 'A Note on Pauline Predication in Plato', *Phronesis* 19 (1974), 95-101.

¹⁰ M. Ficino, *Plato on Love*, trans. Sears Jayne (Dallas, 1985), 155-8.

¹¹ J. Dillon, 'A Platonist *Ars Amatoria*', *Classical Quarterly* 44 (1994), 387-92.

¹² All references to A. Segonds (ed. and trans.), *Proclus, Sur le Premier Alcibiade de Platon*, 2 vols (Paris, 1985, 1986).

¹³ See H. Tarrant, *Thrasyllan Platonism* (Berkeley, 1993).

¹⁴ *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh, 1975).

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